A Woman on a Mission

by Beth Reid

A lone in a county jail cell, Tish Belk was scared. She had been on the run for almost a year, and now she faced as many as 20 years in prison. She had never felt so lost. As Tish looked around her empty cell, her eyes rested upon a Bible. She did not know how it got there, and she tried her best to ignore it. But as the book tugged at her, Tish finally gave in and flipped it open. She started to read.

Once she had picked up the Bible, Tish could not put it down. She read through the Bible chapter by chapter. “I got to the book of Romans, and I started weeping and crying,” remembers Tish. “I knew then that I had to give my whole life to the Lord, because He’s the One that kept me through everything that I’ve been through.” Her “everything” entailed depression, drugs, addiction, and abuse. At that moment, Tish knew that shedding a lifetime of rage and regret would be no easy task. Looking back now, however, Tish says her life has come full circle, and though her journey begins and ends in the same place, her heart has been changed forever.

A Vicious Cycle

Tish grew up thinking fits of rage were a normal part of life. Her father, an ex-Marine and Vietnam vet, suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. His wife and two children lived in constant fear of setting off yet another angry explosion. “We walked on eggshells. He would get very angry and blow things way out of proportion,” Tish says. “I swore I’d never be angry like my dad. But those dredged vows … that’s where you mess up.” As wrong as it felt, Tish found herself copying her father’s behavior. Confused and depressed, Tish tried to get help, but in prescribing medications, doctors unknowingly set her on a path of addiction and on a constant quest for escape. Nearly raped by a family member, Tish confided in her parents, who did not believe her. “As a child, you think you should be able to tell your parents everything,” muses Tish. “When they don’t believe you, everything gets crushed.”

Tish began mixing her medications with alcohol. As she slid deeper and deeper into the darkness of despair, she turned to illegal drugs: first marijuana, then crack, and finally methamphetamines. Eager to escape home, Tish graduated from high school and, at just 17, sought a precarious refuge within a young marriage. She had her first child, a daughter named Courtney, but after a year and a half, her marriage ended in divorce. When Tish wed her second husband, both were addicts, and the marriage was rocky.

A Q&A with Coach Joe Gibbs

in summer 2013, ESPN released a list of the “10 Greatest NFL Coaches of All Time.” Number 9 on the list was Joe Gibbs, the legendary coach who led the Washington Redskins to three national championships. In more recent years, he’s risen to the top of NASCAR racing. Coach Gibbs sat down with IJ to talk about his secrets to success – on the gridiron, on the racetrack, and in life.

IJ: After the NFL, you became a NASCAR owner. Why the switch?

Gibbs: When my oldest son, J.D., graduated from William and Mary (a college) we talked about what he wanted to do. Obviously he had seen me coaching while growing up and basically decided that he didn’t want to go down that path, but would rather do something in racing. Our family had always had a great interest in racing, I was still coaching at the time but started to make some calls about how to get into racing, and we were fortunate to find great people and sponsors to help us build our team. It’s amazing when you look back at our first couple of years. We had about 18 people total back then and now we have over 450. It is truly one of God’s blessings that we have been able to grow the race team to what it is today.

IJ: You’ve had success in both the NFL and NASCAR. What’s your secret?

Gibbs: I have always said that you win with people. That is true in football as well as racing. You have to have good people around you to be successful. In football, it’s the owner, players, coaches, and support staff. In racing, it’s crew chiefs, the guys in the shop building the cars, drivers, and pit crews. You have to take the time to pick the right people and then hopefully motivate those people to be successful.

IJ: Coach Gibbs, you’ve visited a number of prisons in recent years. What got you started visiting prisons?

Gibbs: I had a few opportunities throughout my coaching career to visit prisons, and [Prison Fellowship founder] Chuck Colson was a big part of that actually, but most recently it is something that I began shortly after starting Game Plan for Life. As part of our ministry, I began conducting outreach breakfast events after releasing the book back in 2009, and after that I was invited to go speak to a prison in Florida. It was such a rewarding experience for me that we started to look for additional opportunities to speak in prisons in the same communities where we were having a Game Plan for Life event.

IJ: What sticks out the most about the time you’ve spent with prisoners?

