How Kellie Found the Key to Freedom

by Emily Andrews

Kellie Thimmes stood in front of the mirror, shocked by the miserable 88-pound woman staring back at her. Eyes dark and sunken, arms bruised by drug use—how had her life come to this? Kellie's life hadn't always reflected such hopelessness. Raised in Colorado in a stable family, she attended college on a swimming scholarship and pursued a career as a nurse. She married her high school sweetheart and had two kids. Life seemed good. She got pregnant two more times during her short stints of clean time. Her children went to live with her parents while she continued life on the streets. Once she was robbed and beaten almost beyond recognition. Kellie tried to free herself from the mess, but she felt powerless. "I was depressed, and the more depressed I got, the more drugs I did," she explains. "The more drugs I did, the more depressed I got... And I wasn't a person you would want to be around." Eventually, Kellie hit her rock bottom. Her tried feet had entered and left more rehabs than she could count. Her weary eyes had seen so much darkness. Her knees hit the floor, and it wasn't just from exhaustion; she felt hopeless and needed to pray. She cried out, "God, if You're real, You need to show up—and show up now—because

Lost in the cycle

“I was constantly searching for something to fill the void that I felt,” she admits. Overeating, over-shopping, over-exercising, and late-night partying with co-workers—Kellie tried it all. At one party, she saw a tray with lines of cocaine coming her way. She decided to sample it. “Immediately, I felt like I had arrived,” says Kellie. “I felt like, 'This is the answer. This is filling the emptiness that I feel.'” As quickly as she'd discovered cocaine, Kellie was addicted. She left her job and her family to live on the streets. Cocaine led to crystal meth. Soon she was job and her family to live on drugs, burglarizing homes, prostituting herself. As quickly as she'd discovered cocaine, Kellie was addicted. She left her job and her family to live on the streets. Cocaine led to crystal meth. Soon she was

Conflict: What’s Your Piece of the Pie?

by Danielle Arnold

Let’s face it: women sometimes clash. "You won’t believe what she did!" “Did you hear what she called me?” Occasionally a woman walks into my office wanting to vent about a problem she has with her roommate. The conversation usually centers on what the other person is doing wrong; sometimes it’s a long list. Eventually I ask the woman to pause. I draw a circle on a piece of paper, and sometimes the woman rolls her eyes, because she knows what’s coming next. “This conflict is like a big pie on the table,” I remind her. “How big is your piece? What do you control?” The roots of conflict Generally, we raise little girls to be polite and nurturing. We give them dolls and tell them to play nicely. These traits have an instinctive basis for most women, but without appropriate self-worth and boundaries, these nurturing little girls can grow up to be women who avoid or mismanage conflict. Poor conflict-resolution skills show themselves when women live together in the close quarters of a prison environment. When an issue arises, instead of dealing with it openly and respectfully, some women keep it behind closed doors. They may gossip to vent their frustration or insult one another. Or they may be too afraid of conflict to deal with it, and turn their anger and frustration inward, which can lead to depression or self-harm. ... Women may feel tempted to control others—an impossible job that leads to codependency, anxiety, and frustration. Unhealthy conflict has its roots in poor personal boundaries. Without good boundaries, women may feel tempted to control others—an impossible job that leads to codependency, anxiety, and frustration. To go in a healthier direction, I offer you the same advice I give women in my unit. Sit down, look at the “pie” that represents your conflict, and draw the slice that shows what you have control over. Focus on things inside your slice—your actions, thoughts, and feelings. By having a laser focus on your slice, you can stop letting your personal growth be hindered by the chaos around you. And within these healthier boundaries, you can find the freedom to act with greater respect for yourself and your community. Less tension, more unity Dealing with conflict in healthy ways is easier said than done. If you’ve been around poor examples of conflict resolution your whole life, you will tend to repeat what you know. But you can get out of the rut of toxic conflict. If you work through it thoughtfully and respectfully, conflict can actually strengthen your relationships.
Your Letters

Head up and your faith strong!

Cecile, Oklahoma
I came inside inside journal on the book cart. High point, even though you guys always bring me to tears. Going to sign up for the Bible study—thank you! Some days in here we wonder where it is? Where’s our own humanity? Thank you for keeping us walking toward the light'

Dear Cecile:
Thank you for keeping us there are so many people, even total strangers, praying for you and other women each day. Keep your head up and your faith strong.

Key to Freedom

Continued from page 1

I’m going to die.
Two days later, she was arrested.
Curtained to prison in a white van, Kellie looked out the window and saw razor-wire fences and armed guards. She was terrified as she began her six-year sentence. Still, she told herself, “You’re going to come out of these gates a better woman. Not this empty, broken person that you are walking in.”

“As women, we have all these insecurities, especially if we’ve lost our kids.”

