

INSIDE THE FIRE: MY

Prison Your Praise



Larry D. Morris, Jr.

# **INSIDE THE FIRE: My Prison, Your Praise**

**By Larry D. Morris, Jr.**

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Our present is a reflection of what our future may be, but our past is only a reflection of where we've been. Our future has yet to cast a reflection because it has yet to come, though for some the stains of their past will always distort the image and cloud the vision of such a nation, a society which is so unforgiving. Here are our many struggles, challenges and a few testimonies of those *Inside the Fire*. Not only can we find God, we can find ourselves. *My Prison, Your Praise* is an opportunity for you to do the same, without the scrutiny.

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## **Thank-Yous / Dedication**

Mom (and Tom)  
Dad  
Diana (step-mom)  
Matthew (brother and best friend)  
Kathleen (oldest sister)  
Michelle (sister)  
Ashley (cousin)  
Others (all others. . .)  
God (last, but not least)

This book is dedicated to those who've stood by my side through this entire process. To those who devoted their time to inspire me, encourage me, and motivate me. To those who saw the good in me and were not blinded by my crime. To those who did not abandon me for fear of undermining their reputation. Because of these individuals, I have become a better man, a better friend, a better person, and able to believe in myself. I thank each of you for accepting my apology and forgiving me of my ignorance. You each know who you are, but I would like others to know who you are. May God bless endlessly the following: Mom and Tom, Dad, Diana, Matthew, Kathleen, Michelle, and Ashley. Above all, I am grateful for God's guidance and forgiveness. Thank you all for not giving up on me. Thank you God for choosing to love me, rather than condemn me. I owe you all a debt of gratitude.

## Introduction

What does it take to be a successful writer? I haven't a clue. Every day I have something I could write in this book, but every day I also have this negative attitude about why I should even care to write it. Day after day I see suffering on TV and how cruel our world is becoming. I desperately want to help in any way I can, but I'm powerless. I'm useless. At least that is how I feel. If the world could use another Christ, I would volunteer. I would allow myself to be the sacrifice needed if I knew it would cleanse the stains from our very souls. Who else would actually volunteer for such a task? Of course I would, I care very little for my own life. Does that make it even worthy to give?

Time and time again I feel myself slipping into this negative pity-party. Why do I keep whining about myself? Not because I have it so bad. No, it's because I can't do a thing to help anyone. Okay, that's a lie. I can pray. But what good is a prayer from me if I don't believe in myself? If I don't have faith or confidence in my own prayers how could they possibly be answered? I have never felt so lost and confused as I have felt here in prison. Constantly feels as if I am on fire, running around like an idiot, unable to contain my own misery. Very few people have come to my rescue; however, those who have are wearing themselves out trying to douse the flames. The worst issue isn't the external flames though but the internal ones which are burning the most. In other words, I'm burning from the inside out. I can't seem to breathe. I'm suffocating from the fumes of too many past smoldering fires, awaiting my next brief burst of hope, just to set off a backdraft which irreversibly singes my very desire to exist. Yet, through all this doubt and ignorance I know there's still something out there for me. Why do I feel this? You might call it a desperation tactic. Although I lack trust in myself and faith in any thing I do, I know others believe in me. They are the reason I fight this black-hole within my soul. I shouldn't exist though. Theoretically, I should've died years ago. However, my very existence proves I do not control a damn thing. There are stronger forces, a higher power that isn't quite finished with me yet.

So, I've learned to accept my existence, my purpose or whatever it is and wait until I'm given instructions on where to go or what to do. I am like a vehicle equipped with a GPS device and God is my driver. Until He enters the destination, I am unaware of my journey. "Where He leads me, I will follow."

I have never known what it truly feels like to be humble until *this* journey. I am grateful for His choice in displaying such patience and mercy on my behalf, thus His saving my soul from eternal damnation. I am honored He chose me. Just like Paul, the author of many books of the Bible, I have been blinded and then given the true sight I was meant to see. Though, it's yet to be clear enough to fully comprehend.

Why do we as humans feel we are immortal or irreplaceable at times? What could we actually possess that would dignify our ignorant thoughts of conceit? We are merely molded structures consisting of the very particles we stand upon. I do not believe in the "Big Bang Theory;" though I enjoy the TV program (Hi Penny!) but if it were true, we are just particles of dust and other chemicals bonded to one another. If this theory were true, we are either an accident or a cosmic atrocity. I would rather believe we were each born with a purpose from a creator. Anything other than that and our existence is not only irrelevant but meaningless. This is why I am determined to gather my thoughts through my years of incarceration and

dedicate this vast amount of time God provided me to explore my mind, His word, the trials of others, and to incorporate them into a beneficial script for *all* mankind alike. I want to fulfill my purpose. God's purpose for me. To worship Him, praise Him, and to do my part in providing loving support to all those He places before me.

My intentions of authorship aren't to offend anyone, force anyone to comply with my ways, nor am I writing in hopes people will even believe my opinions. I simply want people to have a better understanding of a prisoner's life, my life, and others. I also comprised this story from many points-of-view and gathered several diverse inmates' opinions, their testimonies, compressing it into one message for you. I am not trying to convince, alter one's ego, beliefs or methods in which to live. This is merely one resource amongst many others to better enhance those who feel they lack enough information from an inside-view. My main goal is to help possible "future inmates" realize their need to make better choices. But if they still choose to take up residency in prison—educate them. The key word in that sentence is "choose." We all have a choice to choose our own destiny. Do you want to live a life full of joy "with your freedom" or a life of regret "without it?" Every step you make in life is a choice and one that *could* lead you straight to jail—no passing GO and not collecting \$200 (if only the game Monopoly would have been more convincing).

One phrase I heard in a Cognitive Therapy program which spoke to me was, "hurt people, hurt people." Isn't it time we stop expressing our pain through giving pain? Victims shouldn't make victims. Instead they should be advocates for others' healing. This trend has to stop somewhere. Why not now? I inspire anyone who knows someone with a criminal history to read this book, as well as those with the criminal history themselves. Also, anyone who just wants to educate themselves with an inside-perspective. The mind is an endless realm of possibilities, and knowing others' ventures in any situation should have relevancy.

May God grant me the blessing of saving at least one soul, through the following personal testimonies, advice and thoughts I've genuinely compiled.

## Prologue

"Where do I begin?" I ask myself. As an amateur artist and an avid writer, I not only read between the lines, around the lines and through the lines but sometimes I must *invent* the lines. There is no foreseen ending to the amount of energy one can put into art. Art becomes your precise definition of how you feel, how you perceive something, and a visual description of your emotional energy and thoughts derived from images flashing through your mind. Art can be an extreme concept to a simple design. The possibilities are endless. Life in itself is art. Every motion, action, and word paints a picture for reality to frame. This is where my story begins.

"David, don't touch that!" "It's hot and you'll get burned," my mother would inform me. Well, I was young and curious. Hell, if I knew what the word "hot" meant. So of course, I would touch the stupid stove or kerosene heater, therefore getting burnt just like my mom warned me. Does the fact I still touched it make *me* stupid or my mom an inadequate parent? No, it makes me human and my mom protective. Exactly how nature intended us to be. Some as the instructors, others as the learners. We influence others by every action. I believe this is explained by the law of cause and effect (a concern of the subject of metaphysics) where one event (cause) makes another event (effect) happen (*metaphysicalrevelations.com*. "Online Text of a Pamphlet Discussing Cause and Effect from the Standpoint of Theosophy." Accessed 29 Nov. 2017)<sup>1</sup>. To be bluntly honest, don't be the cause of someone else's inevitably destructive yet developmentally perceived effect. The end justifies the means, right?

## Testimonies

I have come to learn a story is only unwritten until you've been given a part or a chance to create your own character, thus painting your official perspective of any given subject in life. Well, I've "officially" accomplished that. Now my story needs to be heard. Not just my story but one comprised of several meaningful and unique individuals. Those who nearly had to sell their souls to still be in existence. There is always someone who has journeyed where you were not meant to go. Until we finally meet such a person, we may never believe this. In my case, I met several such individuals. "What are the odds?" I ask myself of befriending so many people meeting these criteria, in prison of all places, who literally "walked *in* the valley of the shadow of death." They did not walk through it, because this would suggest they clearly aren't currently suffering. This is simply *not* the case, which is why I stated they are walking *in* it.

Here I am whimpering of a heart ache, internally lost, confused, empty and utterly destroyed emotionally, yet I find myself not alone. These other men still find ways to express joy, sincerity, and continually try to lift others' spirits. Is this really what happens in prison? Can we really be fixed? Are we really worth the air we breathe? I hadn't thought so. Apparently, neither did these men and most importantly, their families. It's crazy the thoughts you actually conceive in prison. Where your mind ventures off to when you're alone and your family abandons you. My name is Larry (a.k.a. Dave...David) and I am grateful my *entire* family hasn't left me by the wayside. However, this isn't the case for many men in here.