Gibbs: I am always amazed how you have their full attention. These guys are listening and thinking about your message. Obviously they have had tough times in life that have gotten them where they are, but when you take the time to visit and speak with them, they are invested in your message.

IJ: What message do you bring to people when you go behind bars?

Gibbs: That we serve a God of second chances. No matter the mess in your life there is no Second chances. No matter the mess in your life there is no...
Stopping the Shooting

Guest Column: Jim Liske

On December 14, 2012, 20-year-old Adam Lanza shot and killed his own mother while she was still in her pajamas. He then got into a car and drove five miles to Sandy Hook Elementary School in the quiet suburb of Newtown, Connecticut, a place where there had only been one murder in the previous decade. When he got there he killed five adults and 20 children using a number of assault rifles and high-capacity magazines. Most of the children were first graders.

When police entered the building, Adam took one final life: his own. As common whenever we face a tragedy on this scale, the Newtown massacre prompted grief, soul-searching, and anger all over our country. Lawmak- ers have been scratching their heads and asking, “How can we make sure this never happens again?” What laws do we need to pass to protect the most vulnerable among us from such unspeakable acts of horror?”

So there have been efforts to get certain kinds of weap- ons off the streets, to ban high-powered assault rifles or high-capacity magazines that were really designed for military purposes and could have no le- gitimate use for civilians. There have been calls for tougher background checks on gun purchasers. Groups that defend Americans’ second-amendment rights have been fighting back, saying that the government doesn’t have the right to say what kinds of guns people can own.

Common-sense laws that protect people are an impor- tant part of the solution to any kind of crime, but to a certain extent, I believe all the debate is just window dressing. We can’t ever write enough laws to change people’s hearts, and that’s where crime starts. You can’t fix something that’s broken by just covering it up – you have to deal with the real problem. And that’s the kind of healing only God can bring to us as individuals – and as a nation.

For His Kingdom,

Jim Liske
CEO

We’d like to hear from you. How do you think children can be made safer? How do we reduce the rates of gun violence – both in quiet suburbs like Newtown and in places where gun deaths are a tragic and frequent real- ity? You can write to the Editor, Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA, 20146-1790.

A Woman on a Mission

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Still, the couple had two chil- dren together. Christy and Clint entered a world where drugs were commonplace and the rules of the street were law.

“I swore I’d never be angry like my dad. But those dreaded vows... That’s where you mess up.”

This destructive lifestyle tore at Tish and her family. Drug charges began to stack up against her. With her husband already locked up, Tish left her children with relatives and fled. After spending a year on the run, Tish was caught and against her. With her husband already locked up, Tish left her children with relatives and fled.

Rounding A Corner

Almost immediately after her arrest, Tish says, God began revealing Himself to her. Three charges on her file should have earned her up to 20 years behind bars, but the judge dismissed most of the charges and sentenced her to two years instead. “The Lord was showing me who He was,” says Tish. Tish followed this conviction into a Prison Fellowship trans- formational ministry unit at the Dawson State Jail in Texas. This faith-based program introduced her to Lyn Wright, a former Prison Fellowship employee who still volunteered in prisons in the Dallas area. Lyn became Tish’s mentor. With Lyn beside her, Tish flourished within the program and its many classes. Soon, Tish came full circle on her life of drug addiction. Today she is a certified drug counselor.

Tish came full circle on her life of drug addiction. Today she is a certified drug counselor.

For several years. She became a certified drug counselor and has moved back to her old neighborhood. She is even living in the same home where she was raised. And though it is true that she has circled back to where it all started, she is discovering new and completely transformed beginnings.

She is rebuilding loving relationships with her parents. She is sharing her faith with her children every day. As the youth pastor at her church, Tish is ministering to the kids of the people she used to sell drugs to and do drugs with.

“The Lord brings you full circle with the past you can face the way you are now instead of the way you used to be,” says Tish. “I’m just a mission for the Lord.”

Circular Back Again

Tish has been out of prison for a few years. She became a certified drug counselor and has moved back to her old neighborhood. She is even living in the same home where she was raised. And though it is true that she has circled back to where it all started, she is discovering new and completely transformed beginnings.