A reflection of hope
While incarcerated, Kellie began attending church and enrolled in the Prison Fellowship Academy™. a year-long life-transformation program that she postponed her parole to complete. She knew she needed to surround herself with good influences and tackle her issues directly.

“When I first started the Academy, I didn’t feel like I qualified just because of all the mistakes I had made.” says Kellie, “as if no one could be as bad as me. I feel like as women, we have all these insecurities, especially if we’ve lost our kids. We feel like we could never be forgiven for that. The Academy helped me look at that issue. I learned how to love myself.”

With the help of Academy volunteers, Kellie faced the root of her shame and identity issues. She met with a mentor once a week and learned how to set healthy boundaries in habits and relationships.

“II have made a ton of mistakes, but my mistakes don’t define me,” says Kellie. “Through the Academy, Kellie realized what she had been missing for so long—a relationship with Jesus Christ. “I wasn’t ready [to change] until I hit my knees and cried out to Jesus,” she admits.

3. Practice reflective listening. Sometimes, during a conflict, you might race ahead to the next point you want to make, without waiting to hear what your conflict partner is saying.

Practice slowing down so you can really listen.

Practicing slowing down you can really listen. Then reflect it back to her. You could say something like, “I see what you’re saying that when I said X, it caused you to feel Y.” This shows your conflict partner you are listening carefully, and it also gives her a chance to clear up any misunderstanding.

It takes some practice and commitment, but having good boundaries and healthy conflict resolution can revolutionize your life. As you invest your energy in the things you can control, and not the pieces you can’t, you’ll experience greater freedom, confidence, and personal growth. And when you maintain those boundaries in your community, you’ll develop a more positive, encouraging environment to pursue the changes you want to make in your life.

Danielle Arnold works with women in the Prison Fellowship Academy, a holistic life-transformation program at Nebraska Correctional Center for Women in York, Nebraska.
**The Good Kind of Fear**

by Grayson Pope

Abby was the living definition of a “good girl.” Raised in a family of perfectionists, she worked hard in school and earned high grades. She went to college, got a good job, got married, and had two children. But she wasn’t at peace. Inside she had a craving for approval that was never satisfied. She always said “yes,” never “no.” She didn’t just want people to like her—she needed them to. Approval was her drug, and her greatest fear was that other people would stop loving her.

So Abby did whatever she needed to keep the approval of her friends and family. She bought gifts for them that she couldn’t afford, and before long, she was embezzling money from her employer to pay for them.

Abby became so depressed because of her activities that she considered killing herself. Finally she gathered the courage to tell her boss and she was fired. Her worst fears were realized.

Have you ever lived as a slave to others’ opinion of you? It turns your life into a rocky rollercoaster of insecurity. If they praise you one day, you’re on top of the world. If they criticize you the next day, you feel resentful and terrified. Terrified of losing their approval, you bend over backwards to meet their demands—even when it’s not good for you.

When you live to please people, you might seem “nice” on the surface, but your relationships aren’t healthy or loving if they are based on fear. It’s not a path that leads to true joy.

Respecting God—a healthy fear

The Bible tells us there’s a better way. Matthew 10:28 says, “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body, they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

So, are you just supposed to cover before God instead, hoping a lightning bolt isn’t headed your way?

No. The Bible talks about different kinds of fear. There’s the kind you usually think of—the fear you experience when a threatening person or situation confronts you.

It’s fear that makes you try to please someone to avoid getting hurt. The Bible says that God’s perfect love, demonstrated through His Son Jesus, actually casts out fear rooted in respect and love for God the Father. So, a woman with a healthy fear of God is not terrified of Him. She understands that while God can destroy the body and soul, He doesn’t want to. In fact, God “wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

Respect is earned; grace is given

The truth is that God is full of grace. He loves you so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, who willingly sacrificed Himself and died for everything you’ve ever done wrong, and all He asks in return is that you accept Him into your heart.

In our world, approval is not always given without a price. But God’s grace does not need to be earned—it’s free and available to all who believe in Jesus.

In prison, Abby had lost the approval of most of the people in her community, but she found something better that gave her hope: God’s unconditional love. She knew that when God looked at her, He saw a beloved child. That realization gave her the strength to get through the rest of her sentence and rebuild her life and relationships on the outside. And because she no longer sought others’ approval, she had peace that nothing could shake.

What if you did the same? What if, instead of fearing people and their opinion of you, you were unconditionally loved and accepted by an all-powerful God?

Being in good relationships with others is important, but as Abby learned through her anxiety, you will never find peace by focusing on approval of others. True peace comes from the Lord. If you fearfully respect God, and accept the never-ending grace He freely offers, you’ll find what you’ve been searching for all along.

