

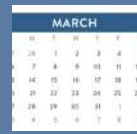
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After Countless Different Houses, Amber Finally Finds a Home

by Emily Andrews

Although Amber Brown moved around a lot growing up, she knows what it's like to feel stuck.

Born in Los Angeles, Amber was raised by her schoolteacher mother. For a while, they lived in the projects of Mississippi, where Amber saw things that no child should, including drugs, prostitution, and gang violence.

Her life was hectic. As a teen, Amber was involved in a fight on school property with another young woman. Amber was charged as an adult at 15 and placed on extended juvenile jurisdiction. Instead of going to prison, she went to a rehabilitation center and entered a six-year probation period.

"The court deemed my household 'unstable,' so I



Photo by Drew Darby

Amber has seen firsthand how women can break free from their pasts in a butterfly-like transformation.

was told I could never go home again," says Amber.

Finding home

Amber spent a year at a rehabilitation center in Texas. Then she moved to a group home for young women in Minnesota and attended high school. While

there, she was bullied and called racial slurs. "I was the only Black girl at the school," Amber remembers.

Feeling alone and unloved, Amber tried finding comfort in men. In her 20s, she experienced domestic abuse. Thankfully, however, she had a friend who helped

her break away from the toxic relationship and get back on her feet.

"You have to know your worth to realize you deserve better, to take yourself out of that situation," says Amber.

She wanted a fresh start, but she didn't know exactly

how to get it. "It was really hard to navigate, being so young, having to be independent and just figure it out on my own," Amber admits.

She then made the life-changing decision to move into an independent living home. There, she discovered what she'd been needing: resources and a support system. A job coordinator helped her apply for work. A housing coordinator helped her look for her own place. A career specialist sat with her during her first interview: a paid internship that turned into a full-time job that Amber held for six years. A court-ordered career specialist, spiritual mentor, probation officer, and other staff were all there under one roof to guide Amber.

Finally, Amber began to realize she wasn't alone.

Continued on page 2

Reader Recs: Christmas Media

During the holidays, you might feel disconnected from the love, joy, and peace so often shown in the media. Prison's not a sappy Hallmark movie. But even if this isn't exactly your dream Christmas, holiday movies and media can still warm your heart and lift your spirits. We polled several current and former prisoners to tell us their favorite holiday movies, books, and songs that make them feel the warmth and joy of the holiday season. 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.*

MOVIES

1. *The Polar Express* (2004)
2. *Elf* (2003)
3. *Angela's Christmas* (2017)
4. *A Christmas Story* (1983)
5. *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (1964)
6. *Frosty the Snowman* (1969)
7. *A Madea Christmas – A Play* (2011)
8. *Last Holiday* (2006)
9. *This Christmas* (2007)
10. *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946)
11. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (animated, 1966; or Jim Carrey, 2000)
12. *Home Alone* (1990)

BOOKS

1. *A Christmas Carol* Charles Dickens
2. *'Twas The Night Before Christmas* (aka, "A Visit from St. Nicholas" poem) Clement Clarke Moore
3. *The Christmas Train* David Baldacci
4. *The Polar Express* Chris Van Allsburg
5. *The Gift of the Magi* O. Henry

MUSIC

1. "Mary Did You Know" Mark Lowry
2. "Silent Night" traditional carol or The Temptations version

3. "O Holy Night" traditional carol
4. "The First Noel" traditional carol
5. "Feliz Navidad" José Feliciano
6. "This Christmas" Donny Hathaway
7. "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" Hugh Martin and Ralph Blaine
8. "All I Want for Christmas" Mariah Carey
9. "I'll Be Home for Christmas" Bing Crosby
10. "The Christmas Song/ Chestnuts Roasting" Nat King Cole

What do you think of this list? How many of these do you agree with? Are there others you'd recommend? Feel free to write to us at **Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790** to share your favorites. ■



Letters to the Editor

Carri in Washington

I want to thank you for the large print NLT Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible. It's really enhanced my time with the Lord in His Word and prayer. What a blessing. There are really no adequate words to thank you enough. May the Lord continue to richly bless you as you continue to spread the good news of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus.

McKinley in Florida

I am writing to thank

you! I have received the (Inside Journal) Life Recovery Bible. I read it every day with prayer! I will surely keep you in my prayers, for doing what you are doing for the "lost sheep."

