Finally Free From the Crushing Weight of Grief

by Joanna Breault

From her earliest days, Chanda’s attitude toward life was simple: “It’s me against the world.”

She was bullied for her weight as a little girl and got into fights. When she was in second grade, she was kicked out of school for the first time.

But those childhood struggles were minor compared to Chanda being violated by her mother’s boyfriend when she was 12—and the betrayal she felt when her mother would not stand up for her.

Before she started eighth grade, Chanda was removed from her mother’s home and sent to a girls’ home. Her life spiraled from bad to worse. She started down a path that included running away, drug addiction, exotic dancing, being trafficked to Florida, a dozen arrests for prostitution and dealing crack, and three prison sentences—all by the age of 24.

Chanda didn’t want to think or feel anything. “That’s what I had been searching for my whole life,” she says of her desire to numb her pain.

During her third time behind bars, she heard the good news of God’s love for her and accepted Jesus as her savior. After release, she joined a church where she sang in the choir and worked as the pastor’s secretary. Chanda was amazed when she learned that the associate pastor had feelings for her—even though he knew about her past.

She said was glad “a man of God could take interest in me after all of that,” and they got married.

Broken dreams

Chanda worked two jobs to make sure she and her husband had all the things she thought a preacher and his wife needed: a Cadillac, nice clothes, and fancy hats for Chanda. But a lot of their money was also going to her husband’s drinking habit—and, Chanda discovered, to another woman.

Although her marriage was a mess, Chanda was overjoyed when she learned she was pregnant. She gave birth to a daughter, Kachandra. Three months later, the unthinkable happened—little Kachandra died due to a heart defect. She was only 24.

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By the time Chanda was only 24, she had already been through a lifetime of pain, drama, betrayal, and abuse. She had no idea her most painful grief was yet to come. But thankfully, she eventually found true peace and a new sense of purpose.

Continued on page 2

6 HABITS of a Lifetime Learner

by Cherise Bopape

All is often considered back-to-school time. Well, going back to school doesn’t just need to be reserved for kids. You too can be a student! Studies show that “lifetime learners” (people who continue to take classes or learn new things throughout their lives) have better mental and physical health. Reading can improve sleep and reduce stress, learning can contribute to longer lifespan, and higher education leads to better intellectual understanding in your old age. An added bonus: If you have kids, they might feel inspired by your desire to educate yourself this fall!

Here are six healthy habits of lifetime learners:

1. Find and focus on your end goal.

Figure out what you want to learn and why. Then when you’re tempted to doze off, skip a day, or quit, remember your reason for learning. Walter Blissit regretted not being able to financially support his wife and daughter during the eight years he spent behind bars. But he was determined to provide for them. He decided to earn his HVAC and personal trainer certifications while incarcerated. By keeping the end goal of his family’s security in mind, he was able to stay focused even on hard days. Walter was released and is now an HVAC technician who provides for his family.

2. Determine your learning style.

You learn by what you see, hear, read, write, and do. Determine what works best for you. Are you a visual learner or an audio learner? Do you prefer studying in a group, listening to lectures, or doing your own research? Would you remember key points from a role-playing exercise but have trouble understanding your notes? Do charts and pictures help you remember what you’ve been taught? Everyone’s learning style is a little different. Embrace yours.

3. Get a mentor—and be open to changing.

Mentors guide and strengthen you—that is, if you let them. Find someone whose expertise is in the area you want to learn. But your mentor’s style might not be a perfect fit for you. Are you a visual learner or an audio learner? Do you prefer studying in a group, listening to lectures, or doing your own research? Would you remember key points from a role-playing exercise but have trouble understanding your notes? Do charts and pictures help you remember what you’ve been taught? Everyone’s learning style is a little different. Embrace yours.

Continued on page 2
Fall is the season when daylight saving time ends and most states set their clocks back one hour (“fall back”). Here’s a quiz on topics relating to fall. See how well you know your stuff. Answers on page 4.

1. Which two states don’t observe daylight saving time?
   a. Oregon and California
   b. Maine and New Hampshire
   c. Hawaii and Alaska
   d. Arizona and New Mexico

2. “Spring ahead, fall back” is a mnemonic (pronounced “nuh-mahn-ik”) memory device used to remind people whether to set their clocks ahead an hour (in the spring) or back an hour (in the fall). Can you think of another memory device like this?