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**Word Search: Important Qualities**

How many of the words below can you find in the puzzle? (Words are hidden left-to-right, right-to-left, upward, downward, and diagonally)

Respectful, Valued, Honesty, Worth, Helpful, Humble, Obedient, Reasonable, Decent, Kind, Useful, Sympathy, Good, Favor

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**Tired of Walking on Eggshells?**

Replace your anxiety about gaining the approval of others with a loving, respectful fear of God. The Bible says, “Fear of the Lord leads to life, bringing security and protection from harm” (Proverbs 10:21). So how do you shift your focus off others and onto God? Start with a simple prayer:

Lord, I have been looking to other people to fill me up with their approval, but only You can do that. You love me in any good days and in any bad. I want to be Your child. I want to receive Your grace and forgiveness. Make me see from the inside out, and teach me how to love, serve, and respect You, no matter what anyone else says. Amen.

If you’d like to learn more about God’s love, Inside Journal wants to connect you with a partner organization that offers a free correspondence Bible study. Write to “Walking on Eggshells,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1970, Ashland, VA 22401-1970. You can also get an Inside Journal LET Life Recovery Bible (limit one per person). To receive a Bible, write to: Tyndale House Publishers, Attn: Inside Journal Bible, 351 Executive Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188 with your name, prison ID number; and institution name and address.

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**In A Family of Faith**

Have you ever lived as a family of perfectionists? We worked hard in school and earned high grades. We went to college, got a good job, got married, and had two children. But we weren’t at peace. Inside we had a craving for acceptance that was never satisfied. We always said “yes,” never “no.” We didn’t just want people to like us—we needed them to. Approval was our drug, and our greatest fear was that other people would stop loving us.

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Abuse, Boundaries, and the Road to Self-Respect
by Emily Andrews

Annette Oltmans: I experienced marital abuse, and at the same time, I witnessed a child go through a crisis of molestation. When we reached out for help, we both received criticism and were shunned by some close friends and family. I was inspired to go on a deep search project about the layers of abuse and simplify the topic for victims and their communities. I learned that when victims reach out for help, they often are re-victimized. I trademarked the term “double abuse.” I’ve been surprised that we can stop it if it doesn’t have a name.

IJ: Tell us a bit more about Double Abuse.

AO: Double Abuse occurs when friends, family, authority figures, or even therapists doubt or downplay the victim’s experience or pass judgment, or define the situation by experience or pass judgment, figures, or even therapists. AO: Double Abuse occurs when friends, family, authority figures, or even therapists doubt or downplay the victim’s experience or pass judgment, or define the situation by experience or pass judgment, figures, or even therapists. AO: Double Abuse occurs when friends, family, authority figures, or even therapists doubt or downplay the victim’s experience or pass judgment, or define the situation by experience or pass judgment, figures, or even therapists.

IJ: What might help incarcerated women on their journey to healing?

AO: The main thing is learning to find your identity in Christ. Everyone matters to God. Incarceration can be an opportunity for women to face their mistakes, and the experiences that shaped them and led them down that path. Facing areas of growth and developing positive character traits will help them overcome the challenges that continue, sometimes unfairly, after their release.

IJ: How can a person form healthy boundaries?

AO: If you have unhealthy friends around you, and they keep asking you for advice but never listen to it, or they encourage you to continue bad habits, that’s toxic. None of us is perfect, but you need to surround yourself with people who are willing to grow and change if they need to. If you confront someone, and they throw it back at you and reverse the blame onto you, you may need to remove yourself from that relationship. It’s like a bad break-up—you know you’re going to miss that person at the beginning, but ultimately it opens the door for you to move on to the right person. It’s about guarding your heart. Scripture says, “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (Proverbs 4:23).

IJ: What does “guarding your heart” have to do with self-respect?

AO: There are voices everywhere that will tell you to isolate yourself. They will tell you that you are worth nothing. But God cares about you, and we have to guard against the lies that tell us otherwise. One of the ways we experience His love is through healthy connection with others. We need connection with safe people. We cannot grow and heal in isolation. Surround yourself with people who will help you name your experience. Find people who will speak Christ’s words into your life, gently confront you when necessary, and always show compassion rather than condemnation.

IJ: What has surprised you about the healing process?

AO: What helped me was the advice, “Get out and help someone.” At first, I kept thinking, How can I possibly help someone? I’m so broken, so afraid. But I learned that you can help someone else because you’ve been in their shoes. That gave me a purpose and actually helped me keep moving forward. By helping other women, I was able to work through some of my own things.

IJ: Do you have any final advice for our readers?

AO: Find a support group. You need Christ, coaches, counselors, and comrades to pour into you and come alongside you on this journey. Use the time inside to practice, strengthen, and develop your character so you’re ready when you’re outside. Even if you’re serving a life sentence, your attitude matters more than your aptitude. It’s worth it to invest in your growth now.