Putting aside my own misery and focusing on the focal point, I will share similarities of our struggles and all other trials we've suffered thus far. How we handle it daily and even why we do. No one situation is completely alike, but as a whole we face indifferences we prisoners hope will change. Enclosed within this chapter are such struggles, especially the ones we dislike the most, our past. I am merely the tape recorder, capturing the dramatic voices of past changes we all go through some time or another in life. For instance, Peter, Joseph, Allen and Edward whose names I have changed for confidentiality are a few of the young men who've given me the inspiration, along with God's grace and mercy, to tell the world our testimonies, our dreams and our nightmares. How we came to be, who we are, and why society is completely ignorant of being "Inside the Fire."

That's right; we are inside a fire society seems to keep fueling by way of politics, the media, etc. We burn each day, some more than others. Besides our own personal "higher power," who really has the right to condemn us to hell? According to *Late Night with Stephen Colbert* and *The Steve Wilkos Show*, the entire public eye has that right. Maybe God should humble them, point out their faults on national television. In my opinion that's exactly how it will be, come the day of our judgement but by God Himself and not some earthly, imperfect, judgmental sinner who is simply hiding behind his own deceit. Obviously, there are good and evil people in the world but even they switch sides time to time. I believe this is why Paul was inspired to write:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (*King James Version*, Rom.3.23).



Yes, I know you may not believe in the Holy Bible, but I do. Once again, I'm not trying to change *your* beliefs, but I must stand on the foundation of mine which was built by my own experiences and understandings in life. If I were of no faith, it would still be obvious, as a whole, society seems to be getting worse. I rarely watch television, but I see enough of it through the background noise of daily living. I see the constant tragedies that are highly pronounced through media. The news becomes the world's commercial, their advertising —Fake News. I wonder why we allow such drama and why we project such ignorance. Then one day I am struck with an inner wave of electricity, lighting a bulb of thought. Society will not change until each person takes responsibility for their own actions. This includes you. However, for this to occur they have to *see* their own ignorance and negligence.

This fire we are consumed by will continue to engulf us, in overwhelming waves of searing flames, as long as we keep feeding its hunger. We need to at first acknowledge the source in which to smother it, as well as, understand the process by which it burns. To accomplish this we push ourselves to view our past. What created us and how did we become who we are? What was *our* main source of influence? Who is responsible for the initial lighting of the fire within our very souls? Although the Holy Bible states we are born into a sinful nature, some sinful ways must be "introduced." The ignorance of some is that we start our own bonfires. I do not believe this is always the case. If so, there would not be any victims. We would all be perpetrators to one or another person's demise. Is it possible all our sins are molded into our very existence, our genetic make-up long before we knew of their ramifications?

I would like you to listen closely to a few testimonies I've enclosed. Maybe you will see my point and be less eager to judge others. Maybe not. Keep in mind, this is not my justification for one's own actions. We all make our own choices. However, some times our choices become a direct resolution from an influential nature of reality itself.

## Joseph

"I hate you, leave me alone!" spoke an enraged Joseph. "Go to your room you pathetic little waste of space....Now!" scolded his mother.

".....AAARRHHGH...you don't understand!" demanded Joseph.

Joseph took off running through the kitchen, across the den, and up the stairs to his room. Along the way he kicked through some littered trash on the floor and slammed his fist into the oblique mirror hanging above the stair-landing, sending shards of pain through his wrist and glass amongst the floor. Unnoticed was the slice in his hand until he felt the warmth spreading across his fingers. Joseph tucked his right hand under his t-shirt to stop the bleeding. He was even angrier now. He was furious! Why didn't anyone ever understand him? No matter how he spoke to people they simply always misunderstood him. It's no wonder he's always being neglected by his parents and rejected by society.

"It's them, not me." "They're all a bunch of idiots." "I will just stick to myself and stop trying to be a part of anyone's life." "Maybe I'll just kill myself." "I hate them...I hate myself...I hate EVERYONE!!"

Among being emotionally and mentally abused, Joseph grew up in a household being severely beaten and undermined. He eventually became an orphan, unwanted, unloved, and abandoned by anyone who knew him. Not by his own demise but by the negligence of his non-supportive and

careless parents. Joseph began to internally encase his heart with the hatred of others. One might even conclude these individuals' actions developmentally changed him forever. We all need love and a sort of nurturing to establish a sense of self-worth and confidence. Without such support we begin a descent into negative development. Therefore, becoming an altered result of who we were designed to be, similar to the "Butterfly Effect" (*psychologenie.com*. "Explanation of the Popular Butterfly Effect with Fluent Examples." Accessed 19 Dec. 2017)<sup>2</sup>.

Our Creator has a specific purpose for each and every soul. This purpose can be interrupted by our own selfish ways and those of every other person(s) we encounter through life. Clearly, God's will, will be done by his steering us back to where He knows we will come upon our true purpose, thus living a successful life. Our stubbornness and ignorance can, however, stall this even up until we cease to exist.

## Allen

"No, Mommy!" Allen screamed while awakening from such a horrific nightmare. Only, he was replaying over and over in his mind and through his dreams the vivid encounters he keeps being put through. Of course we know that as readers but as young Allen is merely going with the flow. He's not yet developmentally capable of realizing what's going on.

Slowly awaking, Allen rolls over on the floor stretching his restless limbs. He tossed and turned all night. Why? You would too under such rugged conditions. Unfortunately, he was living in these less than desirable conditions. Allen crept to his knees brushing through the dirt, debris and left-over scrapes of food left from the mice and cockroaches accompanying his room while he slept. Well, it wasn't just his room. It was also his mother's room. His only two sisters slept in the other room down the hall. Imagine if you will, how the rest of the house was: paint peeling from bare walls, plaster cracking from the ceiling, mattresses of his mother's and his stacked atop one another across the floor, end tables encrusted with ashes, and cigarette butts over-flowing from their respective trays.

"Allen... get me my robe!" demanded his mother as she rose from the depths of her fantasies. Before Allen could even get to the bedside with her robe, she stood before him completely exposed. He tried to turn his head in shame for not making it to her first, but she glared at him anyway, leaving the room after snatching her robe. Disgusted with himself, Allen decided to skip breakfast again and head for school. He had lost his appetite anyway. "Time to escape one misery for another," he mumbled.

See, Allen feared going to school because he was subject to severe bullying and ridicule by his classmates. "What's so different about me?" he questioned himself in route to school. "Why do I go through such situations?" "Do other people face them too?" "Maybe the other kids are just better at hiding the pain." "Guess I will have to try a lot harder at hiding mine."

The other kids had obvious talents, athletic abilities; some could sing while others played instruments. Some were even well-liked. Popular. Allen just never seemed to fit in. He constantly questioned his existence throughout the school day. Then, finally, it was time to go home. However, Allen did not express the same joy to do so as other kids. It was his second misery.

Allen loved his mother but not how she treated him. He was constantly confused why she would make him do certain sexual things with her. Also, his mother's ever-changing boyfriends

hurt him too, while she watched. Each day became another dramatic episode of the worst "Believe It or Not." Many times Allen wished he could cast a spell or just disappear. Maybe he could make himself invisible. Of course, this just simply isn't possible.

Once home, the arguing began along with endless hours of torture. "Allen, get your ass in the house." "Why have you taken so long to get home from school?" scolded his mother.

"I'm sssorry Mom." "I guess I was walking too slowly," shied Allen as he entered into the room.

"Well, we are having company later, so I need you to go get me some more cigarettes."

"But Mom...???"

"Don't back-talk me!" his mother yells as she slaps him across the face.

"Now go...and hurry back." "I got plans for you," she sneered coyly.

Completely fearful and disgusted, Allen did as he was told.

Joseph and Allen are obviously both being neglected and abused in more than one way. There's no doubt about that. At an early age Joseph was merely a figment of imagination to his parents. They were too busy to even care for him. Sure he had a few nice things to occupy his time with but that was the extent of their love. Its price. All he yearned for was to hear the words, "I love you," or "I am proud of you."

Allen on the other hand had plenty of attention. But it was disgraceful attention, completely altering his ability to develop mentally as a normal child. Formulating Allen's testimony as an author, I must be careful not to cause readers to cringe yet compelled to give enough detail to depict a slight image of torture.

The purpose of my telling you these testimonies is a two-part scenario. One, so those of you who can relate, know you're not alone and two, so those of you who cannot, will be given a better perspective of why some people end up where they are. As I mentioned before, we aren't always the starters of our own forest fires. Somewhere along the way someone struck a match and exposed these men to circumstances in which they were too young to discern them as unhealthy and wrong. Once again, keep in mind this is not my giving justification for their future wrongful actions. Even God knew we would commit future sins, yet he never intervened. He simply sent His Son to die for those sins. I believe we are responsible for our own choices, however, seeing how statistics back this up, "hurt people, hurt people," we need to consider this before condemning others. There must be a connection of some sort to our developmental progression and our influences. Those of you, who are parents, please understand I am not undermining your raising of your children. As a parent myself, I know we struggle to do our best to properly influence our kids to rightful living. Though one must realize, without proper guidance ourselves while growing up, we become subject to as much error as did our parents.

## Peter

"Peter, can you tell me what you remember about these past allegations?" his counselor asked.

"I've already told you." "I was only three or four, and no, I don't remember."

"Well, then can you tell me how you feel about these allegations possibly being true?"

"Honestly Doc, I don't know." "I guess they could have happened."