Dear Carri and McKinley:

We're so glad you're enjoying the Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible! Just so you know, these Bibles come from the generous donations of hundreds of thousands of ministry supporters. There are so many people pulling for

you and praying that God will bring full life transformation to the men and women behind bars.

Sarah in Maine

[After years of being in abusive relationships,] I now know red flags to look out for, and I respect myself and my body for the first time. I found myself. I was a shell before, but now I am a strong woman. I am God's daughter. I have goals, and I know exactly who I am and what I want and don't want. During this

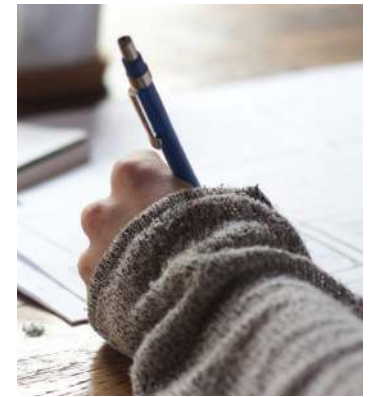
past Lent season, I spent a lot of time with God, in the Bible, in prayer, and listening only to the Christian music station. I am living my life Christ-centered for the first time, and I've never been more free, never been so peaceful or happy. Searching for someone to complete me for so many years—God completes me! I want everyone to feel what I feel, to have what I have! There's nothing better than a life with Christ.

Dear Sarah:

We don't have room to include the full letter you wrote us, but please know

that we read each word and were very inspired. It's great that you've found what can truly fill the void in our hearts: the love of Jesus. By sharing your faith like you've shared in this letter, others will know about the transforming love of Christ. You are making an impact!

Sincerely,
The Editorial Staff ■



Lasting Identity

Continued from page 1

The second chance house

Through her support system, she heard about the Prison Fellowship Academy®, a yearlong program where incarcerated men and women learn to embrace renewed purpose and biblically based life principles, with the help of compassionate coaches and targeted curriculum.

Amber learned about the Minneapolis-area Academy alumni group, where now-released women who have graduated from the Academy meet weekly to support and encourage one another in reentry and in life.

Amber had never been to prison or been through the Academy. But the alumni group welcomed her and mentored her. Amber shared similar experiences and struggles: living with a criminal

record, experiencing abuse and loss, recovering from abandonment and shame.

"We go to church together, we eat together, and we do things together. It's a beautiful family," says Amber. "It's connection. I'm so thankful that God put these women in my life."

Through these women, Amber found a sense of belonging, hope, and purpose. Soon, she began imagining a future where she might help others do the same.

She had been saving up money for years. She didn't have much, but she had just enough to begin her dream project: a group home for women, which she—as someone who loved interior design and floral arrangements—could decorate. She bought a house that was previously owned by a local nonprofit.

She named it the Black Butterfly House, referring to the transformation and renewal of a fresh start.

Amber painted and

"Our job is to prepare them for the real world..."

furnished the home. She hired an Academy graduate, Tamara, as housing manager. And in the summer of 2021, they welcomed their first resident into the home. Amber hopes to provide housing for up to 10 women, all from adverse situations like incarceration, addiction, or homelessness.

"My goal is for the women to do six months at a time, and then we'll reevaluate," Amber explains. "We'll ask, 'How much longer do you

need? What can we do to help you get to where you're trying to go?' Our job is to prepare them for the real world and put them back into society as productive members."

Through it all, the Academy alumni group has been a steady source of strength for Amber. The women and their families helped transform the house into a home. They prayed for her and supported her through ups and downs.

Amber has seen firsthand how women—with the help of a stable support system and strong faith in God—can break free from their pasts in a butterfly-like transformation.

"Everybody needs another chance, and this is a house for transformation," she says. "I just want to let these ladies know, 'You're beautiful, you're loved, and you can do and be whoever you want to be.'" ■



Photo by Drew Darby

NEED A
BIBLE?

Get a free Inside
Journal Life
Recovery Bible!

NOW
WITH A
WORKBOOK!



FREE

WRITE
TO:

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

Include this information to make sure your Bible or Workbook 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 and Workbooks are available in English or Spanish. You can order a Bible and Workbook together, or separately. Limit one order per person.

