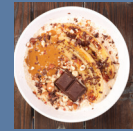


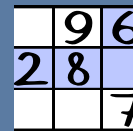
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# Sentenced for a Greater Purpose

by Kate Campbell

At only 11 years old, DeMarcus was already running from the cops after stealing from the mall. For the next 10 years, he would continue to break the law until he was eventually incarcerated.

DeMarcus grew up in Portsmouth, Virginia, with his mother and grandparents. “They always made sure that I had everything I needed,” DeMarcus recalls. He attended church with his grandparents, even singing in the choir, but he lacked a true understanding of who God was.

Though he was surrounded by a loving family, DeMarcus lived in a neighborhood full of



Photo by Shana Thompson

In his younger days, DeMarcus had trouble finding his identity outside of his criminal activities. But prison taught him who he was and Whose he was. Today, he’s a successful business owner and father.

crime. “Everybody was selling drugs or using drugs,” says DeMarcus.

“We witnessed so much [crime] at such a young age.” DeMarcus

noticed how the drug dealers and criminals in his neighborhood were respected for their lifestyle and wealth—and he wanted that too.

Before he was even a teenager, DeMarcus started selling drugs at middle school. By the time he became a teenager, he was, as he puts it, “a full-fledged street dude” selling weed. Eventually he graduated to cocaine and heroin.

“[Drug dealing] began to become a part of my identity,” DeMarcus says, “so as I began to walk in that path, everything else that came along [in] the streets was fair game.”

In 2006, his pattern of robbery and drug possession caught up with him. DeMarcus was 21 years old, with two young children and another on the way, when he was arrested, charged, and sentenced to 17 years in prison.

Behind bars, DeMarcus realized that

his mindset had put him in a dead-end road. He decided—for his own sake and the sake of his children—that he needed a new path.

“My people taught me well, and my family taught me respect, but I was a criminal,” says DeMarcus. “Once I began to realize I wanted to grow and I wanted to be more than what I was, I didn’t find that lifestyle appealing anymore.”

## Finding a new identity

He started a journey of transformation. “The lightbulb clicked on when I began to find out who I wanted to be,” said DeMarcus.

He looked for ways to grow physically and mentally every day. He began working

*Continued on page 2*

# 5 Tips for Furthering Your Education

by S.L. Ray

Fall is back-to-school time for students in most schools. But kids aren’t the only ones who benefit from learning new things. No matter your age, your brain needs exercise to stay strong and healthy, just like other muscles in your body.

Here are five ways to strengthen your mind and further your education.

## 1. Read every day.

Reading not only lowers blood pressure and helps you sleep, it can also slow down or prevent the mental decline that comes with aging. Commit to reading one chapter of a book per day. Or challenge yourself to read one chapter of the Bible every day. Perhaps start with the New Testament. It has 260 chapters, so you only need to read an average of three

chapters a day to get through it in just three months. Even if you miss a day or two, don’t quit.

## 2. Make music.

Write your own lyrics to the tune of “Amazing Grace” or “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” (both are public domain songs, so there’s no copyright issue). Learn a new instrument if your facility offers programs/books



RRice1981: Getty Images

on this. Or listen to classical music to try to figure out how many different instruments were used. Research

shows that playing or listening to music promotes creativity and happier moods, and singing stimulates

*Continued on page 5*



## NEED A BIBLE?

Get a free Inside Journal  
Life Recovery Bible!

NOW WITH A  
WORKBOOK!

## 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.



### Greater Purpose Continued from page 1

out and reading books  
on business. He even  
worked hard to grow  
emotionally, which he  
says was especially tough:  
“It sometimes involved  
me having a conversation  
with somebody about  
life in our past, talking



Photo by Shana Thompson

with a family member  
or somebody on the  
phone—just really  
[learning] to open up and  
ask questions.”

As he pursued  
personal growth, he  
met a man named  
Mike, whom he called  
Coach. Coach became  
a mentor to DeMarcus  
and inspired him to enroll  
in the Prison Fellowship  
Academy®—an intensive,  
biblically based program  
that takes incarcerated  
men and women through  
a holistic transformation  
process. In the Academy,  
DeMarcus began to  
grow spiritually. He met  
with a diverse group  
of caring men who felt  
comfortable freely

# Letters to the Editor



Ekely: Getty Images

### Charles in Texas

I am very lonely here  
[in prison]. I would much  
appreciate literature and  
books to help me increase  
my relationship with  
our Lord. I would also if  
possible love to receive  
Bible studies to help with  
this.

