Lessons from a Lifer

by A.R. Quinn

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Audrey Fay isn’t sure what prevented her from committing suicide.

“I had traveled a long, lonely road,” she remembers. Trying to hide the anger and pain she felt, she focused on pleasing the people around her. She did everything that was asked of her, hoping others’ approval would fill the emptiness inside. “Instead,” she says, “it almost drove me off a cliff.”

Audrey began embezzling money from her employer so that she could meet the expectations she felt from her family, co-workers, and friends. She lived a lie, trapped in the web of her own deceit. She became deeply depressed and thought about taking her own life. When she couldn’t take the strain anymore, she walked into her boss’ office and told him what she had done.

“They say the truth sets you free, and it does,” reflects Audrey, “but first I had to go prison.”

Six Days in the Dark

Under a plea agreement, she was sentenced to a two-year term of which she did 13 months. From the county jail, she was sent to Valley State Prison, which at the time was a women’s prison—in central California—just days before Thanksgiving 2004. She had never been to prison before. On her first night, her cellmate was sent to the hospital with a sudden illness. Then someone down the hall tried to light a cigarette and blew a circuit. The entire unit sat in the dark while rain poured down outside. Audrey sat in her unit room for six long days and nights. She was alone, except for the rat that scurried in and out.

The only things in Audrey’s room were a Bible and a Prison Fellowship pamphlet explaining God’s plan of forgiveness. She picked them up and began to read. Her internal conflict built. She wanted to know God, but she had questions.

On the sixth night, she called out to God. She asked Him to save her from the life she was leading and take her as His child. She even prayed that He would make the lights come back on, and that the rat would disappear.

The next day, the lights finally came back on, and she never saw the rat again. It was then that she knew that God had heard her and she would never be the same person.

Upon her release in 2005, Audrey Fay went to church and began to listen about this new life she had questions.

She wanted to know God, but struggled with letting go of her past. She began talking to anyone who would listen about this new life. She had questions.

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As the judge pronounced the sentence, I stood there stunned. I had never been to prison before, and at age 28, my life seemed to be over. Despairing thoughts flooded my mind as I considered the fact that I would die in prison, never again to be a husband or a father. While I stayed numb and speechless, I heard someone say that I was “trying to be strong.” If they only knew; I had no strength at all.

Afterward, reality set in. I knew; I had no strength at all. "Trying to be strong."

I was going to Angola, then the bloodiest prison in the country. I wondered if I would have to kill or be killed, but since I would spend the rest of my natural life in prison anyway, it didn’t seem to matter.

I felt hopeless. When you have an out date, you can look forward to the future and make plans. Even if you have a long sentence, there is always the possibility of getting it shortened. But how could I hope when there was nothing to hope for?

Let Time Serve You

For the first couple of years, I just existed day to day. But one day I saw a sign in the education department that read, “Don’t serve time; let time serve you.” That was an “ah-ha” moment, and it was then that I began to take note of what the prison environment was doing to me. I knew I was better than what I had been becoming.

I wanted to do: help others study, and grow. My life was not going to come to a church service

I had found behind the barbed-wire fence a love, a peace, and a purpose that I would never be able to let go of. I never gave up. I needed to cleanse myself of bitterness. Until my mind and heart were free, my soul would never be free to face the challenges of prison life.

There were so many seemingly helpless, hopeless people in prison. At last I realized what I wanted to do: help others who were tempted to give up. In June 1980 I surrendered my life to Christ. For the first time I felt that I could make a difference in the lives of others...
Taking the Hill

Guest Column: Jim Liske

Sometimes it becomes clear: It's what I do. I have always known what I am to do. I was born with a desire to make a difference.

And so, for me, the desire to serve others, to help others, has been the driving force behind my life. I have always known that I am meant to be a servant of my fellow man.

In March 2007, Jeff was transferred to Los Angeles for his job, and Audrey came with him, continuing to work for the same commercial real estate broker who had employed her during the work-release phase of her incarceration.

In December 2008, Jeff and Audrey delivered a Christmas gift to a prisoner's family through Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree program. Though she had always hesitated to share her own prison experiences, Audrey knew she had to comfort the family. Her story seemed to come pouring out. As she felt the freedom to talk about the past, she knew it was her time to face her other biggest fear. As they pulled away from the curb she asked Jeff, "Are you ready?"

"For what?" he said.

"For how God is going to move us this coming year," she replied.

"I don't want to move--I like it here," her confused spouse responded.

"Not physically," Audrey said. "Spiritually. God is calling us to do prison ministry together.

Jeff used to be a race car driver, and he tends to drive quickly, but he was so excited that he stopped the car in the middle of the road. He turned to Audrey and said, "Look where we are."

They were right in front of the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC), a prison for men.

Ready to Face the Past

Jeff and Audrey began to get involved in prison ministry in 2008. They volunteered for The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI), a Prison Fellowship multi-year, seminary-level program that equips prisoners to become Christian leaders behind bars and back in their communities after they are released. The growth of TUMI at CRC allowed for another class to open, and Jeff and Audrey began facilitating their own class in prison.

