

IN THIS ISSUE:



Fatherhood,
p.4



Angel Tree,
p.5



Recipes,
p.7

Ray's Road to Redemption

by S.C. Anthony

Ray grew up in a loving home with happily married parents who supported him, attended his baseball games, and made sure his needs were met.

"We never wanted for anything," says Ray.

So his parents were surprised when Ray eventually became, as he phrases it, "a full-blown meth addict" who was first arrested in his early 20s.

Growing up, Ray developed self-esteem issues. Seeking approval and acceptance, he longed for a crowd to connect with. But as Ray got older, he started spending time with unhealthy people.

He began experimenting with alcohol and drugs early



Photo by Shana Thompson

Despite Ray's loving parents and stable childhood, he eventually lost his way—and his son—and spent the next 20 years in prison. But something shifted inside him during his last time in prison. He left those doors truly changed and is now thriving as a new dad and grandfather.

in his teenage years to escape the stress and pressures of adolescence and to fit in. This eventually grew into substance abuse, bad decisions, and trouble for Ray. "I don't really think that I knew what taking responsibility was," Ray says. "I don't think that

I really realized what life was all about."

Ray married young, and his wife got pregnant shortly after the wedding. But the marriage didn't last long, and they went separate ways before the baby was born. Ray didn't even find out

about his son's birth until two weeks after it had happened.

Ray only cared about having enough drugs or money and not about his son.

"I chose my addiction over family," Ray admits. And with this addiction came criminal behaviors

that cycled him in and out of prison for the next 20 years.

During one of his longer prison stints, Ray realized how important relationships are. He didn't have a connection with his young son or his ex-wife (who was raising their son), so he looked for ways to reach out.

He asked his parents to help work on a plan for communicating with his son. That was around the time when the chaplain told Ray about Prison Fellowship Angel Tree® and Angel Tree Christmas (see page 5 for more information). Ray signed up.

Ray credits Angel Tree for a restored relationship with his son, who was not only excited about the Christmas

Continued on page 2

5 Tips for Getting Along With Others

by Dillon Shaw

Prison puts you in close contact with people who are different from you—and sometimes difficult to deal with. Sometimes you get a messy cellmate who doesn't care about his hygiene, or someone who blasts the volume on their TV, or a bunkie who snores like a chainsaw or wants the lights on while you're trying to sleep. One thing is certain: You will have to deal with

people you don't like or who don't like you.

While you can't control what other people do, you can respond in ways that prevent issues or misunderstandings. Here are five tools for getting along with difficult people.

1. Be proactive.

So much can be avoided, understood, or resolved by having a conversation upfront when you get or become

a new cellmate. Talk honestly and respectfully about the boundaries you feel are important, and look for ways to compromise. Is a clean room a high priority to you? Offer to clean regularly or even do more than your share if your cellmate doesn't place as high of a value on cleanliness. By talking about this in the beginning, it prevents issues from festering later on.

FotoDuets/Getty Images



2. Look in the mirror.

Remember that you have faults too. This helps you grow in self-awareness and realize people have to deal with things about you they don't like. Also, this can

help you develop empathy, which is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. As you see yourself more accurately in relation to other people, you

Continued on page 8

Letters to the Editor

Devonte in Wisconsin

I have young children and I would like an application for the Angel Tree program. The institution I'm currently in does not have the Angel Tree program, so I was told to write to you. If possible, can you please send me an application for the program? Thanks.

Dear Devonte:

Please see page 5 for information about the Angel Tree program, or have your chaplain or other prison staff member call 800.55.ANGEL (26435).

Randy in Pennsylvania

Last year I sent [Angel Tree] participation forms and nothing came about it. ... My wife is in another state with our six kids by herself. [They] are my everything, and I want to do so much for them, but I can't while I am in prison. I truly hope you can find a way to help them. It would really mean so much.

Dear Randy:

We are sorry to hear about your Angel Tree issues. Reasons for children not being served include incomplete paperwork, unreachable/unwilling caregiver, or even postal issues. Please see page 5 for more on Angel Tree eligibility.

Tyrone in North Carolina

I'm a new Christian. The King James Bible is hard for me to understand. I was hoping you could send me a NIV Study Bible I can learn from.

Dear Tyrone:

We don't offer the NIV Study Bible, but we do offer the Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible and workbook in easy-to-read New Living Translation. Please see the ad below.

Robbie in Georgia

I am an indigent and destitute Christian serving a sentence of life without parole plus 65 years. I am writing to request a Bible,



Ekely/Getty Images

enrollment in any Bible correspondence courses you offer, and any/all additional resources you are able to send. ... The prison-house is not just where I live—it's my Spirit-led, chosen mission field, and missionary tools and supplies are desperately needed.