"Peter, you're fourteen years old now." "There has to be something you remember."

"No, there's not." "I've obviously blocked it out or...something."

By his current age of fourteen, Peter had already been diagnosed with ADD, ADHD, bi-polar disorder and several depression issues. His parents placed him on whatever medications the doctors felt were necessary. They themselves already had their own "family" and health issues so why wouldn't their son? No matter the cost, Peter's parents were determined to figure out what was wrong with him. Contrary to their belief, Peter felt he was a normal kid but just not being understood. He was alone a lot with many questions about who he was and what he was feeling. Problem being, no one took the time to listen or ask the right questions. He was constantly subjected to therapists, psychologists, counselors and other forms of mental torture. They each looked at him with such suspicious eyes. He often felt a sense of guilt. Guilty of even existing. Only one person was there for him, his older brother. Though, not exactly as a real brother should be.

"Hey Peter, do you want to play this new game I got?" "It's all set up in my room," said his brother.

"YEAH, sure." "What's the game?"

"Does it really matter?" "I'll surprise you..."

"Awesome, let's go play it now." "I love the Xbox 360." "Does Mom know?" "You know I'm still grounded, right?" Peter said in a hurry.

"Nah, I won't tell her." "Plus I can't play right now." "I meant later tonight."

Nonchalantly, Peter lowered his head and said, "Yeah, OK...tonight."

Peter knew what that meant. It was sort of a code or in his opinion a lie. While their parents would be asleep from their multiple medications, Peter would once again be confronted with situations he couldn't explain. If only his parents would talk to him, would recognize the confusion in his eyes. But how could he possibly tell them what his older brother subjects him to and even his younger sister too.

In Peter's confused state, he eventually learned to accept these acts of torment as okay behavior. Once this acceptance took place, he alone would take the place of his brother in this subjection to others, including his youngest sister. Mentally, he believed this was normal behavior. That even other families bonded in such ways. He slowly grew numb to the shame.

I recently read a book titled, *Painting in the Dark* by Paul Thorson. If I'm not mistaken, Peter's situation is a reflection mirrored by this book, metaphorically speaking. There's no physical paint included but configure the painting as Peter's learning. Without the proper light, one's painting would be a hot mess. In Peter's case, "the blind was leading the blind." His brother's history of sexual abuse and neglect led him to teach Peter what he knew as normal. The cycle then repeated with Peter. Eventually, the whole house, or family was painted.

Each one of these testimonies is considerably different yet having similarities. We can

conclude and even understand there is some reasoning behind their actions. Although, we can't justify them, nor will we. However, we can learn to forgive them through empathy and being less-irrationalized thinkers. Your strength is determined by the choices you make every day. Your knowledge can increase your strength and stamina to overcome any temptation, even the one to judge others. Question is how do we honestly help those suffering from past occurrences? Those who are led down dark, unimaginable paths. Can we truly help them or are they lost for good? I believe the key in getting through to one's darkened past ways is to bring *your* lamp. Your lamp of God's word.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light unto my path (*KJV*, Ps. 119.105).

Show them the way to redemption with love and guidance. Don't just point your finger and walk away. We all become lost at times and lose our way. If you believe you have never lost your way, it's because you are being blinded by your own pride and ignorance. Even the strongest of us will fall. Make sure you are following the right light out of your tunnel. Don't be misled and don't mislead others. Some are so lost in their *pasts*, the darkness overwhelms them by casting a fake light of self-absorption.

## Edward

"Edward...EDWARD!!" his mother called out.

"What Mom?"

"You better behave yourself or your father will have your ass when he gets home."

Reluctantly, Edward obeyed his mother's command knowing fully she wasn't aware of the accuracy of her statement. Edward retreated to his bedroom to play some video games trying desperately to erase the thoughts and visions flashing through his mind.

"Hey Eddie...watcha doin'?" his eldest sisters asked.

"Ummm... I'm kinda busy right now but-"

"Well, we're coming in anyway," his sisters spoke in unison, while rudely invading his privacy. "We want you to play a little game with us...You wanna play?"

"No!" Edward quickly denounced, refusing to even glance at them.

"It's a really cool game, a secret game and really fun."

"I told you, no!" Edward exclaimed while concentrating on his game.

"Fine, have it your way!" they scolded as they pouted and ran out of his room angrily.

Edward was so thankful they left. He loves his sisters, but sometimes they, along with his older brother, make him engage in things he...well, things that confuse him. Part of him likes the attention, but he knows deep down it's wrong. Sometimes he has to fight his own cravings to play the game "by himself." "It must be okay if his dad, sisters and brother do it. Right?" The only thing he doesn't understand is why his mom doesn't play the game, or why she's okay with them playing it. "Maybe she doesn't know about it," he thinks to himself. "She would have to know?" he mutters to himself. "If she doesn't know then—"

"Hey little Eddie...we've come to play." "So put your games away you little liar." "You know what happens when you refuse," his brother boldly interrupts.

"Please, I'm just not...umm...I don't feel like playing."

Slowly his sisters began to caress his face, laying him back upon his bed. They ran their fingers through his long, jet black curls. The hairs on the back of his neck began to rise and his toes started to curl. He felt so ashamed, yet the pure ecstasy released through his veins drew him to attention in more than one way.

"That's a good boy." "You know we love you." "Why do you always fight the urge to return our love?" "This is what real families do," said his sisters as they took turns expressing their love for him physically.

"Just lay back and relax Eddie, or we'll tell Dad," professed his brother.

Disinclined Eddie began to succumb to their pleasant tortures. Laying back on his bed, Edward closed his eyes tightly just before seeing the fullness of his siblings' bare features. Half shivering, Edward cringed while they surrounded him, fondling him from head to toe. Inside he is screaming, but he knows he will have to face his father if he lets it be known what happens behind closed doors. So he stays quiet and still, venturing in his mind to seek shelter outside this realm of despair. Though it's too difficult to erase the sensual forces currently arousing him; he is forced to use his extremities to please their foolish desires.

How could he hate his siblings for internally making him feel so great? Somewhere deep down he knows there's a special bond growing for them each time they endure these secret encounters. "Yes, this is okay." "I've never felt so loved..." he mutters to himself, giving way to his own evil cravings. "This must be how true love feels."

Born in a small town in New Jersey, Edward was one of six children. He eventually learned to adapt to change from the many times they moved and his making of new friends. This later helped him blend into his future environment. His father was an alcoholic who abused every member of the household, including Edward's mother. Edward spent countless nights praying he wouldn't fall prey to the sexual torture of his father and his older brother and sisters. He was exhausted mentally from being their favorite toy. His silence of their deviant encounters was driving him to an endless confusion. "Why me?" he would often utter to himself, crying himself to sleep. "Why do I feel so dirty yet so loved at the same time?" was a question burning through his soul. Edward spent many years going through this until his father was arrested and sent to prison for, ironically, being accused of sexually abusing his oldest sister.

When he was eleven, Edward and his sisters were interjected into foster care. Moving from family to family, hoping they would be accepted and not separated. After all, they were too close to separate. Edward's sisters were more liked, and it was inevitable they would be separated. Years later this came to be.

While in foster care Edward found himself easily attaching to anyone who showed him the slightest attention. On one occasion he began having a sexual relationship with a fellow best friend's mom who was 39 years of age (remember he was only 15). After this relationship ended, Edward began cutting himself to release the pain. Unfortunately, this came to be an addiction causing him to be hospitalized as a patient at Rockford Mental Hospital until they felt he was no longer a threat to himself or anyone else. Ironically, while in *their* care, a specific staff member and he became attached. This infatuation grew to her becoming pregnant. Though they felt they were in love, they regrettably chose to abort the child. Mainly because they feared someone would connect-the-dots, plus Edward was still underage. Shortly thereafter, this relationship ended, resulting in his relapse; he began to cut himself again. This one form of pain seemed to

mask the other pain and became easier for him to deal with. Fortunately, Edward was blessed to be adopted and began to feel loved genuinely for the first time in his life.

When pain and ill-fortune enter our lives what do we do to cope? How do we get through situations that feel unbearable at the moment? I've heard, "Time heals all wounds," but I've experienced the false reality of that. Time does not heal shit! What feels like healing is the next pain superseding the prior one. Therefore, one pain covers the next pain and so on. We never truly forget any of these painful memories, but we can learn from them. As odd as it sounds, "what hurts us *does* make us stronger." Then again some do not accept this growth, causing them to spiral downward into a pit they are never released from. Mentally they suffer their most prominent hurtful events in present and future times continually.

How do we help those who've fallen? Can they be helped? Do they even want to be helped? Do we have a duty to help our fallen friends and even enemies? How can we devise a "one-size-fits-all" theory to ensure each person is treated fairly, taking into consideration all they've been through? Who should reside over such a task? After all, aren't we all sinners?

Help? What does it mean to help someone? Is punishment help? What works for one doesn't work for all. Take for instance my dear friend Maggie. Now that's not her real name but a special name given to her by me. I call her "Poor Maggie."

Some days Maggie is afraid and confused though she's never in any physical pain. Some days she exists more than others and some days I can relate to her too. Here's Maggie's story. See if you can relate to her.