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 change your life and bring peace to each day!

Our Gifts and Talents Are Borrowed

by Stacia Ray

“It is not my ability, but my response to God’s ability, that counts.”

–Corrie ten Boom

*“When people come up and give me a compliment...I take each remark as if it were a flower. At the end of the day I lift up the bouquet of flowers I have gathered throughout the day and say, ‘Here you are, Lord, it is all Yours.’” –Corrie ten Boom**

If someone compliments you, or praises you for a deed you did, do you soak it up with pride, giving yourself all the credit? Or on the flipside, do you hate compliments, get embarrassed, or downplay your talents, saying, “I’m not very talented [smart, inspiring, or other adjective]”?

Neither of these extremes is healthy. Pridefully taking credit for your positive traits is arrogant and reveals that you think you’re the author of your life. And downplaying or not appreciating your many gifts and talents is selling God short.

If you’re reading this sentence, that means you’ve been given the gift of sight and the talents of literacy and intelligence. If you’re good at telling funny stories, you’ve got the gift of working lungs and the talents of magnetism. And the list goes on and on. When you get a compliment, recognize it as a gift or talent, receive it, and then turn your gratitude toward God, giving Him the praise for it. Recognize your gifts and talents each day and praise God for them.

The good parts about us—and there are many (even if you don’t always recognize them)—are on loan from God. He’s letting us borrow these gifts and talents while we’re on this earth. And we should use them while we’ve got them! You wouldn’t borrow someone’s pencil just to set it down or ignore it. Nor would you borrow someone’s pencil and wish it were a marker. No, you’d write with it! God lets us borrow His gifts and talents, so we should use them, and then hand them back in words of gratitude!

HEBREWS 13:21 SAYS,

May he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.

DAILY PRAYER: *Lord, You have equipped me with so many gifts and talents, too many to count. I don’t always appreciate or recognize the gifts and talents You’ve given me, and I sometimes focus on my own glory or on my shame instead of on Your generosity. If I’m ever acting too proud or too ungrateful, please remind me that You’ve given me all I need. Every breath in my lungs is a gift, and every good thing about me is borrowed from You.*

**Corrie ten Boom was born in the Netherlands in 1892. She and her family, devout Christians, protected hundreds of Jews from Nazis during World War II—until they were caught and imprisoned. Corrie survived to tell her story in *The Hiding Place* and write 40+ other works.*

RECIPE CORNER: *We call this the “Deck the Halls with Balls of Jolly” edition!*

Coffee Balls

Submitted by Eldon in Minnesota

INGREDIENTS:

- (10) 3-oz. bags of vanilla caramels
- (1) 3-oz. container of instant coffee
- (1) 4-oz container of coffee creamer
- Small bowlful of cocoa powder

Unwrap each caramel and place in large bowl. Heat 30 seconds at a time (stirring after each) until melted. Stir in coffee powder a little at a time until all mixed together. Then add creamer a little at a time, stirring and reheating as you add it. Once all ingredients are mixed together, heat again for 30

seconds. (NOTE: Rubber gloves or other protective wear is recommended for this next step): Take a small amount of the hot batter and roll by hand into a ball, dipping and rolling the ball into the cocoa powder until covered. Set finished balls onto plate to cool. These are especially great for times when you want a caffeine boost but don’t have time or aren’t allowed to drink liquid coffee.



EZ Oreo Balls

Submitted by Lynn in North Carolina

INGREDIENTS:

- Oreo cookies (10-20 cookies)
- Chocolate bar (like Hershey’s)

Crush several Oreo cookies (either by hand or with back side of a spoon). Then shape by hand into balls. Set aside. In a separate bowl or cup, melt chocolate bar (slowly, 10 seconds at a time in microwave, to avoid burning) and stir until liquid chocolate. Dip Oreo balls in chocolate. Set on plastic until chocolate shell has hardened. Enjoy!

The Biggest Investment You Could Ever Make

by Stacia Ray

Which would you choose: one million dollars today, or one penny doubled for a month (doubling each day's new sum)? Your instinct might be to go for the quick million. But if you've heard this question before or are good at math, you'd know that a penny doubled every day for 30 days is actually ten times more valuable: \$10,737,418 total, to be exact. Day 1 would net you two measly cents (a penny doubled). But as each number doubled from there, larger and larger numbers would increase, doubling until the total hit millions.