Dear Robbie:

Great attitude! No matter what situation or location we're in, God can use us for His glory—we just need to let Him. Ask your chaplain to visit prisonfellowship.org/storehouse to see all the free resources we offer.

Sincerely,
The Editorial Staff ■

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.



Redemption

Continued from page 1

gift he received, but also happy to know his dad still cared about him—which led to Ray's first prison visit from his son.

Ray was slowly starting to feel a desire to change. But each time he was released from prison, he went back to his old ways—and back to prison. Despite growing as a person and as a father, Ray still felt like something was missing in his life.

Running since childhood

As a child, Ray had gone to church, but he describes the messages taught there as ones that tried to scare people.

"I kind of ran from all that," Ray says.

Then as an adult, he ran again—this time from the law. After his release from one of his last prison stints, Ray was required to go to court every month but was high on drugs the first time he went. He didn't return.

Ray shoplifted while on the run. He became paranoid, always looking around and never staying in one place for too long. After avoiding law enforcement for a year, he was finally caught.

It felt like a burden had been lifted. He no longer had to deal with the stress of hiding.

That's when Ray reached a turning point.

"I was just done living the way I was," Ray says. He thought back to his childhood in the church and decided to give God another try. He called out to Him.

Ray recalls finally being open to learning about surrender—while admitting out loud to God, "I don't know what this is all about." He came to realize God didn't promise life was going to be easy or that Ray would understand what was happening. But he trusted that God would bring him peace.

Lasting change

Ray and his son now have a good relationship. Ray told his son after his first three times in prison that he would never go back, but he did each time. This time, however, Ray didn't feel a need to tell his son those words because his son really believed his father was a different man.

Ray also credits Celebrate Recovery—a Bible-based 12-step program for life's hurts,

habits, and hang-ups—for getting him on the right track.

"I never felt so accepted and loved by people," Ray says of the program he's been involved in for a decade. "I didn't have to wear a mask. I could share my struggles."

Ray is now a program manager for the Prison Fellowship Academy® at a prison in Oklahoma. The monthslong program brings men through a journey of transformation with the help of targeted curriculum and compassionate coaches.

Outside of work, Ray is a happily married man who is a proud grandfather to his three grandsons. Ray is also once again a father in his early 50s. His wife recently gave birth to a daughter.

"I made bad choices," Ray admits of his early years. "It's just a total life turnaround."

As for his advice to others behind bars, Ray says that if you're considering signing up for Angel Tree or mending relationships with family, "Don't let the shame and guilt stand in your way." ■

Purpose Not Perfection: God Doesn't Make Junk

by S.L. Ray

According to folklore, a water-bearer in India had a pole holding two large pots, which he used to deliver water to his master. Each day, the man filled the pots with water. But one pot was cracked, so by the time he arrived at his master's house, the damaged pot was only half full, as the water had leaked out during his long walk.

The perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments and felt worthy of carrying out its purpose of holding water. But the cracked pot was ashamed of its imperfection and felt that it had not fulfilled its purpose.

Two years later, the cracked pot, feeling like a failure, apologized to the water-bearer: "I'm sorry I can't accomplish what the perfect pot can. Because of my flaws, I create more trouble for you and waste your effort."



Photos.com/Getty Images

The man smiled and said to the discouraged pot: "Do you notice all the lovely flowers growing on the side of the path where I carried you, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. In the beginning, I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we've walked back from the stream, you've watered them. For years, I've picked these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

How many times have we asked ourselves, "Why can't I be more like so-and-so, who seems so perfect?" or "Why doesn't God fix this flaw, or that flaw, or ALL my flaws?"

The answer to these questions is: Nobody is perfect, and God can use all of us. One saying puts it this way: "God doesn't make junk!"

Intentions matter

Don't confuse deliberate



pilesomiles/Getty Images

sins with weaknesses. Sins are immoral acts or thoughts that go against God's desires. We are all sinners who fall short of God's standards (Romans 3:23). However, we can turn away from our sins, or repent. Acts 11:18b says repentance leads to life.

Unlike sins, weaknesses are the things we can't always control. Maybe we're not as physically strong or as academic or as confident as other people. For God to use our "cracks in our pot," we need to surrender to Him and be open to whatever He wants to do through our weakness. Someone confined to a wheelchair can bring God glory as much as (or even more than) someone who wins marathon races. God doesn't love us in spite of our flaws—He loves us including our flaws.

Throughout the Bible, God used flawed men and women to bring Him glory. When they quit trying to "fix" their flaws and instead trusted God to use those flaws for good, He gave them the strength to do incredible things. David was short and wimpy compared to a tall brute like Goliath, but this physical weakness

allowed David to catch the giant off guard and to beat him with a pebble in a slingshot. Moses had a speech impairment and was "tongue-tied" (Exodus 4:10)—but that didn't stop him from serving God in huge ways. In verse 12, God said, "I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say." Moses surrendered to being open to God, and God brought him the power to save an entire nation from Egyptian slavery.