## **Poor Maggie**

Maggie grew up like any ordinary young girl in a healthy little town in eastern Ohio. She was full of life, energy, and ready to take on any journey God placed before her. Without a clue of where she would end up, each day Maggie began with a skip in her step and a smile on her face. Her adventures in life waited just around the corner. See, Maggie loved nature: the trees, the meadows, the sweet sound of nature's busy birds and buzzing bees, the rustling of leaves and the little creatures scurrying about.

Maggie would venture deep into the woods in search of the perfect climbing tree. You know the type, with their limbs stretched out to the heavens. Maggie loved climbing trees. It enlightened her spirit and gave her a wonderful sense of being free. Maggie would close her eyes atop the branches and imagine swinging through grapevines, flying through the wind like an eagle or just floating motionless like a cobweb in the air.

Of course, Maggie knew these things were impossible for her because she didn't exist. Sound confusing? Try being Maggie. As a matter of fact, put yourself in Maggie's shoes. Then again Maggie doesn't have shoes, let alone feet. Imagine your own life doesn't exist but only in your mind or someone else's. This is sort of how Maggie feels. She wants to be free to live life, but she just can't escape from the entrapped mind she exists in. How can this be, you may ask? Well, when you close your eyes and fall asleep, who do you become? Are you still yourself? Can you really *choose* to be what you want or who you are when you fall asleep? Maybe you're just unplugged from your own command center? Maggie has been trying to figure this out for years to no avail. The main question on Maggie's mind is "How do you know what is real and what

isn't real, if you aren't in control when you sleep?" "Did you just fall asleep in this realm or did you just wake up in the next?"

In other words, let's say Maggie *is* real. When she falls asleep, where does she actually go? Physically, she is still in her bed, right? Considering this as truth, then her thoughts just carry her to other dimensions called dreams. What if all these dimensions, extensions of your mind, were inter-connected to a source that really isn't you?

Have you ever heard of the phrase, "think before you speak?" I have but it really makes no sense to me. In order to speak you must have already had a thought to speak. Right? Maybe I'm missing something. Maybe the meaning is more complex. Obviously our reaction time to our thoughts and our actions are connected, but what makes our choices to react while we are asleep? Who's in control, if we aren't? Yet if we are in control then how is it possible to have a lapse in your memory of specific events?

Poor Maggie feels this way and can't seem to unravel the mess existing in her mind. Then again, maybe Maggie *is* the clutter. Poor Maggie just wants to know who she is and how she can know she is who she thinks she is.

The real question is, "Can you seriously be trapped inside your own mind?" Maybe this is something only God can answer. Maybe it's like a conceptual physics class, just a concept with no definitive proof.

Maggie knows she loves God and feels her answers will be given to her soon, but she's desperate to find herself now. She patiently waits for her next sign in life, though, as you and I do. However, Maggie's situation is slightly different than yours and mine. Remember, Maggie does not even physically exist. Well, at least she's not sure she does or so the voices at least tell her she doesn't.

Do you ever feel like you don't exist? Be honest. Like you're only a useless pawn on life's chess board. I believe Maggie hasn't found her purpose in life, giving her a false perception of life. Then again, that is part of life—finding oneself.

### **My Testimony-Larry (a.k.a. David)**

In writing my own testimony I will admit, I am not as eager to tell the world. Not because I don't want those to be helped or for some to empathize but because I still struggle with self-worth: accepting myself. Writing others' testimonies it became easier to sympathize. However, I'm not one who enjoys giving people ammunition to fill my armor full of holes. Then again I believe this is a form of my own therapy and will help me heal, by putting things behind me.

I believe in God's will, but I also believe in reason. There is a reason for everything, even if we do not fully understand it. Sometimes we make unconscious bad decisions to better understand how to make conscious good decisions. Meaning we practice in our dreams or through our mistakes.

The book of Romans in the Bible concludes our fleshly desires are responsible for such instances. But don't we control our flesh? You would think so. The book of Romans further points out our intentions to do good yet our inability to consistently do so. Whether one believes in God's word or not, it's obvious this is true. Unintentionally we tend to hurt one another through our negligence and ignorance. Our emotions draw the worst out of us sometimes.



Am I a bad person? No, I don't think so. Am I sick, demented, an evil-provoking person? No. Are my thoughts always pure? No, they're not, are yours? Most people I know have enjoyed my company and my advice. However, recent choices left me veering down the wrong path. They led me astray, away from all who love me, depleting my ability to witness for God and to others. Though I do believe God is slowly restoring this blessing to me through these words. He believes in me as I should. I have willingly admitted my imperfections, my faults, and come humbly before him. Through this obedience, He alone will speak to you through these pages. May you be comforted and brought peace with the lifting of your burdens through spiritual healing.

It's possible the whole world can't unite in peace, but we can have a sense of inner joy and peace. Nobody can deny you what *you* have control over. But this doesn't mean some won't try. The real question we ask is, "What do we really have control over?" I know for a fact there were many times when I was young I didn't have control. Although, it's difficult not to blame myself for my morbid sense of insecurity or should I say, "my curiosity." My curiosity led me to deceiving others and also brought the wrong attention to me. As a young man I was undergoing changes in my body which I had no explanation of why they were occurring. This is why I urge you parents to step in and warn your children. Talk to them. If you don't, someone else will, therefore teaching them the wrong lessons and giving them the wrong impressions.

I was a good little boy. Loved by all until I was polluted. Most kids are though, and yet the pollution comes in many forms. I'm sure my mother remembers one evening when she caught me watching pornography. She scolded me saying, "What are you doing?" "That crap will pollute your mind." "Don't ever let me catch you watching that filthy, undermining garbage ever again." I felt so ashamed and upset; I let my mother down. I was only eleven years old. If only I could have explained to her how I was brought to watching it and how I was exposed to even more vivid versions of it. It's still surprising to me she never knew or wasn't even slightly apprehensive. No one in my entire family knew of this misguidance, except those who controlled it.

How is it *my* being victimized was never brought to anyone's attention? I gave so many clues. How come I had to endure the circumstances others put me through, yet they were never punished for it? I wasn't afraid of them but worse, I loved them. I looked up to them as role models. They were a few of the most important people in my life. Forever, this is branded in my mind, my memories, my entire being. I can't get any of it out of my head. It became scar tissue glazed across my heart, as a wound that haunts my dreams.

Through faith and my beliefs in my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I have forgiven them. The "forget" part is however a level I haven't been able to rise to yet. With time I am assured to reach such a level but until then I try to focus on the realization it's a part of my past. And, our present is a composition of whatever we allow to be part of it. I'm eager to relinquish these psychoactive disturbances. They put too much strain on my ability to accept myself.

Did you know your self-image can affect the entire population around you? Also, without some sort of complacency you'd be easily subjected to depression, suicide, and being anti-social. These attributes are obviously negative and lead directly to a life of self-indulgence. This could cause a ripple effect on those around you. How does this happen? From you being blinded by another's possessiveness. They no longer see the world as they should. They entrap themselves in a womb of protection, therefore becoming consumed, subconsciously by their own ignorant rationalizations. This is my theory on why I came to make so many hurtful mistakes. Ultimately, leading me down an alternate path God never intended for me to travel.

The good news is God is guiding me through my suffering, bringing me to the end of this unenlightened void. Here's two scriptures I just came upon that help explain.

The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work (*KJV*, 2Tim.4.18a).

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy (*KJV*, Ps. 126.5).

There's only one problem with this whole scenario. My mind has developed its own infinite entity of power. Some call it arrogance. It's a character defect that has taken me over thirty years to attach to myself. To protect myself. Keep in mind, it's nearly impossible to see past your own justification. Both of my ex-wives would tell you so. Before my incarceration I lived the past six years married, never believing I was wrong. I swore for the life of me every one was out to get me. That I was being cornered or set up. Can we say "paranoia?" Where did the real problem lie? Deep within the protective shell encased around my heart, my soul: me. This was my defense mechanism. Sadly, it took prison to break through it, along with God's chastening and the reality of losing my recent wife and our children. May they one day forgive me of my ignorance, lack of dignity, and shameful behaviors. Until then I will continue battling my dreams and nightmares, striving to be a better man. I'd rather do the latter than keep viewing the uploaded projections racing through my mind as if being attached to an internal web page. Time to clean my slate, to erase the messages, and delete the images of my past. If only it were that easy.

You may notice while reading my book I tend to veer from one point to another. I use to laugh at such things as my interrupting myself, thinking of another thing to say, just to interrupt myself again. There seems to be no "Hansel and Gretel" in my mind. I simultaneously fight to find the right words while trying to seclude my own mind from the hidden truths I've lived. There is no tide to rush in and wash away the foot prints of my sins; they are forever imprinted on my yellow-brick road. I only hope when I finally reach "Oz," He can magically cast them aside. Though I know I am not the only wanderer on his way to Emerald City. If only we all could gather together and help one another. Working as the team God intended us to be instead of our current judging of one another and betrayals. No wonder so many suffer from depression.

