Behind Bars
Find Your Tribe

We want to help get you through life in a healthy way. You need a tribe.

And supportive people to help calm you down. This calming presence can help you stay centered when life gets stressful. You need companions to give you encouragement. When you have a conflict with your cellmate or a corrections officer, you need friends to help calm you down. This calming presence can help you stay centered.

You don't need a gang—just people who have the traits you'd like to have. Treat your tribe like you interact with the people in it.

Teresa’s Story: Sober and Celebrating

Teresa Stanfield remembers staring at her face in the mirror inside the Oklahoma County Jail, 41 years old and exhausted. Where did my life go? she asked herself. For 20 years, she'd been running from her troubles, from the law, and from her full potential.

Teresa’s childhood memories were far from picture-perfect. As a little girl, she experienced abuse from a neighbor. She also struggled to deal with her parents’ divorce. When she took her first sip of alcohol at age 12, she liked how drinking helped her forget the pain and shame.

As a teen, Teresa disliked authority. She became more and more rebellious. “If somebody told me to do something, I wanted to do the exact opposite,” she says.

She continued experimenting with drugs and alcohol, and by age 17, she was deep in addiction.

But nothing she tried, from cocaine to heroin, filled her emptiness for very long. Soon she had three DUIs and faced her first drug possession charge.

For two decades, her life was a blur of jails, treatment centers, and prison. When Teresa reached rock bottom, she found herself giving birth to her baby girl in the county jail and handing the baby over to her mother’s care. It was the hardest thing Teresa had ever done. She didn’t want to give up hope, but for so long, she could not see a way out of her addiction. She eventually landed in the Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Center (EWCC).

Teresa grew up going to church, but she always felt distant from God. Most of her prayers up to that point were attempts to bargain with God. But one day at EWCC, she finally tried an honest prayer: God, I feel like You're the only One who can help me.

Walking in freedom

Soon after that prayer, Teresa entered the prison chapel for her first church service in years. It felt like coming home. There, she joined a biblically based, 12-step recovery program called Celebrate Recovery (CR) Inside. The group began each meeting with praise and worship music, and with every song, Teresa felt her guilt and shame lift away.

She met her first group leader at CR Inside. The group began each meeting with praise and worship music, and with every song, Teresa felt her guilt and shame lift away.

One in-depth study from 1948 to 2008 revealed that having a close contact in your social circle who is happy increases your own chance of happiness by 15%. And a secondary social contact (friend-of-a-friend) who is happy increases your chance of happiness by 10%. Even a friend-of-a-friend-of-a-friend, someone who doesn’t even know you well, can increase your likelihood of happiness by 6%.

Find Your Tribe

by Stacia Ray

Muddling through life alone isn’t appealing. We want a circle of friends who will enrich our lives and stand by our side.

That’s true even when—or maybe especially when—you’re stuck behind bars, having to deal with the same problems as the outside world and the problems unique to prison life, all while living in a fishbowl. When prison life is all you know—

Find Your Tribe

Hanging out with happier influencers will rub off on you. One in-depth study from 1948 to 2008 revealed that having a close contact in your social circle who is happy increases your own chance of happiness by 15%. And a secondary social contact (friend-of-a-friend) who is happy increases your chance of happiness by 10%. Even a friend-of-a-friend-of-a-friend, someone who doesn’t even know you well, can increase your likelihood of happiness by 6%.

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Letters to the Editor

Marlie, Florida
I am an inmate. I was shown a Bible from a friend that you had sent her. I would like to have a large print Bible like the one she has. I am 62 years old and would love to have one. I have to wear reading glasses. Even when I wear them, I have issues reading the Word. I would love to have one of your Bibles. Thank you so much. I love the Lord and want to walk closer with Him through His Word.

Tammy, Florida
I believe in God. I have a Tammy, Florida
His Word. I love the Lord and want to I am a prisoner. I was shown His Word. My life truly started to transform.

Dear Marlie and Tammy:
To order the Inside Journal NLT Life Recovery Bible, please see our ad on p.3. God bless you both on your walk with the Lord!

Rosalind, Connecticut
Thank you for the inspiring words that come from your newsletter. The topics are ones that I myself can relate to.

Dear Rosalind:
So glad you’re finding inspiration through Inside Journal! Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, and we will keep you in prayer.

FIND YOUR TRIBE IN PARENTING
An African proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” That’s especially true when you’re parenting behind bars. Here are three ways to find your parenting village while incarcerated:

1. Tap another adult to be your child’s mentor.
Ask your child’s caregiver if there’s a trustworthy coach or other adult who can spend time with your child. Also, find a Christian community member, pastor, or relative who can serve as a spiritual mentor—someone to teach your children to turn to God whenever they’re afraid or missing you. Even if the child’s caregiver is doing a great job, the more positive influences, the better.