### Dear Charles:

See the sidebar on p.3  
for Bible study information  
and the ad on this page for  
information on ordering  
the Inside Journal Life  
Recovery Bible workbook.  
And try to ward off  
loneliness by staying  
busy and finding creative,  
healthy outlets.

### Michael in New York

I’m writing today  
because I’m lost and  
scared. It seems to  
me I have lost all faith  
and can’t seem to find  
it again. I’m on a very

dark path and don’t  
see any light for me. I  
am currently in SHU  
(restrictive housing) ...  
I was supposed to go  
home this August, but  
now that’s not going  
to happen [because of  
the incident that led  
to SHU]. I’m beyond  
depressed. My family was  
counting on me coming  
home. So here I am stuck  
in a cell losing my mind  
and my faith ... I really  
could use some help,  
some faith, some support.  
Someone to tell me it’s  
going to be OK.

### Dear Michael:

We have a team of staff  
and volunteers who pray  
over these letters and the  
people who write them, and  
we’ll be praying for you.  
When all seems hopeless,  
God is powerful enough  
to turn around even the  
worst situations. Some of

the most depressed and  
defeated people behind  
bars have written to tell  
us that their situation  
eventually turned around.  
But no one should try to go  
through hard times on their  
own. Please reach out to a  
counselor or a trustworthy  
friend, ministry volunteer,  
or family member. Talking,  
praying (for yourself and  
for loved ones), and even  
journaling can help process  
the difficult emotions of  
depression and loneliness.

### Casey in Colorado

I received [the  
Winter 2023 edition].  
What great articles on a  
different way of thinking.  
People in prison always  
look and/or talk about  
seemingly depressive life.  
Please keep me enrolled  
to receive these news  
articles. I pass them  
around my unit.

### Dear Casey:

We’re glad you’re  
enjoying Inside Journal  
and sharing it with others.  
If your chaplain ever  
needs additional copies,  
they can contact us at  
subscriptions@pfm.org.

Sincerely,  
The Editorial Staff ■

sharing their thoughts  
and struggles with  
each other.

Through the  
Academy, DeMarcus also  
began to truly know God.  
“[The Academy] was one  
of the first times in my  
life that I let go and I let  
God,” says DeMarcus. “I  
went to God and said, ‘I  
surrender.’”

He fully gave control  
of his life to Jesus and  
began reading Scripture  
daily. “If you read the  
Bible, it’ll change your  
whole perspective,”  
said DeMarcus. “If you  
[study] what Jesus says,  
it’ll change your view  
on life [and teach you]  
to walk in kindness and  
in love.”

### A whole new world

DeMarcus left  
prison a changed man  
on March 16, 2020—at  
the very beginning of  
the pandemic. Even  
though the world shut  
down, DeMarcus was  
determined to live a  
life of purpose. He  
slept on the floor of his  
mom’s house, got a job  
working for a tree service  
company, and took the  
bus to work every day.

He still carries around  
that very first bus ticket  
as a reminder of how far  
he’s come. “Getting on  
the bus was humbling,”  
admitted DeMarcus. “But  
I had a smile, because  
[those people] didn’t know  
where I just came from.”

DeMarcus is now  
the proud owner of a  
successful commercial  
cleaning business.  
Throughout his time  
in prison, DeMarcus  
kept in touch with his  
children through letters,  
phone calls, visits, and  
especially Angel Tree®  
gifts. Now, years later,  
DeMarcus remains  
actively involved with  
his three children—one  
of whom helps him run  
his business.

“I don’t want  
people to look at me as  
someone who just ‘did  
time,’” DeMarcus says.  
“I want to be a positive  
[force for] change,  
wherever I go.” ■



# Walk the Walk: Putting Knowledge Into Practice

by J.R. Breault

*“When are we ever going to use this?”*

**D**o you remember ever thinking or saying something like that when you were sitting in math class or learning about ancient Rome? Kids complaining in the classroom often don’t have great attitudes—but they do have a point. Education is most powerful when it’s put into practice.

