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God's Love on the Doorstep

by W. Thompson

Maurice Woods grew up in a chaotic home. His young mother worked hard to provide, but the men she dated were not good role models. Substance abuse and domestic violence were common in Maurice's home. The impressionable

"The life of a hustler, jacker, ladies' man, and gangster was exemplified and glorified."

young boy often feared for his own life.

"I didn't have those healthy, functioning families that I could look to," says Maurice. "The life of a hustler, jacker, ladies' man, and gangster was exemplified and glorified."

Following in the footsteps



Photo by Chad Prince

Maurice sold marijuana by middle school and was arrested five times before he was even old enough to drink. Then an unexpected message changed his life.

of the men around him, Maurice started smoking and selling marijuana by age 12. In his teens, he officially joined a gang, became a father to a baby girl, and started getting in trouble with the law. He was arrested and imprisoned four times for offenses including armed robbery and assault.

A life-changing message

Back in prison after his fifth arrest, Maurice felt the weight

of his choices more than ever before. He had a deep desire to be there for his little girl, but he just couldn't break free from his criminal lifestyle. He was now facing more than a decade behind bars. And this time, he feared the impact of his absence on both his daughter and her mother, who would have to raise their daughter alone.

"For the first time in my life, I realized that I wasn't the

family man that I thought I was," Maurice says. "I realized that I wasn't the only one doing the time, but in fact my own [family] whom I dearly love was doing the time with me, hurting as I was away," he adds. This was his first wake-up call.

Another wake-up call came when a riot broke out at a Los Angeles-area prison. Maurice's facility went on lockdown, forcing prisoners

into confinement for long stretches of time. In the silence of his cell, Maurice heard a voice in his head say this simple phrase: "Your ways are not working."

Maurice believed it was the voice of God, and deep down he knew the words were true.

"My unstable and failing lifestyle wasn't working," he says. "I responded by saying, 'OK, God. Show Yourself.'"

With no church background or understanding of God, Maurice began reading the Bible every day. Even though he had no idea what it meant to "follow" Christ, he eventually chose to ask Jesus into his heart. Through Maurice's pursuit of God and his participation in prison programs, his life began to change.

"My heart was transformed, and God delivered me from smoking, drinking, gang-banging, and talking foul," Maurice says.

He longed to share the love and freedom he experienced from God with his family in a meaningful way, even while he was behind bars. Maurice knew all too well the impact

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7 Tips for Better Sleep Behind Bars

by S.L. Ray

"Don't go to jail if you want a good night's sleep," jokes Chad, a former Louisiana prisoner. There's no doubt about it: Prison can keep you from catching many z's.

Inside Journal asked former and current prisoners about their sleeping experiences. The majority had trouble sleeping, especially their first weeks, thanks to uncomfortable mattresses, a snoring cellie, the noise of officers' keys, banging doors, screaming or loud talking,

Photo by Tim Kitchen/Getty Images



TO HELP YOU SLEEP:

- 1) Make your sleep area more comfortable.
- 2) Watch what you eat, drink, and view.
- 3) Pray and read Scripture.
- 4) Journal/write out your worries.
- 5) Find your "mental safe place."
- 6) Do breathing and counting exercises.
- 7) Try a simple grounding technique.

anxiety, safety concerns, and flushing toilets.

Getting less than six to eight hours of sleep can negatively affect your body, mind, and spirit. Sleep deprivation is also downright dangerous. According to the National Sleep Foundation, extremely sleepy people are 70 percent more likely to have a workplace accident.

Studies show long-term sleep loss can cause weight gain, memory problems, a lowered immune system, high blood pressure, and an increased risk for diabetes, depression, irritability, and more.

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Angel Tree Restores Lives

by Charles Rock

We've all seen relationships crumble. Friendships can break apart over small things, and marriages can end due to betrayal or selfishness. These are painful moments to witness and even more painful to experience. But nothing is more devastating than seeing a parent and child ripped apart by divorce, neglect, or incarceration.

As the national director of Angel Tree programs for Prison Fellowship, I have seen my fair share of broken relationships between kids and their parents. Incarceration affects the person behind bars, of course, but it also impacts those he or she loves the most. You may know this all too well.

But a prison sentence is not the end of the story. I have also seen relationships brought back from the brink of disaster through the hope and healing offered through Christ. I've witnessed daughters who haven't spoken to their incarcerated mothers in years make their first visit. I know of once-estranged sons who now drive hours each week to see their incarcerated fathers. I've seen children's faces explode with joy when they receive Angel Tree gifts and a personal message from their parent behind bars.