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Prayer Warriors Corner

This quarter please pray for the children of prisoners:

• Pray for thousands of children of prisoners attending summer camp this year, that God will fill their hearts with joy as they enjoy nature and learn about His love for them.

• Pray for children visiting their parents at correctional facilities, that they would not be overwhelmed by this difficult time. Ask God to help them cope with long rides to the prison, the intimidating search procedures, and the complicated emotions that come up.

• Praise God for churches that care for the children of prisoners. Ask Him to raise up more, so that prisoners’ children can have the support of a local church to lean on.

Coach Gibbs

Continued from page 1

mess that is too big for God. It is never too late to join God’s team. Just ask Him into your life, ask for forgiveness and you can still have a tremendous impact on those around you.

U: Is there anything that pris- oners have taught you?

Gibbs: Obviously they have been through some difficult times, but it is a great reminder that it is never too late to join God’s team. The only thing we leave here on earth is the influ- ence we have on others, and even in their current situation they can have an impact on those around them. They still have many people depending on them. Many of them have families depending on them.

They can still have a tremen- dous influence on others even in their current situation. U: If there’s one thing you could make sure all of our readers know, what would it be?

Gibbs: We all have messes in our lives certainly but there is no mess too big for God. We just need to invite Him into our lives, ask Him for forgiveness and then start living for Him. Every one of us can have an impact on another and regard- less of all the successes or failures we may have in this life, the only real thing we leave behind is the influence we have on others.
Coming Clean, Feeling Free
by A. R. Quinn

Tyler Hamilton lied for 13 years. As one of the world’s greatest cyclists, the blue-eyed, charm-
ing American from Massachusetts raced on the U.S. Postal Service team with Lance Armstrong. He was in the summer Olympics in 2000 and 2004 and won a gold medal in a time trial. He was famous. He was successful. He was on top of the world. But Hamilton had a terrible secret—he was using banned substanc-
es to boost his performance. In 2010 Hamilton was sub-
promised to appear before a grand jury convened to investigate doping in the sport of professional cycling. He admitted what he had done, and he gave back his gold medal. In 2012, he co-authored a book about his experiences called Inside the Hidden World of the Tour de France: Doping, Cover-ups, and Winning at All Costs.

“Secrets … eat you alive”

Hamilton may have lost his reputation and his gold medal, but he found something else: freedom. After he confessed to his wrongdoing, Hamilton told The Guardian, a U.K. newspaper, that he finally felt liberated from the pain and depression that had dogged him for a long time. “I lied, I lied, I lied,” he said. “I didn’t have much to look forward to before I told the truth. I still wish I’d made the right choice [in the past], but I’m really excited about moving forward with the second part of my life. I couldn’t have said that two years ago.”

“My strength evaporated”

David, a king who ruled the ancient nation of Israel, learned a similar lesson. Although he loved God, he caved into temptation and slept with a beautiful woman named Bathsheba, who was mar-
rried to one of his soldiers. The cover-up of his first crime, he com-
mitted a second: he arranged to have Bathsheba’s husband killed in battle, where it would look like just another casualty of war. David thought he could get away with it, and no one would find out. But even if he could hide his sin from the world, he couldn’t hide it from God. His guilt tortured him.

“When I refused to confess my sin,” David wrote, “my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night (God’s) hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.” (Psalm 32:3-4, New Living Translation)

“Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt,” he wrote. “I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the Lord. And He forgave me! All my guilt is gone.’” (Ps. 32:5)

Get Out? 11 Things to Do

You hear that you’re getting out soon. What can you do to get ready? 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, ID) and work your way down (make a résumé, plan your celebra-
tion). 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, by Stephanie Likosky)

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-based agencies which can be of help to 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 some already do, representa-
tives from community agencies or private companies that do a large amount of hiring, to give presentations.