God's grace is enough

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul says, "Three different times I begged the Lord to take [the thorn in my side] away. Each time He said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' ... That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

The Bible doesn't say exactly what the "thorn" in Paul's side was, but whatever this weakness was, God decided—for reasons we may never understand—not to take it away. Paul still gave God the glory, and God used Paul in huge ways.

Each of us has "cracks in our pot." But God can use our weaknesses and imperfections to beautify His table. Even the person with the most flaws imaginable has a purpose. Nothing goes to waste in God's universe. So rather than feel sorry for ourselves or wish we were someone else, we can trust that God made us who we are, and remember that He doesn't make junk.

In Isaiah 44:24, God says, "I am the Lord, who made all things. I alone stretched out the heavens." God's universe is beyond massive. If it takes 32 minutes for light to reach Jupiter (365,000,000 miles away), it would take light 25,000 years to get to the nearest galaxy, Canis Major (146,643,601,368,010,816 miles away)—and there are galaxies far beyond that one! The same God who created the entire universe thinks you, specifically, in all your uniqueness, are worthy of existing. The same God who created the entire universe knows exactly how many hairs are on your head (Luke 12:7). How cool is that? ■

CAN YOU READ THIS?

If you're reading this right now, that means you're alive. God's mercies are new every morning, so if you woke up today, then He can still use you for good. Philippians 1:6 sums it up best: "And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."

And Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago."

A Christian singer named Jonathan Traylor has a song called "Masterpiece". The lyrics say: "I was created to bring You glory / Get all the glory God / Take all my broken parts / Make beautiful art / To bring You glory God."

We need to trust that God's not through with us yet. He continues to work on us, and even with our flaws and our broken parts, He sees us as a work of art—and more than just art: His masterpiece.

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

"Dear Jesus: Help me to surrender to whatever You have in store for my life and trust You in my weakness. I give you glory for the masterpiece You're making in me. I confess my sins and ask Your forgiveness. Amen."

To learn more about Jesus' love for us, write to "Cracked Pot," c/o, Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790.

Fatherhood: 6 Tips for How To Be an Active Dad

by L.C. Aggen

Parenting from prison can be challenging—but you can still have a healthy and active role in your child’s life. We asked several Inside Journal readers what their best parenting advice is and how they stay connected to their kids. Here are some of our favorite responses:

1. Have patience with your children.

Relationships take time to build, even with your children. Try to see things from your child’s point of view, and take things slowly. Understand that your child may feel sad or angry about your incarceration. When they argue, talk back, or resist your advice, it is often because they are hurt.

“The kids didn’t deserve this, so keep that in mind. When we push good things, they fight it because we weren’t always this way (lovingly involved). Understand their pain and know that you caused a lot of it.” —Clarence

2. Communicate—and really listen.

Phone calls, letters, video calls (in some facilities), and chats during visits are all great methods of communication. Keep a steady stream of communication to help maintain the relationship and minimize the feeling of distance. Actively listen and show interest in your child’s world. Ask what is going on in their life and bring it up the next time you talk with them. Learn about their likes and dislikes (see “Prompts” sidebar).

3. Find a hobby you can do together.

Activities such as music, art, reading, and crafting can be a great way of building connection. Some readers have learned a foreign language at the same time as their child or written songs with their child. One reader uses art to connect with his daughter.

“I paint her something every month. When I call her, I ask if she liked what I made her. Sometimes it opens me up to rejection, but I accept that.” —Tyreese

4. Give your child a physical reminder.

Having something to hold while you are away can make a big difference in a child’s life. Readers have sent their children creative gifts such as a blanket made from commissary items or an origami animal. One reader sent his daughter flash cards with words he thought described her, like brave, beautiful, and smart. He told her to put them on her wall and mirror so she could see them every day.

“I wanted to let her know how I saw her.” —Shaun

5. Respect the mother/caregiver.

Maintaining a healthy relationship with the person taking care of your child can help you foster a better relationship with your child. Don’t ask them to choose between you and their caregiver. And don’t talk disrespectfully about their caregiver—or any other authority figures, for that matter. When conflict arises between your child and their mother/caregiver, help your child understand the adult’s point of view.

