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When Mom Goes to Prison

by Grayson Pope

When she was 22, Cassie Cluesman fell head over heels in love with a man. To Cassie, their relationship seemed ideal. But he also sold drugs.

One day, she walked out of a gas station to find her car surrounded by police. “I was so embarrassed,” she remembers. She was arrested and charged with delivery and manufacturing of narcotics.

The police had been watching her boyfriend for three months and learned that she and her two children were living with him. They wanted Cassie to testify against her boyfriend. She



Photo by Glenn Triest

Cassie’s relationship with a man who sold drugs resulted in her arrest and incarceration. Separation from her kids was painful, but she found new hope in prison.

“I had pictures of my children, and I’m like, ‘Look at all I’m missing.’”

didn’t want to see the man she loved locked up, so she said no.

A judge sentenced her to four years in a Michigan state prison.

Painful separation

She knew this four-year sentence meant she wouldn’t be with her two kids, who were very young at the time. Cassie recalls being in her cell and realizing all the milestones

they achieved without her. “I had pictures of my children, and I’m like, ‘Look at all I’m missing.’ Just thinking about it now makes me choked up because I missed their first steps,” she says. “I missed [many of] their first things.”

Cassie knew the pain her children were experiencing in her absence. Her father had done time when she was a kid, leaving her mother as her sole caregiver. Though her mom

didn’t take her to church, Cassie remembers walking to church with her sister. Faith gradually became more important to Cassie, and she was baptized at age 15. But that faith practically disappeared until her incarceration.

Her arrest served as a wake-up call that revived her faith. She was determined to leave behind any association with criminal activity. But prison bars and razor wire still

separated her from her kids. Cassie’s mother assumed the role of caregiver once again, only this time for Cassie’s children. Fortunately, the facility where Cassie was incarcerated was only about 30 minutes away, so Cassie’s mother was able to bring her children to visit her every other week.

While in prison, Cassie wondered how she would make things better for herself and her children. Then she saw a posting for the Prison Fellowship Academy®, an intensive, biblically based program that takes incarcerated men and women through a life transformation process.

She applied and was accepted into the program.

Making the most of her time

“The Prison Fellowship Academy provides incarcerated women with the tools they need to become not only better parents, but better wives, daughters, and grandparents,” says Denise Harris, the Prison Fellowship field director in charge of the program. “During the 12 months in the program, the women grow in community and together explore ways to build stronger relationships with their families and with God.”

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

Photo by dbrimages/Getty Images



HOW TO SAY NO:

- 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.

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.

You have to set up boundaries ahead of time, so you know where you stand when pressured. It’s harder to say no if you are unsure about your priorities. Make a list in your mind of the things you aren’t willing to participate in and make a personal commitment to stick to it no matter what.

Also, be consistent in your personal policy. When you say yes to some people and no to others, you open yourself to conflict.

Continued on page 2

Stop People-Pleasing

by Annie Goebel

Shortly after I arrived in prison, the cheerful chirping of birds outside my window seemed to mock my separation from the ones I loved. Having spent time in a juvenile detention home and many jails, I was no stranger to life behind bars. But this was my first time in an adult prison. I felt so alone.

Then I heard a soft tapping. *Where is that coming from?* I wondered. I followed the sound to the baseboard heater. As I got down low and listened closer, I heard a woman's voice coming through the hole where the heater extended into the next cell.

"Hey, welcome. Wanna be friends?" she asked. "Sure," I replied. "I have a welcome gift for you," she said. "Thanks," I said. Then she said, "Put your hand right up close. I am

going to pass you a joint." I quickly told her, "No, thank you. I'm not using drugs anymore because of my new life as a follower of Jesus." She proceeded to let me know refusing her "gift" was a slam, and if I wasn't a friend, I was an enemy.

When I was let out into the community room, I saw the looks from women who knew of my "gift refusal" and now also considered me an enemy. A few of them sent remarks my way, and I had to watch my back during movement for a while. But I stood my ground on saying no to requests that would be bad for me.

When I finally went to chapel, I met other women following Jesus. They welcomed me with the right kind of friendship, and they didn't pressure me into doing things that would go against my values.

It's important to know when to say no, especially behind

bars. There will be times when saying no has consequences, like not being accepted. But it's more important to chase after God than to chase after popularity. The Bible says, "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult" (Matthew 7:13-14).

In this 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!

Annie Goebel is the director of programs and special events for women at Prison Fellowship. ■

Ways to Say No

Continued from page 1

2) Avoid situations where you'll be pressured into things you shouldn't do.

Once you've decided where your "line in the sand" is, stay away from it. It's not hard to stay out of trouble unless you're looking for it. Be smart about the people you associate with, and stay away from the ones who are likely to pressure you to cross your boundaries.

3) Don't lie or make up excuses.

Never lie to anyone in prison. That doesn't mean you have to always tell every detail of the truth; sometimes the best idea is to simply say no or say nothing at all. But don't give a reason you can't do something if it isn't true. Nothing causes more problems than lying to another prisoner and having her find out. Be honest about why you have to say no, and you'll often earn respect for sticking to your values.

4) Use "I feel" statements.