Imagine taking a swimming class and getting 100% on every written test—but then jumping into a pool and ignoring every single thing you learned. You know all the information, but you decide not to kick your legs, move your arms, or breathe the way you were taught. You wouldn’t be a very successful swimmer, would you? The lifeguard would be coming to your rescue pretty quickly!

Or what if you attended a class on preparing for your release, which taught you step-by-step instructions for successfully returning to your community after your sentence ended—but on the day of your release, you decided to do the exact opposite of what you were taught? It’s one thing to listen to information, but it’s something else to put it into practice.

The Bible talks about this in the book of James: “But don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves” (James 1:22).

What does it mean to “fool ourselves”? It’s when we tell ourselves lies about our hearts or behavior. We might think things like “I’m

doing great—I never miss chapel, I know all the Bible stories, and I can even quote some verses from memory.” But if we treat other people rudely, excuse our bad habits, and tell lies, we are fooling ourselves.

God doesn’t just want us to take in knowledge—He wants us to be changed by it. He wants us to act on it.

Read the verses that come after the one quoted above: “For if you listen to the word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it” (James 1:23–25).

## Food on your face

The writer is using a word picture of looking in a mirror. What if you looked in a mirror, noticed you had peanut butter on your chin, and then walked away and forgot all about it? Looking in the mirror—and even thinking “Hey, that doesn’t belong there!”—doesn’t do you much good if you aren’t going to act on wiping off the peanut butter.

It’s the same way with God’s Word. We might hear a moving message about how God wants us to turn our lives over to Him in response to His love. We might even get tears in our eyes or say “amen.” But if we walk away and live no differently, we are the same as a person walking around with food on their face.

So what is the answer to letting truth actually change us? The James passage tells us: “If you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard.”



There are two parts to it: doing and remembering.

## Living out what you learn

To do what God’s Word says, we need a plan. Here’s one: Any time you hear teaching about the Bible, ask yourself “what next?” Make a list of action steps, and be specific. Instead of “grow in faith,” how about “read the Bible each day”? Instead of “be a better parent,” try “send a weekly letter.” The more we act in new ways and develop new habits, the more natural they will become. It can also be helpful to share your plan with a trusted friend who you know will hold you to it.

When it comes to remembering what we have heard, nothing is better than passing it on. Putting truth into our own words helps it stay in our minds and hearts. Maybe you can do this aloud with a friend or on the phone with a family member. Or maybe you can write a summary of what you learned and what it means to you—either to mail as a letter or to keep and reread later.

The Bible contains life-changing truth—not only principles for living, but also God’s great rescue plan through

Jesus. When our hearts don’t simply listen but are also ready to act and remember, we will be amazed at what happens in our lives.

The Bible passage above says, “God will bless you for doing it.”

We don’t know exactly what that will look like—His blessings are different for everyone. But we do know that as we respond to God’s Word in obedience, we will be transformed! ■

## ARE YOU JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS?

Are you walking the walk, or just talking the talk? If someone taught you free and practical ways to sleep better, you’d at least give them a try, right? The same is true for living out all we learn in our faith journey. To experience the best versions of ourselves, the way God sees us, we need to live out His goodness. Philippians 4:5 says, “Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do.” Did you catch that? Not just to people we like, and not just when we’re in a good mood, but in all we do.

God wants to enrich our lives. But He also wants us to enrich the lives of others by sharing His love in all we do and by living out His teachings. God sent His only Son Jesus to show us how to live, and to teach us examples of His traits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (also known as the fruit of the Spirit, in Galatians 5:22-23). Some days, living this way will be easier said than done. But spiritual habits are just that: habits—which take time to form and master. So practice these traits every day.

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

*“Dear Jesus, I want to learn more about Your teachings and traits and then put them into practice in my daily life. I want to be the version of me that You created me to be. I surrender my life to You, confess my sins, and ask Your forgiveness. Please help me walk the walk. Amen.”*

To learn more about Jesus or to sign up for a free correspondence Bible study through one of our trusted partner organizations, write to us at “WALK THE WALK,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. For a free Bible or accompanying study guide/workbook, see our ad on page 2.