3. University of Chicago researchers have found that people born in the fall have the highest chance of what? A. Having freckles; B. Being born on a Friday; C. Living to be 100 years old; D. Being tall.

4. How many pumpkins are used in the average container of pumpkin pie spice?

5. Fall sees more wars than any other season? A. New relationships; B. Weddings; C. Babias born; D. Divorces.

6. Habits of a Lifetime Learner

   1. “Live in the present.” Paul writes in Philippians 4:11–12 that “I am a Christian but have a contentment is about where your heart is.” I have learned to have contentment in whatever I have. I know how to live with plenty or with little, I have learned the secret of having more or less than I want.

   2. “Don’t worry, be happy.” The Bible talks a lot about this. Several verses mention the idea of the past being behind you (“the old life is gone, a new life has begun” —2 Corinthians 5:17), and several more talk about not worrying about the future. Matthew 6:34 says, “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” By the way, that doesn’t mean tomorrow is sure to have worries, or that those worries will have a hold on you. It just means today is all you need to worry about right now. Be present.


   4. “Don’t worry about the past.” Are you upset by the past? Worried about the future? There are too many things in life that we have no control over—most things, in fact.

   5. And if we let things get us, worry can take its toll. Did you know that there is a study in the Bible, 1 Peter 5:7 says: “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.” And Isaiah 41:10 says, “Don’t worry and fret—God says you don’t have to worry. You don’t have to fret. Don’t be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my righteous right hand.”

   The Bible doesn’t say to never plan ahead or to never learn from the past. It’s human nature to want to control the future or dwell on the past. Worry, especially over things that are truly troubling, is a common emotion. But if you accept Jesus in your heart as your Savior and are ready to fully surrender your life—your worries, your fear, your desire to control—then you can have a relationship with His peace. Maybe not overnight, but in time.

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

   “God, I want to live in the moment and not worry about things outside of my control. I need You as my Lord and Savior. Please replace my fear with Your peace.”

   Want to learn more about Jesus or have other questions? Write us at “Don’t Worry,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashtabula, OH 44004-1790.

   Need a free Bible or Workbook? See our ad on page 7.

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Kayla in New Mexico

You publishers made my day! I needed a boost! Lot! I decided out of the blue, to read your Inside Journal “Mental Gymnastics.” And, my goodness! I was able to see much more clearly. You are an inspiration to all! I thank you and your staff for your good work.

Shabolir in New Mexico

My dad has cancer right now, so prayers of healing and restoration for him, and also prayers that we become closer in God and lean on his wisdom and knowledge instead of our own... I am one of God’s sheep that has lost the way, but I do know that He left the 99 to find me. I have the right tools, I just need to utilize them. I am very excited to finally go home and back to my Celebrate Recovery group so I can keep continuing donating and sharing Christ with the women He is calling me to be.

Jodi in Virginia

I am incarcerated and have cancer. I am currently receiving chemotherapy and hope to have surgery as well. I really want to get closer to God in any way I can. Thank you so much for your help and for all you are doing to help others.

Sharon in Michigan

I am a Christian but have a need to spend the rest of my life in prison. Please pray for me. I have learning on my own through library books, commit to a certain number of hours per week or for a certain number of months. Start your day with something inspiring—a devotional, a prayer, a quote. And end your day with something relaxing, like gentle stretches or reading. Intentionally set up an activity that promotes learning instead of chaos.

Chanda was arrested on what would have been her mother’s birthday. She fell deeper into despair and depression. Then, Chanda fell into a five-year sentence, a transitional house for incarcerated women. She wrote a letter to the Editor of your publication, asking for help... I am calling me to be. ...I am one of God’s sheep that has lost the way, but I do know that He left the 99 to find me. I have the right tools, I just need to utilize them. I am very excited to finally go home and back to my Celebrate Recovery group so I can keep continuing donating and sharing Christ with the women He is calling me to be.

Chanda was released in Oklahoma City in 2009. She has served several years in prison, earned her master’s degrees. For God. She earned her associate, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees. For God. She earned her associate, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees.