“[The mom] is the one going through it all. She has to be the mother and you (the father). Talk about what you know but don’t bad-mouth the mom. Don’t impart your opinion too heavily but give the kids a different perspective.” —Quinton

6. Sign up for programs that allow connection.

Many different ministries and organizations have programs to connect parents with their children. Prison Fellowship offers Angel Tree (to learn more, see ad on page 5). Through this program, you can provide your child with a gift and a personal note at Christmas, the opportunity to attend summer camp for free or at reduced cost, and so much more. Your facility may also offer in-person events to highlight your role as a parent. ■



South_agency/Getty Images

PROMPTS TO ASK YOUR KIDS

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.

For Younger Kids:

- What is your favorite dessert?
- What is your favorite color?
- What is one thing you really like to do?
- What is one thing you really don’t like to do?
- What is your favorite animal and why?
- If you could go anywhere, where would you go?
- What is your favorite thing about yourself?

For Teens:

- What is one activity you have never done that you wish you could do?
- What are your pet peeves?
- What is your favorite sport to watch? To play?
- What is your favorite TV show? Movie? Book?
- If you won a million dollars, what would you do with it?
- If you could visit anywhere in the world, where would you go?
- What is your favorite thing about yourself?

PAST EDITIONS OF INSIDE JOURNAL NOW AVAILABLE!

Did your facility run out of copies of the Spring 2024 edition? We now offer copies of recent editions of Inside Journal! Chaplains can order them FOR FREE by visiting prisonfellowship.org/storehouse.

NOTE: Individual copies are not available. Free bulk orders will be shipped to requesting chaplains or facility staff only.

THE OUTSTANDING CHAPLAIN AWARD RECIPIENTS

We asked readers to nominate their favorite chaplain for the Prison Fellowship® Outstanding Chaplain Award. Based on your nomination submissions, here is our first round of recipients:

Jukabiea Barlow (IL), Jannie Davis (GA), Cara Debose (IN), Nicolas Meyer (VA), Myron Olson (WI), Dorothy Presley (AL), Jeff Rendon (IL), David Urquides (AZ), Jessica Wilson (IN).

The Outstanding Chaplain Award honors dedicated chaplains who faithfully and lovingly serve those behind bars. This ongoing award is given monthly. Mail your nomination to OCA, c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. Or email your nomination to chaplainresources@pfm.org. Be sure to include the name of the chaplain you want to honor, the name of their facility (including city and state), your name, and your personal story or paragraph about why this person should be recognized as outstanding.

ANGEL TREE: Frequently Asked Questions

Prison Fellowship Angel Tree® equips churches to strengthen relationships between incarcerated parents and their children and to support the families of prisoners year-round. Below are some frequently asked questions about Angel Tree, including how you and your child(ren) can participate.

What is Angel Tree, and how did it start?

Back in 1972, a prisoner named Mary Kay Beard noticed other incarcerated moms sending the little they had—soaps, shampoos, and other items—to their children as gifts at Christmastime. These makeshift gifts brought so much joy to the children, simply because they had come from their mother. Upon her release, Mary Kay joined Prison Fellowship’s staff. When asked to come up with a Christmas program, she remembered those incarcerated mothers, and Angel Tree was born. In the 40-plus years since the program started, it has continued to grow. Angel Tree now serves hundreds of thousands of children throughout the year.

What is Angel Tree Christmas?

Through Angel Tree® Christmas, children receive a Christmas gift and a personal message from their incarcerated parent, and their caregivers can request a free, easy-to-read Bible. Applications are shipped to the chaplains of participating prisons. Parents then fill out an application, which the chaplain mails back. In the fall, Angel Tree volunteers call the child’s

caregiver to coordinate the details. Angel Tree volunteers buy and wrap the gift, which is then delivered to the child at home or at an Angel Tree Christmas party.

How does this program strengthen the bond between a parent and child?

Incarcerated parents can write their own personal message to each child. It’s a great way to connect parents and children who are physically separated. Kids get to know that their dad might not be home at Christmas, but he’s still thinking of them and sending his love.

How much does the program cost the participants?

Nothing! It’s completely free to participating parents and children.

I filled out an application, but my child didn’t receive a gift. What happened?

Although we try to serve every child, sometimes issues come up. The three most common are:

1. Eligibility issues: You must be the child’s parent, stepparent, or parent figure; your child must be 18 or younger and live in the United States; and there must not be a court order restricting your contact with your kids or their caregiver.
2. Paperwork issues: If the application is incorrect, incomplete, or late, we may not be able to serve the children.
3. Caregiver issues: If the caregiver is not reachable or refuses to

participate, we may not be able to deliver the gifts to the children.

How does Angel Tree connect families beyond Christmastime?

Angel Tree supports children throughout the year with the help of church partners, athletes, community supporters, and merchandise sponsors. Angel Tree Every Day promotes year-round engagement and support for Angel Tree families by offering ideas, resources, and encouragement to local churches. Those caring for your children will also gain access to helpful resources like our Family Portal and monthly newsletter, *The Hope Connection*. In addition, Angel Tree camping and Angel Tree sports camps are two specific ways kids can feel supported.