Lessons from a Lifelong Visitor

I wire fences. By 1982, I had matured in my faith and began teaching the Bible to others. A few years later, my mom came to visit me. She told me she was proud of the person I had become. I could see in her eyes that she meant every word. Her expression of love and faith in me was so moving that I began to apologize to her for all the wrong I had ever done. It was so unburdening.

My mom came to visit me. She told me she was proud of the person I had become.

A New Life for a New Person

After that day I started getting involved in every self-help program the prison had to offer. I was a new person, and I had to do new things. On Oct. 12, 1985, I received a call into the ministry to preach the Gospel of Jesus. In 1990 the prisoner church elected me as its pastor, a position in which I still serve. About five years ago, as a way to reduce recidivism, enhance public safety, and create fewer victims, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in California launched an initiative called the Prison Fellowship Multi-Year, Seminary-Level Program (PFLP). PFLP pairs prisoners with mentors who are professionals in fields such as psychology, social work, and law enforcement.

In June 2010, Warden Cain selected me to be the lead mentor and coordinator of the Corrections Court Reentry Program, a pilot program established in New Orleans that has since spread to seven other Louisiana parishes. Working with young men, many of whom have never had a real chance in life, has been my most rewarding experience. The mentors and tutors are helping to make society safer. After almost 36 years of incarceration, I am no longer angry or bitter with anyone for any reason. I believe that God has given me another chance to be a good father. I have restored my relationship with my own children, and now I have so many more "kids" behind bars who call me "Pops."

I've learned that because you have committed a criminal act you do not have to become a criminal. Even inside prison you do not have to waste away: You can grow where you are planted and be fruitful. The simple truth is that if you water yourself and fertilize your mind with good food, you will become better and find joy in yourself and in the God who gives you all you need.

Jim Liske is the president and CEO of Prison Fellowship Ministries.

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Prayer Warriors Corner

This winter, please pray for the following concerns:

- Pray for all those who are in authority, including wardens, corrections officers, parole and probation officers, and the parole board. Ask God that “they may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” (1 Timothy 2:2-3)
- Pray for the peace and health of the jail or prison you are in, and all the prisons in your state.
- Pick three people in your prison and commit to praying for them regularly. Pray about what they need and pray specifically for their children and family members.

"They say the truth sets you free, and it does," reflects Audrey, "but first I had to go to prison."
A master bombardier aboard B-24 second lieutenant, serving as a 1936 Olympic Games in Germany.

Tortured in POW Camp

Until the end of the war, the Japanese held Zamperini as a prisoner. His family believed that he had been killed in action. He was terribly mistreated, in violation of international law protecting captured combatants. To avoid starvation, he had to eat rice that had been thrown on the ground and mixed with dirt. He was mocked and forced to run a race against well-fed Japanese soldiers.

Worst of all, he caught the attention of the moody, sadistic camp commander Mutsuhiro Watanabe, whom the prisoners had nicknamed “the Bird.” The Bird hated Zamperini because he had been an Olympic athlete; he wanted to humiliate him, so he would order Zamperini to stand at attention while he beat him viciously. Once, he forced Zamperini to hold a heavy hardwood beam over his head for 37 minutes straight, until finally, enraged by the prisoner’s endurance, the commander punched Zamperini in the stomach. Zamperini dropped the beam and it hit him in the head, knocking him unconscious.

When the war was over, Zamperini and the other imprisoned Americans were released. The Bird went into hiding to avoid prosecution for war crimes. Zamperini slowly made his way home to his family, resting and regaining his strength along the way. He met and married the beautiful Cynthia Applewhite, and he enjoyed the attention and awards he received because of his incredible story of survival.

But inside, Zamperini carried terrible scars that no one could see. He had horrible nightmares about the mistreatment he had endured, and he would wake up sweating and shaking with terror. When he mistakenly thought he heard the Japanese word for “salute,” he would reflexively snap to attention, ready to receive a beating. For a while, he became obsessed with the idea of hunting down the Bird and murdering him. He became angry and sullen, and as he had during childhood, he turned to liquor to help dull the intolerable emotional pain he felt. His wife felt she had no choice but to divorce him.

Zamperini’s life began to change when some neighbors invited him and Cynthia to an event in California where Billy Graham, the famous evangelist, was preaching. He went reluctantly, but the message of God’s forgiveness and salvation transformed his life forever. He felt able to let go of the past.

‘Forgive Your Enemies’

In 1950, he returned to Japan as a missionary. He sought out the camp guards who had imprisoned him and told them that he forgave them. He became reconciled to them and told them about the love of Jesus. The only one who refused to meet with him was the Bird. Zamperini wrote a letter which he asked to be delivered to Watanabe. It said, in part, ‘As a result of my prisoner of war experience under your unwarranted and unreasonable punishment, my post-war life became a nightmare. […] but thanks to a confrontation with God through the evangelist Billy Graham, I committed my life to Christ. Love replaced the hate I had for you. Christ said, ‘Forgive your enemies and pray for them.’ […] I also forgive you and now would hope that you would also become a Christian.”