Shannon in Michigan

I am writing to say thank you so much for the gift of a Recovery Bible. My bunkie needed a Bible, so I passed it on to her. I was already blessed with a Bible. It’s the little things in life that matter, and when in prison, it’s everything. Thank you to sever Charles is and God bless you all.

Dear Patricia and Shannon:

Please see the ad on page 7 for information on how to receive a free Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible and our new companion Life Recovery Bible Workbook. To learn who Charles Columbus is, please see page 6.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Staff
T his past year has been hard for everyone, and in the midst of COVID-19, which caused many facilities to shut doors to volunteers and programs, God was still making a way to bring encouragement and hope inside. That’s how Prison Fellowship’s Floodlight was born. Floodlight is a free video service created especially for men and women in prison and currently used in virtually every state. It provides videos through partnerships with top content providers and through original productions created by Prison Fellowship.

Every month, Floodlight viewers can see inspirational stories from returning citizens, hear words of encouragement from believers on the outside, enjoy music and drama, learn and practice leadership skills with the Global Leadership Summit faculty, or come together for a virtual Hope Event™. Viewers can also find thoughtful and practical Bible studies. Programs are available in Spanish and English.

FROM THE INSIDE OUT: Serving Time, Not Just Passing Time

by Richard Swiger

H ow are you passing your time? After spending 15 years in the prison system, I can tell you that many incarcerated men and women waste their days doing nothing worthwhile. Some will say this is because there is simply nothing worthwhile to do. That’s a bunch of garbage! Take a brief moment to examine yourself. What are you doing with your time? Are you making the necessary changes to get out and stay out? Or even if you don’t have a release date set, are you using your time to become a person of purpose right where you are? There’s an old saying: “If you keep doing what you’ve always done, you’ll keep getting what you always got.”

One prisoner named Ali is a great example of this. He has served 20 years and doesn’t have much to show for it, other than sleeves of tattoos and a spades card game so tight he can beat anyone in his pod. As part of his daily routine, he spends his mornings ironing the sharpest patterned creases into his state shirt and then running down the stairs to the dayroom to claim control of the TV remote so he can watch Jerry Springer. He occasionally gets sent to the hole for getting caught stealing from the Chow hall. But his attitude never changes. Prison is a big joke, and he’s not going to turn soft like those “holly rollers” over in the chapel. It’s the same thing day after day.

Let me ask a question to those of you who are sick of doing time: If you were to die today, what would you most regret? Consider all the gravestones you have ever seen. What are some of the most common inscriptions? “Here lies so-and-so: faithful father, brother, and son.” But do you ever see: “Here lies so-and-so: spades guy,” or “Here lies so-and-so, who wished he could have watched more TV or ironed better creases or gotten one more chicken sandwich from the chow hall?” When I was incarcerated, I had a lot of time to think about the choices I made. I had rejected God’s authority over my life and decided to live my own way. Often, it seemed that overcoming the obstacles and challenges set before me would be impossible. But then I examined my life and committed it to the Lord. Every day, I had to choose whether to wallow in my self-pity or to begin the difficult process of preparing for my freedom.

You all have the same choice. Which will you choose?

After his release from prison, Richard Swiger began to work for Prison Fellowship, where he now serves as the Ohio field director. ■

H E R E ’ S A N O T H E R O N E : F R O M T H E I N S I D E O U T

A New Day 1
Original Documentary • Prison Fellowship
Walk through the steps, hurdles, and successes of Prison Fellowship Academy graduates upon their release.

I’m Not OK, but Jesus Is with Louie Giglio
Bible Teaching • Passaic City Church, Lewis Giglio
Be encouraged to hang in the face of real depression (part series).

Here’s one program guide of this fall’s lineup*

SEPTEMBER

A New Day 1
Original Documentary • Prison Fellowship
Walk through the steps, hurdles, and successes of Prison Fellowship Academy graduates upon their release.

Heart Over Head with Craig Groeschel
Leadership • Global Leadership Summit
Explore the power of emotions in leadership and navigate those emotions of the heart.

Serenity Prayer
Bible Teaching • The Skit Guys
Here’s a blast with Tommy Woodward and Eddie James, better known as “The Skit Guys.” Long-time best friends, these two jokesters teach God’s Word using comedy, drama, and talking action figures.

From Giving Up to Giving Her All
Prison Ministry • Prison Fellowship
Hear Angela share her powerful personal story (four-part series).