Speaking of depression, you'll soon read a few of my poems...etc. about where my past has taken me mentally. However, I want to express a few more not- so obvious points about myself and the often feared D-word. For example, currently I am not on any medication for depression or anything really. Do I still feel depressed on a daily basis? Of course I do, I live a depressing life. And see, that's the problem with people like me. We have everything we need. God has given me several comforters in my life. He has blessed me with not only a loving mother, a guiding father, a few protective and caring sisters but also a few special friends. None of which who've left my side. Yet am I grateful? Well, of course I am. The question really is, "Do I show God that I am grateful?" To that I must answer a resounding "No, I do not show Him my gratefulness." In showing how grateful I am for such continued love, inspiration, and support I should be living a joyful life. But I'm not. I'm miserable almost every day. Why, you ask? Well, because I'm depressed. What am I depressed about? I am depressed because I miss my children. I am depressed because, though I try to have faith, I feel my life's purpose is depleted by my own

fault, no one else's. I know God can lead me out of this pit of despair I wallow in, but the real question is "will I let Him?"

Medication will not help me through these internal struggles. Friends and family, though needed, won't bring me out of the depths which I've fallen to, and even my Savior Christ Jesus won't. See, these things are all placed in our path to encourage us not to give up on ourselves, to see reason to fight and to want to change where we are. But we must "do the work." Only you can fix you; others are only around to influence and give support. Though you have to *want* to be fixed, to change. And I want this change. I want to be joyful again. Do you?

## Depression & Poetry

To be professional let's start with the definition of depression. In this case we will concentrate on the second part.

Depression: 2: an act of depressing or a state of being depressed: as **a**: a pressing down: lowering **b** (1) a state of feeling sad: dejection (2) psychoneurotic or psychotic disorder marked especially by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, a significant increase or decrease in appetite and time spent sleeping, feelings of dejection and hopelessness and sometimes suicidal tendencies.

This is an incredibly long definition for it to only be considered a mood or even irrelevant. I included most of the definition for a reason. Depression is becoming more prevalent with the increase in technology and advancements in medical research. Society is becoming less involved as a single unit and keeping more to themselves. Although, there are still some social butterflies fluttering about trying their best to be the adhesive we need to adhere to. However, I will not pretend to be a medical professional. I dare not include too many of my own pretentious claims, just to be criticized even more. The individuals' testimonies you read through were at least being evaluated by medical professionals at one time or another for depression, due to their situation and lacking ability to cope with the conditions of their environment. Not by my command. I'm only observing them because of my curiosity and concern for their well-being. Plus, I'm included in the above statement. I was medicated too for my own personal reasons.

Furthermore, the institution we are held at has its own mental health services. Under normal conditions individuals are given reasonable opportunities to express *their* personal issues with the staff. The honesty of inmates to mental health staff is quite questionable though. Then again, why wouldn't it be? Who can *we* really trust?

For instance, here's one of my favorite questions asked by staff, "Are you having any suicidal thoughts?" or "Are you having any thoughts of hurting yourself or others?" Being a victim of the justice system we inmates all know "the truth" does not set you free. Matter of fact, if you *were* having suicidal thoughts and told them the truth—they cuff you up and take you straight to a personal cell of your own, strip you of your clothes and belongings, leaving you in this cold, damp room with no blankets or sheets until you can be further evaluated. Evaluation includes a physical search of all your extremities and continues with relentless questions of your mental stability.

During your stay on "suicide watch" you will be given hourly checks to correct your former statements, in which you learn quickly to say, "No, I'm not suicidal nor going to hurt anyone else." After a specified amount of time you become cleared from one level to another until you are finally returned to your former housing. It's more than obvious why I know all this. Thanks to my previous wife I witnessed this first hand. It becomes obvious here you never tell them exactly how you feel. Their interpretations can only cause you more grief. Rarely do they ever treat you with more respect by being honest.

Here's the contradiction, people with true suicidal thoughts temporarily care very little for their lives or even yours. Whether intentionally wanting to hurt themselves or just wanting attention this is a serious matter. The problem is, this level of depression causes a person to feel unloved, neglected and as if no one cares about them, no matter how many times you do tell them you care. This becomes the wrong time for "sympathetic gestures." I believe this is why depression defines itself as psychoneurotic and psychotic. It's an internal imbalance that anyone could face, thus introducing you to a whole different *you*. So I ask that you be vigilant of your surroundings and honest with yourself.

I have enclosed a few examples of some "personal states of depression" and "suicidal thoughts." Once again, the names are changed or extracted for confidential purposes.

May 9, 2014

Today my wife threatened me over the phone. She said she is moving away to Pennsylvania with her new lover. She said she is taking *our* son away from me and it's *all* my fault. I am beyond upset with her to the point I could kill her with my bare hands. I am starting to despise women in general. My being in prison has nothing to do with my son. Instead of her helping me and being here for me as she vowed, she's leaving. Abandoning me! She said our son doesn't need to see me anymore. The woman I married and loved endlessly has just signed my death certificate. Now I can't stop thinking about how to end this misery. Why does God feel I should still have any purpose left to live? Honestly, why? I have so much anger built up in me. Why did she turn on me? What did I ever do to her, besides love her for the past eight years? She said I was cheating on her with my best friend, Jena. That's a complete lie fueled by her jealousy. She's overreacting. Does it matter anymore? Not really. What's done is done. I am sorry Lord, but it's time. I've tried to hear You, but You're not listening to me. I want the pain to end and You're letting it continue. You said You'd comfort me. People hate me. I hate me. I love my wife and son, but You took them from me. Why? Please take my breath away or You leave me no choice. I wish I just had a knife to dig out the pain in my chest. How can people think so lowly of me when I've loved them, fought for them, cared for them? Anyhow, this letter will be left to be found. Guess you can call it my goodbye or a last will and testimony.

So, here it goes. First, I love you Mom and Dad. You gave me life, but I didn't ask for it. Maybe I was your mistake. Sorry if this upsets you, but I'm weak and tired. Not your fault though. It's mine. It's always been mine. I make people miserable. At least that's what my wife says. Well, even my ex-wife would agree. So it must be true. All I will be is a faded memory. I don't even want to be that. If people can't love me when I'm alive, or I wasn't "good enough" for them, they don't need to mourn me now. Thank you Mom for always trying to bring me back. Thank you Dad for trying to be here for me now, but it's too late. Sorry.

To my wife, all I can really say is, "Why?" You know how deeply I've loved you and what you mean to me. Why would you let one mistake ruin that? Once again, too late now.

To my daughters, this is probably what you wanted anyhow. How could you have conspired against me like you did? I thought you knew how much I loved you. So, you're welcome. Wish granted. For the record, I loved you each with all my heart and soul. Sorry, I wasn't the dad you wanted.

To my son, my precious little boy. I'm sorry to you the most, but I couldn't dare face you when you're older about why I'm in here. The memories I'll miss, is killing me. Be good to your mother. She needs you and you need her. I will always be in your heart. I love you, son. I hope you never have to walk in my shoes. You will be a better father, dad, because of this.

To my sisters, I am sorry I wasn't the perfect brother. I hope your lives become better and you learn to open up and love each other.

To my supposed friends, enjoy life to its fullest. Never be ungrateful for what you have. Give to others. Cherish what you have because it can be taken away from you. Thank you to those of you who took the time to care for me and get to know the real me, and accepted all my flaws. Keep God number one in your lives and don't ever forget what we had.

To my best friend Jena, "My Punk." While I write this you are a major reason I keep trying to convince myself not to do it. However, I can't live for "what-ifs" and "maybes." Currently, your friendship means the most to me. But it just doesn't mask the pain. I love you and hope you never forget me. I am sorry I let you down.

If today doesn't work, it's only a matter of time before it does. I am sort of scared though. Why? Because if I stay, I end up hurting people unintentionally. If I go, people will be hurt, too. I can't win. I pray God gives you all one of my many guardian angels when I go. They are of course no longer of any use to me. My life means nothing to me. No, that's wrong. My life meant everything to me; it's my death that means nothing. Life is too painful and I am tired of seeing the people I love being hurt. I'm sorry God. You are almighty and powerful and I feel You shouldn't let Your people or anyone suffer. Life should be what You originally planned. It's time to collect Your people and end all this. Start anew. You said Yourself, You were coming back. So let's go! Do it now. You don't have to take me but take everyone else in my place. Yes, we are all sinners, but we deserve to be joyous eternally. That's why people have hatred in their hearts and do evil. They feel lost and unloved. Alone. Abandoned. Free Your people. Free me. I surrender my all to You. Actually, I have nothing to surrender, You already took it all. You're welcome. Sorry, way off track here. I'm rambling, venting. Not good. Might save me. Anyhow, not sure what else to write just now. Nobody will *hear* this anyway. I'm never heard unless I am wrong.  
The End

November 7, 2014

I am utterly sick of having these thoughts just randomly popping into my head. Why is it I can't have a good time without someone ruining it? Then I get slightly upset, I pull out my pictures only to become depressed again. Am I not supposed to look at them? Am I supposed to forget my family exists? Well, too bad, God, not going to happen. Looks like You're going to have to make me stronger, let me die or bring them back. That's not a threat and no, I'm not tempting You; however, You do need to make a choice for me. I am tired of suffering. May not look like it, but inside I am torn apart. I miss my kids, Lord. I miss my family. I miss my best friend. Obviously, I've failed You. Get over it already. I am testing something tonight. Just a test, but if I'm lucky this will be the last I write. I'm just sick of looking at the blank stares on my kids' faces and their disappointment in their pictures. It's utter torture.