Gather Together All of the Documents That You Will Need (from Con-
nections 2009)

In order to apply for jobs and be eligible for most private or government programs, you are required to have certain kinds of documentation. If you begin to collect what you need now, you will save a lot of valuable time and frustra-
tion. At the very least, be sure to have a social security card (sometimes a number alone is not enough) and proof of identification (a birth certifi-
cate, baptismal papers, driver’s license or non-driver’s photo ID, for example). Each agency has its own requirements for documentation, but the fol-
lowing are commonly required, or may help in increasing your chances for 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 completed, for example)
• Working Papers (required for persons under 18 years of age)
• Proof of Functional Disability
• Certificate of Relief from Disabilities
• Certificate of Good Conduct

Of course, not all of these documents can be obtained easily, 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. (Please note: Inside Journal does not have the capacity to help you obtain these items.)

Pre-release Success Checklist

THE FOLLOWING CHECKLIST contains things to do prior to release. Failing to complete most of these items before release can increase your chances of returning to prison either on technical violations or for new crimes.

• 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 on your record.
• Complete drug treatment program or find a program in your community immediately after release.
• Form a job search plan (make a résumé, network with friends and family).
• Secure short-term housing.
• Make a celebration plan for release date.
• Contact Prison Fellowship for more resources. (www.prisonfellowship.org)
• Get directions and a ride to a local church on the first Sunday of your freedom.

True Confessions

You might be carrying around a secret—and it feels like having a giant weight chained to your leg. You can’t get rid of it, and you can’t move on with your life. But there is hope in Jesus, who died to pay the penalty for every sin, including yours—and who rose again so that you, too, can have a new life.

You might still be facing the consequences of sin. You might be facing some hard time, and you might have a long way to go to get your family or friends to trust you again. But God can set you free from the crushing weight of secret sin. How do you start?

With confession: Tell Him what’s weighing you down. Tell Him you can’t make it on your own and you need Him. Tell Him that you trust Him to save you from your sins through His death on the cross, and ask Him to lead you forward in a new direction—one that leads to life. (Psalm 51, also by David, is a great example of a prayer of confession.)

Don’t keep your decision to follow Christ a secret! Tell your chaplain and ask about baptism. Tell Christian brothers and sisters. And tell us at Inside Journal. We’d like to help you get started in a free correspondence Bible study (and also an NIV Bible, if you don’t have access to one), available through one of our ministry partners. Just write to “True Confessions,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790.

You might still be facing the serious consequences of sin. You might be paying the penalty for every sin, including yours—and who rose again so that you, too, can have a new life.

The prophet Nathan finally con-
fronted David about his crimes, and he confessed. When he did, like Tyler Hamilton, he finally started to feel free.

“Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt,” he wrote. “I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the Lord. And He forgave me! All my guilt is gone.’” (Ps. 32:5)

David’s sin still had some very serious consequences for him and his family, but God forgave him. The guilt that was eating him alive finally vanished. And God was able to pick up the pieces and use David in significant ways. In fact, David was the great-great-great... (a lot of greats!) grandfather of Jesus.
Motherhood Without Bars

by S.B. Matthews

Two programs, Drew House and JusticelHome, have emerged over the past few years to rehabilitate mothers charged with felonies and to provide a place for them to reconnect with their children. Nearly 1.3 million women are under the authority of the criminal justice system in the United States, and two-thirds of them are mothers of a child under 18. When these mothers go to prison, their children often get lost in the foster care system and turn to a life of crime. Both of these programs aim to decrease the rate of family imprisonment and give these mothers a chance to form lasting relationships with their children.

Drew House, located on the second floor of an 1885 mansion near the district attorney’s office in Brooklyn, has six apartments. Five are reserved for mothers, while one spot is left for the house manager.

District Attorney Theresa Fabi believes this program allows mothers of young children to connect with other women in a noncompetitive environment, likely for the first time. “They watch each other’s kids and plan recipes together. We are showing them that a functional existence is possible,” she said.

The program’s goal is to break the cycle of crime that often gets passed from a mother to her children. “When a child’s mother, typically their primary caregiver, goes to jail, he or she never gets made whole. [We want to] heal the mothers and help the kids,” said Fabi. The program has graduated 12 women and around 26 children, all of whom have stayed out of the system.