We have a hard time seeing the value of an investment in our future if we're too focused on the instant gratification of the

present. It's like the old expression says, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." A guarantee of a lower value is often seen as more valuable than a possibility of a higher value. But if you could invest in something that promised to keep growing and increasing in value like the "penny doubled" example, wouldn't you want to?

That's how God's riches work. The greatness of God is practically guaranteed to increase in us—but first we must invest in Him. Psalm 115:14 says, "May the Lord richly bless both you and your children" (NLT). The King James version of the Bible puts that verse puts it this way: "The Lord shall increase you more and more, you and your children." The word "shall" isn't a suggestion but a commitment.

But what does "increase you" even mean? Will there be clones of you running around? No, but you will increase, or grow, as a person—in blessings and in maturity. Your concerns over money won't weigh you down as much because you'll have an increase in being content with what you have. The troubles of your life won't bother you as much because you'll have an increase in peace. Your alone-time won't feel lonely because you'll have an increase in your bond with the Creator of the universe—the same God who knows how many hairs are on your head and who sent His only Son to die for your sins.

God's love for us is limitless. That being said, even though we can't hinder His love for us, we will only receive as much

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WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE?

Have you ever imagined what it'd be like to be rich? Most of us won't actually be millionaires in our lifetime. But when we invite Jesus into our heart, we can receive the riches of His peace, joy, and love. When we start to change our thinking, from prioritizing money to prioritizing God's peace in our lives, we can experience a calmness money can't buy.

God sent us His only Son Jesus to pay the ultimate price—He died a violent death as a sacrifice for our sins. When He rose from the grave, Jesus left behind a free gift for anyone who believes in Him: eternal life. That's worth more than a million dollars. That's worth more than 11 quadrillion dollars. It's priceless.

Romans 8:2 says, "Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?" Those who believe are beyond millionaires, beyond billionaires, beyond trillionaires—they're heaven-aires!

Want this priceless relationship with Jesus, but not sure where to begin? Start with this simple prayer:

"Dear God: I want to experience the love, joy, and peace that only You can provide. I accept Your Son Jesus into my heart as my Savior. Please help me to focus on Your heavenly riches of tomorrow and not on earthly riches of today. Amen."

To learn more about God, get a free correspondence Bible study, or send us a comment, write to us at: "Heavenly Riches," c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. See page 6 for information on receiving a free *Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible* and companion workbook.

ACTIVITY: Find the Differences

Find the 11 differences in these two pictures. Then color the pictures—or send them to your child to color and send back to you.

