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When Abuse and Addiction Don't Get the Last Word

by Joanna Breault

Robyn Paterson was only 9 years old the first time she experienced sexual abuse.

“Men were my mom’s thing,” says Robyn, adding that the men in her mom’s life were often dangerous and cruel.

At age 13, Robyn was impregnated by a 26-year-old man. He forced Robyn to marry him so that he would not be prosecuted for rape. He divorced her a year later. Due to Robyn’s extremely young age, the man was granted custody of their daughter.

Robyn was heartbroken. She did not want to return to her mother’s home where she might be further abused, so she went to the street. One night, some acquaintances offered Robyn a place to stay and introduced her to intravenous meth. She tried it once and was hooked. She was 15.

For the next nine years, Robyn bounced from place to place. Oftentimes, “home” was a motel. She had three more children with three



Photo by Cory Cameron

Before she was even old enough to drive, Robyn had lost custody of a child and gotten a divorce. She experienced decades of struggles and relapses—until a caring probation officer showed her another way.

different abusive and unstable men. Meth was her constant companion.

At age 24, Robyn noticed a friend’s credit card on a table and slipped it into her pocket. Over the next three days, she spent \$5,000 with the stolen card. Robyn was arrested, and the judge sentenced her to 27 years at High Plains Correctional Facility in Brush, Colorado.

Eight months into her

sentence, Robyn attended a ministry event. She was overwhelmed by the love and power of God.

“I laid on the ground for the whole service, and [even] part of the next day, just wailing,” she says. “I spent a day and a half under a chair in the fetal position. God was just delivering me from everything in my life.”

When she finally got up from the floor, Robyn says

She got sober.
And she felt
the shame
melt away.

she felt like a new person. She began working for the chaplain, setting up services and helping with music. She got sober. And she felt the

shame melt away.

“My heart was clean, so I was able to see the Lord,” Robyn says. “I was able to forgive and ask for forgiveness.”

It was during this time that Robyn learned about Prison Fellowship Angel Tree™, which enables incarcerated parents to give their children gifts at Christmas. Robyn sent gifts to her kids through Angel Tree® for four years, and it gave her a wonderful sense of “doing something” as a mom.

A familiar trap

After serving five years, Robyn was released. She was thankful to be free—but reentry was not simple. At first, she lived in a ministry home, but it was not the right fit. So Robyn’s pastor help her set up an apartment in the basement of the church.

Finding employment was hard, too.

“If you say ‘yes, I have a felony,’ it is so hard to find work,” Robyn says. “I had trouble even cleaning hotel rooms because you’re not bondable by most insurance

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20+ Book Recommendations to Inspire You Behind Bars

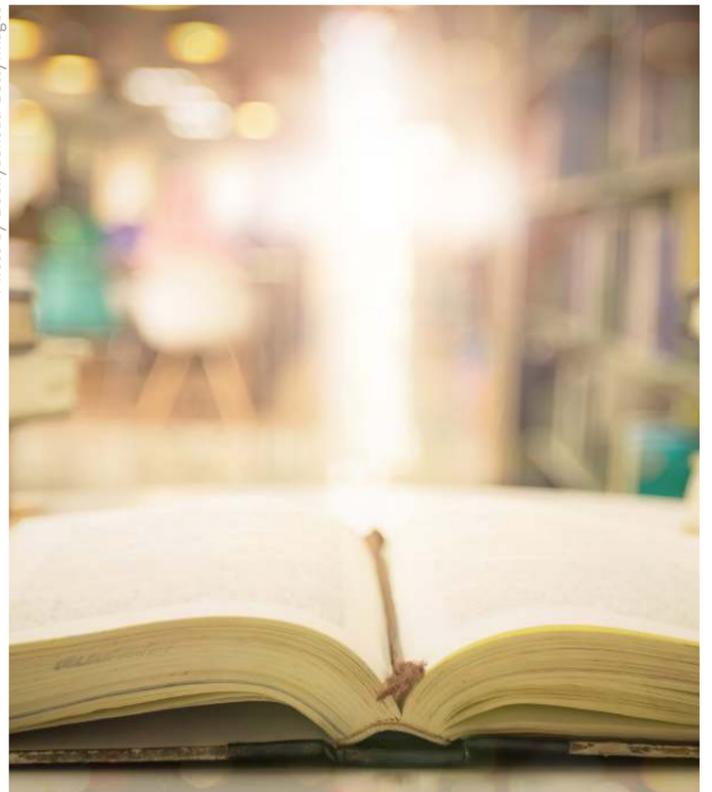
by Stacia Ray

When you’re incarcerated, staring at the ceiling alone with your thoughts can quickly turn to boredom or depression. It’s important to use any free time you have wisely. Books are a great way to engage your mind and stay productive and positive. We polled several current and former prisoners to tell us which books motivated, educated, or inspired them behind bars. Here are some of their go-to favorites. Note: Not all of these are available in all prison libraries, and some of these contain mature content.

1. ***The Heart of a Hero* by Clarence Singleton** (Nonfiction: Self-Help/Inspirational)
2. ***We’re All Doing Time: A Guide for Getting Free* by Bo Lozoff** (Nonfiction: Self-Help/Interfaith)
3. ***Total Forgiveness* by R.T. Kendall** (Nonfiction: Self-Help/Relationships/Christian)
4. ***As a Man Thinketh* by James Allen** (Nonfiction: Self-Help/Spirituality)
5. ***Relationship Goals: How to Win at Dating, Marriage, and Sex* by Michael Todd** (Nonfiction: Self-Help/Relationships/Christian)
6. ***Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor E. Frankl** (Nonfiction: Psychology/Holocaust)
7. ***Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World* by Bob Goff** (Nonfiction: Christian/Memoir)
8. ***Mentor: The Kid & The CEO* by Tom Pace** (Fiction: Inspirational)
9. ***Discover the Wealth Within You* by Ric Edelman** (Nonfiction: Finance)
10. ***The Case for the Real Jesus* or other “Case for” books by Lee Strobel** (Nonfiction: Christian)

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Photo by Boonyachaoat/Getty Images



Inside Journal: Bigger and Better!