# FROM THE INSIDE OUT:

## More Poetry Written by Our Readers

We asked you to submit original poems you wrote, and wow, did you ever deliver! The submissions we've been getting are fantastic. Some of you should consider keeping a notebook or journal of all your thoughts and poetry, whether to look back on yourself or share with loved ones. Inside Journal sure has some talented readers.

### LIKE US

by Glen in Pennsylvania

**Behind the poem:** *“This poem is to show all of those who have looked down on someone else that they aren’t much different than us. We all feel the same about a lot of things and feel the hurt from others. ... We have all had difficult times in our lives. It’s just that some of us handle those difficult times in a different way.”*

We walk these roads most of our lives  
With our heads hung down in shame  
Trying to avoid all the stares of others  
What a disappointment we finally became  
We tend to think the worst about our best  
It seems it will never be good enough  
We act like the words of others don’t hurt  
But in all honesty it’s just a bluff  
Closing ourselves off to those who love us  
‘Cause we feel we are nothing more  
Nothing more than wasted time  
To all those we truly do adore  
We keep our pain masked with smiles  
So no one will see us hurt  
Looking forward to the day it’s over  
So we can put our pain into the dirt  
Feeling if we were gone  
The ones we love, their lives would be more free  
The demons inside of us so deep  
That is all they will let us see  
It’s hard for us to put into words  
The way that we all may feel  
And we try our best to keep up the smiles  
Not letting it break our will  
We keep ourselves together the best we can  
To keep the goodness inside from shrinking  
So take your time with ones like us  
‘Cause you never know what they are thinking  
And in time that you may see  
That we all don’t make such a fuss  
Even with all the demons inside  
You’ll see a lot of you are just like us

### REMEMBER ALL

by William in Michigan

**Behind the poem:** *“One night, I was laying in bed asleep and all of a sudden, I was woken up by chest pains. I’ve had heart problems in the past and was supposed to have a procedure done before coming to prison. So, after coming back from medical, I was laying there thinking of who would really miss me when I die. And that’s when I came up with this poem.”*

Remember all the Presidents  
And Martin Luther King  
For the great marks in history  
They did bring  
We lift them up  
And give them special days  
For the things they have done  
We give them great praise.  
But who remembers  
The ordinary man  
The one that didn’t have  
A great and noble plan  
The ones who raised  
The crops and cattle  
That fed the troops  
That went off to battle  
Or the teachers who taught  
Those famous men  
How to read and write  
So with the mighty pen  
They learned how to fight?  
How did we get  
So far apart  
When all that matters  
Is what comes from the heart  
So remember from the least of men  
To the greatest of names  
When we pass away, in God’s eyes  
We are all the same.

### LEMME PREACH

by Corey in California

Back when my visions were cloudy and  
My actions were rowdy I proudly  
Walked the walk and talked the talk  
Of a sinner  
Remember winners are only winners  
Because they give life as they live life  
And since life is so unpredictable  
Principles are typical instruments  
Instances such as these  
Breed the mind of the beast  
Toward the time of belief  
Signs of relief are soon only around the corner  
Seeing karma come back  
Plus back twice around  
Kinda sounds heavy  
Born to die but I’m not ready  
Confined but steady  
Chasing the light at the end of this tunnel  
Or will I possibly fumble  
If God passes me the rock  
Half of me forgot  
That in order to get to heaven  
You got to been with heaven here on earth  
Preach!

**BETTER**  
by Bentley in Maryland

When the night reaches its darkest point  
That’s when the sun will start to rise  
When the storm is at its strongest peak  
That’s when it will begin to subside  
Coal only turns to diamonds  
After they have endured great pressure  
Just when it seems you’ve reached the lowest point  
That’s when it’s all about to get better  
Something better is in store  
So much better than before  
Everything you’ve been praying for  
It will be all that and so much more! ■

## READER RECIPES

### Big Boy’s Delight Cheesecake

Submitted by Steven in Florida

- INGREDIENTS:**
- 1 Chocolate chip cookie
  - 2 Maple brown sugar oatmeal packets
  - 1 Peanut butter squeezer (or ½ tablespoon)
  - 5 Cream cheese single-serve cups
  - 1 Vanilla pudding snack pack
  - 1 Butterfinger candy bar (or similar)



Not all ingredients will be available at all facilities. Be sure to comply with your facility’s rules and regulations whenever cooking.

margouillatphotos: Getty Images

**DIRECTIONS:**

In a bag, crush the chocolate chip cookie into crumbs. Then add both brown sugar oatmeal packets. Mix them together. Place the mix into a bowl, and then add four teaspoons of water and the peanut butter. Mix it all together until it molds to the bowl.