What is Angel Tree camping?

Angel Tree camping began in 2002, thanks to a generous donation that fully funded camps to sponsor Angel Tree children. Since then, it continues to grow and expand each year. Although Prison Fellowship does not directly operate the camp facilities, we partner with Christian camps across the country by providing scholarships so that your child(ren) can attend a camp at little to no cost. To be eligible for the scholarship, your child(ren) must be between the ages of 5–18 and have participated in Angel Tree Christmas. By attending a sleepaway camp or day camp, kids can make new friends, escape the


challenges of daily life, learn more about Jesus, and experience fun in the great outdoors.

What is an Angel Tree sports camp?

In 2005, Prison Fellowship hosted the first Angel Tree football clinic at Stanford University. From there, the sports camp program expanded across the country and extended into such sports as basketball, soccer, and ice skating. Angel Tree sports camp has held events for thousands of children who might otherwise not have a chance to attend a day camp. Past camps have included superstar coaches and athletes like Kenny Clark, Sherman Williams, Clay Matthews III of the NFL, Jackie White of the Harlem Globetrotters, and Olympic figure skater JoJo Starbuck.

How can my child participate in Angel Tree?

Ask your facility chaplain for a 2024 application for Angel Tree. If your facility does not yet participate in Angel Tree, your chaplain can contact 800.55.ANGEL (26435) to learn more. Applications must be completed and postmarked by October 1, 2024. Angel Tree camping and Angel Tree sports camps have limited space, but they are growing and serving as many Angel Tree children as possible. To find out if there is a summer camp or sports camp in your child’s area, your child’s caregiver can call 800.55.ANGEL (26435) to connect with an Angel Tree specialist in your region. ■



**PRISON FELLOWSHIP
ANGEL TREE**

OPEN DOORS FOR YOUR CHILD THROUGH ANGEL TREE!

Through Prison Fellowship Angel Tree® your child can attend camp (at little to no cost), participate in sports camps (in select cities), connect with a church, and receive a gift from you this Christmas. Plus, your child’s caregiver will get access to practical resources like our Family Portal and *The Hope Connection*.

Call 800.55.ANGEL (26435) to learn more.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:

1. You must be the parent, stepparent, or mother/father figure.
2. There must not be a court order restricting your contact with the child(ren) or their caregiver(s).
3. Your child(ren) must live in the United States.
4. Your child(ren) must be 18 years old or younger.
5. The form must be filled out completely and legibly and then signed.

ASK YOUR CHAPLAIN OR PROGRAM COORDINATOR FOR AN APPLICATION TODAY!

Contact your child(ren)’s caregiver to gather the most current information for your application. **Forms must be postmarked by Oct. 1.** Ask your chaplain about your facility’s deadline for completed forms.

IMPORTANT: *If your information is incomplete or inaccurate or if your child(ren)’s caregiver cannot be reached or refuses to participate, we may not be able to deliver gifts to your child(ren).*