What first comes to mind when you hear the word “summertime”? Whatever it is, we’re willing to bet it’s not a Christmas present.

Here at Inside Journal, we talk a lot about Christmas during the summertime. Summer is when churches, community volunteers, and your children’s caregivers all start to gear up for Prison Fellowship Angel Tree Christmas, where children of incarcerated parents receive a gift, the Gospel, and a personal message from their mom or dad.

Our summer edition of Inside Journal is traditionally the “Angel Tree Christmas” edition. However, in this summer edition, we’re focusing on how you can connect with your children through Angel Tree year-round.

Angel Tree serves incarcerated parents by providing a pathway for strengthening and restoring their relationships with their children and families—with year-round programs like Angel Tree camping (where prisoners’ children attend Christ-centered summer camps with the help of partnering churches) and Angel Tree sports camps (where prisoners’ children hear the Gospel and receive sports lessons and even life lessons from professional athletes).

Being behind bars can put a huge strain on parent-child relationships. You may know this all too well. But your sentence is not who you are. And your incarceration is not the end of your story. In fact, it’s often just the beginning.



Photo by Chance James

You’ve probably heard the expression “don’t just serve your time; make your time serve you.” Use this time to grow in your faith, in your character, and in your relationships with others, both inside and outside these walls.

Through Angel Tree, we at Prison Fellowship have seen once-estranged sons and daughters reconcile with their mothers after not speaking for many years. We’ve witnessed children jumping with glee when they receive an Angel Tree gift and a personal message of love from their parent, as a reminder that “out of sight” does not equal “out of mind.”

What better way to share inspirational Angel Tree stories than through this first-ever deluxe edition of Inside Journal? This premiere

“supersized issue” is twice as big (eight pages instead of the usual four pages)—and we hope twice as inspiring. Page 1 has a list of great books to check out. On page 6, hear from a woman who hasn’t walked in over 20 years and wouldn’t trade her circumstances for anything. Check out the word search and devotional tear-out on page 7. And if you’re a parent who wants to restore a relationship with your child or just connect with them in a new way, we invite you to read about and sign up for Angel Tree (restrictions apply; see pages 4–5 for more information).

We hope you enjoy this jam-packed eight-page edition of Inside Journal. Let summer begin!

Sincerely,
The Editorial Staff ■

Book Recommendations

Continued from page 1

11. *The Beginners Guide to Real Estate Investing* by Gary W. Eldred (Nonfiction: Finance)
12. *The 5 Love Languages; The 5 Languages of Apology; and The Marriage You’ve Always Wanted*—all by Gary Chapman (Nonfiction: Self-Help/Christian)
13. *Fight Fair* by Tim and Joy Downs (Nonfiction: Self-Help/Christian)
14. *The Way of Serenity: Finding Peace and Happiness in the Serenity Prayer* by Father Jonathan Morris (Nonfiction: Self-Help/Recovery/Christian)
15. *Peace Like a River* by Leif Enger (Fiction: Drama)
16. *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank (Nonfiction: Autobiography/Memoir)
17. *Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Oscar Zeta Acosta (Fiction: Historical Drama)
18. *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey (Nonfiction: Self-Help)
19. *Evidence Not Seen: A Woman’s Miraculous Faith in the Jungles of World War II* by Darlene Deibler Rose (Nonfiction: Biography)
20. *The Bondage Breaker, The Steps to Freedom in Christ, and Victory Over the Darkness*—all by Neil T. Anderson (Nonfiction: Self-Help/Christian)
21. *God’s Power to Change Your Life and The Purpose Driven Life*—both by Rick Warren (Nonfiction: Self-Help/Christian)
22. *He Loves Me* by Wayne Jacobson (Nonfiction: Christian/Inspirational)
23. *Tattoos on the Heart* by Greg Boyle (Nonfiction: Memoir)
24. **King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible* (Nonfiction: Christian)

What do you think of this list? How many of these have you read? Are there other books you love? Feel free to write to us at Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790 to share your favorites.

**NOTE: Several prisoners recommended the KJV Bible version. It’s one example of a “literal translation” Bible, which are often considered the most accurate, as they were translated word for word from the original Hebrew and Greek text. However, literal translation versions can be difficult to read, especially with their challenging verb tenses and grammar. Therefore, KJV may not be right for everyone. We use the New Living Translation (NLT) version in Inside Journal articles. (To receive a free Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible, please see ad on page 6.) ■*

When Abuse and Addiction Don’t Get the Last Word

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companies.”

For three years, Robyn worked hard to get back on her feet. She eventually secured a job in road construction. She attended church and Bible study. And she even regained custody of her children.

One day while working on a highway crew, a co-worker suggested they get high.

“I left the job site, got a needle, and it was like I had never quit,” Robyn says.

Robyn was back in the grip of addiction—to meth and to abusive relationships.

“The kids were a mess,” she says. “They spent a lot of time with friends and living on the street.”