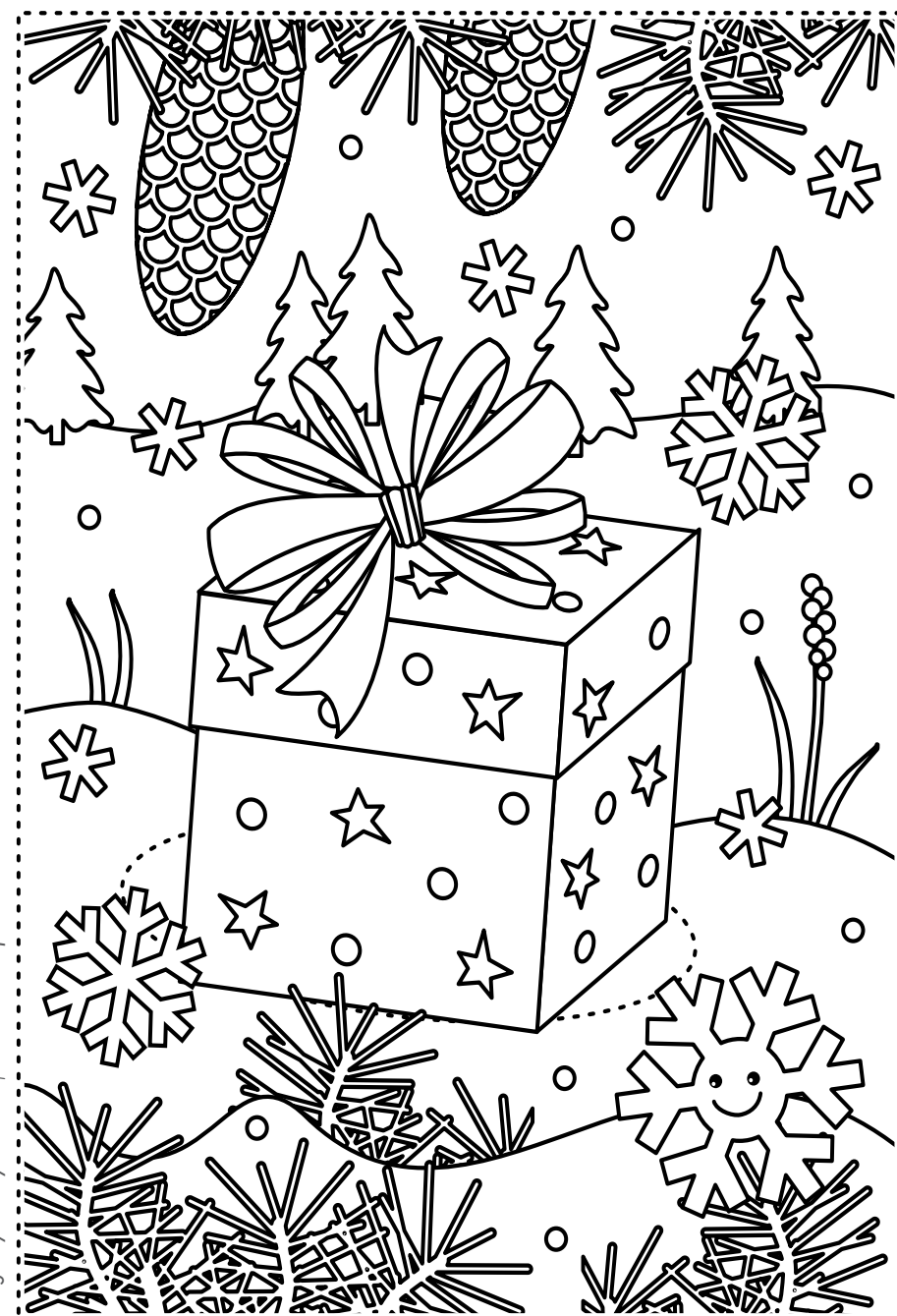


Image by Getty Photos / Answers on p.8

I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. –Philippians 3:13a-14

JANUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	1	2	3	4	5

FEBRUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
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20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12

MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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JUNE

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3	4	5	6	7	8	9

JULY

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AUGUST

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SEPTEMBER

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28	29	30	31	1	2	3
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25	26	27	28	29	30	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8

OCTOBER

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16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	1	2	3	4	5

NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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18	19	20	21	22	23	24
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1	2	3	4	5	6	7

HOLIDAYS

- JAN. 1** New Year's Day
- JAN. 17** Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- FEB. 14** Valentine's Day
- FEB. 21** Presidents Day
- APRIL 17** Easter
- MAY 8** Mother's Day
- MAY 30** Memorial Day
- JUNE** Ask your chaplain for an Angel Tree participation form.
- JUNE 19** Father's Day
- JULY 4** Independence Day
- AUGUST** Don't forget to submit your Angel Tree participation form!
- SEPT. 5** Labor Day
- NOV. 11** Veterans Day
- NOV. 24** Thanksgiving Day
- DEC. 25** Christmas Day

IMPORTANT DATES

The Biggest Investment Continued from page 4

as we open ourselves up to receiving. Our blessings will only increase as much as we let Him increase them. We have to let go of our own one million dollars and make room for God's 10 million dollars.

Of course, this is just a metaphor. God isn't going to literally put millions of dollars into our laps like some magic genie in a lamp. In fact, these increased blessings may not involve money at all. And the increase in our blessings will involve some

work on our part—prayer, meditation, reading the Bible, studying the Word, being mindful of our words and actions. But the more we trust in Him, the more we will see our “penny double,” until we realize His blessings are too high to count. That's because His love and grace are immeasurable.

The Bible in 2 Corinthians 9:10 says, “For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of

generosity in you.”

The Lord states this in His own words in Zechariah 8:12: “For I am planting seeds of peace and prosperity among you.” Philippians 4:19 adds, “And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.” His riches are indeed glorious!

