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# Priceless Gifts and Precious Blessings

by Cherise Bopape

**S**heaveal was only 11 when she learned her parents were using drugs.

Sheaveal and her four younger siblings spent a lot of time with their grandparents, who took them to places like church and Bible studies. But at home, the five young kids lived with their cocaine-addicted parents. Though Sheaveal didn't fully understand what drug abuse meant, she says, "I knew they were doing something different."

While her parents struggled with addiction, Sheaveal and her siblings struggled to find food to eat. Sometimes their grandparents would feed them. But by the time Sheaveal was 16, she was stealing food from her grandparents' home and shoplifting groceries



Photo courtesy of Sheaveal

Following a rough childhood, Sheaveal struggled through four prison terms and the loss of all six of her children. She was at death's door. But God saved her life—in more ways than one.

from the store so that she and her siblings wouldn't starve.

Sheaveal was a hard worker and tried to do well in school. After high school, she went off to

college on an athletic scholarship. There, she met her first boyfriend. Like her parents, he also used cocaine. When she found out about her boyfriend's drug use,

she made a decision that she'd regret: "I tried cocaine for the first time in my life," she says. "And my life just spiraled down from there."

Sheaveal's grades fell. She lost her scholarship, left school, and ended up back at home with her parents.

She continued to use drugs and to steal. Eventually, she was arrested for criminal behavior related to her theft and addiction. She was in and out of prison four times.

## God was merciful

Between prison stints, Sheaveal gave birth to six children—and lost custody of them all because they were born addicted to crack cocaine. Every time she was released from prison, she'd return to the unhealthy environments that encouraged her

addiction. She eventually became homeless.

But in 2011, everything changed. Sheaveal knelt in her hotel room and asked the Lord to deliver her from drug addiction. She had been using cocaine for three days straight.

"I just knew I was going to die, and I saw my kids' faces flash in front of my eyes," she says. "When I lay down, I tell you, I lay down to die."

But God was merciful. He woke her up the next morning. That day, she went to church. Before Sheaveal could leave the building, she was arrested for some outstanding warrants. She was later sentenced to five and a half years in prison. But still, she was at peace because she knew God had saved her.

*Continued on page 2*

# 5 Tips for Getting Along With Others

by Dillon Shaw

**P**rison 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 can grow in empathy.

*Continued on page 8*



# Letters to the Editor

## Alicia in South Carolina

I have pursued God and am working on strengthening my relationship with Him. I work at improving myself every day. I've gained a GED and intend to further my education. I'm always seeking more skills and resources. I would love if you would send me what you may offer. I appreciate you so much. Please keep me in your prayers.

## Maryann in Indiana

I would like to learn more about God and study the Bible more. Please send me more information on the Word of God. I'm so hungry for the Word of God and I have been looking for more.

## Felicia in Connecticut

[Reading Inside Journal] makes me so excited for what God is doing through others and your organization all around the nation.

I've always wanted to serve in a mighty way in God's Kingdom. I want to prepare for just that while I'm in here. What better time than now? ... I want to be successful when I leave here and never go back to the drugs and the lifestyle and the "friends" that are not right for me and aligned with my transformation. I wasn't so good with planning my future, but I feel myself more empowered with Prison Fellowship.

## Dear Alicia, Maryann, and Felicia:

*It's great that you all want to use this time to strengthen your education, your character, and your relationship with God. 'What better time than now' indeed! To see a full list of free resources we offer, please have your chaplain (or other staff member if your facility doesn't have a chaplain) visit [prisonfellowship.org/storehouse](https://prisonfellowship.org/storehouse). The list of our free resources includes financial planning brochures and addiction recovery*



Ekely: Getty Images

materials. When you approach your release date, visit [prisonfellowship.org/resources](https://prisonfellowship.org/resources) and scroll down to the section called "Preparing for Reentry." There you will find tips on writing a resume, a national reentry directory, and more. You can also visit [211.org](https://211.org) (or simply call 211) to find a community resource specialist in your area. Keep your heart fixed on Jesus. We'll be praying for each of you on your journey.

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.*



## Priceless Gifts

Continued from page 1

While in prison, Sheaveal was introduced to Prison Fellowship Angel Tree®, a program that connects prisoners' families with local churches, healing broken relationships and spreading the hope of the Gospel. During two of her prison sentences, she signed up for Angel Tree Christmas so her children could receive the Gospel and a gift delivered on her behalf. (For more information, see page 5.)

Though Sheaveal's children are now adults, they still remember Angel Tree. A couple of years ago, her son mentioned how happy he had been to receive the gift of a basketball from his mother during her incarceration. He thought she had forgotten about him and his siblings. He even slept with the ball because he knew it came from her.

