

IN THIS ISSUE:



Letters to the Editor p.2



Happiness p.3



Recipe p.4

Faith, Fatherhood, and Washing Others' Feet

by E.G. Andrews and S.L. Ray

Roderick McNeely was exposed to drugs and alcohol when he was just a young kid in grade school. His aunt was an addict, and while Roderick and his cousins were in her care, she would bribe them with marijuana, pills, and alcohol to keep them from ratting her out to anyone. This bribery plan quickly led to Roderick becoming an addict. Before long, he was lying, cheating, and stealing to sustain his addiction.

His lifestyle led him down a dark path. He spent years chasing his crack cocaine habit. The fast and furious life of a criminal and addict soon became too much, and he had a heart attack while high. He barely survived that episode. Yet he kept up the



Photo by Chad Prince

Roderick was only in grade school when his substance abuse began. After years of addiction and parenting struggles, he eventually found freedom behind bars and learned the power of serving others.

lifestyle awhile longer.

"I did everything but join a gang," Roderick remembers.

His first prison stint didn't happen until he was 31, when he was booked on drug-related charges of assault and aggravated robbery with a deadly

weapon. He ended up serving multiple terms behind bars.

While incarcerated at a men's maximum-security prison in Texas, Roderick crossed paths with Prison Fellowship staff in a faith-based wing. They convinced him to apply

for the Prison Fellowship Academy®, an intensive, biblically based program in the Carol S. Vance Unit a few hours away. He gave it a try—and stayed for 24 months.

The joy of humbly serving
In the Academy, caring

staff and volunteers taught Roderick who God is. They also showed him the difference between knowing about God and really knowing God. His faith became real to him, and he was baptized.

One of the most impactful—and surprisingly joy-filled—memories from the Academy was the time Roderick and his classmates washed one another's feet to follow the example of Jesus.

"It was the most humbling experience," he remembers. "If my Lord and Savior can do it, who am I to not be of service to someone?"

The Academy also taught him how to humbly serve as a better father.

Even before being sent to prison, Roderick admits he wasn't there for his kids. He shared custody of only his son, Roderick II, but the older

Continued on page 2

Mental Gymnastics:

7 Activities You Can Do in Your Cell to Keep Your Mind Sharp

by S.L. Ray

Anyone who has spent any amount of time in lockdown or alone in a cell knows how lonely and isolating the separation from other people can feel. A lack of human contact not only can take a toll on your mental health, leading to anxiety and depression, but it can also cause your brain to become slow and sluggish. Studies show that social isolation can lead to mental fatigue ("brain fog"), lack of self-control, impaired memory, and difficulty

making simple decisions. Just like our body's muscles need exercise to stay in shape, our brains also need exercise—through stimulating activities.

Here are some easy, lockdown-friendly "mental gymnastics" to keep your mind stimulated while alone in your cell.

1) Exercise.

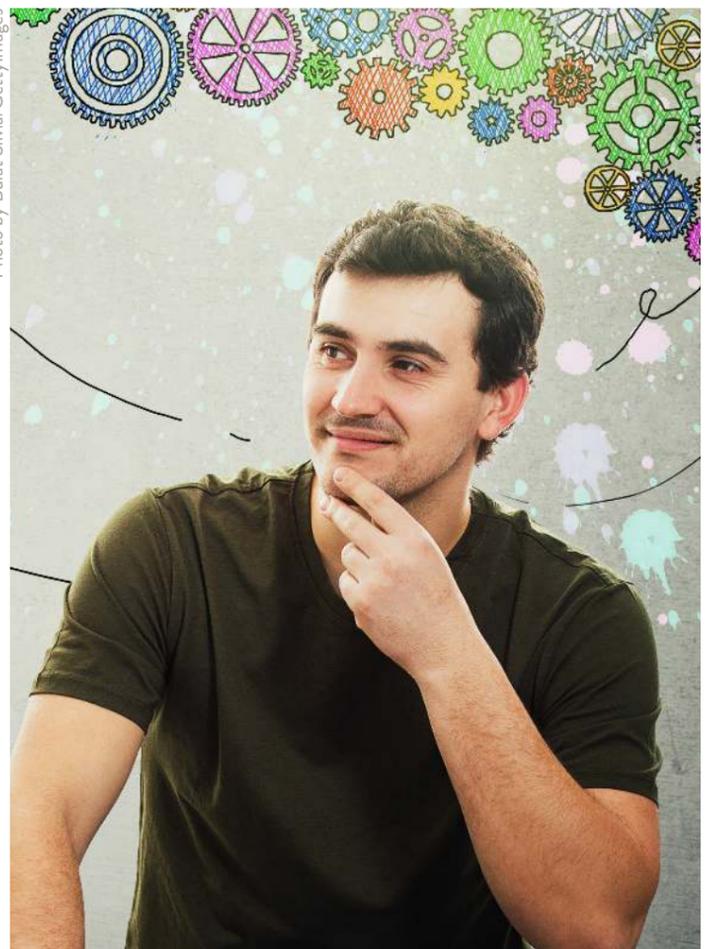
It's simple: To stimulate your brain, you need to stimulate your body. Physical exercise increases the oxygen and blood flow to the brain and maximizes brain activity. One university study discovered that three