Seven years into her relapse, Robyn was caught driving without a license and was put on probation. Her probation officer noticed

her bruised body and could tell she was using drugs. The officer showed Robyn compassion by helping her leave her abusive partner and check into a residential treatment center.

“I used drugs all the way up there, did drugs in the parking lot,” Robyn admits. “But as soon as I walked through the door, a weight lifted off of me, and I thought, ‘I’m done.’”

Another second chance

Robyn spent three months in rehab and then went to live in a sober home. She has now been clean for two years. She has a steady job, and her relationships with her children have been restored.

Robyn says there is one thing she absolutely loves: volunteering with the homeless. She especially has a heart to see people delivered from drug abuse. Just as she was given second

chances to turn her life around, Robyn is eager for others to experience the same.

“I hope to help pull people out of that dungeon of addiction,” she says.

Recently, Robyn served with Angel Tree as a volunteer. Her job was to call caregivers to arrange for gift delivery.

“Volunteering for Angel Tree gave me an opportunity for me to share ... how it makes people in prison feel to be able to give something [to their kids],” she says. “I love being able to give back in all the places, in my addiction, that I took from.”

Robyn is proof that sometimes healing isn’t once-and-done. But she is also proof that healing can happen, through the grace of God. Today, she’s full of hope as she looks forward to the many chapters of her story that are yet to be written. ■

Photo by Cory Cameron



Unrelatable: What a Loving Father Really Means

by Jason Aten

The worst part was always watching them leave. As a dad, the thing that got me through the 39 months I spent incarcerated was that I was fortunate enough to see my children almost every week. It took a huge effort on the part of my wife, and sometimes my parents, but we all felt it was important that we spend time together as a family.

Those visits were the highlight of my week. I would count down the days, and sometimes the hours, until I would get to give my four children a hug and then sit and play Uno, Life, or chess with them while we ate a snack from the vending machines.

And then, after a few hours, they would leave.

Their departure broke my heart every single time. While I sat there in the visiting room, I could see them walk out through the security gate, and they would turn and cry. That part was brutal. No child should have to go through that experience, and the only reason mine were going through it was because of the choices I made.

Every child needs their dad. And when dad isn't there, it creates a hole that ends up getting filled with all kinds of other things. Insecurity. Fear. Anxiety. Loneliness.

I can't even imagine what it must have felt like for them.

Maybe you don't have to imagine it. Maybe you had that experience in your own childhood. Maybe you know exactly what it's like to feel lonely in your own home as a kid because, for whatever reason, your dad wasn't there for you. That's actually pretty common, especially in prisoners' childhoods.

The thing is, most of us don't want our children to go through that. We want the very best for them. But being a parent is hard. And one reason parenting is so hard is because the way most of us learn to be a parent is by watching the people who parented us. And sometimes our own parents weren't the best example.

As a result, we aren't always the best version of what we'd like to be as a parent. There is another option, however. The Bible tells us about a different kind of Father—God Himself.

As 2 Corinthians 6:18 (NLT) states, "And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

It can be hard to understand what the Bible really means when it talks

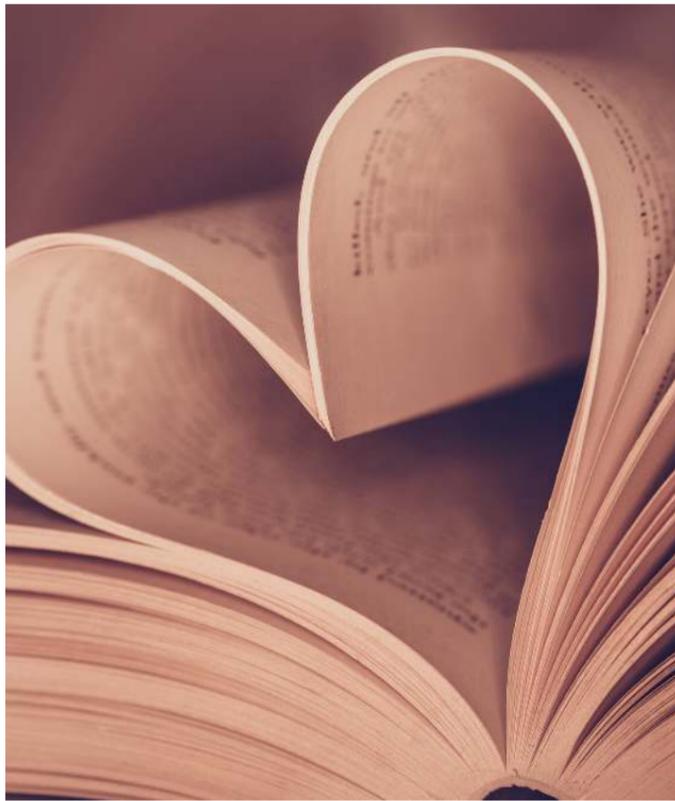


Photo by Protechnik/Getty Images

about God as our Father. There's a story in Luke chapter 15 that does maybe the best job of explaining it. Some call it the parable (story) of the lost (prodigal) son, which Jesus tells to a group of people.

The son in the story has told his father that he'd like his inheritance now—basically, he's tired of waiting for his dad to die. The father gives it to him, and the son takes off to do his own thing. In the process, he wastes all of his money on what the Bible refers to as "foolish living" (Luke 15:13).

I can relate. I've done plenty of foolish living in my own life, and it has never left me anywhere but broken and alone. The son in this parable feels broken and alone, too. He heads home to see if his father will forgive him, knowing he's hardly worthy of it at this point.