The key to the “penny doubled” example was the ability to not look at the single penny you see right in front of you but to consider the possibilities you can't yet see in the

future. When you're having a bad day, stop for a minute and count all the blessings in your life, from the breath in your lungs to the shoes on your feet. Even when it feels like most things are going wrong today, imagine all the things that could still go right in your future. Imagine a life filled with peace beyond your wildest dreams.

God wants to multiply your blessings, your peace, and your contentment, more than you could imagine. Ephesians 3:20 sums it up best: “Now all glory to God, who is

able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.” Read that last line again: He is able to accomplish INFINITELY more than we could ever ask or even think.

In our “penny doubled” example, at the end of only two months, you'd have 11,529,215,046,068,469.76. That's more than 11 quadrillion. One quadrillion is one million billions. Our minds can't even think that big. But God can go even bigger. ■

A New Year, a New Approach to Your Finances

The fresh slate of January is a great time to develop new habits and new ways of thinking. Finances are an important area to examine and see if we need to change our habits and actions. Our decisions about money impact almost every area of our lives, both inside and outside the prison walls. Take a look at the concepts below and see if you might need a fresh start on your journey toward financial freedom.

1. Money is a mirror

What do you value most in life? Take a minute and identify your top three priorities. Examples might be your family, your physical health, your mental health, your education, or your faith. Now think about the last five things you spent money on—or if you haven't been spending money lately, what you would spend \$100 on if you received it. Does the way you spend money match your priorities? If not, that's a good sign that you need to rethink your spending habits.

2. You can't evaluate what you don't track

It's so easy to spend without thinking. And there is no way to know if you're making good choices if you don't keep track of where your money is going! Start keeping a chart of money you receive (from a job and/or gifts from family) and money you spend. Record every dollar and cent so that you can see exactly what's going on.

Write down things you'd like to save toward, too. Once you can see all of this in black and white, you'll know if your money choices align with your goals.

3. Little choices have a big impact

Think about the small things you spend money on. Is there anything you can limit or even cut out altogether? Sodas and snacks seem like little expenses, but they add up! Consider ways you can spend less so that you have more for the things that really matter to you.

4. Make a short-term plan for long-term goals

It might seem impossible to help your family with a big education expense or to pay off a large court fine. But like the old saying goes, the only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. Write down the amount of your big goal and when you'd like to complete it. Now calculate what you need to save per month to reach

your goal. Decide whether you need to work more or spend less (or both). Your long-term goals can be achievable if you are willing to make short-term sacrifices.

5. Live simply

When you simplify how you live and reduce what you buy, you can meet your savings goals faster. And simple living can also help you stop chasing temporary material pleasures. In prison, this might mean eating in the dining hall and rationing snacks to make them last. After your release, you can use coupons, buy food in bulk, purchase clothes at thrift shops, and use the public library to rent books and movies for free.

6. Plan to avoid and solve debt

Credit is when you buy something with money you don't have—and usually, there is a fee for borrowing that money. You might have to pay interest when using a credit card. Or maybe your cellmate will let you



have one of their snacks, as long as you “pay back” two. The bottom line is that it is always more expensive in the long run to use credit than cash. The best policy is to wait and save! But if you do have debt, don't miss due dates (late fees are expensive), and when you're released, don't ignore mail from credit card companies or bill collectors, find out if you can consolidate or combine your debt with one credit union or agency, and check your credit report every year.

7. Expect the unexpected

It's a good idea to save money for emergencies. While in prison, you can set aside a small amount for unexpected expenses. And after your release, you can keep

an “emergency fund” by putting aside your tax return each year, or if you get paid weekly, you can set aside some money from the several months a year that have five paychecks instead of four. You can also cancel cable or cell phones when an emergency arises. Or you can create income by selling unnecessary assets (extra car, jewelry, etc.) or doing services like yard work or cutting hair.

No matter what the new year holds, make plans now to be a smarter money manager. The peace and security this will bring are priceless! ■

This article is adapted from Faith & Finances®, a collaboration between the Chalmers Center and Prison Fellowship®. This financial education material was specially designed for incarcerated people and is used in the Prison Fellowship Academy®.