In another bowl, empty out the five cream cheese cups and then add the pudding. Stir together until blended. Crush the candy bar (on a plate or even in its original packaging) and then add three-quarters of the crumbs to the cream cheese mix. Stir it together and pour it into the first bowl (of the peanut butter mold). Finally, place the remaining one-quarter of the candy bar crumbs on top and set the bowl in the fridge for two hours until chilled. Then enjoy what Steven (the aspiring baker who submitted this recipe) calls “heaven in a bowl.” ■



# DAILY DEVOTIONAL TEAR-OUT

Tear out this daily devotional and 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.

## Fall Harvest

by S.L. Ray

“Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. So, let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time, we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.”  
—Galatians 6:8–9

For farmers, fall is harvest time. If the crops planted earlier in the year were watered and well cared for, the result will be abundant and healthy foods. But if the crops were damaged by storms or drought, the fall harvest won’t be as hearty or healthy.

The same is true for our spiritual life. Once we plant our roots in God’s love and not in the things of this world, we can start to see the benefits of His goodness. But we really need to pay attention to our crops. That means soaking up God’s Word instead of soaking up books/music/movies that can promote mental decay or trigger unhelpful thoughts. It means choosing words that encourage others and glorify God instead of using offensive or hurtful words. It means asking ourselves how Jesus would handle a situation before doing it our own way. And it means connecting to God more deeply and more often through prayer.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Never stop praying.” How much of your day is spent in prayer? Are your prayers conversations, or more like short wish lists of “please do this or that”? Do you only pray when things are really bad or really good? Try praying like you’re talking to a dear friend. Be real and vulnerable. Try praying more often, whether it’s quietly while walking alone or out loud with a group. As a random person walks by you, ask God to bless them.

If you’ve planned healthy habits in your spiritual life but haven’t seen a lot of blessings lately, remember verse 9: “At just the right time, we will reap a harvest of blessing.” That means God’s timeline, not ours. So, tend to your relationship with the Lord each day. And even if you have a bad day, like the end of verse 9 says, don’t give up. ■



Zoonar/S.Heap: Getty Images

### Tips for Furthering Your Education

Continued from page 1

the part of the brain responsible for digestion, relaxation, and the immune system.

#### 3. Write often.

Writing strengthens creativity, memory, and communication. What you write isn’t as important as just putting pen to paper and writing something. At the end of a day, jot down everything that made you laugh. Ever wanted to write a book? Create a

sci-fi novel or a memoir about your life. Or send a poem to a loved one.

#### 4. Go to school.

If you have children or nieces/nephews, ask their caregivers what they’re learning in school and try to learn that subject along with them. Or if you’re not a dad/uncle or aren’t allowed contact, see what education classes are available in your facility and share what you learn with a friend.

#### 5. Get fluent.

You’re never too old to learn another language.

See if your facility offers classes, and if not, find a book in the prison library on learning a new language. Make study guides and practice translating basic phrases or simple song lyrics. If you have a child learning a language, study the same one and write short letters to each other in that language.

*Different facilities offer a variety of classes/programs/jobs. Be sure to comply with your facility’s rules and regulations. ■*

### GET A JOB!

Furthering your education isn’t just about academics. Strengthening your work ethic is also an important part of educating yourself and growing as a person.

Whether you are paid or not, here are just a few of the benefits to working while incarcerated:

- Giving back to society by becoming a productive citizen.
- Preparing for a successful career after prison.
- Gaining practical job experience for your resume.
- Developing work skills, including soft skills like punctuality and responsibility.
- Learning to work on a team.
- Finding a job more easily after prison.
- Reducing violence in your facility.

Working hard can play a part in your restoration and prepare you for a more successful return to society after your release.

## WRITERS WANTED!

If you’d like to write a devotional for Prison Fellowship, please list a Bible verse, followed by a personal short story (2-3 paragraphs) that ties in to that verse, and end with a daily prayer/meditation on that verse or topic. Please add the line “I give Prison Fellowship my permission to publish my works.” Send it to “DEVOS,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146. No previously published works allowed. Submissions may be edited for content. Only your first name/state will be used. Not all submissions will be chosen.