Except his father gives him a very unexpected response. He showers his son with fancy clothes and gifts and says, "We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found." (Luke 15:20-24)

This story represents how God responds to His children. He is an unbelievably forgiving Father. And unlike many earthly dads, He will always be there for us and will never leave us. If we've run off to do foolish things, He will always welcome us home and celebrate our return.

Psalms 103:8-13 explains, "The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve." This chapter calls God a father to His children.

Not like our own father, but like the most compassionate, most forgiving, most loving father you could ever imagine.

By the way, there's more good news. It's okay that we aren't perfect parents. That's why God's love is so powerful. It isn't based on what we deserve, but rather, God gives it to us as a gift.

Our job, as parents, is to look to Him as our example. You can't change where you are or how you got there, but you can ask God to help fill the need your children have for their Father.

Jason Aten, a 2016 graduate of the Prison Fellowship Academy (a program for prisoners in some facilities), is an author, creative director, husband, and father. ■

WHO IS YOUR ROLE MODEL?

Did you grow up with a perfect father? Do you have a current role model who is perfect in every way? Of course not! In fact, all human role models are a little flawed at best, and bad influences at worst. The only role model who is perfect is God. The Bible says, "Your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48); "He is a faithful God who does no wrong" (Deuteronomy 32:4).

To set an example of how we should live, God sent us His Son Jesus, who was both fully God and also fully human: the perfect role model.

Jesus died on the cross to give the free gift of eternal life to all who believe in Him. Through this ultimate sacrifice, He shows us what unconditional love and true forgiveness look like—again, the perfect role model.

To be great role models to our own kids, we need to use God as our parenting role model, not our own parents or our own efforts—and then cut ourselves some slack when we mess up, knowing that we are not perfect. Thankfully, that's again where Jesus comes in.

The Bible says, "But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous." (1 John 2:1). When you fall short as a parent, ask God to forgive you. Then ask your kids to forgive you, too.

Not sure where to begin? Start with this simple prayer:

"God, I admit I'm a sinner. Please forgive me. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. Please show me how to love others through Your example as my role model. Please show me how to live more like You. Amen."

Want to learn more about God's Word? See below for information on receiving a free correspondence course through Prison Mission Association. See page 6 for information on receiving a free *Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible*. Want to learn more about God as a loving Father or have other comments? Write to us at "Role Model," c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790.

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Photo collage from recent Angel Tree events

Angel Tree: Connecting All Year Long

Throughout this edition of Inside Journal, we're talking about Angel Tree, a Prison Fellowship program that works to strengthen bonds between incarcerated parents and their kids through giving gifts at Christmastime. But what exactly is Angel Tree, and how can you participate? Here are some frequently asked questions about Angel Tree.

Question: What is the purpose of Angel Tree? Is it just about kids getting gifts?

Answer: Prison Fellowship Angel Tree is a great way to bless your child(ren) with a gift at Christmas—but it's so much more. Through Angel Tree, you can send a personal message to your child(ren). It's a wonderful way to stay connected with them and to remind them that you're thinking of them. Not only will your child(ren) receive a gift and personal message from you, they will also be given an opportunity to request a children's *Adventure Bible* and/or a *Teen Life Application Study Bible*.

Q: I want to participate. How does Angel Tree work?

A: Angel Tree is free of charge. Prison Fellowship

ships applications to chaplains of participating prisons. Ask your chaplain for an application and fill it out between now and August. The chaplain will collect and mail it, or you can mail it yourself. In the fall, Angel Tree volunteers call each child's caregiver to coordinate delivery of the gift. Before Christmas, Angel Tree volunteers from local churches buy and wrap the gifts, which are then delivered to the children at home or at an Angel Tree Christmas party.

Q: Who can I send gifts to? Are there other guidelines I should keep in mind?

A: You must be the child's parent, stepparent, or mother/father figure. Your child must be 18 or younger and live in the United States. There must not be a court order restricting your contact with your kids or their caregiver. You must fill out the form completely and SIGN it. If the form is incomplete, your child(ren) may not be eligible. Finally, if the caregiver is not reachable or refuses to participate, we may not be able to deliver the gifts to the child(ren).

Q: What if my facility doesn't participate in Angel Tree?

A: Your chaplain can contact 800.55.ANGEL (26435) to learn more.

Q: I've heard that Angel Tree does more than deliver Christmas gifts. What other opportunities are available to my child(ren)?

A: Angel Tree loves to connect families to local churches where kids can participate in activities like vacation Bible school, Sunday school, or youth group, building supportive relationships all year long. And Prison Fellowship also sponsors two additional Angel Tree programs: Angel Tree camping and Angel Tree sports camps.

Q: What is Angel Tree camping?

A: There is nothing like summer camp when it comes to making wonderful childhood memories! Prison Fellowship partners with Christian camps across the United States by providing scholarships for Angel Tree kids to attend camp at little to no cost.

Angel Tree camping is a great way for your kid(s) to have fun experiences, make new friends, and enjoy the great outdoors. Angel Tree camping, which is currently only available in select

locations, has both sleepaway and day camp options. Have your child's caregiver check out angeltreecamping.org to find a camp near them. Your child can attend camp at no charge with our Angel Tree camping scholarship.

Q: What are Angel Tree sports camps?

A: Angel Tree hosts sports camps in select locations across the country where children gain skills in various sports and learn about God's love. Through lessons, drills, and fun competition, kids who might not otherwise have a chance to attend a day camp are treated like champions.

