A New Life for Jorge

by Kate Campbell

Jorge Garcia was just 13 years old his first time in a juvenile detention facility. For him, it was a badge of honor. “It made me think I was cool,” says Jorge. “But I was only a kid. I didn’t know where all this was going to take me.” Jorge was born in Mexico but immigrated to San Diego with his family when he was 11. “I found out that it was a different language, a different culture,” he remembers.

A Life of Crime Begins
In middle school, Jorge began selling candy, bicycles, and clothing with his “kids’ gang,” and sniffing gasoline, paint, and glue. By 13, he was smoking marijuana. In high school, he began selling marijuana and pills, which made him very popular. “I grew up with seven kids, so it was hard for me to get attention,” he says. “I looked for that attention outside of my family.” Jorge’s uncle opened the door to a life of crime when he convinced Jorge to become a drug trafficker. At 16, Jorge often made $7,000 a day “working” for his uncle.

When he was 19, Jorge married his first wife, who didn’t know about his criminal lifestyle. “I knew I had to hide myself,” he says. They had four kids and remained married for 18 years. Jorge spent much of that time in and out of prison, and he got tired of his life of crime. “Deeply, I was not happy,” he says.

Becoming a Child of God
In 1978, Jorge was invited to go to church. “Before I went in [to church], I put my gun … and my bag of cocaine under the dashboard,” he says. The church was different than what Jorge had experienced before. “People at this church were singing and clapping,” he remembers. “The church where I used to go, everybody was quiet.”

After a life of crime, Jorge Garcia still spends a lot of his time behind bars—but not as a prisoner. Jorge continued his criminal lifestyle, spending more than two decades in and out of prisons in Mexico and America. In 1990, everything fell apart when

Repeating the Past

We’ve all been in situations like Chuck’s. Our mistakes catch up with us, and our apparent success goes up in smoke. When this happens, we have two choices: 1) We can ignore the past and try to start over, or 2) We can look carefully at the past and learn from it before moving ahead. Often we choose Option 1. We make plans for becoming different, better versions of ourselves, without examining why we do the things we do. We say things like, “Man, I shouldn’t have had that last drink. I’m going to be late for work again, I hope I don’t get fired. That’s it. I’m going to be different. No more drinking for me—starting tomorrow.”

Or, “I know my wife doesn’t like my ‘side business.’ She’s afraid I’ll go back to prison. But we really need to move into a bigger place. Just one more big deal, and then I can leave it all behind for good.”

Speeches like the ones above are “famous last words.” Sadly, just having good intentions rarely leads to a changed life. Why?

Look in the Rearview Mirror
Maybe you’ve heard the old saying, “Those who don’t know history are doomed to repeat it.” That’s true in our personal lives. If we try to fix our bad choices, without ever looking at why we made bad choices in the first place, we’re not going to be successful. If we’re serious about changing our direction in life, it’s not enough to be sorry. We need to take a good, long look in the rearview mirror.

• Examine the past. Are things from your past driving your present actions? Have you used alcohol, drugs, or toxic relationships to numb the pain of something bad that happened? Being reminded of a painful
**Letters to the Editor**

**'Roy's Long Road'**

I was laying on my bunk and this old man came up to my cell door and asked me if I wanted something to read. I got up and started talking to him, and my heart went out to this man in his 80s named Dave. He said the Inside Journal Prison Fellowship’s newspaper for America’s prisons, Volume 23. No. 2, Spring 2014 under my cell door and told me, “You read that and you will find some answers.” I read that newspaper three times and was touched emotionally by all of the articles. “Roy’s Long Road to Paradise” is a little like my story.

– C.C., Tennessee

**Prisoner Wages**

During my times inside I have noticed the cost of items increase multiple times while inmate worker wages have stayed the same. Both state and federal minimum wages have risen multiple times as well. But who cares about the hard-working inmate population? [...] It is way past time for a change. It is way past time for a raise. It is way past time for respect.

– M.P., Connecticut

**Getting in the Christmas Spirit**

Dear Angel Tree, I want to thank you for giving my children … gifts on my behalf. My daughter wrote you for giving my children … gifts. “That church had something of cocaine and my bag...