2. Do “shared activities” together.
If your kids are young, find activities you can both do, even while apart, like each coloring a picture. If they’re older, ask them to write a list of tough questions about faith, life, friendships, and then discuss the answers together, in person (ideally) or through video visits, phone calls, or the mail. The Angel Tree program is also a great way to bond. (See p.3.)

3. Encourage your child to find their best tribe.
Remind your kids to hang out with other kids who are making good choices. Positive influences—including books, movies, and social media sites—matter too. Your example matters most of all, so stay out of trouble yourself and dive into prison classes and programs.

Find Your Tribe
Continued from page 1
2. Find a tribe with balance.
Healthy tribes offer a safe place to just be yourself—and to be called out when you need a reality check. Surround yourself with people who tell you what you need to hear, not just what you want to hear. People who simply agree with everything you say aren’t going to challenge you.

But on the flipside, you don’t want a tribe that only brings conflict. If you and a friendship/feud feel tension, try this exercise together: Make a list of the strengths and weaknesses in your relationship. Write down more positive than negative aspects (at least a 2-to-1 ratio) and to not critique anything that’s unchangeable (“I wish you had a different laugh”) or vague (“I wish you weren’t an only child”). To get you started, finish the statements “I appreciate ____ and “I get frustrated by ____.” Then take turns discussing your list using the “sandwich” feedback method: list one positive, then one negative, and then end with another positive.

3. Consult a trustworthy mentor.
To strengthen your friendships, find a fellow prisoner or outside volunteer who has a strong, healthy social circle. To strengthen your marriage or relationship with your significant other, find a prisoner or volunteer who is in a long, healthy marriage.
Ask these mentors what they know now that they wish they’d known when they were younger or earlier on in their friendships/relationships. Turn to them for advice or support whenever you’re feeling lost or frustrated in your own relationships.

Surround yourself with positive and supportive people. Find the friends who will have your back while still bringing out the best in you—friends who care enough about you to give you what you need, even when it might not be what you want. That’s a sign of a healthy tribe.

Sober and Celebrating
Continued from page 1
shame begin to fade away. “Before, I had allowed the enemy to tell me that I wasn’t good enough, or that I wasn’t worthy,” Teresa explains.

“Then I started filling my heart and my mind with tools to stay sober and with God’s Word. My life truly started to transform.” In CR, Teresa found a supportive, Christ-centered community. She met other incarcerated women who faced similar struggles and addictions. With the help of those women and caring volunteers, Teresa took steps toward healing.

“It is so important to have people walk with you when you’re going through that [recovery] journey,” says Teresa. In order to heal, she says she needed to learn to finally trust people, to learn more about herself and what brought her to this point, and to fully accept the unconditional love of Jesus.

A life to celebrate
At CR, Teresa discovered a new identity in Jesus, and He freed her from her addiction. At first, it was a challenge to experience emotions without drugs. “Whether I was excited, or I was mad, or I was sad, I always used [drugs],” she says. “I used every single day of my life. It was really humbling to walk through the different challenges that I’ve had and remain sober and seeing God’s hand in all of it.”

On August 29, 2011, Teresa walked away from the prison yard and toward her mother, grandmother, son, and daughter on the other side of the fence. She went to live with her grandmother at first, whom Teresa calls “a beautiful Christian woman—and such a huge part of my recovery.”

Today, Teresa serves as a full-time field director for Prison Fellowship's Oklahoma and West Texas Prison Fellowship. In this role, she has helped launch seven Prison Fellowship Academy® sites in Oklahoma and West Texas. One of the Academy sites is in Oklahoma and West Texas. The very place where she began her own transformation as a prisoner.

And she’s still celebrating recovery—hitting the milestone of 10 years sober this summer.

She thanks God for it all. “Every time I sit in that Academy classroom,” says Teresa, “I learn something. When you finally let go and let God in, He’s just so amazing and so faithful. I know that He has brought me where I am today.”

Sudoku: It Takes a Village, So Find Your Tribe!

Use the key to unlock the message below!

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See p.4 for answer key.

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Summer 2020

INSIDE JOURNAL | Summer 2020
I first learned about “jailhouse religion” when I came to prison. But as it turns out, I had been living it most of my life. You see, I was the “good kid” growing up—the kind who came from a solid family, made good grades, and never got in serious trouble. I went to church every Sunday and volunteered in the community. Others looked up to me as a spiritual leader. But that all changed when the story of my arrest made the front page of my hometown newspaper. People who knew me as a child seemed shocked. No one saw it coming.