vigorous, 40-minute walks per week over a six-month period improved memory and reasoning. You may need to settle for jogging in place or walking in circles in your cell, but movement of any kind is better than sitting still.

2) Do mental multitasking.

Grab something you have two or three of (socks, commissary items) and juggle or toss them to yourself while solving math problems (multiplication tables, simple subtraction, etc.). Recite the lyrics to a

Photo by Bulat Silvia/Gettyimages



Continued on page 2

Letters to the Editor

Daniel, Oregon

[Recently] there were some very serious fires burning in Oregon. ... The entire prison was evacuated. ... I had a Bible from the community library [that] was left behind. My roommate ... mentioned that I was looking down. He asked me why I looked so sad and if there was anything he could do to help. I told him how I was used to reading the Bible every morning and evening. I explained to him how the Bible is like my “battery charger” and how God is my supply of love and positivity. Without access to the Bible I was feeling drained and a little depressed.

Dear Daniel:

The next time you read your Bible, consider memorizing scriptures that uplift you or provide comfort and peace. That way, even when you're not near your Bible, you can recall what it says and be encouraged. Continue to let the Bible “charge” you with hope and love.

Kevin, Pennsylvania

[My chaplain] left this wonderful Inside Journal



Photo by Studio-Ammika/Getty Images

Fall 2020 issue in my door while I slept. ... One thing I honestly do enjoy is reading about people and how faith in God has helped them and ... how to deal with life in prison and prepare for life outside. Your publication Inside Journal entertained and informed my mind.

Dear Kevin:

Everyone loves a good story, and we're glad that you enjoyed the ones in Inside Journal. Jesus told stories too. His stories were simple, relatable, and spiritual. They're called “parables.” Consider reading one of them in Luke 15 for inspiration.

Wesley, Florida

I have just got my new [Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible] today. Man, I love that I asked to get this Bible. I got it around 10:30 a.m., and it was 9:45 p.m. before I [stopped] reading it. I'm telling ya'll that I never thought that Jesus could ever open up my eyes and talk to me. I know that it's God talking to me through the [Bible].

Dear Wesley:

Wonderful to hear you're so fired up! You've experienced one of the ways that God speaks—through His Word, the Bible. Keep on reading! ■

Mental Gymnastics

Continued from page 1

song while sorting items in your cell by size or weight. Speak each letter with an ordered number (A1, B2, C3, D4, etc.), and then recite the alphabet backward with those same ordered numbers (Z1, Y2, X3, W4, etc.).

3) Go offhand.

Write with your non-dominant hand (if you're right-handed, put the pencil in your left hand). Or do a “double doodle” with a pencil in each hand, drawing random shapes or specific scenes.

4) Play the categories game.

Either on paper or in your head, pick a category (brands of jeans, names of TV shows, famous singers, etc.) and see how many you can list. To challenge yourself even more, see how many you can list that only start with a certain letter.

5) Play the memory game.

Closing your eyes, see how many details you can recall of your daily life. What specific objects are in your cell? What color is the floor in the cafeteria? How many tables are outside on the yard? What color hair do the different corrections officers have? Do any of

them have a beard? What did you eat for lunch three days ago?

6) Play the memory game, the drawing version.

In this spin on #5, use pencil and paper to test your memory. Draw a map of your hometown. See how detailed you can get with the street and business names. Or draw your home or bedroom from childhood.

7) Learn a new skill or language.

If you have access to the prison library, check out books on hobbies you can learn in your cell, such as origami (which only requires paper) and calligraphy (which only requires a pen and paper). And lockdown might be a good time to pick up a new language.