– R.S., Ohio

**Subscription Info**

At Inside Journal (IJ), we receive many letters each week from prisoners asking for subscriptions to our newspaper. We are grateful for the interest and support of our readers – however, because of limitations on our staff and budget, it is only available in bulk shipments to your chaplain, programming coordinator, or a volunteer who visits your facility. Chaplains to set up these shipments for free, please contact our editorial staff at PO Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790 or insidejournal@ffm.org.

**Vegan Food**

I am a vegan. It is not healthy or logical in the year 2014 to eat products from animal-based foods. [...] The problem is that the DOC does not offer any meals that are strictly plant-based. The DOC does not even offer a vegetarian diet. On average, the DOC serves four ounces of 1/4 cup of vegetables about four days out of seven. [...] The DOC commissary is an option, however, the only plant-based products that the DOC sells are peanuts, black beans, pickles, tofu, nuts, and pop- corn. One cannot create a normal plant-based diet on what the DOC provides. [...] If a person wants to be a Muslim, the DOC provides a non-meat-based diet. It is sad that the DOC will not honor my spiritual decision of wanting only a plant-based diet.

– K.M., Connecticut

**A New Life for Jorge**

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his wife asked for a divorce. He tried to repair the damage, even seeking help from a woman who practiced witchcraft. While his family crumbled, the rest of his life began to crumble, too. “I started losing everything one by one;” says Jorge. With no house and no car, Jorge lived in his brother’s garage and rode the public bus. “I didn’t even have $5 to buy a hamburger,” he says.

Jorge soon decided his life wasn’t worth living. While lying on the couch he used for a bed, he attempted to kill himself by overdosing on drugs, but his friend found him and brought him back to life. All he said to his wife was, “Why did you bring me back?” I wanted to die.” His second attempt to overdose was also unsuccessful; a police officer found him in a park and took him to the hospital. Feeling like a failure, Jorge thought, “I’m not even good enough to kill myself.”

That’s when he prayed: “OK, God, I want to go Your way.” Jorge remembered the church from 12 years earlier and decided to go back again.

“That church had something special that I never felt before,” he says.

When he returned, he found lasting peace for the first time since he started using and selling drugs as a kid. “I was tired, I’m tired, and that’s what made a criminal become a child of God.” That day, Jorge gave his life to Christ.

**A Life Redeemed**

After he became a Christian, Jorge left California and spent five years on a farm in Mexico. “It was like therapy. God changed me little by little,” he says. “He had a mission for me.” When Jorge returned in 1996, he began working in Los Angeles and volunteering with Prison Fellowship. In 2003 he became Prison Fellowship’s Hispanic ministry coordinator. Through his new position and faith in Jesus Christ, Jorge discovered God-given gifts and talents, “I thought that [selling drugs] was the only thing I knew how to do,” he says. “But I discovered it knew how to love my people behind bars … I discovered that I have a lot of talents that I never knew I had.”

Jorge remarried and now has another child and a grandchild. He directs Prison Fellowship’s work in Latin America and Mexico and also produces “Libres en Cristo,” a Spanish-language radio program that airs regularly on Radio Nueva Vida.

**Art of Looking Back**

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event can trigger an explosion of bad choices, like stepping on a land mine. It will be hard to stop engaging in addictive behav- iors until you deal with the pain head-on. That might mean journaling about your experi- ences or joining an addiction support group. You can’t change the past, but you can choose what you do about it now.

**Examine your worldview.**

We all have a worldview, or way of thinking, that drives how we act. If you think money is the most important thing in life, you will worry about having enough, and you might break the rules to get more. Is status the most important thing to you? you will do whatever it takes to be on top. Ask yourself what thoughts might have led up to decisions that you now regret, and you might want to embrace instead. If you’re a Christian, search the Bible (Proverbs and the New Testa- ment are great places to start) for principles worth building your new worldview on.