People here seem to think I'm rich. Constantly using me. Well, let me tell you something my friends, "Money doesn't buy my happiness." It's all material crap temporarily satisfying you. Thank God mental health personnel don't know my thoughts right now. Hell, if my Christian brothers knew, they'd smack me upside my head. Some might be grateful though if I could be deleted. I am grateful for all I have, especially the people who write me, but why can't I receive a letter from my wife or son or even my best friend or daughters. Don't they know how hurt I am by all this? Do they care?

My mom and dad will always love me no matter what. That's what great parents do. But my wife and kids... what will they do if I depart tonight? Will they remember me? Will they seriously even care? God, I hate this. I have to continue living, suffering, just so I don't hurt a few people's feelings? My heart hurts. How can I even let this bother me? People here barely know me. I've tried to make a difference in their lives but seem to get nowhere. The Holy Spirit must not be a part of me as I thought. Time for me to move on to a different realm. People act friendly but most don't even care. I can't tell the difference anymore. God does watch over some people in here. They are much stronger than I am. If only people knew how weak I really am. I wish I could *fold* this hand of life. Bring me home Lord. Please... You promised.

As you can see from these letters I was quite distraught. Some people may feel they are just a lot of complaining and we inmates should "shut-up and do the time." Well, we are doing the time, but the extreme changes of prison can shake the strongest of anyone's faith. Prison is a mental desecration, a game. Mixed with emotional realizations of your new atmosphere, this can devastate your mental stability. Without continual support and reassurance from others we

become dependent on our own experiences. Another inmate's opinions can become facts of our lives, even though they are merely judging us for personal gratification.

The mental health staff who evaluate us give off the impression they despise their own jobs. How can we believe what they say if their actions say, "rot in hell, you sick bastard...I hope you burn for your crime." First impressions do say a lot for both sides.

There are a few more ways people deal with their own depression than I know but enclosed are the ways I came across. Some people vent through writings, whether sounding suicidal or not. Once written down a sense of relief is found. As if you just took some sort of soothing medication. Though sometimes it can just make you angrier. Only you will be able to find what works for you. For me, I find the process of writing poetry helps me escape the binding grasps of my mind's grip. Writing and poetry can also be productive while it heals.

Poetry is a rare form of art in my opinion. But as in any art, the artist/poet expresses him/herself, drawing on attention of the viewer /reader. It's a challenge trying to unravel the mystery of another's mind. Though adventurous it can also be quite informative and educational. Here are a few I wrote.

## "Incomplete"

Anxiety...anxiety this feeling in my chest,  
Anxiety...anxiety put this discomfort to rest.  
Streaming thoughts and impulses, I black in and out;  
Emotions and anger make me want to scream and shout.

Anxiety...anxiety to what do I owe this pain?  
Anxiety...anxiety my heart continuously feels the strain.  
Tension and tightness I seem to lose my breath;  
Eradicated emotions and visions display my needless death.

Depression...depression I sink further from myself;  
Depression...depression my life is but an empty shelf.  
Once filled with precious diamonds, silver, and gold,  
Now useless, unwanted, no longer loved is what I'm told.

Depression...depression why should I even try anymore?  
Depression...depression I drag myself out the door.  
Empty and emotionless I barely strive to be;  
Without God's light, these walls would be the death of me.

Written March 2014



## **"Spliced Yet Split"**

If I am here and you are there,  
Then you are here and I am there.  
Different times and space we ultimately share,  
United as one our flesh needs no pair.

Connected by love, God, and faith blended through,  
No man-made object may break the bond we grew.  
Separations just a word and distance is too,  
But neither are strong enough to keep me from loving you.

Written January 2014

## "Longing"

The longing tide influences the sea,  
Which your warm embrace does for me.  
Images of a life without you I am stubborn to see;  
A fractional price yet simply not free.  
No matter what trial, toil, or burden,  
I won't turn back or ignore what's given.  
Let the devil taunt me and stand in my way;  
Let my faith and my hope be strengthened I pray.  
He gives me courage, will power, and lightens my path,  
Though gained by a life taken by God's great wrath.  
Eternally, I am at His mercy, as I've been all my life,  
Although oblivious to it all, until the loss of my wife.  
Your love and my love are united as one,  
Not by me, nor by you, but by what God hath done.  
He chose you for me and me for you too,  
To love and to cherish one another through and through.  
For better or for worse we must accept what He bound,  
Each completing the other, a match heaven found.  
To comply with his grace, love, mercy divine,  
Forgetting past mistakes, while keeping one another in line.  
Your path runs parallel, right next to mine,  
Which may glide together and eventually intertwine.  
Till then above my heart remains a half-broken key,  
For the one washed upon the shore to set me free.

Written February 2015

## "One To Come"

My mind's indecisive at this simple proposal,  
With guided missiles at my disposal.  
Ready to launch at my eager command,  
Are predetermined destinations of where they'll land.

Once and for all the courage I gain,  
To release this vengeance and overcome the pain.  
Not to just hurt, bruise, or simply be lame,  
But to destroy, to dispose of, and utterly maim.

Though knowing this won't even solve a thing,  
But sadness and grief to others it will bring.  
Fulfilling a desire I've held deep within,  
Through past, present, and future are these layers of sin.

"Press the button and watch them soar;"  
I say with a grin, while wishing I had more.  
Awaiting the image when they reach their destination,  
The time has come to witness her total devastation.

Count down begins before impact is final.....  
Ten....nine....eight, patiently I await,  
Seven....six....five, she's barely alive,  
Four....three....two "What did I do?"

Written April 2014

## "Alone"

I feel like a sailboat with no wind.  
I feel like a tree with no leaves.  
I feel like an eagle with no wings.  
I feel like a desert with no sand;  
    every day, constantly I feel utterly alone.  
I feel like a rose with no petals.  
I feel like the ocean without a shore.  
I feel like the night sky with no stars.  
I feel like a book with no pages;  
    every day, constantly I feel utterly alone.  
I feel like a movie with no picture.  
I feel like a picture with no frame.  
I feel like a printer with no ink.  
I feel like a mattress with no sheets;  
    every day, constantly I feel utterly alone.  
I feel like a song with no harmony.  
I feel like a drum with no beat.  
I feel like a solar system with no planets or stars.  
I feel like a human being with no matter;  
    every day, constantly I feel utterly alone.

Written August 2017

## "A Rage Within"

"W.T.F." is an acronym I dare not express,  
exploding with emotions I struggle to suppress.

Mixed with others whining and tempers that flare,  
encouraging me to slit my wrists or pull out my hair.

Each for their own, guarding our turf you'll see;  
instincts handed down through our own pedigree.

This arrogance and ignorance seeps out every pore,  
rotting with maggot-eaten flesh straight to its core.

Blood boils and festers coating our skin's surface,  
as an energy overwhelms us for no real purpose.

Let me out of this shell I struggle to shed,  
And let me enact my revenge, or let me be dead.

Written August 2017

## Drugs & Medication

As you can see from the previous chapters, one's mental stability is a major necessity. It's vital you learn information about yourself. For example, as I am writing *this* page, I am on 30 mg. of Celexa. This is a medication used to treat anxiety and/or depression. I use to be ashamed to admit I was using medication, let alone allow myself to be on any. Here's the issue though, meds are here for your well-being. Not for you to abuse. I've seen several inmates lie just so they could get a buzz or sleep their time away. Eventually, this misuse will catch up to you. I've learned to accept the fact I have mood swings and need the assistance of medication, for now. Since using Celexa I seem to be more "chill," relaxed. I accept things now in life as reality better now than flipping out over everything.

One of the most difficult issues for inmates to deal with is a lack of control. Until I lost a few friends, including my wife, I hadn't realized I was always trying to control every situation from inside these walls. I just couldn't let go and allow my family, friends or even fellow inmates have control of what was outside my reach.

Once I learned I did have a control issue (thank you, Jena) the time came to understand the foundation of this problem. As I looked closer at myself I began to see the symptoms of my controlling issue and the triggers leading up to an uncontrollable outburst. The following chapters will explain more on how to be aware of your issues, but for now we'll focus on the pros and cons of medication and drugs.

First, if you have a lack of control or an addiction to previous drugs or street drugs, seek mental health for further information. Be honest with them and yourself about your struggles. Remember, your addictions may have landed you in prison, seeking help may keep you out of prison. Now's your time to fix you. Heal you. Protect your future and resume responsibility of your life. Unless you're looking to invest in continuously being incarcerated, then it's time to self-access.

Only you know who you really are behind closed doors. You know whether you have problems controlling yourself at times or if you just love the drama and attention. A positive about anti-anxiety and anti-depressants are their calming effect. Scenarios arise in prison and daily life in general but having the power to think rationally and maturely will benefit you more than being arrogant. These types of medications are typically designed for such a purpose, to assist you in ways your body lacks the balance to do so itself.