Try these ideas or create mental gymnastics of your own. It's important to keep your mind sharp during times of boredom, loneliness, or lockdown. And don't forget to eat healthily (see page 4 for more on healthy eating) and get enough sleep. Your mind and body will thank you. ■

Subscription Info

At Inside Journal® (IJ), we receive many letters each week from prisoners asking for subscriptions to our newspaper. 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.

Washing Others' Feet

Continued from page 1

Roderick's life was a mess. The little boy's mother also struggled with addiction, so his grandparents raised him. Roderick and his son became distant.

But in the Academy, Roderick made a bigger effort to reconnect with his kids. He signed them up for Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree® Christmas program, where children receive gifts, the Gospel, and a personal message from their incarcerated parent. He registered his kids every year for eight years.

Once, at age 9, Roderick II attended an in-person Angel Tree Christmas party (this particular prison allowed in-prison family events), which was the first time he had seen his dad in years. When his son walked

into the room that day, “I was in tears because he had gotten big,” Roderick recalls.

Roderick had missed so many of his kids' milestones and birthdays. But Angel Tree was his chance to reconnect with his kids, even from a distance.

Helping heal the suffering

After his release from prison, Roderick got involved in a church, launched his own business, and eventually bought a house. There, he raised his son with the help of his brother. He is thankful to have a repaired relationship with his now-adult son.

Roderick also became an Angel Tree volunteer, serving families who have stories like his. He even returned to prison—this time, as a volunteer. But even though his visits to prison now include the

freedom to leave, he knows that his true freedom came while he was incarcerated and found Jesus.

Today Roderick is an assistant pastor. He loves to teach the importance of living in a Christ-centered community, both in and out of prison. He knows firsthand the impact serving others can make, whether it's through a humbling Academy activity on the inside or a positive mentor relationship on the outside. He helps others because God has placed that desire on his heart, and he encourages others to find the same passion in their own hearts.

“There are a lot of people who are suffering in the world and don't have a lot of help,” says Roderick, “and you might be the one that God sends to help them.” ■

NEED A BIBLE?

Get a free Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible!

WRITE TO:

Tyndale House Publishers

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.

Happiness Versus Joy

by S.L. Ray

My close friend Mike was barely 32 years old when he was diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer. For years after, he endured chronic pain and was in and out of hospitals. Yet no matter how much he hurt, or how close to death he came, he always seemed to be in a good mood. He was always so peaceful, content, happy.

I didn't really understand it, but I admired it. How could someone suffering so much be so happy, while I griped and complained about minor things?

It turns out Mike wasn't experiencing happiness. He was experiencing joy. And when I truly learned the difference, it changed my life.

Happiness is a temporary feeling that's a reaction to something external. Joy is a deeper state of being that's internal. Unshakable joy comes only from God, and it's as simple as accepting Jesus into your heart and finding contentment in His salvation. Well, actually, it's not quite that simple.

Superficial earthly goals

Since childhood, we're taught to seek happiness. We've been conditioned to chase after fancy cars, celebrity mansions, problem-free relationships. Yet life isn't problem-free. And studies show that the wealthiest, most famous people aren't actually very content. Sure, they have moments of temporary happiness. But when life gets tough, they get depressed and stressed.

Why is happiness so short-lived? Humans are adaptable creatures, which



Photo by zimmytwsi/GettyImages

comes in handy with things like famine, disabilities, or even prison life. But it's also why we're rarely satisfied for very long when good things come our way. We quickly get used to something enjoyable and adapt. Then we just want more, bigger, better.

Society's goals of "do whatever makes you happy" and "live your best life" are happiness goals: superficial, unreliable, quickly unsatisfying. We should strive for joy goals—the kind that can weather life's storms and bring us peace even during pain.

When God sent His one and only Son to pay the ransom for our sins, He flipped worldly wisdom upside down. Jesus died so we may live. He said His power works best in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

He even said hardships can be good. "When troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow" (James 1:2-3).

We aren't promised

money or fame or even comfort. Quite the opposite. Here on earth we'll have trials and sorrows (John 16:33). But like He did when He sent Jesus, God flips those worldly struggles upside down—through His unshakable joy.