OBJECT LESSON: Advertising and Parenting

by C.L. Bopape

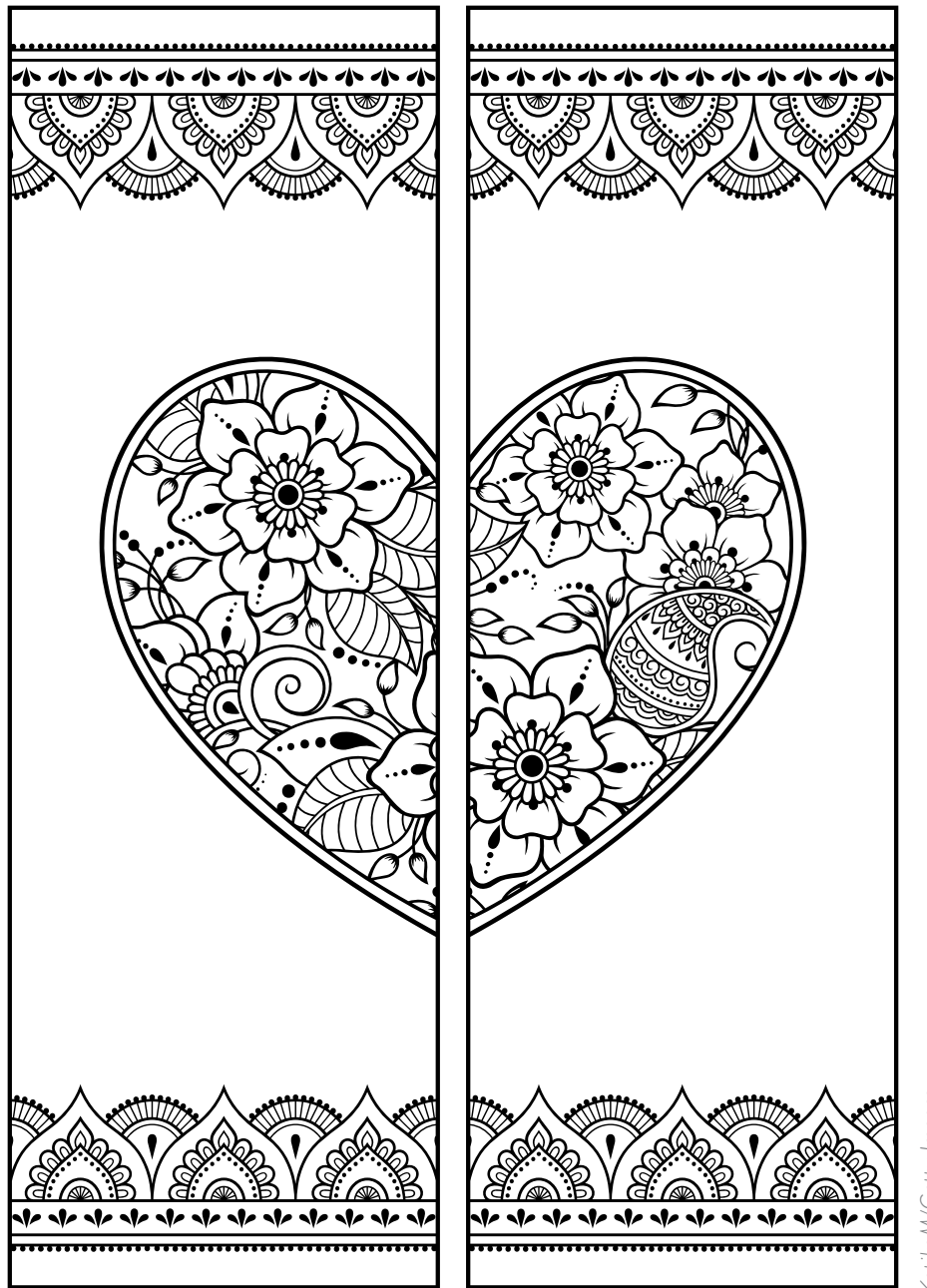
In prisons across the country, Super Bowl Sunday is a big deal. It’s a chance for viewers to enjoy football, halftime show performances, and of course, those big-budget commercials. But did you know the strategies behind a good advertisement can be used as a tool to help you parent your children? This object lesson will show you how.

What is an object lesson? Object lessons are teaching tools that use everyday items to illustrate an abstract topic in a simple way.
OBJECT: A printed or television advertisement.
LESSON: A healthy relationship with your children starts with you!

Look closely at an advertisement. When you read or watch it, do you think the company “gets” you? Good marketers foresee your needs and use the right words and designs to grab your attention. If you are a parent, you can incorporate some of the following strategies successful marketing teams have used and apply them to your parenting journey.

ACTIVITY: “Other Half” Bookmarks

One of our readers requested make-your-own bookmarks. These “other half” bookmarks are a unique way to connect with your child, spouse, or other loved one while you’re apart. The idea is to color one half and give it to your loved one, and ask your loved one to color the other half and give it back to you, so you can think of each other when you read. To personalize this idea even further, use commissary paper to make your own “other half” bookmark, or use your imagination to create different “remembrance” gifts where you and your loved one each hold onto one half of an item (trinkets, origami hearts, or anything that can be divided in two). *Be sure to follow all rules and regulations.*



- **Know your audience.** Marketers sometimes survey their customers and pay attention to feedback. Marketers also watch other companies and copy what other organizations are doing well. You can use a similar approach to your parenting and strengthen your relationship with your children. You can learn what motivates and inspires them, just like ad agencies learn what motivates and inspires their audiences.

Ask your kids questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. For example, have them teach you the theme song to their favorite TV show or ask them about the week’s highs and lows. (See “Prompts” on page 4 for more ideas). Then really listen. You’ll not only get to know your kids better, but you might also notice that future conversations develop a more natural, relaxed flow.

- **Anticipate their needs.** When you see an advertisement that states something like “new, easy-to-open lid!” that means the company has done its research. It may be testing out ways to better serve its customers. A well-informed company can design solutions even before its customers have voiced a concern.

Similarly, when you regularly interact with your children, you become better at knowing what they need. The Bible says, “Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too” (Philippians 2:4). You may be able to tell when your children need a little praise or want you to send more letters. Reading their body language during a visit will become easier, and you’ll know when they long to hear your heartfelt *I love you*. Healthy relationships need consistent communication. And even if your letters aren’t answered or your phone conversations start slowly, you’ll have fewer regrets because you know you’ve done your part.