Keep in mind these medications *do* take 6-8 weeks till you notice the benefits. More often you'll see the side effects first. This is what tends to cause people to quit taking them before they are even given a chance to work. Trust me; I am guilty of quitting by like day four or five. You may also need to try a few different ones till you find the medication that works for you.

The worst part about these medications is obviously the side effects, including the patience needed to allow them to work. Within the first week you'll notice some side effects you can tolerate and others you can't, for example, slight drowsiness, odd dreams, and possibly even sexual side effects. Discuss any of your concerns with your physicians. I encourage you to ask them as many questions as possible. This is your life and your body. This you can be in control of. Do not feel any of your questions are silly or irrelevant. Find out for yourself and don't always believe hear-say. Your body may react differently.

Remember, you are not alone. Having a chemical imbalance does not mean you're not normal. What is normal anyway? No two people are alike. God created us uniquely different with our own strengths and weaknesses.

Now here's the flip to the flop I just wrote. You may not need to take these medications indefinitely. For example, I wrote the above pages months ago while on meds, and now after weeks of being denied mental health, due to a recent lockdown situation involving a hostage or two (four), I've been forced to come down from my dependency of Celexa. Though this is dangerous, what choice did I have? I became hellishly cranky, moody, and quite unstable. However, in time (about 5 weeks) my mind cleared and I was able to reassure myself, along with the encouragement of family and friends to continue on without the need of medication. The medication was effective when needed, but now I lack the need for it anymore. Though I have recently learned I have had the will power, stamina, and devotion to face this period of my life. Then again, maybe these medications are known for boosting one's confidence.

So my friend, choose the path which is right for you. Know your body. Know your mind. Know your limits. Always be true to yourself. If you are having uncontrollable nightmares, suicidal thoughts, evil thoughts you've never had before and/or you're cutting yourself to "feel" the pain, get help immediately. Contact people you trust. Those you confide in. Your current medication, or lack-there-of, should not increase the above symptoms. Learn from my testimony and the many others written. Read between the lines of my poetry and moments of depression. Don't be dumb like I was. I got caught up in episodes late at night while everyone was asleep. I would pull out my razor blade and make slash marks across my body. Only in specific areas of course. For example, the tattoo over my heart, above my left pectoral muscle, which depicts the key that once unlocked the heart of my beloved wife, became the epicenter of crimson droplets that would flow through my chest hair and down my stomach. I would immerse myself in the tantalizing glow and the brightness of how vibrantly red my blood was. This felt like I was releasing tears from my heart: a pressure longing to be expunged. The problem? It almost became addictive. I was losing will power and converting to a life of self-punishment. Every day I awoke from having lustful dreams or ones in which others would die by my hand. I felt ashamed and would submit myself to self-mutilation.

Can you see the connection? Can you see the danger? Please heed my warning and STOP. Pain does not relieve pain. All it does is adds fuel to your flames. Imagine if I resorted to cutting deeper. Trust me, I thought about it. Where would I be now? Don't let the devil trick you. No matter what you are thinking, someone out in this world loves you or is *waiting* to love you. You must believe in yourself.

You must be asking, "How can I overcome such an issue?" Well, continue reading my story. You will either adhere to my advice and use the resources I mention to help you, or you'll realize I complain too much and seek healing so not to sound like me. Though I hope you'll recognize the strength I've built from enduring all this grief. I currently have several years left on my sentence, but it doesn't matter. My time is highly valued to me now. Yours should be too. Not for other's benefit, but for your benefit.

I encourage you to continue on through these pages engraved with countless hours of genuine concern and ambition. This is no fictional story. These are real testimonies and factual information. This is what I'm dedicating *my* time for. You. I could have stayed medicated, laid back eating honeybuns and drinking Mountain Dew, yet I am determined not to waste my life no matter what's outside my window. Remember, your state-of-mind while incarcerated could be the difference between you ever seeing your freedom and your loved ones again. Nobody

deserves to lose something so precious because of a crutch we all share. But you can replace that crutch with something or someone more beneficial.

Now, for all you stubborn people out there who are under the impression you must adhere to "certain" ways in prison. WAKE UP! Here's an impression one celly of mine gave me about his addiction. He said, "Once I get out of prison and am on the street" "I'll have no problems not doing drugs, but while in prison, there's no way I'll quit." "It's how I do my time." Are you kidding me!? This is code for, I'm never truly going to quit. He's also admitting his drugs not only have a control over his life, but that he lacks the willpower and even the desire to change. He's justifying his faults. He's justifying his addiction. For all you intelligent folk out there, "what becomes of us when we justify and accept our addiction into our daily life?" Exactly, you become powerless to your problem. To fix this you need to place yourself above your addiction, not the other way around.

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lust. (*KJV*, Gal. 5.24).

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things (*KJV*, I Cor. 13.11).

The above scriptures, in my opinion, are just a few examples of why we should not only accept change when change is needed but also the understanding of why change is needed in the first place. For example, when your conscience tells you something is wrong or that you're heading down the wrong path, do yourself a favor and **listen**. God gave us a conscience for this very reason. Without it we would just be the same as any other creature.



## Reality Check I Self-Realization

Deep within my soul I am fighting an unknown source. Every day I worry it will overtake me, yet I still barely hold on to my beliefs. Why do I continue to fight something I'm clueless about? Something I can't see. A battle that feels like I'll lose. What if I'm keeping something good from happening? What if it's a power, an energy that could actually make a difference for me and others? Then again, it could be something to fear. Something we should all fear. Our true self desperately trying to over-take us. I can't exactly fully express on paper the depth of where my mind takes me, though I'm trying. I will eventually break free of this uncontrollable environment within my skull, accept reality and divulge myself. I have no fear of expressing my issues. I often get lost in thought when I close my eyes. Behind my eyelids something almost magical happens. I'm only resting though, right? Yet, when I finally realize I've been overtaken I am utterly confused about the conversation and who I was talking to.

I know, sounds crazy, but it's not. You should try it. When you close your eyes imagine whatever you want, but I guarantee you will hear yourself or a narrator describing what you see. So then who is it? Is it you? Are you sure? Do you recognize the voice?

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not crazy nor do I have a known history of mental issues. I am however a spiritual person and believe at times I am closer to God than to myself. That's how we should be, right? Sometimes this connection is so overwhelming, it's nauseating. Yet not your normal nauseous feelings. A nausea of the mind, not the stomach. It can be so powerful; it becomes a thunderstorm in my head which unfortunately can lead to a migraine. I know what you're thinking, but my MRI's always come back normal. Maybe I just have a special connection not all people have. Someone out there knows what I'm talking about. Most days I am drained of my energy just from trying to understand all my thoughts. This makes it tremendously difficult to write. I need technology to advance, so I can have mind-control-typing...etc. Then I would be able to just think and my words would appear on screen. Once again my thoughts got the best of me. Dare we look at this from another angle?

First, what is an angle? What is a point-of-view? Seriously! In order for you to correctly understand any given situation you must be able to see all points of perspective. Imagine if you will geometric shapes. Any shape, as long as it has at least two angles. The more angles, the more sides it has and vice versa. Sometimes a person's life can be as complex as these shapes. How we all wish our lives were a simple sphere, simple, one way and never ending. However, that's not reality. Reality is complex. The more angles and sides a shape has, the more intricate. Though, like in reality, this complexity causes more frustration, less focus, an allowance for negativity, stress, tension, and most importantly anger. When our lives involve more than we can physically, mentally and emotionally sustain, we tend to over-compensate and become angry, irrational. This causes our level of understanding to decrease, shifting aside our ability to properly reason with others and causes more underlying issues to be exposed on top of our already hectic lives.

When confronted with a certain situation we each react in certain ways. The way we react is generated by the information at hand. Common sense explains this in itself. It's our natural human defect at times. Our fight or flight comes into play. Different scenarios determine which

are necessary and which are positive or negative reactions. You control that determination. Though we really have more options than the above-two mentioned. Compose a few different altercations in your mind and then write down all the ways you could react. Find what triggers you to act one way over another. Work on your mental reaction time. Train yourself to do so over and over. When a situation arises begin by altering your thoughts by thinking of calm, subtle props to ease your temper. You're not a robot programmed to do this or that. You are your own programmer.

This is only an approximation of how I've learned to sort through the layers of distortion in my mind. Take into consideration your instincts and your heart-felt reasoning. Though don't get stuck letting your heart make all your decisions. This unfortunately can cause you more pain and suffering. Between your mind, your instincts and your heart, a reasonable solution should be easily obtainable.

How about we look at this from another angle? Have you ever "really" challenged yourself before? Be honest. My bet is most people just wake up and go about their day. Not even attempting to realize they may need to make a few changes in their life. As I've mentioned, we struggle to see our own blindness. Is it our pride, arrogance? The Bible states God hates arrogance (pride).

But He giveth more grace Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble (*KJV Jas. 4.6*).

Let's define arrogance.

Arrogance: an attitude of superiority manifested in an over-bearing manner...etc.

Does this mean if I feel others are incapable of telling me something I don't already know then I'm arrogant? Possibly. Obviously I do not know everything. The issue I have is people tend to give me advice I already know. Each day becomes a repeat of the last. The past few years flew by and I feel about the same. The usual. Depressed one day, angry another, happy once in a while and annoyed every other day. I know I have grown in the last one thousand, one hundred and eighty-five days. Plus I will continue to grow, mature. However, all still *feels* the same.