Angel Tree gave Sheaveal's family a gift worth far more than anything purchased at a store—it gave the gift of connection. Sheaveal explains, "I

had no connection with my children [outside of Angel Tree]." Her children's caregiver didn't allow the kids to contact their mother. But their caregiver did allow them to participate in Angel Tree Christmas, through which Sheaveal's children received a personal note from her.

"I looked forward every year for Angel Tree to come around because that was the only way that my kids heard from me," she says.

## A godsend

When Sheaveal was released from prison in February 2017, she connected with New City Fellowship Church in Hollywood, Florida. For the past five years, she has worked as its outreach coordinator. Because she is still in recovery, she enjoys connecting with others who are also recovering from addiction and longing to hear the message of Jesus' healing. She introduces them to her church and its powerful sense of community.

Sheaveal asked her pastor about registering their church for Angel

Tree, describing it to him as "a godsend," and he approved. He knew how passionate Sheaveal had been about ministering to women in prison. At one point, Sheaveal was writing encouraging letters to more than a dozen women behind bars.

Now, she's serving as the Angel Tree coordinator for her church. She says, "The reason why I serve with Angel Tree is because it brought me joy. It brought my children joy—and a sense of peace on my end."

New City Fellowship has served families through Angel Tree for two years, and congregants have fully embraced it, sometimes reaching out to families long after Christmas.

Today, by the grace of God, all of Sheaveal's children are back in her life. Her relationships with each of them have been restored. And Sheaveal even has three grandchildren. God continues to bless Sheaveal every day. And she keeps on passing blessings onto others. ■



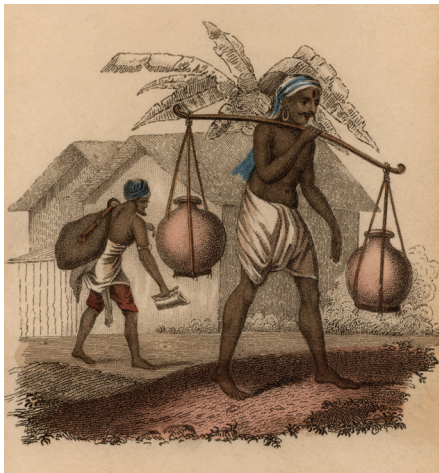
# Purpose Not Perfection: God Doesn't Make Junk

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."



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



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.



# Motherhood: 5 Tips for Parenting Behind Bars

by Lexi Aggen

One of the greatest gifts in life is motherhood—but parenting from prison can be challenging. Still, you can have a healthy and active role in your child’s life while behind bars. We asked several Inside Journal readers what their best parenting advice was and how they stayed connected to their kids. Here are some of our favorite responses:



Zheko - Boss/Getty Images

## 1. Don't let your incarceration define your motherhood.

Your relationship with your child may look different today than it did before you were incarcerated, but remind yourself that you are more than your mistakes or your circumstances. Despite the physical distance, you can stay emotionally connected to your children through talking, participating in events, making calls, and more. Get to know their hobbies and passions. Ask questions about their lives (see “Prompts” sidebar).

“Being incarcerated does not take away being a mom. It does, however, force us to be creative in the ways we stay connected with our kiddos.” —Karla

## 2. Create routines and traditions.

Make a schedule for when you and your children communicate and stick to it. Don't miss making a phone call or sending a letter. Create traditions with your children during this time. One reader always sang the same song to her children before she got off the phone with them. When her 1-year-old son visited her, it helped him identify her as his mom.

## 3. Send something personal to your child.

Giving them something physical to hold onto can help them feel like you are still present. When they have a bad day, they can give it a hug as if they are giving you a hug. One reader makes crocheted items for her children. (Be sure to follow your facility’s rules and regulations.)

“With every project I send home to them, I make sure to tell them that I put all my love in it, so when they wear the backpack or cuddle the blanket, I’m with them and my love is holding them!” —Allison

## 4. Maintain a good relationship with caregivers.

As hard as it might be to imagine someone else caring for your child, a healthy relationship between you and your child’s caregiver can benefit everyone involved. Don't compare yourself to or talk negatively about your child’s caregiver. And don't ask your child to choose between you and the person caring for them. When conflict arises between your child and their caregiver, help your child understand the adult’s point of view.

“It may not be easy but try to remember that it’s not so easy for [the caregivers] either, and this is for the kids we love so dearly.” —Stephanie

## 5. 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. ■

### 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](https://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](mailto: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 Cherise Bopape

