Tuan’s Fear of Failure Turned to Freedom

by E. Greene and S.L. Ray

Tuan Nguyen grew up in a high-pressure home. “My parents expected me to perform at a very high level at a very young age,” he remembers. “I was always trying to live up to their expectations.”

“I spent the next year there just living in complete regret, resentment, and hatred towards my family.”

He tried to find his identity in the approval of others, but only wound up with a fear of failure. “I really didn’t have a sense of direction of who I was, and that ultimately led me to a life searching for significance in the streets,” he remembers. At a young age, Tuan started rebelling against his parents and getting into trouble with gangs and drugs. When he was 13, his parents told him to get in the car. They wouldn’t say where they were going. Five hours into their drive, they made the shocking announcement that he was headed to military school.

It was a painful experience. “They dropped me off,” Tuan says. “I really didn’t have a sense of direction of who I was, and that ultimately led me to a life searching for significance in the streets,” he remembers. At a young age, Tuan started rebelling against his parents and getting into trouble with gangs and drugs. When he was 13, his parents told him to get in the car. They wouldn’t say where they were going. Five hours into their drive, they made the shocking announcement that he was headed to military school. It was a painful experience. “They dropped me off,”

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The military school didn’t help, and Tuan’s rebellion continued. At 17, Tuan briefly went to jail for cocaine possession. “My first time in jail was definitely a scary experience,” Tuan recalls. When he got out, he vowed to do better.

At his parents’ urging, Tuan enrolled in technical college. But he eventually dropped out, with no degree and thousands of dollars of debt. It seemed like the only solution was to go back to what he knew he was good at—dealing drugs and “just really running from fear of failure and fear of success.”

False sense of security

Tuan spent most of his young adult life in the system, but during one of his several prison stints, something changed. “I started crying out to God this time,” Tuan says. “I was just sick and tired, just trying to maintain this lifestyle that was so unstable.” After three years of digging into their drive, they made the shocking announcement that he was headed to military school.

Continued on page 2

7 Ways to Say No Behind Bars

by Jason Aten

Maintaining your boundaries can be a challenge when you spend most of your time in close quarters with people who don’t have your best interests in mind. One of the most important things you can do while inside is learn to say no when someone wants you to do something that isn’t good for you.

Whether you are being pressured to cover for someone else or asked to give up something to another prisoner, saying no can be difficult—or downright dangerous. Here are seven effective, healthy tools you can use to say no if necessary:

1) Know your boundaries in advance.
2) Avoid situations where you’ll be pressured into things you shouldn’t do.
3) Don’t lie or make up excuses.
4) Use “I feel” statements.
5) Say no, but offer an alternative or compromise.
6) After saying no, watch for guilt.
7) If you decide to say yes, do it on your terms.

Continued on page 2
“All in” for a New Life
by Maurice Woods

W hatever I do, I do it all the way. When I was living the street life, deep into drugs and my gang, I was “all in.” I took my prison time as another notch in my belt; I thought it strengthened my reputation. In 2009, I went back to prison on a parole violation and a new charge. While I was there, a big shot broke out on the yard. People got hurt—even killed—and a building was burned down. The whole facility went on lockdown.

One day in my cell, I thought I heard a voice say to me. “Your way is not working,” I began to look back on my life in a new way. Juvenile hall. County jail. Prison. Shot. Stabbed Back to prison. Were those signs of my toughness? Or signs that something in my life was terribly wrong? I asked God to show Himself to me. I started to pray, fast, read the Bible, and fellowship with fellow Christians—four things I had a lot of time for in prison. I didn’t suddenly start trying to change people around me, but I did start to change myself. I began to understand that God created me for a purpose. I realized I am a leader. I do matter. I can care for my family. I learned who I really was, and I wanted to please Him—not the people in the crowd I’d been running with. I worked wholeheartedly to change my lifestyle, and for the most part people respected that. The people around me could see that I wanted to please God with my actions. That’s not to say changing your lifestyle in prison is easy. When people have expectations of you and you put pressure on you, it can be hard to break away. But I encourage you to figure out who you really are. As you learn who you are created to be, it will be easier to react to any given situation in a way that is consistent with the life you want to live.