• **Examine your relationships.** We don’t make decisions in a vacuum. Sometimes the people around us encourage us to make bad decisions, and sometimes our bad decisions hurt others. Before we can be ready to move forward, we might need to choose to surround ourselves with more posi- tive influences. We might also need to apologize to others for the pain we have caused, and do whatever is in our power to make up for the legal actions. Repentance is a lot more than feeling sorry for something we’ve done wrong and promise- ing to do better. It’s an “about- face,” a total change of direction in the way we think and act. It’s a revolution of the heart.

As he took a hard look back at his own life, Chuck Colson realized that his worldview was built on the wrong priorities. He valued power and winning instead of humility and serving others. When he had a personal encounter with God, the whole direction of his life changed. He pled guilty to charges that he knew were true and agreed to serve time in a federal prison camp. When he came out, he dedicated the rest of his life to serving prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families, and help- ing others develop a healthy worldview.

It’s not always easy or flat- tering, but finding a new life starts with looking hard at your old one. Once you have looked back, you will be better pre- pared to leave the past behind for good.

**PRAYER WARRIORS COVER**

This fall, please pray for the following concerns:

• Pray for all those who are behind bars in this country and around the world, whether they are being imprisoned unjustly or unjustly.

“Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” – Hebrews 13:3

• Pray for Christians, as well as other religious minorities in the Middle East, who are being forced to flee their homes as they are persecuted for their beliefs in the Middle East. Tens of thousands of Christians around the world are committed to praying for this special concern every Monday.

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” – Ephesians 6:18

• Pray that the Lord would continue to reveal Himself to those who don’t know Him and comfort the families whose loved ones are incarcerated.

“Pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread among those who don’t know Him and comfort the families of those whose loved ones are incarcerated.” – Thessalonians 3:1

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“Before I went in [to prison], I put my gun ... and my bag of cocaine under the dashboard.”

– R.S., Ohio

**Life for Jorge**

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**Getting in the Christmas Spirit**

Dear Angel Tree, I want to thank you for giving my children … gifts on my behalf. My daughter wrote you for giving my children … gifts. “That church had something...
behind bars. What more could several self-improvement courses had written letters on my behalf, members of my home community network. Over a dozen upstanding job leads, and a strong support plan I'd filed with the board. I had a safe place to live, excellent expected to wipe those blots away, but it makes us eternally guilty before Him—and nothing we say or do that falls broken all of God's laws” (James 2:10 NLT). A lot of us think we can be saved from sins by going to church and doing our best to follow God's rules. We think that our good deeds will somehow cancel out past mistakes, and so we do our best to simply be “good people.”

But that’s not how God judges. The Bible says, “The person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws” (James 2:10 NLT). That means anything we think, say or do that falls short of God's perfect standard makes us eternally guilty before Him—and nothing we say or do afterward can erase that guilt. When our cases come up for review, those past misdeeds will still be on our records, and we'll still have to answer for them.

Better Than Parole

Because He created us and loves us, God has provided a way to wipe those blots away, but it has nothing to do with our merits. “He saved us,” the Bible says, “not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy” (Titus 3:5).

God knew that once His perfect justice was served, we would all perish: “That's why He allowed His own Son to become one of us. Jesus Christ, being God in human flesh, lived the perfect life none of us ever could. Yet He was also destined to die at the hands of the very people He came to save. Nailed to a Roman cross like a common criminal, He submitted to a punishment He didn't deserve so that God could extend us the mercy we don't deserve. At the cross, God put His wrath against our sin, and then He raised Jesus from the dead three days later to demonstrate that death no longer has any claim on us.”

We think that our good deeds and invite Jesus into your life, you can receive it right now as His free gift. You can start with a simple prayer like this one:

But what if you don’t have access to one through your facility—by writing to No Revocation Hearings

Parole comes with conditions, and it can be taken away for misbehavior. God’s mercy isn’t like that. His grace has no strings attached, and He'll never summon you to a revocation hearing.

You can’t earn that kind of love, but if you’re willing to confess your sins and invite Jesus into your life, you can receive it right now as His free gift. You can start with a simple prayer like this one:

God, I’ve tried so hard to run away from my sin, but I can’t. I don’t deserve Your love, and yet I know You still do love me. I believe You sent Your Son Jesus to die on the cross for my sins, and today I ask You to come into my life and set me free for His sake. Help me live in a way that honors Your love.