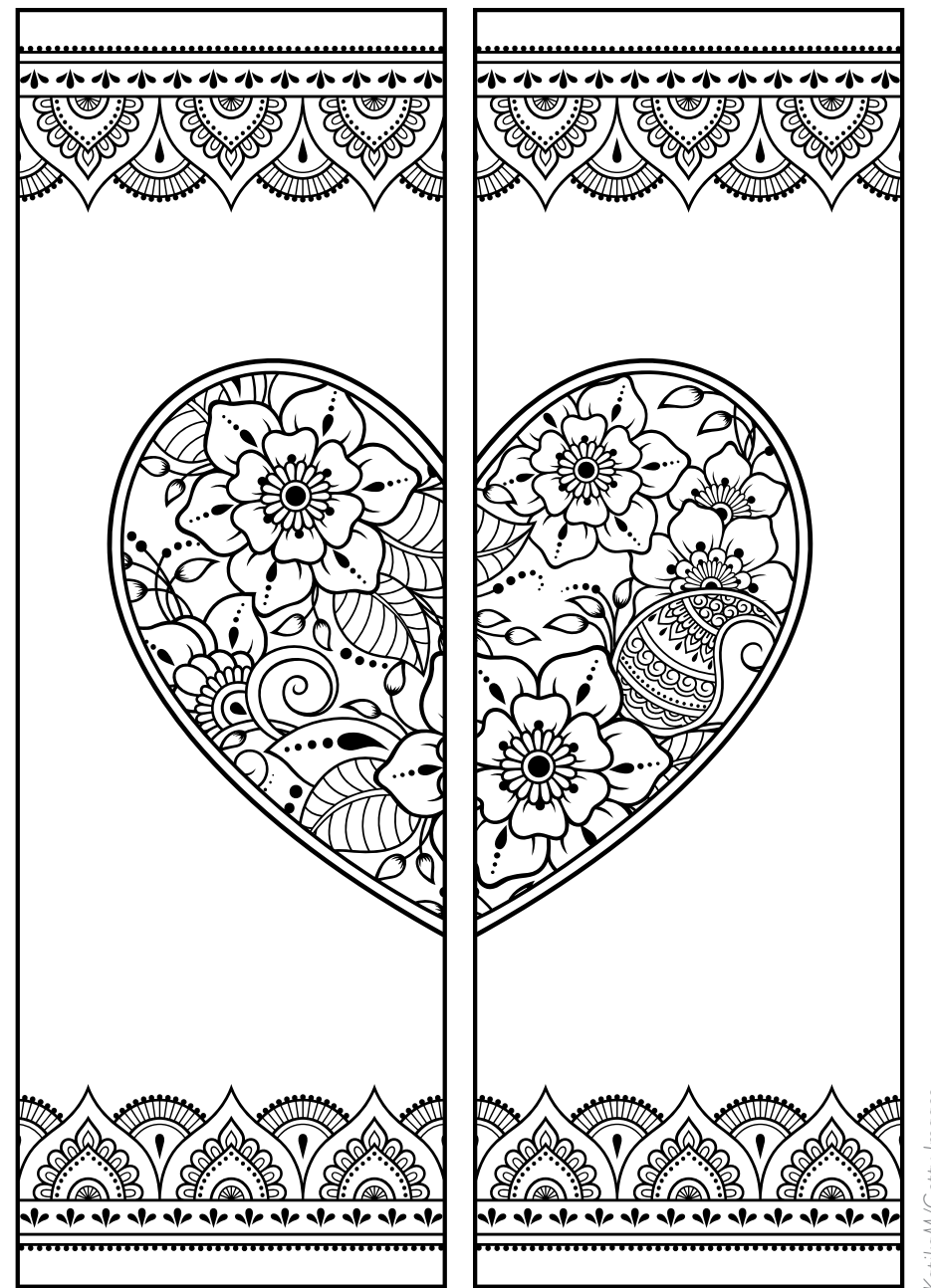
In prisons across the country, Super Bowl Sunday is a big deal. It’s a chance for viewers to enjoy football, halftime show performances, and of course, those big-budget commercials. But did you know the strategies behind a good advertisement can be used as a tool to help you parent your children? This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

Be Refined

Submitted by Heather in Connecticut

To remove impurities from silver and gold, they must be heated to temperatures above 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit. That’s extremely hot, right? Satan is the author of adversities that burn us. But God uses our suffering to cleanse us and mold us into the individuals He desires us to be. We all go through things. But we are called to obey God and to face our trials and troubles with courage and confidence. God sees within us great potential and beauty. And His desire is to cleanse us so we can become more like Christ. The truth is, when troubles come our way, and when our faith is tested, our endurance will grow (James 1:2-3). When we go through fiery trials, we ought to keep a positive outlook, knowing that great joy is ahead (1 Peter 1:6-7).

God often allows us to go through fiery trials in order to clean us up and bring us closer to Him. So if you are currently going through a painful situation, embrace it as an opportunity to grow closer to God and grow in your faith.

“Father, give me the courage to surrender to Your refining process and help me to be transformed into the person You desire me to be. I pray I will be a doer of Your Word, not just a listener.” ■

ZECHARIAH 13:9

“I will bring that group through the fire and make them pure. I will refine them like silver and purify them like gold. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘These are My people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’”

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-Cherry/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 Emily 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 Lexi 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 Lexi 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

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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