Keep your reasons focused on yourself. You can't speak for someone else, and they can't make you feel anything—that choice is up to you. Instead of saying, "I don't like you cornering me," or "You're making me feel pressured," say things like, "I feel like that's not something I can commit to right now." And you can even use statements of understanding, such as, "I get that you need help with that, but I just can't swing it." Saying no doesn't need to be hostile or rude. Showing some empathy can help prevent confrontation.

5) Say no, but offer an alternative or compromise.

One of the most effective ways to say no is to find something else you can say yes to. If someone asks you to do something you're not comfortable with, you can suggest something else instead.

When I was serving time, I'd frequently get asked by

guys who wanted to call home if they could give me commissary and use my phone card. It wasn't something I was willing to do, but instead of simply saying no, I'd say, "I don't feel comfortable with that, but what I am willing to do is pass along a message."

6) After saying no, watch for guilt.

If you've said no respectfully, for the right reasons, there's no reason you should feel guilty. There were people I would have liked to have helped while behind bars, but couldn't because it would have crossed the boundaries I set. When I knew that I had made the right choice for the right reasons, I would simply trust that God would take care of the rest, and I'd sleep just fine.

7) If you decide to say yes, do it on your terms.

Sometimes the best solution is to actually say yes, but in a way that doesn't compromise your boundaries. When you do say yes, be clear about what you're agreeing to so there isn't any confusion.

Set guidelines and a time limit, if necessary: "Today only, I'll help you—for 10 minutes." That way, you're saying yes in a way that also communicates what your terms are and lets them know this isn't going to be a regular thing. Then it'll be easier to say no next time, because you've already let them know where you stand.

Saying no in prison might not always be easy, but in times when saying yes will lead to trouble, it's better to take the high road than the easy road.

Jason Aten is a 2016 graduate of the Prison Fellowship Academy®. He served time in Michigan from 2014 to 2018. ■



Photo by Taralyn Quigley

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, IJ 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 P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790 or insidejournal@pfm.org.

Mom Goes to Prison

Continued from page 1

Cassie says the Academy also helped prepare her for reentry. She especially enjoyed the classes on budgeting and on preparing for job interviews to impress potential employers.

While in prison, she also signed her children up for Angel Tree®, the Prison Fellowship program that provides Christmas gifts to children from their incarcerated parents. This was the same program that provided her with Christmas gifts from her incarcerated

father when she herself was a child. "They would say [the gifts] were from my dad," she remembers. "It was just, it was a wonderful experience."

To get to give her own kids that same experience through that same Angel Tree program was a powerful full circle. "It's great to feel like you could actually do something for Christmas for them," Cassie says.

Cassie was released after four years. She was sent home with a donated Bible and some basic supplies, plus some new clothes to begin her new life.

"The first day of freedom, I was just so excited," she

remembers. "I was with my sister and my new brother-in-law and my mother. And I went and got my kids out of school early, and they ran and

jumped in my arms, and it was just wonderful."

Back with her children, Cassie began looking for jobs to support her family. She

eventually found work in a call center, and then waiting tables. Between shifts, she loved spending quality time with her kids and staying active in her faith.

With the help of the financial literacy training Cassie received in the Academy, she was able to save up enough money for a down payment on a house.

She says about her home, "It's just so beautiful. I even made a song about it, and me and my son sing it together." And that togetherness is priceless. ■



Photo by Glenn Triest

Are You Following the Right Path?

by Zach Sewell

My 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 being 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, despite his pain, he got back on the right path and made his way to his destination. He persevered.

Staying the course

It can be tough to maintain the right course when life puts difficulties in our way. We face obstacles such as addictions, relationship problems, temptations, and fear. Adding to the challenge is knowing which path to take. Are we pursuing temporary happiness, which can lead to restlessness and disappointment? Or are we following the path of righteousness, which leads to true freedom?

In Matthew 7:13, toward the end of Jesus's most famous sermon, He tells a story about two paths that represent the two ways of living. The first path Jesus describes is a wide one, which many people travel, and which ultimately leads to destruction. The second path is a narrow road that only a few people find, and it leads to life. The narrow path is just that: narrow. Following Jesus isn't going to be the most popular choice. But it will lead you to the freedom of living in the promise of eternal life.

You might face temptations to wander off the path. As sinners, we stumble. We fall down. We mess up. We relapse. None of the people traveling the narrow road are perfect. The narrow path is full of people stumbling and picking themselves back up, through God's grace, even if it

means painfully inching their bruised 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

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 gladly honor each other, but you don't care about the honor that comes from the one who alone is God.”

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.