Zamperini and his wife had two children. His war-ravaged body would not respond to training in the same way it had before, and he never competed athletically again, but near his 81st birthday, he carried the Olympic torch in Japan. His life story was made into Unbroken, a best-selling book by nonfiction author Laura Hillenbrand, and a 2014 Hollywood film of the same name, directed by Angelina Jolie.

Ex-POW: ‘Love Replaced the Hate I Had’ by A.R. Quinn

The pain of the past can be like a heavy chain around your ankles, weighing you down with every step you take. You can carry it around with you your whole life, or you can ask God to give you a new start as you commit your life to Him. You can start with a simple prayer like the one below. The words can be your own; what matters is that you talk to God openly and sincerely from your heart. It will never reject an honest prayer from someone who admits they need Him.

Dear God, I’m a broken person. I’m tired of carrying around all the pain of the past—pain from the things I’ve done and what’s been done to me. I want a new start. I want to experience Your love, forgiveness, and redemption. Please show me how to live a life committed to You.

If, like Louis Zamperini, you’re ready to let go of the past and let God take charge of your life, Inside Journal wants to help. We will connect you with a partner organization that can provide a free correspondence Bible study, as well as a Bible if you do not have access to one through your facility.

Write to “Letting Go” c/o Inside Journal, PO Box 1780, Ashburn, VA 20146-1780.

Enroll Today!

Free Bible Correspondence Courses in English and Spanish

- Receive lessons in the mail.
- Earn certificates of completion for each course.
- Build spiritual strength, character, and endurance.
- Receive personalized comments and encouragement.
- Trained volunteers review and respond to each lesson.
- Upon completing the self-paced 35 lessons, the student may earn 6 credit hours at Berean Bible Institute, in Slinger, Wisconsin. www.BereanBibleInstitute.org

In the last 14 years, over 20,000 students have taken our courses. Here is what one prisoner said:

“While in prison, a cellmate asked me if I would like to do a Bible Correspondence course. ‘Why not,’ I told him. One of your courses in particular was Works vs. Grace. When I finished it, I understood for the first time the Grace of God. The Holy Spirit opened my eyes and I opened my heart to Him, deciding to follow Jesus. Now I understand the love of God. I want to study the Bible more, possibly taking college courses. I want to learn more in order to teach others about grace and the peace found in our Lord.”

- Edward (He took our Spanish courses.)

This year we celebrate 60 years of prison ministry and outreach from 1955-2015. You can download all our lessons at www.prisonmission.org

Letting Go, Letting God

Inside Journal
Winter 2015

www.prisonmission.org

Enroll Today!
The Bible: Plugging into the Source

Jesus christ. It gives practical in-
books) begins with the life of
summer of 1994. Enjoy!
The article below first appeared in
from some of our earlier editions.
we are running classic content.
In celebration of 25 years in print,

A Book of Many Books

The Bible is actually a whole library of books and letters.
The new Testament has:
17 books of prophecy
47 books of the Old Testament
17 books of history before the birth of Jesus
11 books of poetry
5 books of prophecy

The Bible—advice on how to get
readers, and what he wants from us.

Why Should I Read

The Bible?

For example, Isaiah 55:10-11 is
repeated and it contains many words and
verse 10 and 11.)

What to Read When ...

When agca arrived at the Vati-
pardon by Italy in 2000 and
Turkish prison in 2010.

What does it give us?
Applying change your behavior.
Ask what the verses you are studying mean to you personally.

Interesting Bible Facts

Chapters in the Bible: 1,189
Longest chapter: Psalm 119
Shortest chapter: Psalm 117
Middle chapter: Psalm 117
Longest verse: Esther 8:9
Shortest verse: John 11:35

Who Wrote the Bible?

The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The OT was written between about 1100 BCE and 100 BCE, while the NT was written between about 40 CE and 100 CE. The Old Testament was written in hebrew and Aramaic, while the New Testament was written in Koine Greek. The Bible was originally written to communicate God’s message to humanity, but today it is also used as a historical and cultural artifact. The Bible is divided into 66 books, including 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. The Bible contains the story of God’s relationship with humanity, including creation, the flood, the covenant with Abraham, the law given through Moses, the prophets, and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible is also a source of ethical and moral guidance, providing principles for living a righteous and virtuous life. The Bible is the most translated and read book in history, with over 5 billion copies printed to date. The Bible is also considered the inspiration for much of Western literature, art, and music. The Bible is a complex and multi-layered text, with different perspectives and interpretations, and continues to be a source of inspiration and guidance for people around the world. The Bible is a source of inspiration and guidance for people around the world.