In this edition of Inside Journal, learn tips for saying no in prison (page 1), read more about how to acknowledge your sins and find your narrow gate (page 3), and check out the free offer for an Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible (page 3) to help you say yes to Jesus. And finally, check out more recipes you can make yourself using commissary items (page 4). We hope you enjoy this edition!

Tuan’s Fear
Continued from page 1

deeper into his faith, Tuan was released. He stayed out of trouble for a while. But he wasn’t quite as ready as he thought he was to face his past.

“I felt that I was confident enough to start going back to some of the same places,” Tuan explains. “I thought I could be amongst the crowd and still not be tainted by the world.” But he gave in to old temptations, was bussed selling a pound of drugs, and landed his longest prison sentence yet: 16 years. While in the back of the squad car, Tuan felt a flood of peace. “I was like, ‘I know, God. I know that I’ve been running, so just give me the strength.’ And I began walking back [to my faith],” says Tuan.

A couple years into his sentence, Tuan hired a parole lawyer. He wanted to try for an earlier release, but he was also focused on getting stronger in his faith in God. He began looking into joining the Prison Fellowship Academy®, an intensive, biblically based program at the Carol S. Vance Unit in Houston (also available at select facilities nationwide). He told his parole lawyer about his interest in the Academy. But she told Tuan he didn’t need it and that she could get him released early. Based on this new information, Tuan told her he no longer wanted to apply for the Academy.

“I remember walking out of that parole office that day,” says Tuan, “and I just felt the Lord saying, ‘It doesn’t matter what you want, because I am sovereign, and if I want you to go to Prison Fellowship Academy, I’m sending you.‘”

At first, Tuan “shook it off,” but he couldn’t ignore the tugging feeling drawn him to the program, so he applied and got in.

Newfound freedom
Six months into the program, Tuan realized how much the Academy was transforming him. After years of living his own way, he was finally learning to live God’s way. He was letting the classes—and the power of the Gospel—change him.

“For once in my life, I found a dream that was worth chasing,” Tuan says. “Prison Fellowship, that’s where I found my strengths. I found my element, I found my purpose, and I began walking it out … I started learning how to lead. I started learning how to teach.”

Today, Tuan is out of prison. He has a desire to help others find their potential and purpose. He plans to use his leadership skills to help advise returning citizens on how best to fix their credit. Tuan doesn’t know exactly how it’s all going to play out. But he now trusts that God is opening doors for him. “Faith doesn’t make sense until you look at things in reverse,” says Tuan. And he now sees that life is a lot easier to live when you finally stop worrying about pleasing others and simply follow God.
Are You Following the Right Path?

by Zach Sewell

M y friend Scott recently suffered a skiing accident. While he was on a slope, he decided to follow a side path that cut through the woods. He had never followed this path before and didn’t know that it led to a jump. He gained a lot of speed along the way, and at the end of the path, he found himself unexpectedly launched several feet into the air. He landed on his left side, breaking four ribs and dislocating his shoulder.

Scott was in excruciating pain and was having trouble breathing. The crash had knocked the wind out of him, and he wondered if he had punctured a lung. He lay in the snow for 10 minutes before he was finally able to breathe well enough to sit up. Then he climbed back onto his skis and slowly made his way to the bottom, his terrible pain making it difficult to stay upright.

Scott could have waited for help or even given up. But he knew it was important to reach the base quickly and seek medical attention. So, he started to walk, despite his pain, he got back on the right path and made his way to his destination. He persevered.

Are Y ou Following the Right Path?

Whether you want English or Spanish.*

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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.

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What four words first jump out at you in this word search? Are those the qualities you want to describe you? Now see if you can find the 16 positive traits listed below this word search. (Words hidden left-to-right and downward. Answers on p.4)

NEED A BIBLE?