Priceless heavenly goals

Joy should be our goal in all moments, even the hard times. 1 Thessalonians 5:16 says to "always be joyful," not just when life is good. And Philippians 4:4 even says it twice: "Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!" In fact, the translated word for joy is mentioned in the Bible several hundred times. (Happiness is mentioned fewer than a dozen times.)

So how do we find joy in difficult times? First, we need to get to know God better. Once we understand that He works all things (even painful things) together for the good of those who love Him, we can trust that He has a greater plan in mind. He also says that if we follow His commandments, our joy will overflow (John 15:10)—but we also

ARE YOU CHASING TEMPORARY HAPPINESS?

Do you feel contentment deep in your soul? Or are you chasing earthly happiness instead of the joy that can only come from God?

The Bible says, "I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation ..." (Isaiah 61:10). When you accept Jesus' gift of eternal life, which covers you like a fancy robe, you can experience that overwhelming joy. And this "glorious, inexpressible joy" (1 Peter 1:8) can never be robbed from you (John 16:22).

In John 17, when Jesus was on the cross, He said to God: "And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth." You too can know Him by reading His Word and praying to Him. Jesus then spoke of giving people on earth the joy of Himself. You too can experience this joy of Jesus, the kind that doesn't disappear when times get tough.

Not sure where to begin? Start with this prayer:

"Dear God: I want to accept Your Son Jesus into my heart as my Savior. I want to experience Your unshakable joy that brings me peace even when times are hard. Please show me how to live in that joy. Amen."

Want to learn more about God's Word? See page 2 for information on receiving a free *Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible*. See page 3 for information on receiving a free Bible study. Want to learn more about Christ's unshakable joy or have other comments? Write to us at "Unshakable Joy," c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790.

need to really learn those commandments.

Second, we need to actively seek joy. You may need to work at this at first, especially after seeking earthly happiness for so long. But in time, Christ's joy will start to flow through even painful moments. Troubles will become an opportunity to give thanks and to grow.

When it comes to seeking joy in hardships, I'm still a work in progress. But watching Mike live out James 1:2-3 has inspired me so much. Despite his extreme pain, he rarely

complained and instead focused on the joy of Christ. I want to be more like that.

Mike went to heaven this week. He was only 38 and left behind a wife and young kids. But he also left me these priceless reminders:

Stop seeking earthly happiness and instead choose godly joy. Appreciate every breath, even the painful ones. And no matter how difficult things get, remember the truth proclaimed in Nehemiah 8:10: "Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." ■

WHO IS GOD?

God is Good,
God is Merciful,
God is Love,
God is Sovereign,
God is Holy.

Would you like to participate in this free 5-lesson Bible Study?

WRITE TO:

CLI Who Is God Study
P.O. Box 97095
Raleigh, NC 27624

Please specify whether you'd like to receive the study in English or Spanish. Also available on tablets in select facilities.

Better Health Behind Bars

During a recent National Inmate Survey, 40% of people behind bars

(in prison or jail) reported having a current chronic medical condition, with high blood pressure being the most common chronic condition reported. And 21% reported having ever had tuberculosis, hepatitis B or C, or other STDs (excluding HIV).

Health problems are common behind bars. And although some medical conditions require medication or treatment, some can be helped through better lifestyle choices.

Things like prayer, meditation, exercise, restful sleep, and healthy eating habits help us stay healthy and ward off diseases. Superfoods like blueberries, broccoli, kale, and artichokes have antioxidants that can help our body's cells function properly. But when's the last time you bought fresh kale at the commissary?

There are some commissary-friendly ways to stay healthy while incarcerated. Here are a few to get you started:

- **Limit** your salt and caffeine intake, which can raise blood pressure and hinder deep sleep.
- **Go nuts!** Walnuts, pecans, chestnuts, and even peanuts are rich in antioxidants (which may reduce the risk of diseases); almonds contain more fiber and Vitamin E than any other nut; macadamia nuts contain the most monounsaturated fat (shown to lower cholesterol and blood pressure). Just be careful not to eat too many at once, as nuts are also high in fat.
- **Fill up** on oatmeal! Oatmeal can help lower cholesterol, can improve blood sugar, is filling, and is high in fiber, antioxidants, and nutrients. Just be warned that some flavored oatmeal packets contain

sweeteners and artificial ingredients, which can be unhealthy.

- **Get fishy!** Canned tuna, sardines, and salmon are all vitamin-rich, lean proteins that are high in Omega-3 nutrients, which can help your heart and mind stay healthy. See recipe in box for a yummy spin on canned tuna.