An Angel Tree sports camp is a unique opportunity for youth of all ages and abilities to learn from seasoned college players and former professional athletes. In the past, Angel Tree has hosted camps featuring basketball, football, soccer, baseball, bowling, ice skating, and cheer. To find out if there is a sports camp in your child's area, your child's caregiver can contact Prison Fellowship's call center at 800.206.9764.

Q: What is the history of Angel Tree?

A: In 1972, Mary Kay Beard

was sentenced to 21 years for robbery and other charges. While in prison, Mary Kay sensed God guiding her to serve Him. At Christmastime, she noticed that incarcerated mothers gathered and sent the little they had—soaps, shampoos—to their children as gifts. These makeshift gifts brought joy to the children simply because they had come from their mothers.

Upon her release, Mary Kay joined Prison Fellowship's staff. When asked to come up with a Christmas program, she remembered those incarcerated mothers, and Angel Tree was born—first in Alabama, and eventually expanding nationwide.

Q: I have a great Angel Tree personal story about how Angel Tree has impacted my own kids. Can I share that with you?

A: Of course! We love hearing inspiring stories from participants.

If you have a story about Angel Tree that you would like to share with us, write to: Editor in Chief, Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. ■

THIS YEAR, GIVE YOUR CHILDREN A PRICELESS GIFT:

A present and a personalized message from you, their parent who loves them!

Through Prison Fellowship Angel Tree™ your child can receive a gift, a Bible, and a personal note from you this Christmas—all at no cost to you! And throughout the year, your child can also participate in Angel Tree® camping or sports camps (see page 4 for more information).

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.



ASK YOUR CHAPLAIN OR PROGRAM COORDINATOR FOR AN APPLICATION TODAY!

Forms must be postmarked by Sept. 7. Ask your chaplain about your facility's deadline to submit completed forms.

Contact your child(ren)'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).



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2021 ANGEL TREE CALENDAR

JUNE							JULY							AUGUST						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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27	28	29	30				25	26	27	28	29	30	31	29	30	31				

SEPTEMBER							OCTOBER							NOVEMBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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26	27	28	29	30			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	28	29	30				
							31													

DECEMBER							HOLIDAYS							IMPORTANT DATES						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S														
			1	2	3	4	June/July – Begin filling out your Angel Tree form							_____						
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	July 4 – Independence Day							_____						
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	July/August – Submit your Angel Tree form							_____						
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	September 6 – Labor Day							_____						
26	27	28	29	30	31	November 11 – Veterans Day							_____							
							November 25 – Thanksgiving Day							_____						
							December – Angel Tree gifts are delivered							_____						
							December 25 – Christmas Day							_____						

My Last Step Backward

Inside Journal spoke with Tasha Schuh, inspirational speaker, author, and spinal cord injury survivor (see blue sidebar), about her journey to overcome depression, suicidal thoughts, and physical pain.

Inside Journal: You used to believe you control your own destiny. How did that change the day of your accident?

Tasha Schuh: I was always one who firmly believed that nobody was going to tell me how to live my life, including God. Immediately after the accident, I thought I was invincible and figured I'd be fine. Then I got to the hospital and heard, "You're never going to walk again." Being paralyzed is one of the top fears of human beings, and it happened to me.

IJ: How did you process—and eventually accept—this news?

TS: I eventually accepted that this is going to be my life, whether I like it or not, so I might as well make the best of it. It took me a long time—we're talking months, years—kind of like a rollercoaster of having two good days and one bad day, and then having three good days and five bad days. I had to force myself to focus on the positive. For a long time, I had been focusing only on the negative, and it was ruining me.

IJ: How did the accident change your relationship with God?

TS: Before the accident, I used to think that He was millions of miles away, that He had so many other bigger things to worry about. He certainly didn't care about little old me or the decisions I made. God was just a "Sunday morning" kind of thing. I'd go to church, do the ritual, feel good about myself, and then leave God there. After the accident, my mom tried to get me to go to church. After resisting for a year and a half, I finally went—and really heard the Gospel for the first time. Or maybe I'd heard it before, but my heart was not open to

it. That was the day I finally felt peace. That day, for the first time, I realized, "Oh my goodness. He loves me! And He has a plan for my life! Good thing, too, because I don't; my life's a total mess."

IJ: When people get to prison, they surrender their independence. You can relate. How do you handle the moments when you can't just do whatever you want?

TS: Oh yes, I definitely have things I can't do even though I want to. There are moments when I would do anything to be able to move, to make a meal for my husband, to swim in a pool. But I can't. Before the accident I was SO independent. Now every part of my day is scheduled for me. But we get the choice every day of how we're going to look at our situation.

IJ: You still have bad days. How do you handle them with grace?

TS: My mantra in the beginning was "one day at a time." Just focus on today. Whether it was a good day or bad day, I did my best. We can't change our circumstances, but we can change how we look at them.

IJ: In your suicide prevention curriculum, you created an acronym that has helped you: PATH (Purpose, Attitude, Team, and Hope). How do you focus on your purpose even on days when you feel discouraged?

TS: I'm a firm believer that our biggest battle is between our two ears—in our own mind. I used to let negative thoughts run without challenging them. After the accident, I would hear, You have no purpose, you have no worth, you have nothing to offer, you're such a burden. I mean, I heard that over and over again. Then I started realizing that's not true. Turning those thoughts around is key. We're all here for a purpose. I truly believe that.

IJ: How do you focus on your attitude and stay positive?

TS: It's a daily battle. You're never going to wake up and

say, "I don't need to check my attitude today." The Bible, in Philippians 4:8 and Romans 12:2, is so clear about renewing our thoughts and focusing on positive things. We're all fighting with darkness. We need to change the way we think and the thoughts that we allow to run through our mind. Write out a gratitude list or do a gratitude journal. Sometimes it's just asking someone, "Can you pray for me?" Some days are going to be tough. There's no way around it; to get through it, we need to go through it. We can adapt.