If you're a parent who wants to restore a relationship with your child or just connect with them in a new way, I invite you to sign them up for Angel Tree this year.



Photo by Prison Fellowship

Every year, nearly 300,000 children receive a Christmas gift and a personal message from their parent behind bars. (Restrictions apply. We make every effort to serve every eligible child but may not be able to in some circumstances. See the bottom of page 3 for more information.)

Over the years, I've learned that no relationship is beyond God's power to repair, renew, and restore it. This edition of Inside Journal is all about restoration. Page 1 has an article about how to get better sleep so you can wake up feeling restored. On Page 3, learn about renewing your heart through genuine, healthy trust, the kind that hasn't yet been jaded by our adult need to feel in control. And on Page 4, you'll hear from a man who journeyed through tragedy and anger with God and came out on the other side.

P.S. Do you have an Angel Tree story to share? Write to: Managing Editor, Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. ■

ANGEL TREE WORKS LIKE THIS:

- Applications are shipped to the chaplains of participating prisons.
- You fill out an application asking Angel Tree to give your child a gift from you at Christmas.
- You suggest what kind of gift your child might like and write a personal message to your child.
- Your chaplain collects all the applications and sends them to Angel Tree by the deadline.
- In the fall, Angel Tree volunteers call your child's caregiver to verify what gift your child would like to receive.
- Before Christmas, Angel Tree volunteers buy and wrap the gift.
- The gift is then delivered to your child at home or at an Angel Tree Christmas party.
- Your child is told that the gift is from you—their dad who loves them!

Doorstep

Continued from page 1

that a good influence, or the lack of one, could have on a young life.

A family restored

One year, a group of volunteers came to the prison and talked about a way for Maurice to make the holidays special for his daughter. He learned that each year, local churches and community organizations volunteer for Angel Tree®, a program of Prison Fellowship®. Through Angel Tree, hundreds of thousands of children receive a gift and a personal message on behalf of their incarcerated parent.

Maurice signed up, knowing his daughter would enjoy the gift. But he was even more excited about his daughter and her mother experiencing the love of God right on their doorstep.

"It wasn't just like, 'Sign

"[My family] got to see Jesus' love and not just hear 'God loves you.' That really was the biggest blessing for me."

your kid up and hope for the best.' ... There were these churches, there were these individuals that would follow up," Maurice says.

"[My family] got to see Jesus' love and not just hear 'God loves you.' That really

was the biggest blessing for me."

Years have passed. Maurice is out of prison and able to spend time with his family in person, but he'll never forget the impact Angel Tree made on them.

Today, Maurice is the field director for Prison Fellowship in California, working with prisoners in Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties. He shares his story of transformation not only at his church, but also on the streets, bringing God's love directly to people facing the challenges he once faced.

"I am honored to share the Lord's story and this amazing life He has freely restored," Maurice says.

Maurice knows the power a simple message has to restore. And he knows Angel Tree can transform lives, rebuild broken parent-child relationships, and bring hope to an entire household. Maurice says simply, "How beautiful is that?" ■

Tips for Better Sleep

Continued from page 1

To know if you're getting enough sleep, ask yourself, are you:

- Waking up not feeling refreshed most days?
- Feeling sleepy most days?
- Struggling to concentrate and stay alert during work or activities?
- Feeling depressed or on edge?

If so, here are some tips for better sleep, as shared by prisoners and psychologists:

1) Make your sleeping area as comfortable as possible.

Buy earplugs, a small fan, or a radio with headphones and use them to block out external noises. Also, make sure your body isn't too warm or cold.

Get creative with your blankets and pillows. "My mattress is not conducive to a good night's sleep, but I fold up a blanket [to put under] my hips," says Steve, a current prisoner, about his flat, hard bed.

2) Be kind to your body and mind.

Avoid anything unhealthy or negative before bed, including junk foods and violent TV shows or books.

According to many sleep experts, including Dr. Michael Breus, you should avoid caffeine after 2 p.m. and stop eating or exercising several hours before bedtime.

Many prisoners agreed, adding it's also important to exercise and eat right daily.

Joseph, another current prisoner, says he buys melatonin (an over-the-counter sleep aid) at the commissary to help him.

3) Pray and read Scripture.