# The Importance of Education Behind Bars

by Sammy Perez

I was first incarcerated at the age of 14. From there, I spent about a decade in and out of youth and adult prisons. I never graduated high school and didn't read my first book until age 19 while incarcerated. I obtained my GED behind bars. Shortly after being released from prison at age 26, I enrolled at Liberty University online.

I was a bit scared, as I had never pursued formal education. But I knew obtaining a degree would be critical to my success. I studied while maintaining a full-time job and supporting my family. Four years later, I graduated with honors with a degree in psychology, becoming the first person in my family to graduate from a 4-year university! I later continued my education and obtained a master's degree in professional counseling.

A few years after graduation, I was invited to teach a class on incarceration and families at the Catholic University of America. This was a significant accomplishment for me, because the word "college" was never discussed in my household growing up. Education has opened so many doors for me, and I recommend it to every man or woman who's incarcerated.

Getting an education, especially during your sentence, will enrich your life in many different ways:

- It will introduce you to new concepts and ways of thinking.
- It will challenge you to think critically about topics that you may not have thought of before.
- It will also provide you with a sense of purpose. Finding purpose is hard while in prison because you have a lot that is stripped away from you. Pursuing higher education is a way to gain control of your future and can provide a sense of purpose and responsibility during your time in prison.
- Taking classes while you are incarcerated will fill your time with pursuing something productive that will reap great benefits upon your release. (Editor's note: Research by the RAND Corporation shows that people who take college courses during their incarceration have a 43% lower likelihood of returning to prison after release).
- If you are able to obtain a degree, it will make you more marketable to potential employers upon release. It will also open the door for upward mobility (promotions), which will allow you to obtain higher-paying jobs that will provide for your loved ones. There is a huge difference between working a dead-end job and working a job that offers benefits, vacation, and substantial pay.

Obtaining a higher education may seem daunting. If so, challenge yourself to step into the unknown. While it may be scary, stretching yourself to new heights is where you will find personal growth and accomplishment. It's well worth the effort!

*Sammy Perez is the director of Prison Fellowship's grassroots program and an advocate for education and career opportunities for people who are formerly incarcerated.* ■

# RECOVERY CORNER

## Celebrate Recovery Inside

A Q&A with James D'Amato, a former Prison Fellowship chaplain resource specialist.

### Prison Fellowship: What is Celebrate Recovery?

James D'Amato: Celebrate Recovery® (CR) is a yearlong 12-step program that helps people in recovery experience fellowship through Christ's healing power. John and Cheryl Baker founded the program in 1991 at Saddleback Valley Community Church in Lake Forest, California. Since then, CR has grown to nearly 40,000 churches nationwide.

### PF: What is Celebrate Recovery Inside?

JD: Celebrate Recovery Inside is the in-prison extension of CR. The first incarcerated group formed in 1998 in New Mexico and today, prisons and jails throughout the United States and other countries use CR Inside as part of their recovery programs. Prison Fellowship partners with CR to bring Celebrate Recovery programs to incarcerated adults as part of the Prison Fellowship Academy. The addiction recovery program addresses alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, overeating, and more by dealing thoughtfully with life's hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Through these programs, men and women behind bars can grow spiritually and overcome their addictions.

### PF: What's the difference between Alcoholics Anonymous and Celebrate Recovery?

JD: Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a fellowship of men and women that support each other in their fight against alcoholism. AA acknowledges a Higher Power but is not Christ-centered. Another difference is that AA meetings usually mix men and women together, while CR is gender specific. Also, AA is usually volunteer led. CR facilitators are thoroughly trained before they can lead groups.

### PF: Who can benefit from CR Inside?

JD: Everyone can benefit from CR Inside, not just those with addiction. CR Inside gives its participants a new path to make amends with those they have hurt and with themselves. Participating in the program allows them to create stronger personal relationships with their families and grow more faith-based bonds in every area of their lives.