IJ: How do you find your team?

TS: Mental health is a huge struggle right now in this world. But we need to understand why people are feeling the way they're feeling. We need to remember that we can't go it alone. We're born for relationship. It's hard when there are relationships that are strained. But there's always someone—a parole officer, a grandma—someone who believes in you. We also need to know it's OK to ask for help. And sometimes that's asking God for help—He is on our team, too!

IJ: If you could go back in time and stop the accident from happening, would you?

TS: Absolutely not! My accident is what made me who I am today. It has taught me so much about life, about faith, about who I am and what I stand for, and what I believe. I can't imagine not going through that. Don't get me wrong: What I went through, I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy—but I would not change a thing, and I mean that. My life is not problem free; I have my challenges and my struggles, but I just know that life is such a gift that we have to cherish it. The fact that we wake up every morning is a blessing. That's what I choose to focus on.

Tasha Schuh is a motivational speaker and author of *My Last Step Backward* and *My Next Move Forward*. ■

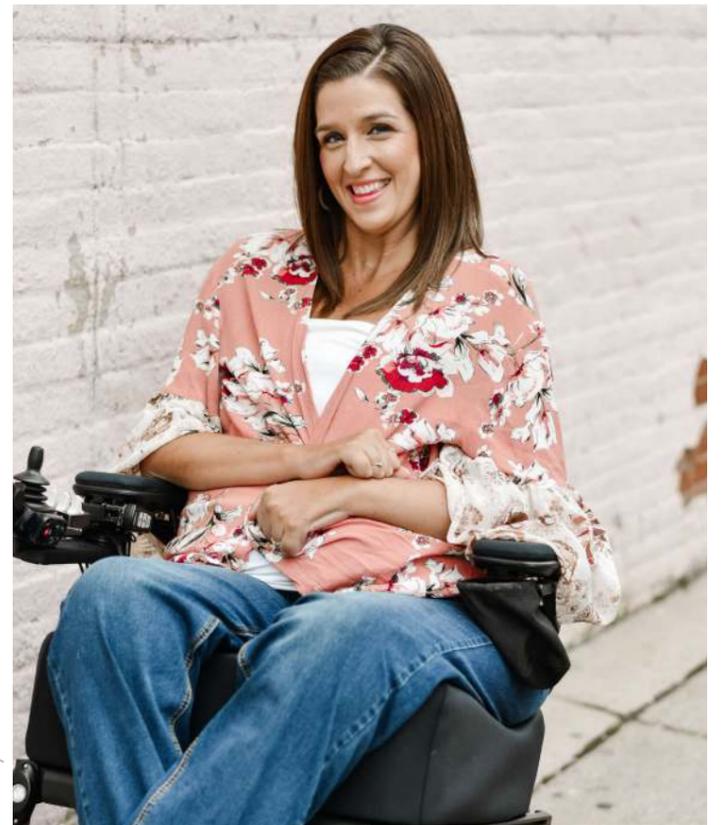


Photo by Jillian Jean

MOVE OUT OF THE WAY!

At age 16, Tasha was rehearsing for her school play, *The Wizard of Oz*. During a scene change in the dark, someone moving a large set piece yelled, "Move out of the way!" and Tasha stepped backward—into a trap door that had just been opened. She fell 16 feet onto the concrete below, immediately becoming paralyzed from the chest down.

Over the years, Tasha has endured an eight-day coma episode, a fever of 108 degrees, skin sores, painful surgeries, and countless physical and emotional setbacks. When Tasha shares her story, people often begin to share theirs. Sure, most people haven't spent over two decades completely paralyzed. But as Tasha has learned, sometimes all it takes is "permission" to open up and be vulnerable, and suddenly people connect and relate.

"Everyone has a story," Tasha says. "So many people can relate to how a split second, a quick movement—in my case, one small step backward—could alter the course of a life forever. Early on, I believed that my step backward was unique. No one could ever relate. But as I am constantly reminded, this just isn't true. Everyone has their own 'one step backward' that changed their lives forever. And God reminds me every day to 'move out of the way!' so He can work in my life."

Many of our readers had their own "one step backward"—that one moment, one decision, one criminal act—that changed their lives forever. For some, it was a culmination of many missteps, but there's often one MAIN moment that led to their arrest.

What's your one step backward? Might God be trying to get your attention after that misstep? Maybe where you are is exactly where you need to be to truly move forward in your life, as long as you get out of your own way. So if you're trying to control things, ask yourself if you need to MOVE OUT OF THE WAY and let God work in your life.

NEED A BIBLE?

Get a free Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible!



WRITE TO:

Tyndale House Publishers
Attn: Inside Journal Bible
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Carol Stream, IL 60188

DON'T FORGET!