Time of Growth
Beth, a former inmate at Shakopee Correctional Facility in Shakopee, can attest to the hardships of being a mother while serving a prison sentence. Beth had her daughter three months before she entered prison and worried her daughter wouldn’t know who she was when she got out. “I was really afraid of not having that relationship. But I learned that when a door would shut, God would just open a new door to let me grow,” she said. Beth believes that having a daughter motivated her to lead a positive lifestyle both in and later out of prison. She said, “It propelled my fight in prison – I made me want to do everything possible to be as healthy as possible, mentally, spiritually, and physically. I looked at prison as my healing time. God’s hand was over me the whole time.”

Mothers at Home
Because of the concerns Beth and many other women have about their relationships with their children, more organizations like Drew House have developed to prioritize incarcerated mothers. For instance, JusticeHome, which was inspired by the Drew House, allows women to serve their time in their house rather than in a traditional prison setting. The program is available to women who are facing a minimum of six months of incarceration as a result of felony charges. It will tentatively work with 45 women a year who will be enrolled in the system from six to eight months.

Alexandra Villano, director of strategic initiatives for the Women’s Prison Association, believes JusticeHome “will benefit mothers involved in the program because of the special importance of family for women. When these women receive relevant support, they as well as their families realize significant positive changes and embrace law-abiding futures,” she said.

Parenting Motivation
Amanda, a prisoner at Washington Corrections Center for Women, said in a documentary about residential parenting programs that she believes having her child with her on a regular basis motivates her to be a better mother. She says, “If you’re not a good mom, they can easily take your child away.”

Amanda knows she would have a very different relationship with her daughter if she didn’t get to see her on a daily basis. “I’m glad my daughter is here. You want to be here with them, to cuddle with them when they cry and put them to sleep,” she said.

Another mother in the documentary, Samantha, also feels blessed that she can participate in this special program, as it has changed her frame of mind. She says, “Prison saved me. I’ve learned my lesson, and nothing’s going to take me away from my kids. I’ve found something more important than getting high; forming a relationship with someone who loves me.”

Sign Your Children Up for Angel Tree!

What is Angel Tree? Maybe you’ve heard of Prison Fellowship’s Angel Tree program, but you’re not sure how it works. Angel Tree is a simple way to let your children know that you are thinking about them at Christmas.

Angel Tree works like this: You fill out an application asking Angel Tree to give your child a gift from you at Christmas (you can suggest what kind of gift you think your child would like). During the following week, your chaplain collects the applications and sends them to Angel Tree. In the fall, Angel Tree volunteers call the person who cares for your child to verify what gift your child would like to receive. Before Christmas, Angel Tree volunteers will buy and wrap the gift. The gift will be delivered to your child’s home or given to your child at an Angel Tree Christmas party along with a presentation of the Gospel. Your child will be told that the gift is from you – their mom or dad who loves them! Plus, your brief, personal message to your child will be written on the gift tag.

Give Your Child a Gift
It might still be summer, but now is the time to sign your children up to receive a Christmas present from you through Angel Tree. Applications must be postmarked by September 3, 2013. You must ask your chaplain or program coordinator for an application, and either the chaplain or program coordinator must submit it for you when you are done.

There are some important restrictions to the Angel Tree program, so please read carefully before filling out an application:

1) You must be the child(ren)’s father, mother, stepfather, or stepmother.
2) There must not be a court order restricting your contact with the child(ren) or their caregiver(s).
3) Your child(ren) must live in the United States.
4) Your child(ren) must be 18 years old or younger.
5) The form must be filled out completely and legibly.
6) The form must be signed.
7) The form must be postmarked by September 3, 2013.

Get an application and sign your kids up today! A special gift from you at Christmas will help them know that you love them, and it will connect them with a church that can come alongside your family in your absence. Best of all, it will give them an opportunity to experience the transforming love of Jesus Christ.

Angel Tree makes great efforts to serve every eligible child. Sometimes, however, if we are unable to locate your child’s caregiver, if the caregiver refuses to participate, or if there are not enough Angel Tree volunteers in a local area, we may not be able to deliver gifts to your children.

Staying in Touch
Even if you can’t be with your kids, there are still plenty of ways to show them you love them. Giving your child a Christmas gift through Prison Fellowship’s Angel Tree program is a great way to accomplish this. If you are interested in participating, ask your chaplain for a form, which is due by September 3. Once you complete it, he or she will submit it for you.

Amanda was able to deliver gifts to her children.

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