I did, though. For many years, my life had been careening out of control, and I had skillfully hidden my struggles behind a mask of religious activity and personal accomplishment. Outwardly, I seemed like a “good Christian” who had it all together. But inwardly, I was a time bomb ready to go off at any minute.

I was a spiritual fraud.

Spiritual criminals

When I told my story to my unit chaplain, he said, “You see, I was the “good Christian” who had it all together. But God isn’t impressed. “Hypocrites!” he calls them. “You are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled with the inside with dead people’s bones” (Matthew 23:27). In Jesus’ day, a “hypocrite” was a stage actor—someone hired to play a fictional role. Here, Jesus describes how certain religious leaders appear good but are lifeless in spirit. Like stage actors, they simply put on a good show for others’ applause. People who practice “jailhouse religion” have learned how to play a fictional role, too. They act one way, but deep down, they’re someone else. They may be admired by others, but God isn’t impressed. “People judge by outward appearance,” the Bible says, “but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Sincere believers aren’t known by their religious behaviors. They’re known by the way they give genuine, selfless love to others. They’re constantly growing in patience, kindness, and self-control—what the Bible calls “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22–23). They make mistakes, of course; we all do! But over time, real believers look more and more like Jesus—both in public and private. The Bible says, “When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags” to God (Isaiah 64:6). That’s why God sent His Son Jesus to live the perfect life we never could—and to die the criminal’s death we deserved. And when God raised Jesus from the dead, it proved He had dealt once and for all with our spiritual crimes. Now, if we’re willing to surrender our lives to Jesus, God’s Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, changing us from the inside out.

Have You Got “Jailhouse Religion”?

by Johnathan Kana

In prison, people use the phrase “jailhouse religion” to describe individuals who seem religious on the outside but haven’t changed much on the inside. They go to chapel, own a Bible, and pray over meals. But outside of church, they cus freely, badmouth people, break the rules, and get into petty fights right alongside their peers.

I knew guys like this. They could quote Scripture readily and offer long, wordy prayers in our evening prayer circle. But they couldn’t seem to stay out of trouble with the officers on our unit. A few proudly went by names like “Preacher” and “Reverend.” But they spent more time boasting about war stories from the streets than they did reading their Bibles.

Such people are what Prison Fellowship senior executive-vice president Sam Dye calls “spiritual criminals.” They say they’ve changed and are working on getting right with God, but what they’re really doing is wearing their religious habits like a spiritual jacket. “You can take it on and take it off at will, depending on who’s around,” Dye says. “It’s really not a part of you.”

It angered me to see people trying to get the benefits of being religious without changing their lives to honor God. But then I knew I was just as guilty as them. Like my chaplain said, I had been a “spiritual criminal” most of my life, too.

Getting real

In the Bible, Jesus has some pretty harsh words for religious pretenders. “Hypocrites!” he calls them. “You are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled with the inside with dead people’s bones” (Matthew 23:27). In Jesus’ day, a “hypocrite” was a stage actor—someone hired to play a fictional role. Here, Jesus describes how certain religious leaders appear good but are lifeless in spirit. Like stage actors, they simply put on a good show for others’ applause.

People who practice “jailhouse religion” have learned how to play a fictional role, too. They act one way, but deep down, they’re someone else. They may be admired by others, but God isn’t impressed. “People judge by outward appearance,” the Bible says, “but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Sincere believers aren’t known by their religious behaviors. They’re known by the way they give genuine, selfless love to others. They’re constantly growing in patience, kindness, and self-control—what the Bible calls “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22–23). They make mistakes, of course; we all do! But over time, real believers look more and more like Jesus—both in public and private. The Bible says, “When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags” to God (Isaiah 64:6). That’s why God sent His Son Jesus to live the perfect life we never could—and to die the criminal’s death we deserved. And when God raised Jesus from the dead, it proved He had dealt once and for all with our spiritual crimes. Now, if we’re willing to surrender our lives to Jesus, God’s Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, changing us from the inside out.

I’m grateful God pursued me into prison. For me, it was proof that no one—not even a spiritual fraud—is a lost cause. If we’re willing to drop the religious act and pursue God with all our heart, it’s never too late to turn “jailhouse religion” into an authentic, lifelong commitment.

THIS CHRISTMAS, GIVE YOUR CHILDREN A PRICELESS GIFT:

A PRESENT AND A PERSONALIZED MESSAGE FROM YOU, THEIR PARENT WHO LOVES THEM!