Include this information to make sure your Bible gets delivered:

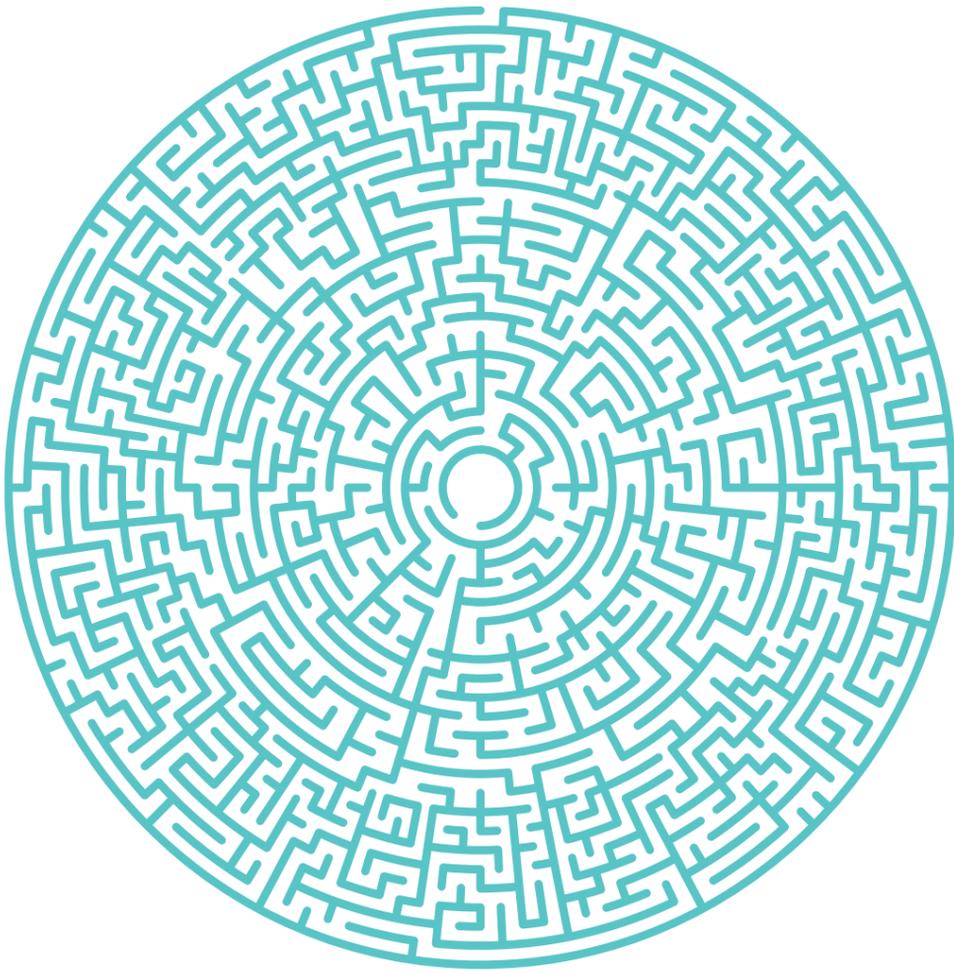
- ✓ Your complete name and prison ID number
- ✓ Your facility name
- ✓ Your facility address for prisoner parcel delivery
- ✓ Whether you want English or Spanish*

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

ACTIVITY

Does your life feel a bit like a maze?

Do you feel like there are too many paths before you, and you don't know where to turn? Complete this maze* and remember this verse: *Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path.* –Proverbs 4:26 (*answer on page 8)



RECIPE CORNER

Deluxe Fruit Salad

(submitted by Seth in New York)

INGREDIENTS*:

- Sliced fruit of your choice (apples, oranges, raisins)
- Marshmallow fluff
- Butter
- Honey
- Granola

Mix together the marshmallow fluff, honey, and butter in a bowl. Microwave to soften (editor's suggestion: start with 5 seconds at a time to avoid overheating). Mix together. Next, mix in fruit and granola. Allow to cool and then enjoy!

**Use approximately equal amounts of each of these ingredients, to your preference. Not all ingredients will be available at all facilities. Be sure to comply with your facility's rules and regulations whenever cooking.*



Photo by Natalia Sirobaba/GettyImages

DAILY DEVOTIONAL TEAR-OUT

Tear out this daily devotional and then start each morning and/or end each night saying it and praying over it. You'll be amazed how a healthy spiritual habit like this can bring encouragement and focus to each day!

Seeking the SON-light

by Jenny Cassell Faulknier

Searching for light in the darkness? Looking to the bright, balmy sun to warm up your soul? God's Son Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, is right here with us. Seeking His face—being more aware of His presence on purpose—means intentionally looking to see Jesus in every circumstance, every place, every moment. Asking, “God, where are You in this?” and then listening for the answer. God is not the author of our trouble; He is a perfect and kind Father, holding us in His warm embrace as we endure.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6 PROCLAIMS,

“For God, who said, ‘Let there be light in the darkness,’ has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Like a child seeing the reassuring face of a good and loving parent, we can weather any storm, darkness, or icy chill, because God is here with us. Seek and you will find Him.

Right now, as you start and/or end your day, clear your heart and mind and simply ask God, “Where are You in this day? What do You want me to hear right now? What do You want me to learn today?”
Then wait in a few minutes of silence with Him.

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Stress and the Prisoner: A Complicated Relationship

In speaking to several mental health professionals who work with prisons, they agreed that stress is a very real part of a prisoner's life, whether before incarceration or during—or often both. It's a vicious cycle: stress (or even trauma) can lead to low self-esteem, which can lead to drugs/alcohol to self-soothe, which can lead to being a "bad" parent or friend or significant other, which can lead to guilt, which can lead to even more self-soothing. And while you are ultimately responsible for your own actions or inactions, there are people and resources that can help you through the difficulties of prison life.*

Several prisoners shared their thoughts with Inside Journal regarding emotional pain and challenges in coping with life behind bars. Each quote seems to feel more hopeful than the one before it. We pray that's also how your days behind bars feel.