Prayer has helped many prisoners to get better sleep, like Zane, who says, "Surrender things beyond your control to God or a higher power."

After struggling with awful sleep, night terrors, and cold sweats, Zane dug into prayer and Scripture. Eventually, he was free of his sleep issues for good.

Michelle, a former prisoner in New York, had a similar experience. "I slept better because I began the process of forgiving myself and started attending chapel," she says.

"Evening devotionals also help," adds Joseph.

4) Write out your worries.

Several prisoners we spoke with found journaling to be an effective way of getting thoughts out of their heads for better rest.

"My anxieties, if allowed to go unchecked, will keep me up at night," explains Marvin. "An unsolved problem will

float through my brain until I write it down," adds Jesse about his incarceration worries.

5) Find your "happy place."

James Peasley, a Minnesota therapist, explains that if negative thoughts or worries are running through your mind, you can change your thoughts just like you would change the channel if something bad came on television.

To change your thoughts, he suggests finding your own personal "mental safe place," somewhere you've been that has really positive memories, ideally somewhere in nature. Close your eyes and vividly visualize all the sights, sounds, smells, and sensations of that place until you feel calm.

"This can actually cause you to get control over troubling emotions," Peasley says.

"It doesn't mean the troubling situation won't happen or doesn't need attention, but it resets your brain" to stop the obsessive worrying.

6) Breathe and count.

Peasley also suggests placing your hand on your stomach and slowly breathing in through your nose for a count of five and out through your mouth for a count of five, for five minutes total.

Dr. Breus tells people to count backward from 300 by threes, which requires concentration, thereby taking your mind off all other worries, and is boring, thereby putting you to sleep faster.

7) If you're still anxious, try grounding exercises.

Observe your surroundings, including the feel of your body getting heavy on your mattress, and then slowly list, out loud, five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.

Experiment until you find what works for you, and then stick to it, doing the same things at the same time every night. And remember, sleep habits, like any habits, don't happen overnight.

"It took me close to a year to calm my mind down and start to embrace the fact that I couldn't keep feeling so guilty," says former prisoner Michelle.

In time, restorative sleep behind bars is possible. So rest easy." ■

When a Father Really Does Know Best

by M.M. White

I remember when our oldest son received his first vaccines. I took him to the doctor's office. I carried him in and placed him on the table, while the doctor prepared the shot. My adorable baby boy just cooed and smiled up at me. He didn't even realize I was holding him down for the doctor to insert the needle.

So, it was a complete surprise to my baby when he felt pain.

I never left his side, but I did allow him to be pierced by a needle, despite knowing it might not feel good to him. His cries let me know that he did not understand. As a baby, he did not grasp that even though it hurt, it was for his own good. Even though it was painful, and he didn't like it, it would protect him from disease and help him grow healthy and strong.

As I hugged and consoled him afterward, I knew this was the first of many uncomfortable or painful encounters my son would not be able to understand or control. But as he calmed and soon forgot the shot, even falling asleep in my arms, I realized that through it all, he still trusted me.

The quest for independence

When we were infants, we relied on others for everything. But as we grew and got more capable, we longed for the independence of full-fledged adulthood.

When I was a kid, I remember I thought, *I can't wait to get out of my mama's house so I can run my own life.*

But let's be honest: Even when the years pass, and we're good and "grown," are we really in charge of our lives?

Even with our independence, we still have family, friends, and neighbors. Teachers, coaches, pastors, mentors. Bosses, coworkers. We interact with all of these folks—or some combination of them—and they shape who we are and who we become. We may be a little more independent, but we're still influenced.

As we get older, we decide just how much we let others influence our lives, for good or for bad. I'm probably not the only one who grew up with a mother who countered peer pressure with this old favorite: "If your friends jumped off a bridge, would you jump, too?" Whether we wanted to admit it as a hard-headed teen or not, who or what we let influence us can make or break us—and even lead to

our freedom or the loss of it.

So what does God have to say about our independence? While the Bible says we all need to act responsibly and carry our share of the load, we also need to take a page from the youngest among us.

In Matthew 18:3–4, Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven." In other words, unless we learn how to be dependent on God, we will never experience life as He meant it to be lived.

A Father worth your trust

When we trust in God, we become the children of a King (1 John 3:1). He knows what's best for us and fulfills His promise to provide for us. In return, He asks us to trust Him and follow His guidance.