Photo by LauriPatterson/GettyImages



ZESTY TUNA WRAPS

- 6 oz. tuna, drained
- 1 tbsp. salsa
- 1 small pickle, diced
- ½ tsp. ranch dressing or cream cheese
- ½ tbsp. low-fat mayo
- 1 flour tortilla*
- ½ oz. Velveeta-style cheese

Combine tuna, salsa, pickle, ranch dressing, and mayo in a bowl, stirring until well blended. Place 1 tortilla (the wrap) on a clean work surface. Spread cheese along one edge of wrap. Place tuna filling on top of cheese. Roll wrap starting at the edge with the filling.

Roll halfway, then fold inward and finish rolling. (Hint: tortillas can crack, but if warmed first, they will be more flexible.) Warm the tuna wraps in a hot pot or microwave or eat cold.

*If your commissary doesn't sell tortillas, spread the tuna filling on crackers or bread instead.

NOTE: Some of these ingredients may not be available, and restrictions on cooking vary. Be sure to comply with your facility's rules and regulations. Also, this content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Talk to your facility's medical staff about any questions you may have regarding a health condition. ■

News + Notes

Hope Reaches In

As the pandemic continues into 2021, Prison Fellowship has continued to serve incarcerated men and women in creative ways. Despite the colder winter temperatures making it harder to have outdoor activities, Hope Events carried on into the winter, including some outdoor events in warmer climates and even some indoor events with social distancing, masks, and other safety measures in place.

Prison Fellowship partnered with departments of corrections to bring hope inside however possible. This has included hosting more virtual Hope Events through Floodlight™—the video-based platform created last year in response to the pandemic's limitations on indoor events—and hosting more “outside-in” Hope Events that took place just outside the prison fence. These events include musical performances, testimonies, and an altar call, where dozens of prisoners continue to dedicate or rededicate their lives to Jesus.

One such Hope Event™ at South Carolina's Camille Griffin Graham Correctional Institution shared the Gospel with 400 women.

Hope Events continue to reach more men and women behind bars every week, and 2021 is already on track to be our biggest and most events-filled year ever!

The Gift of Connection

Angel Tree is all about connection—strengthening the bonds of prisoners' families through Christmas gifts and messages of love. Last year, COVID-19 forced prisoners and their loved ones apart even more than usual. By God's grace and the creativity of Prison Fellowship staff and volunteers, Angel Tree bridged the divide, delivering applications to parents in prison through chaplains.

Children still received gifts, notes from parents, and a free Bible. Instead of using printed tags, many partner churches used Virtual Angel Tree, the new online option, to match children with sponsors. Instead of giving

gifts through visits and parties, some churches hosted drive-thru events in their parking lots. Some others created a “party in a bag” for children, with snacks, candy, and crafts. And still others blessed families with homemade meals or mailed gift cards

So many families last year said their Angel Tree gift came “at the perfect time.”

directly to homes. As COVID-19 forced a pivot in the usual programming, Prison Fellowship developed solutions that may prove helpful in the future.

In 2020, Angel Tree reached 222,000 children with a priceless gift: connection with an incarcerated parent. For many children, Angel Tree is the highlight of the holidays. So many families last year said their Angel Tree gift came “at the perfect time.”

A Presidential Victory

Back on Nov. 3, 2020, Former vice president

Joe Biden Jr. was elected president of the United States. President Biden's criminal justice proposals include Pell Grant restoration for incarcerated students, addressing the penalty disparity for crack and powder cocaine, and further investments in effective correctional and reentry programming.

“We look forward to working with the new Biden administration and Congress to advance policies that honor the God-given dignity of every man and woman impacted by crime and incarceration,” said James J. Ackerman, president and CEO for Prison Fellowship.

“In 2018, President Trump signed into law the FIRST Step Act, featuring federal drug sentencing reforms and expanded in-prison programming. The historical reform would not have been possible without bipartisan sponsors and support, including then-Senator and current Vice President Kamala Harris' vote. We can think of no better time to take up the next steps to advance criminal justice as a place of common ground and shared purpose.” ■



© 2021 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

Editorial Manager:
M.M. White

Editor in Chief
S.L. Ray

Writers:
E.G. Andrews,
S.L. Ray

Graphic Designer:
J. Davis

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

Inside Journal® is a registered trademark of Prison Fellowship®.