- **Work with influencers.** In the business world, companies sometimes work with “influencers,” or celebrities/well-liked people who endorse or recommend another company’s product or service to their followers.

Your child’s caregiver may not be a celebrity with a huge following, but they do have an incredible influence on your child’s life. Let them know you want to influence your child as a team. Ask your chaplain for resources on effective co-parenting.

- **Improve your brand.** Some companies are quick to let you know when they’ve made upgrades or received an industry award. This improves their reputation with customers. The same is true for you. When you let people on the outside know you’re using your incarceration to take classes, repair relationships, grow spiritually, and prepare for reentry, you’re building trust and reputation. Because you’re getting your priorities in order, others—including your children—may extend a little more grace to you.

You don’t need to wait for the Super Bowl to start applying some of these tips. The next time you see an advertisement, remember that a healthy relationship with your children starts with you! ■

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 at how a healthy spiritual habit like this can bring encouragement and focus to each day.

It’s What’s Inside That Counts

Submitted by Wes in Michigan

1 SAMUEL 16:7

“But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

This verse means a lot to me because no matter the appearance or height someone has, and no matter the sense of judgment people may have towards one another, God loves all of us the same. We are only pure through Him, and no other living or dead thing can take that from us or can separate us from God’s love. He holds the almighty power, and His Son was willing to give the ultimate sacrifice to ensure we can all be saved.

We may feel like we have all the answers to the questions, but only the Lord knows all the answers. We might think of ourselves as kings ruling over ourselves, but God is the one true King. And the way we see things and the way God sees things should be the same. We should try to line up our desires with His. The heart—what’s on the inside—makes the individual. That is such a comfort.

“Father, help me not to worry about outward appearances, or to judge others or myself. Instead, help me to really see people the way You see them, and to really see myself the way You see me. Every morning, create in me a pure heart. And bring me closer to You each day. Amen.” ■

WRITERS WANTED!

The above devotional was written by one of our readers. If you’d like to write a devotional for Prison Fellowship, please list a Bible verse, followed by a personal short story (2–4 paragraphs) that ties in to that verse, and end with a 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. Note: 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.

RECOVERY CORNER
HIGHER POWER = HEALING POWER

Dr. David Larson of the National Institute for Healthcare Research and Dr. Dale Matthews of Georgetown University found higher religious commitment* had a beneficial effect in 16 of 18 studies on alcoholism recovery and 12 of 12 studies on drug addiction recovery. And several studies (Koenig; Shreve-Neiger and Edelstein) have shown that higher levels of religious commitment are associated with lower occurrences of mental illness and better mental health outcomes.

- The first three actions of step-based recovery programs:
- **Step 1:** Admit we are powerless over [our addictions]—that our lives have become unmanageable.
 - **Step 2:** Come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
 - **Step 3:** Make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.

Steps 1, 2, and 3 in a nutshell: I can’t, He can, so let Him.

Of course, we can’t force ourselves to have faith if we don’t. And God understands that sometimes our faith feels tiny or even nonexistent. But if your ways aren’t working (Step 1), perhaps try praying to believe in God’s ways (Step 2). As Jesus says in Matthew 17:20, “If you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.” ■

*Commitment means living out the values of your religion and actively participating in religious activities (ex: chapel, Bible studies). Consider joining a step-based recovery program (if available), starting a Bible study, or keeping a prayer journal. See page 2 for information on how to receive a free Bible study or Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible.

READER RECIPES

Buckeyes

Submitted by Gary in South Carolina

- INGREDIENTS:
- 5-oz. packet of peanut butter
 - 3-oz. raisin or trail mix*
 - 5-oz. packet of instant oatmeal*
 - 1 banana, mashed
 - Powdered sugar/confectioners’ sugar*
 - Instant cocoa



Svetlana-Cherruty/Getty Images

DIRECTIONS:
In a bowl, mix equal parts powdered sugar and cocoa, and set aside. In separate bowl, combine all remaining ingredients. Stir together (with hands or spoon) and then shape into quarter-sized balls. Roll balls in sugar/cocoa mix. Let “set” and enjoy! ■

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

NEWS + NOTES

Hopeful Futures Bloom by E.G. Andrews

Vertical farming and agricultural technology industries are becoming valuable career opportunities for people behind bars. Vertical farming is the recent trend of using tower-like structures to plant crops on top of each other instead of in traditional horizontal rows.

According to Greenhouse Grower, the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC), joined by the South Carolina Department of Agriculture and South Carolina-based AmplifiedAg, Inc., will soon build a vertical farming facility and training program at Camille Griffin Graham Correctional Institution for women in Columbia, South Carolina.