*To learn more or to see if your facility has CR Inside, talk to your chaplain or counselor.* ■

## SAMMY'S 5 TIPS FOR CAREER SUCCESS AFTER RELEASE:

1. Pursue an education. Get a diploma/degree, and if you already have one, pursue advanced education.
2. Be humble. Be open to learning from others, and don't think you're "too good" for school.
3. Have a positive mindset. Positivity goes a long way, especially if education sounds hard or boring.
4. Be open to a variety of jobs. Your "dream job" may not happen right away, so be willing to work your way up the ladder or to do less-rewarding jobs at first.
5. Utilize resources. There are many websites and organizations that help people with a criminal record create a resume or find a job. There are also some great resources on the Prison Fellowship resource page (be sure to follow your parole/release requirements): [www.prisonfellowship.org/resources/support-friends-family-of-prisoners/supporting-successful-prisoner-reentry](http://www.prisonfellowship.org/resources/support-friends-family-of-prisoners/supporting-successful-prisoner-reentry)



# 4 Simple Ways To Improve Your Public Speaking Skills

by James J. Ackerman,  
CEO of Prison Fellowship

When it comes to public speaking, I’ve often joked, “I have never met a microphone I didn’t like.”

But I didn’t learn to love public speaking overnight. I learned many things from my mother, the actress Elinor Donahue, and I learned a lot from practice.

Here are four basics to help you become a more confident and effective communicator.

## 1. Speak slowly.

My mother always said, “Speaking slowly may feel a bit unnatural or uncomfortable to you at first. But to everyone else, you’ll sound thoughtful and considered.”

My mother was right—most people get nervous in front of an audience and speak too fast. Slow it down and you’ll seem more confident. The other thing she taught me is to “muster the butterflies to give the best performance you can.” Having butterflies is a good sign; it means you want to do well. You must slow down enough to control them, or they will ruin your talk.

## 2. Prepare well.

Do your research. Make sure you understand your subject. Consider all the information that may be available to you

ahead of time, so that you can stand up in front of a room and explain it in detail. If people have questions, you want to be ready to answer.

Sometimes, I find it helpful to write things out in long form. Practice reading it aloud to yourself, even if you aren’t memorizing it word for word. Or you could write the outline in a few bullet points on a note card. As you’re speaking, you can glance down to remind yourself of what comes next.

## 3. Make it interesting.

Public speaking is a performance art. Believe in what you’re saying and put some passion behind it. You might try to add humor. Starting with a joke can be a great way to engage the audience and get them to accept you as the speaker.

Another great trick is building surprises into your talk. When I tell the story of Darryl Brooks, one of our Prison Fellowship Academy staff, I always tell his story in reverse chronology. I share that he’s a member of our staff who serves our Academy in Texas. He’s a wonderful leader, well-loved by all the men at the prison. Then I share that he was a graduate of that very same Academy and served 15 years in prison. It creates that element of surprise. Whenever you are giving a talk, try to find that thing that makes people go, “Aha, wow.” Because that’s the thing that they will remember.



Chinnapong: Getty Images

## 4. Practice makes perfect.

Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse—you can even rehearse certain vocal inflections or certain pauses. I like to read poems and speeches out loud just to practice that art of saying something with a cadence, or a certain flow. Practice different intonations where you really emphasize something powerfully, for the purpose of getting that point across.

As you’re practicing, remember your “why.” You have something to say about something that’s important to you. You can either stand there and worry about what everyone’s thinking about you, or you can decide to harness those butterflies and give it your best! ■

## ACTIVITY: Even & Odd Sudoku

Complete this Sudoku, placing even numbers in the blue cells. Answers on p.8.

	9	6	7		5		1	2
2	8					3		
		7	8	3	2		9	4
5	4			1	3	7		
		1	2		7		4	6
6	7		9				3	
				7	8	2		
7		3	4		9		8	
	2			6		4		3

Anastasia Rybalka: Getty Images

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# NEWS + NOTES

by L.C. Aggen

## Coming Soon to a Prison Near You

In April 2019, the first episode of “The Chosen” premiered online and eventually on television. The series quickly grew in popularity and became the largest crowdfunded TV project in history. The approximately one-hour long show chronicles the life of Jesus as He calls His disciples. Dallas Jenkins, its writer and director, hopes to develop seven seasons to fully tell the story of Jesus’ ministry on earth.