Answer the questions about yourself and mail them to your child. Then, ask your child to answer the same questions and mail them back to you. And check the Spring edition of Inside Journal for a TEEN version of this Totally Fun Test.

- 1 What is your favorite color?
- 2 What is your favorite fruit?
- 3 Would you rather:
 Sing/Rap Play an Instrument
- 4 What is one thing you really like to do?
- 5 What is one thing you really don't like to do?
- 6 Which can you do better?
 Write a Story Draw a Picture
- 7 What is your favorite thing about yourself?
- 8 What is your favorite animal and why?

- 9 What is your favorite kind of cookie?
- 10 What is your favorite kind of candy bar?
- 11 What is your favorite movie?
- 12 What place would you like to visit?
- 13 If you could have two wishes, what would you wish for?
- 14 What is a goal you have for this year?
- 15 What would you rather be?
 A Famous Athlete A Doctor
 A Musician

16 Use this space to send a note to your kids. And kids, you can also send a note back to your mom...

FROM THE INSIDE OUT: Loving Your Kids From Right Where You Are

by Karla, incarcerated mom in Minnesota

I remember feeling so anxious and scared before making my first call to my kids from prison. I didn't know what I was going to say or how I was going to handle it, but I knew I wanted and needed to call them.

For me, the hardest part of prison is being away from my children. My children were 1 and 3 at the time of my arrest. My biggest fear was not having a strong

bond with them. Since arriving at [the prison] in December of 2018, my focus and goal has been to maintain, grow, and nurture the relationship with my children and to ensure they know their mother loves them.

Incarceration can make it challenging to be there for your children, but not impossible. Consistency is key when it comes to any relationship, but especially

for kids. They need to know that we are going to be there for them however we can. We may not be able to be physically present, but we can show up for our kids by calling them and sending mail on a regular basis (and as often as possible).

During my first call, I let my kids know that even though we are apart, we still see the same moon. I ended our call with a song that God put on my heart, about Mommy loving them.

It has become our "special song" that ends all of our calls and visits. I sang our "special song" for six months straight at the end of our phone calls. Then as the end of our first in-person visit approached, I asked my kids if we should sing our "special song" before they left. As I held them and we sang it together, I watched my then-2-year-old son's eyes light up with recognition. He connected my voice with the voice on the phone, and

that was a magical moment I will never forget!

One night it was cloudy, and my daughter was upset that we couldn't see the moon together before bed. So I asked her if she wanted me to make her a special moon, and she said yes. Since that day, our signature special purple moon is somewhere on everything that goes home, so they know it's from mommy. We also all have one on our walls to look at, at all times.

Our phone calls are filled with bonding activities: sharing our highs and lows from the day, reading books together, having dance parties, playing games,

Continued on page 8

Loving

Continued from page 7

singing silly songs, using our imaginations, making up stories together, doing math, and even playing hide and seek. I have utilized the library to check out children's books to read to my kiddos. I've even copied some of the books onto paper and kept them in a folder, so when the kids request a particular favorite, I have it ready and available.

With all of our quarantine lockdowns this last year, I've had to get creative with ways I send my love to my kids. I utilized this time to create and send extra weekly "kid mail," so my

kids knew that Mommy was still thinking about them despite not having regular contact with them. On my first call after I was off quarantine the last time, my kids had two questions, "Mom, can we come see you now so you can hold us again?" and "Can you also please keep sending us the extra weekly mail?" The first question crushed my heart. But the second one filled my heart with joy because it reassured me that my "kid mail" was keeping us deeply connected even while apart.

My weekly "kid mail" always includes a note for each of them, various papers such as coloring sheets,

pictures I draw for them, pictures I start to draw or color and they finish (so we make it together), origami animals and other items, stories, and poems I've written for them, a homemade board game with ways for them to learn colors, shapes, vocabulary, numbers, and letters by following directions on homemade game pieces.

Recently, they have asked for some math problems and writing practice, so I made fun packets for them to complete. Sometimes I ask them what they want and do my best to fulfill their requests, though I am far from an artist. They assure

me that it's OK as long as I try my best. Sometimes, a dinosaur goes home with six legs and, well, we use that to make up a great story about why the dinosaur had extra legs and all the cool stuff he could do with them.