“ [There was] so much stress and drama leading up to my incarceration.” —**Steve in Colorado**

“ I don't think you can truly live in prison. There is no

way to be happy in prison. I can find moments of happiness, but I cannot find life. I've learned to cope, but I haven't learned to live.” —**Ivy in North Carolina**

“ This place will make you feel like you are nothin, that your life doesn't amount to anything. It will make you feel dry and hopeless. But, by showing a man that he still has a purpose, you give him hope. But don't just show him a purpose for when he gets out; show him that God has a purpose for him right now, in here.” —**Raymond in North Carolina**

“ God knows that I have a lot of anger issues. I am a believer and have been for over 30 years. I still go through a lot, some of which makes me mad, especially when I can't do anything about it, or should have known better. Figuratively, I 'beat myself up' a lot.” —**Gary in South Carolina**

“ I would wake up in the middle of the night ... concerned for my safety and wondering if someone

might hurt me while I was sleeping ... aches and pains from getting older, lights coming on at all hours, random noises.” —**David in Colorado**

“ I've decided that instead of trying to bring God into my life, I'll give my life to God. I keep trying, and I keep failing.” —**Keith in Alaska**

“ Prison is a hard place. You have to pay attention all the time to what is going on around you. People with bad instincts are more in number than there are good. Yet I see piercing through the dark abyss the Word of God, and I'm chasing after it. I found your newspaper. A guy was using it to block the light from coming into his cell room by placing it over his window. I made him a new one, made out of Styrofoam, and traded him.” —**William in California**

“ If you are still alive, it means you do not know the whole story. Each of us must wait until we find the outcome. To honor life, we must be willing to grow through what we don't know yet, and

outgrow what no longer fits us. To honor life, we must be willing to give in to the process, moment by moment, realizing a new plot that may be unfolding, with a new character taking the stage. In honoring life, we must give credit to the Divine director, producer, and the creator of this live production.” —**Tanya in Minnesota**

“ Never have I been more free and happy as I am today in this prison. I wouldn't have it any other way. I am content and grateful for everything that I have and am extremely blessed.” —**Sonja in Florida** ■



One prisoner in a max. security prison created this drawing, which represents the trauma, stress, anxiety, and other challenges he has experienced in life, both during his Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) job before his incarceration and during the pandemic while incarcerated.

MAZE ANSWER KEY



*NOTE: We at Inside Journal are not mental health professionals. This publication does not give legal, medical, or psychological advice; instead, all content is for general informational purposes only. This article contains prisoners' quotes that are unique to their own experiences. If you need mental health help, we suggest you speak to your counselor or other appropriate prison staff. There are also in-prison programs, such as Celebrate Recovery, that can help with life's hurts, habits, and challenges. Prison can be a dark place, but hope and healing are possible.

News + Notes

Celebrate Recovery Founder Dies

Earlier this year, Prison Fellowship mourned the passing of John Baker, who died on February 23 at age 72. Along with his wife Cheryl, John, then a recovering alcoholic, founded the program in 1991 as a ministry of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California.

Celebrate Recovery is a faith-based, 12-step program for people seeking restoration from life's "hurts, habits, and hang-ups." It now has thousands of chapters across the country and around the world, including many in jails and prisons.

In recent years, Celebrate Recovery has become a key partner of Prison Fellowship. Celebrate Recovery chapters deliver Christmas gifts in the name of parents behind bars as part of the Prison Fellowship Angel Tree Christmas program, and Prison Fellowship volunteers

facilitate Celebrate Recovery groups inside many correctional facilities.

"Celebrate Recovery has become a beacon of hope," wrote Prison Fellowship President and CEO James J. Ackerman, in a tribute published after Baker's passing. "John was a great leader, and he will be greatly missed, but the impact of his faithful obedience will go on for generations."

Celebrate Recovery Inside, the in-prison extension of Celebrate Recovery, is currently directed by Danny Duchene, who served time in California prisons between the ages of 18 and 50. For information about Celebrate Recovery chapters, please contact your chaplain, program coordinator, or Prison Fellowship representative.

Pell Grants for Incarcerated Students Return

In late 2020, the 116th U.S. Congress acted to restore access to Pell Grants

for incarcerated students as a provision within the Fiscal Year 2021 package.

The bipartisan REAL Act reversed an amendment to the 1994 Crime Bill that had put Pell Grants out of prisoners' reach and dramatically reduced their options for pursuing higher education behind bars.

"My experience with the Pell Grant program has been amazing, one could almost say lifesaving," Carai says.

Twenty years later, during the Obama administration, the Department of Education opened Second Chance Experimental Sites to grant Pell access to a limited number of students. Expanded during the Trump administration, the pilot eventually benefited 16,989 men and women behind bars.

One of them was an incarcerated man named Carai in Alabama. He told

Prison Fellowship, "I didn't come to prison with the reserve of funds to pay my way through school, and I [had] no way to work for them in here."

"My experience with the Pell Grant program has been amazing, one could almost say lifesaving," Carai says, because "[I'm] able to further my education, build skills to help me succeed in the future, and [it's] giving me something to strive for, gives my life a sense of purpose."

Many organizations, including the National District Attorneys Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Correctional Leaders Association, lobbied long and hard for the widespread return of Pell Grants nationally, and not just at the pilot locations. Now that the return of these grants is finally a reality, research suggests that greater access to education behind bars will improve public safety, prepare people for the work force, and even reduce racial disparities in the criminal justice system. ■



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703.478.0100

Editorial Manager:
M.M. White

Editor in Chief:
Stacia Ray

Writers:
Jason Aten, Joanna Breault, Jenny Cassell Faulkner, Stacia Ray

Graphic Designer:
J. Davis, E. Hays

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