The vertical farming program at Camille Graham will not only help residents access fresh

produce, but it will also create a constructive environment for prisoners to give back to their community. The program would help develop STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) skills and agricultural work experience. With relevant experience, people are more likely to secure meaningful employment after their release.

The program can contribute to South Carolina’s lowest in the nation recidivism rate while also bolstering the state’s agricultural workforce.

“[Prisoners] learn job skills while providing food for the institution,” said SCDC Director Bryan Stirling. “We see this as a win-win.”

Second Chance Month a Success by L.C. Aggen

This past April, hundreds of churches and organizations joined

Prison Fellowship as Second Chance Month® partners during the eighth annual Second Chance Month. City Church Chicago and Pastor Kent Munsey hosted the national Second Chance Sunday service on April 7. When asked about Second Chance Sunday, Mark Batterson, author and pastor, said, “As Christ followers, we aren’t defined by our past mistakes. We are defined by what Jesus accomplished on the cross.” He added that our Lord “is the God of second, third, and hundredth chances. To be like Jesus is to give second chances!”

Along with church services, many partners participated in prayer walks during the month of April. Since the first-ever Second Chance Month in 2017, Prison Fellowship has partnered with supporters each April to bring awareness

to the nearly 44,000 legal barriers facing those released from prison.

Georgia Program Supports Reentry by L.C. Aggen

The state of Georgia recently instituted a new reentry program called Walking the Last Mile. The mentor-based program was created with the goal of training and supporting those transitioning from incarceration to the workforce.

“The Walking the Last Mile program will help break the chains of incarceration by equipping participants with the skills and resources necessary for a successful reentry into society,” Commissioner Bruce Thompson told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. “This innovative program is where opportunities begin for those who are seeking to embrace a fresh start and rebuild their lives.”

Participants of Walking the Last

Mile work with the program manager to create a personalized plan that accounts for their individual needs, abilities, background, and professional goals. In addition to this, participants will attend mock interviews, build resumes, and find networking opportunities.

While not every state has a program like Walking the Last Mile, there are many different groups helping those reentering society to find employment. One such organization is Honest Jobs (**HonestJobs.com**), which is the nation’s largest network of employers who are intentionally hiring people impacted by the criminal justice system.

Visit **prisonfellowship.org/resources** and scroll down to the section called “Preparing for Reentry.” It lists helpful resources, tips on writing a resume, a national directory for reentry, and more. Or call 211 (or visit **211.org**) to find a community resource specialist in your area. ■

5 Tips

Continued from page 1

can grow in empathy. This is an important skill for developing healthy relationships with people around you now, or when you attempt to build or rebuild relationships with friends, family, or others in the future.

3. Build a bond.

Generally speaking, we all want to get along with one another while we’re serving time. You might be surprised how far an act of courtesy or unexpected kindness will go. I recall a time when I had a cellmate that was about as unlike me as possible, and some of his behaviors really frustrated me. But because I truly wanted to find a way to get

along, I looked for ways to build a bridge of understanding. I asked him about his interests. I offered to help him with his GED homework. We even cooked foods in our cell together. These choices on my part contributed to what became an unexpectedly enjoyable cellmate friendship.

4. Ask for consideration.

Asking someone to be considerate of your needs or feelings has a higher chance of success if you’ve walked through numbers 1, 2, and 3 above. This request for consideration should be done with a spirit of humility, because it’s easy to get defensive if you feel anyone

is attempting to press in on the little personal space or control you do have. And in addition to asking them to consider your needs or feelings, you also should be willing to consider theirs. Then ask yourself: Are your differences molehills (minor irritations you can overlook) or mountains (major violations of boundaries or respect)? Even though we need to learn to get along with others to be successful in life, situations also require healthy boundaries.

5. Prioritize self-care.

When all else fails and you just have to endure a difficult season with a cellmate, focus

on the habits and activities that will help keep you sane and stable until your situation changes. Keep a positive mindset. If possible, exercise regularly, go out to the recreation yard, sign up for classes or time in the library, get a pair of earplugs if necessary, and use the dayroom as a buffer. But all the while, continue to be respectful, focusing on being the best cellmate you can be.

Prison and everything that comes with it is hard enough, so do what you can to get along with the people around you. Don’t believe the lie, “It is what it is,” as though you just have to accept the way things are. Instead, take responsibility and start believing, “It is what you make it.” ■



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prisonfellowship.org
877.478.0100

Editorial Manager:
D.P. Bender

Editor in Chief:
S.L. Ray

Writers:
L.C. Aggen, E.G. Andrews, S.C. Anthony, C.L. Bopape, S.L. Ray, Dillon Shaw

Designer:
A. Raquel

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