If you just prayed those words from a sincere heart, then you’re on the road to a new life, and Inside Journal wants to help. You can enroll in a free correspondence Bible study—and get a Bible, if you don’t have access to one through your facility—by writing to “No Revocation,” c/o Inside Journal, PO Box 1780, Ashburn, VA, 20146-1780. We will connect you with a partnering organization that provides these materials.

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Nothing Johnathan did seemed to make his parole date arrive any faster. He realized there was nothing he could do to earn his freedom—or his salvation. But there was still hope.

The parole panel assigned to review your case has determined that, in light of the nature and circumstances of your offense... I didn’t need to read any further to know I wasn’t going home. I’d never felt so heartbroken in my whole life.

Worse Than a Set-Off

It was my first parole set-off, but it wouldn’t be my last. In the months that followed, I slowly followed all the warden’s rules, trying to keep a clean disciplinary record. They say good behavior counts, after all. But as I watched others receive similar set-offs time and time again, I began to lose hope. It became clear that my crime would always be the first and most important thing the parole board considered, and nothing I said or did behind bars would ever change “the nature and circumstances of my offense.”

After my second set-off, cold reality set in: I would never deserve to be set free until I had fully served my time, all the way down to the last day.

The same is true for all of us when it comes to our standing before God. The Bible says, “When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned” (Romans 5:12 NLT). A lot of us think we can be saved from sins by going to church and doing our best to follow God’s rules. We think that our good deeds will somehow cancel out past mistakes, and so we do our best to simply be “good people.”

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Prison Food—From Field to Chow Hall

by Kate Campbell

The Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in San Diego recently launched its new Farm and Rehabilitation Meals (FARM) program, in which prisoners work as farmers and learn sustainable agriculture, according to The Huffington Post.

To accommodate 20 prisoner-farmers, Donovan Correctional Facility is building farming facilities, including three acres of farmland on prison grounds, a classroom, and several raised garden beds to serve prisoners in wheelchairs. Their produce will be served in prison cafeterias after undergoing an approval process by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

San Diego Roots Sustainable Food Program, a nonprofit organization that promotes gardening and farming education, is partnering with the health department at Donovan to coordinate this program. “It’s kind of a grand experiment for all of us. We’ve never done anything like this before,” says Richard Winkler, who is on the board of directors for San Diego Roots and volunteers to help run FARM. “For me, this is sort of a big opportunity to demonstrate what’s possible,” says Richard. “It seems to me that [farming] is a basic skill that I think everybody should know.”

Getting Back to the Roots

In the first class, the prisoners will start by growing summer vegetables, including tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and squash. “We teach them how to do everything from irrigation to growing healthy soil [to] what you need to know to grow food,” says Richard. The program will also teach prisoners about good nutrition.

The program was created in response to a study conducted at facilities with similar programs, which demonstrated that prisoners involved with the farming program had a recidivism rate of only 5 to 10 percent, compared with California’s overall rate of 61 percent.

Potential for Growth

Wehtahnah Tucker, health care administrator and FARM program coordinator, hopes that the program will be able to provide certification for participants, so prisoners can more easily find jobs in the sustainable agriculture industry, especially in San Diego, where farming skills are in high demand. Wehtahnah has been working alongside Elizabeth Gransee, information officer at California Correctional Health Care Services. They hope to one day expand FARM into a statewide initiative.

“My expectation is that this curriculum will be successful in teaching inmates … not only at Donovan, but statewide,” says Wehtahnah. “When we start out projects that are innovative like this one, we start on a small scale and we see where it takes us.”

Richard hopes that the program expands beyond the half-acre set aside for its launch. “There’s a huge potential to grow food and have an outdoor recreational activity,” says Richard.

As for prisoners entering the application process to be a part of this program, Wehtahnah says, “We’re looking for the inmate who wants this, who is motivated to learn and to take that knowledge and share it with others.”