This Christmas, your child can wake up to a gift from you through Angel Tree®, a program of Prison Fellowship®.

The gift is purchased by an outside volunteer on your behalf and given with a gift tag containing your personalized message ... all at no cost to you!

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

1. You must be the parent, stepparent, or mother/father figure.
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 and then signed.

Forms must be postmarked by Sept. 8.

Contact your children’s caregiver to gather the most current information for your application.

IMPORTANT: 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).

NEED A BIBLE?

To get a FREE Inside Journal NLT Life Recovery Bible, write to: Tyndale House Publishers, Attn: Inside Journal Bible, 351 Executive Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188. Please include your name and prison ID number, your facility name, your facility address, and whether you want English or Spanish. Limit one Bible per person.

Another way to get deeper? Dig in to the Word!

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News + Notes

COVID-19’s Reminder of Resilience

COVID-19 has affected everything from our nation’s economy to the justice system. This virus is like nothing we’ve ever seen before, and people’s lives are forever changed.

COVID-19 has impacted our justice system, our prison system, and even Prison Fellowship’s Second Chance® Month prayer walks, which were changed from physical to virtual in response to the virus. COVID-19 has also shown how incredibly strong prisoners are. When faced with challenges and lockdowns, prisoners handled it with grace, even inspiring the outside society, who turned to those on the inside for ideas on how to handle being isolated from family.

On April 11, the White House issued a proclamation, signed by the president, declaring April 2020 as Second Chance Month for the third year in a row.

More than 380 partners joined Prison Fellowship in advocating for second chances, and several declared their support for Second Chance Month. In April, social media campaigns, prayer groups, Twitter chats, and other activities centered around Second Chance Month took place around the nation. Prayer leaders in Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis, Lincoln, Oklahoma City, Fresno, and San Bernardino joined forces for a Road to Second Chances Virtual Prayer Meeting, where community members from all these cities came together to cover our nation with prayer.

Second Chance Month reminds us that we are more than our past mistakes. We are all made in God’s image, and each of us has a future.

COVID-19 reminds us that we are all in this world together, and God can reveal silver linings in even the biggest storms.

Oregon Prisoners Make a Difference for Kids

For more than 10 years, prisoners at the Oregon State Correctional Institution (OSCI), a medium-security, 900-person facility in Salem, Oregon, have held an annual fundraiser. Last summer they raised money for Prison Fellowship’s Angel Tree program, which helps ensure that children of incarcerated parents receive a special Christmas gift and personalized note from their parent (see p.3).

On August 16, 2019, a group of prisoners at OSCI’s football clinic, a walkathon, and fundraising booths. Wonderful smells filled the air at OSCI’s large yard. The barbecue featured cheeseburgers, barbecue chicken, hot dogs, and more. Hundreds of people participated in the walkathon, each earning one penny per lap. After three and a half hours and hundreds of laps, walkers had earned hundreds of dollars, including donations from prisoner clubs. The event raised more than $4,000—a new record.

When you do something to help others, you bring hope back to the community, and it’s a really, really positive thing,” said George Escalante, recreation specialist at OSCI. “It’s a great message, a great cause. The result is priceless at all levels. It’s helping [prisoners] realize, ‘I can do something good.’

INSIDE JOURNAL | Summer 2020

© 2020 by Prison Fellowship. INSIDE JOURNAL is published four times a year by Prison Fellowship, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. prisonfellowship.org Phone: 800.55.ANGEL (26435) to learn more. Forms must be postmarked by September 8, 2020.

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A member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability and the American Correctional Association.

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Use the key to unlock the message below:

BE KIND. 7 8 9 5 6 4 WE ARE ALL IN 3 1 16 3 12 THIS 241 TOGETHER 7 2 4 7 8

Emily Andrews, Jonathan Keeney

Prison Fellowship, a project manager for Angel Tree, a Prison Fellowship program, she remembered being inspired by the chaplain to serve the outside society, who faced with challenges and strong prisoners are. When also shown how incredibly system, and even Prison Fellowship’s Second Chance Month took place around the nation. Prayer leaders in Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis, Lincoln, Oklahoma City, Fresno, and San Bernardino joined forces for a Road to Second Chances Virtual Prayer Meeting, where community members from all these cities came together to cover our nation with prayer. Second Chance Month reminds us that we are more than our past mistakes. We are all made in God’s image, and each of us has a future. COVID-19 reminds us that we are all in this world together, and God can reveal silver linings in even the biggest storms.