“Search me, O God, and know my heart ... Point out anything in me that offends You, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.” (Psalm 139:23–24)

XUDDCKEBYXVBAMZ

What four words first jump out at you in this word search? Are those the qualities you want to describe you? Now see if you can find the 16 positive traits listed below this word search. (Words hidden left-to-right and downward. Answers on p.4)

FAITHFULLTREFFX

ZWHURTEBRAVERYB

JEOWKFARISOWAYH

OSPTITCLEANYI

YEUNIQUEUYQDGR

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LRLOVINGTYAEALAMIFNHNMAHPAZOU

EBKBOUAIIDTIVITYT

CRIANGRYDSOYNAY

CQIGEAXUKNPGGZ

ZQMDSWISETGDDUL

CRPATIENTZHVVJO

AMAZING, UNIQUE, FAITHFUL, LOVING, JOYFUL, AWESOME, WISE, PATIENT, GREAT, CLEAN, FAIR, TRUE, BRAVE, KIND, HONEST, LOYAL

ARE YOU LIVING TO BE HAPPY?

Chasing happiness or the approval of other people is a dead-end road. God created us to live our lives for Him—not others, and certainly not ourselves. John 5:44 says, “No wonder you can’t believe! For you are looking for the things that are visible, and those things are not important to Him.”

And 1 John 2:17 says, “...Anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.”

If you don’t even know where to start, begin with this simple prayer:

“Lord, please help me to stop living for myself or others and start living for You and You alone. I know I can’t do it alone. Save me because of your death on the cross, and guide me through Your Spirit. Show me Your joy that goes way beyond all human happiness. Amen.”

To discover how to follow Jesus, sign up for a free correspondence Bible study through one of our trusted partner organizations. Just write to “Narrow Path” 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 the offer on this page.

To help or even given up. But

reach the base quickly and

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partner organizations. Just write to “Narrow Path” c/o

through God’s grace, even if it

means painfully inching their

brusied and broken selves
down the slope to their final

destination. So how do we get

on the narrow way? It starts

with accepting Jesus—as your

Savior, Friend, and God. He

made the incredibly difficult
decision to suffer and die for

our wrong choices, opening

the path for us to have a right

relationship with God. Every

choice to follow Jesus is made

in response to what He first
did because He loves us.

Tips to stay on track

There are practical strategies you can follow when trying to stay on the narrow path. Since perfection is not an option, I offer three suggestions:

First, when you fall, reflect on what caused you to slip, and try to avoid putting yourself in that situation again. And don’t dwell on your mistakes; pick yourself up and keep going.

Second, take responsibility for your sin. We often want to hide our sinful behavior from others, from God, and even from ourselves. Hiding our sin doesn’t help us move away from it. Sin grows in the dark, when we have no one to keep us accountable. Confess your sins, to God and to others, and ask for forgiveness.

Third, the healthy narrow path may mean walking away from something unhealthy.

When I left a life of drug abuse and devoted myself to Jesus, I had to walk away from certain friendships. The narrow path will most likely cost you something. It may be relationships. It may be creature comforts. It may be popularity. Jesus cared about love and compassion way more than popularity. In fact, there were times when Jesus’ actions and words caused people to dislike Him, spread rumors about Him, and even try to kill Him.

But whether loved or hated, Jesus stayed on His course. You can stay on the narrow path even in prison. You can also stay on it when you are released from prison. There will be setbacks. But just keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, until you reach the end.

Zach Sewell is a Kansas City-area minister and the author of Prisoners in the Bible, A Time to Preach, and the soon-to-be-released Visceral Sin (fall 2019).
LA Rams Inspire Prisoners’ Children

In California this past June, the Los Angeles Rams hosted an Angel Tree Sports Clinic® for children with an incarcerated parent. Through lessons, drills, and fun competition, kids were treated like champions and learned about God’s love.

More than 100 children from across California attended the clinic at the Rams’ practice facility. Kids were joined by pro players Clarise Miller, Kendall Blount, and other Rams players. News crews from the Los Angeles Times and the NFL Network covered the event. The children had an experience of a lifetime.

LA Rams offensive lineman Matt Kalil talked about the power of sports in his own life. “It’s important to teach these kids how to come out here and help them and show them how to do things right; how to have a good time, but also how to live a good life,” said Matt. Coach John Fassel added, “At this clinic, the kids come of the common area for cooking fish, but it’s a chance we all take.”