OCTOBER

The Bible for Grownups with Andy Stanley
Bible Teaching • North Point Ministries
Watch Andy Stanley give a fresh approach to the Bible (four-part series).

ACTIVITY FILL-IN FUN: A Thanksgiving to Remember!

It was a cold _______ November day. When I woke up, I heard _______ yell, “_______!” That’s _______.

When I realized it was Thanksgiving! That meant the cafeteria was going to be serving _______. But it also meant _______ would be in a _______ mood!

Still, this Thanksgiving felt different. The yard was covered in _______ snow, and the hallways were filled with _______. The warden was even _______. I was so _______. When it finally came time to eat, the chow hall ended up serving plates of _______ and glasses of _______. It was the _______ Thanksgiving ever!

To learn how your facility can access this free Floodlight platform, ask your chaplain or prison program manager to email floodlight@pfm.org for more information.

INSIDE JOURNAL • Fall 2021

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Fall is the season when leaves change colors and nature prepares to rest for the winter. This gradual transformation isn’t just for trees and wildlife, though. People also need time to reflect, grow, and reform. And incarceration, with its extra downtime, is the perfect place to reflect on what you might want to change in your life.

To face your future, you might need to start by looking at your past. Look at it closely. What has already begun to change? What still needs to change? Wherever you are, whoever you are or once were, NOW is a time for change and new beginnings with Jesus.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 SAYS, “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”

This verse means if you have accepted Christ as your personal Savior, then you belong to Him! And your old unhealthy life is behind you, and your new healthier life is ahead of you. God is already working in your life—in big ways or even in small—for your good.

Know that you are made a new person full of life, love, and redemption.

Just as the leaves change colors and animals reset, we are constantly changing, evolving, and turning over a new leaf when we call upon Jesus. Look for Jesus in the big and the small things, pray for new beginnings, and trust Jesus’ power to transform your life just as He transforms the fall trees. Say the Corinthians verse out loud as the first thing you do every morning and the last thing you do every evening.
News + Notes
Spring and Summer Round-Up

Prison Fellowship hosted a Hope Event like no other in Columbia, South Carolina. Hip-hop Grammy-winning hip-hop artist Lecrae and formerly incarcerated artist Jeff Walker, also known as SWAAG, headlined.

Lecrae, a frequent partner with Prison Fellowship, also performed at the Prison Fellowship Second Chance® Month Gala held in April, with a keynote message delivered by Bryan Stevenson, founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative and author of Just Mercy.

“I’m already accepted by God,” said Lecrae. “Because if you live for other people’s acceptance, you’re going to die from their rejection. When you realize you’re already accepted, you don’t really have to get extra bent out of shape over somebody disrespecting you. Because it’s like, Man, I’m already somebody.”

Angel Tree sports camps, such as the Dallas Cowboys event in June, gave kids an opportunity to receive encouragement and practice skills on the field with top-tier coaches and athletes. NFL player Kenny Clark, a former Angel Tree participant and frequent partner with Prison Fellowship, also hosted a camp in June with hundreds of kids.

Angel Tree camping is a chance for children to get away from the challenges of having an incarcerated parent—a place to have fun in the great outdoors, make new friends, and meet caring adult counselors. Prison Fellowship partners with camping organizations to provide scholarships so that Angel Tree children can attend Christian summer camps.

At camp, children like Mike encounter the love of Jesus and discover hope for the future. One Christian camp in Missouri has become like a second home. “Camp introduced Christianity into my life,” said Mike. “I love that place. It’s like a home away from home. I have good friends there [that] I actually count as family. I think about them all the time.”

This summer, thousands of children across the country attended summer camps and experienced the love of God in the great outdoors. Mary, the grandmother of two Angel Tree kids who attended camp, said about her grandkids’ experience: “They have talked about it constantly and already asked to go again next year. They both loved all of the activities—many of them neither had ever done before (horseback riding, archery, etc.). They were excited to meet new friends and talked about the staff being so nice and fun to be around.”

To learn how your child can participate in Angel Tree sports camps or Angel Tree camping, your child’s caregiver can contact Prison Fellowship’s call center at 800.206.9764.

IN REVIEW:
2021 SO FAR

Photos by Prison Fellowship

PRISON FELLOWSHIP

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