In short, we don't run our own show anymore. We humble ourselves, which, according to one of my favorite preachers, means not that we think less of ourselves, but we think of ourselves less. We stop the "my way or the highway" approach in relationships. We stop making

ARE YOU A "MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY" PERSON?

Do you try to control everything, including other people, only to end up frustrated or anxious? It's time to depend on God instead.

In Isaiah 30:15, the Lord says, "Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved." And James 4:7 says to submit yourself to God. Once you stop trying to be so independent and start relying on God, you'll feel free, knowing you can just take things as they come. You no longer have to juggle everything alone. You can surrender your life to the Father who knows what you need.

If you don't know where to begin, start with this prayer:

"Father God, show me how to let go of my controlling ways and seek You instead. Teach me to submit my life to You, so You can guide my actions and relationships each day. Amen."

To discover how to let go and let God lead you, sign up for a free correspondence Bible study through one of our trusted partner organizations by writing to "Letting Go" c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. To request a large-print Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible in English or Spanish, see offer on Page 4.

Frank Sinatra's biggest hit our theme song, "I did it myyyyy waaaaay!"

Why? Because if we turn our lives over to Jesus Christ, not only does He forgive us for all that is past, but He also makes us brand new (2 Corinthians 5:17). And in Him we live and move and exist (Acts 17:28). That makes Him worthy of our absolute trust.

Sometimes, it takes something traumatic to make us dependent on Christ. It can even be something uncomfortable or painful that our Heavenly Father allows to come our way—just to remind us we are not in control. In those moments, we must trust that even through the pain, we are safe in Jesus. ■

A GIFT FROM YOUR HEART TO THEIRS ...

REMIND YOUR CHILDREN THAT
YOU LOVE THEM



NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE

This Christmas, your child can wake up to a gift from you through Angel Tree®, a program of Prison Fellowship®. Ask your chaplain or program coordinator for an application today!

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:

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 **Sept. 3, 2019**.

Contact your child(ren)'s caregiver to gather the most current information for your application.

Angel Tree makes great efforts to serve every eligible child. However, if your information is incomplete or inaccurate, if local volunteers are unable to locate your child(ren)'s caregiver, or if the caregiver refuses to participate, we may not be able to deliver gifts to your child(ren).



What One Dad Learned by Facing Tragedy

by Grayson Pope

In 2013, David Hatch got the news no father should ever receive. He learned his 24-year-old daughter, the mother of his granddaughter, was driving when her vehicle struck a utility pole, instantly killing her. Adding to the tragedy, he later learned that her boyfriend was chasing her when she lost control of her vehicle. Inside Journal spoke with David about his painful loss, how grief shook his faith, and how he eventually learned to trust again.

Inside Journal: How did your daughter's death and the circumstances surrounding it affect you?

David Hatch: I struggled because of the death itself but [also] the struggle of anger. I got angry with God because He took one of the most precious things in my life away from me. So, I questioned God. I [also] got angry with my daughter for this happening, and then I got angry with myself for not being able to be there for her. And that caused a lot of bitterness in me. I didn't trust anyone. I allowed the pain and hurt to overshadow me.



Photo by Prison Fellowship

IJ: Why didn't you trust anyone?

DH: Because I felt like, what's the use? When I trusted in [God], I lost the one I loved. Not only could I not trust anyone else, but I could not trust myself because I felt like I had no control. For a while, I didn't smile. People looked at me and said, "You frown all the time." I didn't even know I was frowning. So, I recognized there were some things going on inside that I needed to correct—and correct quickly. I've learned to smile again, but it was a process.

IJ: What was that process like?

DH: I got an opportunity to serve inside a prison. I told my story to the men I ministered to in one of the dorms. When I talked about my past, the pain would ease, and I would let go of the negative thoughts. It took a while. It wasn't a quick fix. But sharing caused restoration inside of me. It helped the men to recognize the pain they had caused others. And that began the healing process. From there, I was able to begin to gain back trust.

IJ: What does the word "trust" mean to you?

DH: Trust is not just a word; it's an ingredient of love. You [usually] can't trust someone you don't love. Love was the key ingredient that brought things back together for me. It was the glue that I needed.

IJ: How can our readers learn to trust themselves and others?

DH: The first step is to recognize the fact that you don't trust [people]. And once you acknowledge that, then there's an opportunity to release [the distrust]. To release it, you have to go inside yourself. Nothing you can do on the outside will fix your situation.