I have always invited the women who live around me to join me in making my weekly "kid mail" and love hearing their reactions after their kids get the mail, and how that makes them feel. I know that being a parent in and from prison is challenging. I am not perfect, and I definitely don't know everything, but what I do know is that I love my children. And I've found

creative ways to connect with them even when we're apart, and even from behind bars.

So, I encourage you to pick up the phone, create some of your own "kid mail," or find another creative way to send your love and connect with your kids today! ■

Editor's Note: Check out the activities on pages 4 and 7. You can send them to your kids or create your own versions of them. And if you have unique parenting tips you want to share, write to us at "From the Inside Out," c/o INSIDE JOURNAL, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790

News + Notes

Connecticut Makes Prison Phone Calls Free

In Connecticut, Gov. Ned Lamont has signed a new law to make phone calls free for prisoners across the state. Connecticut is the first state to relieve this financial burden for incarcerated men and women. Now, prisoners may make 90 minutes of free calls daily.

Connecticut joins several regions nationwide that have taken steps to make prison and jail phone calls free, including New York City, San Francisco, San Diego, and Los Angeles.

"This historic legislation will change lives," Bianca Tylek, executive director of Worth Rises, told USA Today.

Removing Barriers to Employment in Maine

A new law in Maine will prevent employers from asking about job applicants' criminal history. Although employers may ask questions about convictions later in the interview process, advocates say this will help many former prisoners find work.

Job applicants will have a chance to talk about their past and prove their skills at work, rather than being judged on their mistakes.

According to Lewiston

Sun Journal, former warden Randall Liberty says the measure should help thousands of individuals to have a better shot at finding employment—and at avoiding criminal activity in the future.

Curtis Picard, who heads the Retail Association of Maine, says that many employers need new hires in the wake of the pandemic. As a result, Picard says, "They are being incredibly flexible" and willing to give prospective employees with a criminal history a chance.

Promoting Fairness in Minnesota Courtrooms

Minnesota advocates hope new regulations will prevent unreliable testimonies and false convictions. Prosecutors are now required to disclose past behavior of jail informants. The information will be saved in a database to track the informant's behavior patterns. This tracking method can help determine a person's reliability before they take the stand as a witness.

Minnesota is the eighth state to pass new safeguards preventing prisoners from giving false testimonies in exchange for leniency.

According to the Star Tribune newspaper, Attorney General Keith Ellison says, "This legislation

is meaningful because it provides more transparency and trust in the criminal system. The credibility of any witness is relevant to any trial. The jury has a right to know about the witnesses testifying so they have the full story and can come to a just and fair conclusion."

Former Prisoner Honored as 'Advocate of Hope'

Prison Fellowship recently honored Marcus Bullock and his mother, Rev. Dr. Sylvia Bullock, with the Charles Colson Advocate of Hope Award. Every year, this award is given to someone with a record of faithful advocacy for restorative criminal justice reform.

Since 2018, Prison Fellowship has partnered with the Bullocks and Flikshop, an app founded by Marcus, to serve prisoners' families and unlock second chances.

When Marcus was incarcerated as a teen in Virginia, Sylvia sent him cards and letters daily.



Marcus Bullock accepts Advocate of Hope Award

After his release, Marcus couldn't forget the impact of those daily messages from his mom.

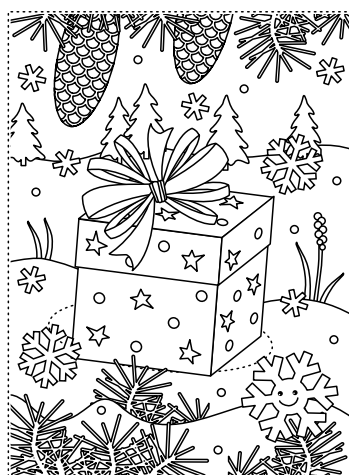
From that experience, Marcus created the Flikshop app in 2012. Flikshop allows users to take photos from their phones or social media accounts and deliver those photos directly to a loved one in prison as postcards, for as little as 79 cents each.

"Every single postcard ... is a moment that can be cherished in a prison cell and experienced over and over again in that person's memory," Marcus says.

Today, Flikshop has access to more than

2,700 jails and prisons across the U.S. More than 170,000 people have sent half a million postcards through the platform. ■

Answer Key • Find the Differences (p.4)



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