Mackerel Burger
• as submitted by Melissa in Virginia
• 1 standard size package mackerel, drained
• 1 can black beans, drained
• 1 small can tomato sauce
• 1 small can pineapple chunks, drained
• 1/4 packet ramen noodle seasoning
Mix all ingredients into small trash bag. Put into burger patty shape. Microwave on high for three minutes. Serve over rice, in a tortilla wrap, or on a bagel. Top with sauce made from mixing the following (to your liking): mayonnaise, mustard, hot sauce, sugar, and pickle juice.

Note from Melissa: “Not saying you won’t be run out the door.”

Garlic Ranch Chicken Alfredo
as submitted by Larry in Arizona
• 4.5-oz. chicken breast
• (1.7-oz.) packet Thai rice noodles
• (3 oz. two 1.5-oz. packets) ranch dressing
• 1 tsp. garlic
• 1 tbsp. dry powder milk

Place noodles in a large bowl with lid on. Heat water until hot. Add hot water to dry rice noodles and veggie mix. Cover with lid. Set aside to soak (10 minutes). In small bowl, mix together ranch, mayo, garlic, pepper, dry powder milk. After noodles have soaked for 10 minutes, drain water, then add sauce (and peas) and mix well. Gently and carefully fold in chicken breast. Heat in microwave until warm. Serve with crackers.

Hot Wings
as submitted by Elizabeth in Texas
• Pork skins (or pork rind snacks)
• Barbecue sauce
• Ranch dressing
Place pork skins/rinds in a bowl with lid. Add equal parts barbecue sauce and ranch dressing until coated. Place lid on bowl and shake until all mixed together. Serve and eat!

Trail Mix Supreme
as submitted by Junior in Florida
• 3 oz. (2-oz. packets) apple cinnamon oatmeal
• 2 oz. (1 single-serve packet) trail mix
• 6 oz. (3-oz. squeeze packets) peanut butter
Mix all ingredients together and enjoy!

More Recipes from Readers
by S.L. Ray

In a recent edition of Inside Journal (Spring 2019), we ran an article called “A NI Prisoner’s Cookbook: Tasty Treats Behind Bars,” which included several recipes from a Minnesota prisoner named Angelina. We asked you to send in any feedback or additional recipes, and the response was overwhelming. Your letters came pouring in, some filled with gratitude toward Angelina and some filled with even more recipes. We were very impressed by the creativity being used in prisons across the country. Instead of replying to everyone individually, we will simply say thank you to all of you who wrote to us. And for those of you who requested Angelina’s contact information or a copy of Angelina’s full cookbook, sharing her contact information is against regulations, and unfortunately there is no way to publish and mail out her full cookbook.

But this experience has shown us how much you enjoy the idea of cooking and baking with commissary items. So in this edition, we decided to share more recipes from readers. We only had room for a few, as there were just too many to print. If you submitted a recipe that isn’t shown here, you might still see it in a future edition of Inside Journal. And if you have an amazing dish you’d like us to share, please mail it at: Inside Journal, ATTN: Recipes, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790.

NOTE: Some of these ingredients may not be available or allowed in all facilities, and restrictions on cooking vary. Be sure to comply with your facility’s rules and regulations.

Rapper Lecrae visits with prisoners.

By day’s end, several Prison Fellowship Academy participants performed an original rap, followed by a surprise freestyle session by Lecrae’s squad. Words of hope filled the room. The place erupted in cheers.

Lecrae said, “We’re visiting like a little bookmark saying, ‘Hey, your story’s not over.’”

Deluxe Peanut Butter French Toast®
as submitted by Lynn in North Carolina
• 2 slices buttered toast or French toast
• 1–2 tbsp. peanut butter
• 2 full-size Reese’s® (or similar) peanut butter cups
• Approx. 2 oz. honey or maple syrup

Spread peanut butter on both pieces of toast to your liking. Place peanut butter cups inside the two pieces like a sandwich. Then pour honey or maple syrup onto outer piece of toast. Let sit for an hour or so, then eat.

“This recipe was submitted as an unnamed treat; the editors thought “Sugar Rush” was a little too obvious a name.”

PAGE 3 WORD SEARCH: ANSWER KEY


French Toast** Deluxe Peanut Butter

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