Then, start to see yourself as a trustworthy person. See yourself as a person that's not hated. See yourself as a person that's loving. You've got to see that within yourself. It's an inward job of saying, "This is who I am, and this is how I am going to act."

But to do that, you have to allow God in. What a man's thinking in his heart, that's who he is. So, you must allow God to be in your heart. Then you can begin to trust Him. As I began to trust God

again, I began to trust myself and others. But until I could trust God, I couldn't trust me. I didn't know how to trust myself or anyone else because I didn't trust something that was greater than me.

IJ: What would you say to someone who feels like it's just too late for them to learn to trust or be trusted by others?

DH: I don't care how bad you think you are or what you have done, you can change. No matter how much pain you have caused another person, you can learn how to trust again.

I thought I couldn't trust anyone after the death of my daughter, but I learned how to let go. Letting go meant going beyond what I understood as trust and giving myself totally to God. I listened to others who had lost their children, family members and others and began to talk about my feelings, and that began the healing process.

Pain is something that we carry. But we do not have to carry it if we can recognize that everything has a purpose. Yes, you've done the crime, but that is not the end. God has given you an opportunity to turn things around. ■

News + Notes

Second Chance Month Unlocks Opportunity

People across the country are joining together to raise awareness of the barriers men and women face when returning home from prison. In April, more than 300 organizations joined Prison Fellowship to celebrate Second Chance™ Month, which recognizes the potential of people with a criminal record and the importance of removing obstacles that make it harder for them to succeed once released.

On March 30, the White House issued a proclamation, signed by the president, declaring April 2019 as Second Chance Month for the second year in a row. Several states, counties, and cities also declared their support.

Social media campaigns, Second Chance Sunday church services, Road to Second Chances prayer walks, a press conference, a Second Chance Month Gala hosted by Prison Fellowship, and other activities took place around the nation. Supporters participated in the Second Chance 5K in St. Paul, while

Minnesota prisoners ran or walked in similar 5Ks on the yard, coordinated with the permission of the Minnesota DOC. The new Minnesota DOC commissioner even got in on the action, running alongside prisoners in the Stillwater facility.

Second Chance Month participants like Pastor Denise Strothers, National Director of Operations for Healing Communities USA, were proud to show their support. "For the broken, those who feel forgotten, those in prison ... we stand in the gap for you," Pastor Strothers said at the prayer walk in Washington, D.C., on April 6.

Second Chance Month reminds us that there is power in community. We are all stronger when we lift each other up.

Son of Prisoner Nominated for NFL's 'Man of the Year'

Kenny Clark, nose tackle for the Green Bay Packers, was nominated for the 2019 Walter Payton Man of the Year Award. Clark, who grew up with an incarcerated father, was one of 32 NFL

players considered for the national award that was announced prior to Super Bowl LIII.

In 2018, Clark took part in the "My Cause, My Cleats" campaign, wearing specialty cleats to support Prison Fellowship and the Angel Tree program. Clark received Angel

Tree gifts for much of his childhood. Having his father gone was hard, says Clark, "but Angel Tree definitely helped that process out. He's still gone ... but Angel Tree definitely helped out with [softening] the blow."

When he has time, Clark, who is 23, returns to his

hometown of Rialto, Calif., and hosts football clinics for local youth, including children with an incarcerated parent.

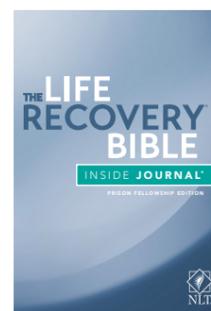
The Walter Payton Man of the Year Award is given to an NFL player for outstanding community service activities off the field as well as excellence on the field. ■

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Get a free NLT Life Recovery Bible from Inside Journal!

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Attn: Inside Journal Bible
351 Executive Drive
Carol Stream, IL 60188



DON'T FORGET!

Include this information to make sure your Bible gets delivered:

- ✓ Your complete name and prison ID number
- ✓ Your facility name
- ✓ Your facility address for prisoner parcel delivery
- ✓ Whether you want English or Spanish*

*Bibles are available in large-print English or large-print Spanish. Limit one Bible per person



© 2019 by Prison Fellowship
INSIDE JOURNAL®
is published four times a year by
Prison Fellowship,
P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA
20146-1790.
prisonfellowship.org
703.478.0100

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Accountability and the
American Correctional
Association.

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