This past year, the third season was released

in movie theaters around the country—and now “The Chosen” is coming to prisons! Prison Fellowship, in partnership with the Come and See Foundation, is on a mission to make “The Chosen” accessible to more than 300 prisons across the nation through Floodlight®, Prison Fellowship’s streaming platform.\*

“We are honored and excited to be partnering with Prison Fellowship so ‘The Chosen’ can be viewed by inmates across the country,” said Stan Jantz, CEO of the Come and See Foundation. “We

pray that those who are captive will find hope and healing through Jesus as they watch ‘The Chosen.’”

*\*Floodlight is currently not available in all prisons. Ask your chaplain to visit the chaplain resource page on Prison Fellowship’s website to learn more about getting Floodlight in your facility.*

## Growing Support for Addiction Recovery

The fight to provide more effective drug treatment has received growing support at the federal level in recent years.

The Mainstreaming Addiction Treatment

(MAT) Act passed through the House of Representatives in a 402-20 vote, then advanced into the Senate and was signed into law by President Joe Biden as part of a larger package in late 2022. The bill will help provide more effective addiction medication for those in prison. It also should help save lives and reduce the shame attached to addiction by normalizing some drug addiction treatments standard healthcare procedures.

There is a major need for new reforms related to addiction recovery, especially for those in prison. People released from prison are 12.7 times more likely to die

of an overdose during the first two weeks post-release than people who weren’t incarcerated. When people behind bars quit drugs quickly and with limited support, their tolerance is usually lowered, which can lead to an overdose if they relapse.

Other legislation has been proposed in recent months that also addresses support for addiction recovery. Bills have been aimed at providing easier access to medications, including for those behind bars. These types of proposals could help those battling addiction while incarcerated and provide safer and more successful ways to recovery. ■

# DID YOU KNOW? Pell Grants

A Pell Grant is a form of financial assistance provided by the federal government for students who need help paying for college. Pell Grants are the most common form of financial aid given to low-income students in the United States. But for the past 30 years, they have not been available to students behind bars.

In 1994, Congress passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which made it illegal for federal and state prisoners to apply for Pell Grants. Then in 2016, a limited number of incarcerated students were able to access Pell Grants when the government introduced the Second Chance Pell Program. However, in 2021, Congress passed a new law that permanently removed this restriction.

Starting in July 2023, all prisoners will be able to access Pell Grants for the first time in 30 years. This policy shift will open up academic opportunities for up to 700,000 men and women behind bars nationwide.

Here are some key things to know about who is eligible for Pell Grants and how to apply for them:

1. Pell Grants will be available to any resident of a prison, jail, or juvenile detention facility.
2. Incarcerated people can apply for Pell Grants regardless of what they have been convicted for or how long their sentence is.
3. To be eligible for a Pell Grant, applicants need to show they have a financial need.
4. Pell Grant applicants must have a high school diploma or GED.
5. Pell Grants can be used to pay for undergraduate studies only (not graduate programs) at public or nonprofit colleges and universities (see note below).
6. The maximum annual amount of a Pell Grant for the 2023-2024 academic year is \$7,395.
7. Unlike student loans, Pell Grants do not have to be repaid.
8. Pell Grants can only be used to pay for a maximum of 12 semesters of education.
9. Individuals who have already completed a bachelor’s degree are not eligible for Pell Grants.
10. To confirm eligibility for a Pell Grant, applicants must fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, also known as FAFSA. The FAFSA can be filled out and submitted online or by mail.

NOTE: Pell Grants can only be used at educational institutions with eligible prison education programs (PEP). Many schools don’t have PEPs in place yet, but several are actively working on making their programs available to students behind bars. Contact a counselor or other staff member at your facility to see if they can help get you more information or to ask for a printed FAFSA application (be sure to follow all facility rules, judgement orders, privilege allowances, etc.). ■

## ACTIVITY: Sudoku Answer Key

3	9	6	7	4	5	8	1	2
2	8	4	1	9	6	3	5	7
1	5	7	8	3	2	6	9	4
5	4	9	6	1	3	7	2	8
8	3	1	2	5	7	9	4	6
6	7	2	9	8	4	5	3	1
4	1	5	3	7	8	2	6	9
7	6	3	4	2	9	1	8	5
9	2	8	5	6	1	4	7	3



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**INSIDE JOURNAL®**  
is published four times a year by Prison Fellowship, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790.

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

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