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). ■

SEARCH ME

“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)

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

X	U	D	D	C	K	E	B	Y	X	V	B	A	M	Z
F	A	I	T	H	F	U	L	T	R	U	E	F	F	X
Z	W	H	U	R	T	E	B	R	A	V	E	R	Y	B
J	E	O	W	K	F	A	I	R	S	O	W	A	Y	H
O	S	P	T	I	T	C	L	E	A	N	Y	I	G	L
Y	O	E	U	N	I	Q	U	E	Y	U	Q	D	G	R
F	M	H	T	D	I	D	Q	K	H	R	G	A	U	B
U	E	Y	Y	L	F	U	N	N	Y	L	R	M	L	E
L	R	L	O	V	I	N	G	T	Y	A	E	A	L	A
M	I	F	N	H	U	M	N	A	G	P	A	Z	O	U
E	K	B	U	O	U	A	I	D	T	V	T	I	Y	T
C	R	I	A	N	G	R	Y	D	S	O	Y	N	A	Y
C	Q	I	G	E	A	X	J	U	K	N	P	G	L	Z
Z	Q	M	D	S	W	I	S	E	T	G	D	D	U	L
C	R	P	A	T	I	E	N	T	Z	H	V	J	J	O

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- ✓ 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.

More Recipes From Readers

by **Stacia Ray**

In a recent edition of Inside Journal (Spring 2019), we ran an article called “A 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.



Photo by GMYord/Getty Images

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 us 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.

Mackerel Burger

as submitted by *Melissa in Virginia*

- 1 standard size package mackerel, drained
- 1 handful cheese puffs
- 1 small bag (single serve) favorite chips
- 1/4 packet ramen noodle seasoning

Mix all ingredients into small trash bag. Pat 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

of the common area for cooking fish, but it’s a chance we all take.”

Garlic Ranch Chicken Alfredo

as submitted by *Larry in Arizona*

- 4.5-oz. chicken breast
- 1 (3.7-oz.) packet Thai rice noodles
- 3 oz. (two 1.5-oz. packets) ranch dressing
- Approx. 1 oz. (three single-serve packets) mayo
- 1 tbsp. garlic
- 1 tbsp. dry powder milk
- 4 single-serve pepper packets
- 13 oz. peas (optional)

Place Thai rice noodles and contents of accompanying veggie packet in large bowl with lid (use only veggie packet, not

the seasoning packet). Heat 1 large cup (about 20 oz.) 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)*
- Barbeque sauce*
- Ranch dressing*

Place pork skins/rinds in a bowl with a lid. Add equal parts barbeque sauce and ranch dressing until coated. Place lid on bowl and shake bowl until all mixed together. Serve and eat!

*The amount you use will depend on how many servings you want to make.

Trail Mix Supreme

as submitted by *Junior in Florida*

- 3 oz. (two 1.5-oz. packets) apple cinnamon oatmeal
- 2 oz. (1 single-serve packet) trail mix
- 6 oz. (three 2-oz. squeeze packets) peanut butter

Mix all ingredients together and enjoy!

Deluxe Peanut Butter French Toast**

as submitted by *Lynn in North Carolina*

- 2 slices buttered toast or firm 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 to soak in, then eat.

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

News + Notes

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 boys and girls from across California attended the clinic at the Rams’ practice facility. Kids were joined by pro players Clay Matthews, Kendall Blanton, 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 Kasky talked about the power of sports in his own life. “It’s important to teach these kids ... 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

to life. Their eyes get big. They feel like somebody cares about them.”

Angel Tree, a program of Prison Fellowship, provides pathways to restore and strengthen relationships between children of prisoners and their families. All year, Angel Tree provides encouragement and support to families affected by incarceration through sports clinics, camps, and mentoring.

Grammy-Winning Rapper Visits Prison

This spring, rapper Lecrae and members of the 116 Clique made an unpublicized tour stop with Prison Fellowship at the Carol S. Vance Unit in Texas.

Lecrae says he feels at home making a visit behind bars. He grew up visiting his father and uncles behind bars and later volunteered in juvenile halfway houses. These experiences, and his growing Christian faith, gave him a passion for prison ministry.

Lecrae and his group ate



Photo by Michael Bell

Rapper Lecrae visits with prisoners.

with the incarcerated men in the chow hall and swapped jokes like old friends—“You know, cars fly now,” Lecrae

teased. In more serious moments, prisoners shared their hopes and fears for life outside.

PAGE 3 WORD SEARCH: ANSWER KEY

X	U	D	D	C	K	E	B	Y	X	V	B	A	M	Z
F	A	I	T	H	F	U	L	T	R	U	E	F	F	X
Z	W	H	U	R	T	E	B	R	A	V	E	R	Y	B
J	E	O	W	K	F	A	I	R	S	O	W	A	Y	H
O	S	P	T	I	T	C	L	E	A	N	Y	I	G	L
Y	O	E	U	N	I	Q	U	E	Y	U	Q	D	G	R
F	M	H	T	D	I	D	Q	K	H	R	G	A	U	B
U	E	Y	Y	L	F	U	N	N	Y	L	R	M	L	E
L	R	L	O	V	I	N	G	T	Y	A	E	A	L	A
M	I	F	N	H	U	M	N	A	G	P	A	Z	O	U
E	K	B	U	O	U	A	I	D	T	V	T	I	Y	T
C	R	I	A	N	G	R	Y	D	S	O	Y	N	A	Y
C	Q	I	G	E	A	X	J	U	K	N	P	G	L	Z
Z	Q	M	D	S	W	I	S	E	T	G	D	D	U	L
C	R	P	A	T	I	E	N	T	Z	H	V	J	J	O

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.’” ■



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