My family (those who care) are thankful I'm alive and still fighting to survive. Though they just don't comprehend the difficulties we inmates face. I have had plenty of opportunities to fight, plenty to even take my life—more than a safe amount—and even plenty of probable occurrences pressuring me to ram my yellow Office Depot #2 pencil into the throat of some cynical, overbearing, selfish, self-centered, pathologically annoying waste-of-space persons. There are way too many of them here. It becomes challenging sometimes weeding them out. The reason some people are in prison is obvious. Other inmates you wonder how they possibly could be behind bars. I know of least one reason, from our over-judgmental society forcing the hand of our Justice Department. Also we have some judges, public defenders, lawyers, probation officers...etc. who would rather you just sign a plea, spend eternity in prison and be out of their way. They are lazy, worthless, hypocrites. They don't believe *in* the law. They believe they *are*

the law. There should be no such thing as a "minimum mandatory" for any crime, whether violent or not. No two situations are alike, nor should anyone be condemned to such a poor standard. (Cohen, Andrew. "Wasting Their Lives Away -The Case Against Mandatory Minimums." *brennancenter.org*. 30 September 2013. Accessed 22 December, 2017).<sup>3</sup>

Now remembering my mentioning the *fuel* to the fire? The media. This also includes, and I regrettably say this, "journalists and reporters." Sometimes I believe if the story doesn't sound juicy enough, they'll add their own special sauce to it. Here's just one, maybe two examples: Bill Cosby and Donald Trump. Two completely different people, same dramatic effect. What makes a person's personal life, whether criminal or not, public news? The media. Why? So the news station covering it can gain more publicity. Why? They say it's because of what "the people" want. Really! Have we all stooped that low? My point is, whether Bill Cosby is innocent or guilty he should not be disgracefully shamed on national television. He's a human being for heaven's sake!

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. (*KJV*, John 8.7).

Let's consider Donald Trump's harassment as our forty-fifth president. You don't have to like the guy. He's not *your* Daddy. He's our *elected* president. According to how our country generates the popular vote and electoral votes, HE WON. So get over it. I can honestly say, "I do not care who is our president," because I have *never* voted. Why? In my opinion, the position is not needed if "we the people" actually decide what's best for our country. I'm getting off track here, but my underlined point is, voice your opinion on politics, laws ...etc. and then keep your personal opinions about the man or woman to yourself. I'm neither a Democrat nor a Republican because I do not believe you should have to "pick sides" for your country (...one nation under God...indivisible). Last I checked the word indivisible means not able to be divided.

If we as a country want to argue about something, how about we argue what our country is supposed to be known for, our freedom. Then educate yourself on the prison system and how it runs. You should care because your tax dollars pay for it. It's actually quite a tricky conspiracy. Remember, majority rules. Your laws, our country's laws, and state laws are decided by your votes. All it takes is for the scale to slightly lean one way for that decision to be made. Did you know, through your tax dollars, pay approximately \$36,000 a year for each inmate behind bars (*doc.delaware.gov/faqs*. Accessed 29 Nov.2017)<sup>4</sup>? So, a minimum mandatory sentence is like locking a profit of 360 grand for an inmate sentenced to 10 years. That's \$3.6 million a year for only 10 inmates for 10 years. The prison I am currently being held at has about 2500 inmates. You do the math. That is a lot of money. In case you're wondering, there's no possible way I cost this prison \$36,000 every year. I worked 40 plus hours a week, clearing \$2500 a month to take care of a family of six and I grossed less than that amount each year. We ate better meals and three out of six were teenage girls. Looks to me like a conspiracy. What do you think?

To top off all this statistical crap, are you aware it's more of a burden to our country to have over-populated prisons than not. Yes, I believe when the law is broken we should be punished, but until you've actually had to do time you won't see the adverse effects it has on people and their families. People, who are what we still are, sentenced for excessive amounts of time become more criminalized. Imagine what we learn in here from the system. Our prison has very

little educational programs and zero rehabilitation, which is exactly a reason the hostage situation occurred. Yet, no one is listening. With educational programs our minds would be occupied with positive reinforcements that one day upon our release will help us merge into society and better our country. Though some feel our obtaining an education would mean we were being rewarded for committing a crime. See, people (society) are confused. "Our time *is* the punishment for our crime." That's it. Trust me, it's a big deal. If our also being punished *while* doing the time seems logical to you then reduce or rid our laws of a minimum mandatory. Here's my example, when you punish your child or even a pet, you do the following. You scold them and possibly send them to their room or put an animal in its cage. You don't follow them and continue punishing them. Repeatedly being punished is called abuse. Some other countries are way worse. But they don't promote freedom and justice. America does. I've served my country, paid all my taxes then made one mistake, and because of a minimum mandatory I will be in prison for an excessive amount of time.

## Reality Check II Self-Defense

Do I believe in karma? Absolutely. When push comes to shove, sometimes we have to push back. Not physically, but metaphorically speaking. I've never been an aggressive person. No one has really been in fear for their life being near me. Then again, I am a criminal now. I must have this imaginary force field around me giving off a defensive array of violent pheromones. At least it seemed as if a specific corporal believed so. But his super-powers must have been stronger. I guess my standing still gave off a dangerous vibe as if I was a cobra ready to strike at any moment. Me? Really? At least this is what a specific correctional officer presumed would occur. Needless to say, he abused his authority attacking me first.

Have you ever predicted something was going to happen moments before it did? Then you're incredibly defenseless when it occurs because you're in shock. Later you say, "What the ...?" Well, some doofy-looking guard, maybe half my size, sure shocked me. I'd give you his name, but God knows I don't want anything ill to happen to his punk—. I will spare him the harassment he caused me.

Anyhow, I went to the "hole." I was found guilty of assaulting an officer with two magazines. Imagine the irony. "CO (correctional officer) gets assaulted by inmate, who when handing the officer two magazines brushed his chest." Boy did that little coward freak out. More than likely he planned the event and I fell right into his trap.

Long story short, these two CSI hearing officers heard my case and found me guilty. Oh, sorry, I meant to say "SCI" hearing officers. They were just wannabe detectives. Honestly, how can you pretend to find out the truth if you never get off your ass and go question the "right" people? Plus, the hearing officers (lieutenants) believe every word their little co (correctional officer)-robots say. No matter what, you're guilty before you even see them. There's no justice behind bars. You're already a criminal which labels you as guilty. Once again, just another way prison creates criminals and lacks rehabilitation. This forces us inmates to believe there's no benefit in telling the truth. Doesn't make a difference here. There's no incentive to do what's right (Chammah, Maurice. "If Prisoners Ran Prisons"/ "Behavior and Clothing." *themarshallproject.com*. 23 Oct. 2016. Accessed 30Nov. 2017)<sup>5</sup>.

For the record, I could have by-passed this whole unfortunate event. All I had to do was keep my mouth shut. Then again, maybe I should've beaten the crap out of this guy. He needed to learn some respect. Just speaking my mind was all I did. He just kept asking stupid questions. Yes, there are stupid questions. If you already know the answer, and ask it, "it's a stupid question." Let me explain. You be the judge.

I was heading toward the bathroom with a roll of toilet paper and my shower shoes. I'm asked, "Where are you going?" See, that was a stupid question. It was obvious where I was going. Toilet paper is commonly used for only one thing.

These are the people we inmates have to deal with. You're right, not every one of them acts this way but the majority do. This particular guard is known for his harassing and retaliation toward inmates. Yet he is never reprimanded for it. Actually the one hearing officer condoned his actions toward me. Just another example of why inmates are forced to stand up for themselves.

Then, once I got cuffed and led down the stairs into a hallway, said officer rammed me into the wall threatening me. Told you he was a coward. Half these guards would never approach most of us inmates if they ever saw us on the street. They wouldn't have their shield, their back-up. Oh well, their house, their rules.

I've heard from a few sources that some personnel actually went under-cover as a corrections officer to witness the brutality in our prisons (Bauer, Shane. "My Four Months as a Private Prison Guard." July/Aug. 2016. *motherjones.com*. Accessed 30 Nov. 2017)<sup>6</sup>. This is disgusting and should not be tolerated. There are many cases online. But once again, nothing is being done about it. I hope my voice will be the "tipping point" of change.

The real problem is communities are taught (brainwashed) to fear us. Some of the most genuine people I've met were on death-row or are lifers. Others have 10, 20 or more years. Even a few with lower sentences. My point is, we are all inmates, but we are not life-long criminals. Even though we are tagged for life as being such, each one of us still tries to better our self and prepare for our future. There needs to be a bonding process between criminals (inmates) and the community. No, I'm not talking about community service. That's just court ordered slavery or correctional officers "walking their pets." The public needs to remember, they are no more innocent than we are. Most just haven't been caught yet. Be thankful for that too. It's never too late to change.

Then again will our changing really change others' preconceived perceptions of criminals and of what prison is to be used for? Probably not. Most will more than likely continue believing we're just a bunch of deranged, problematic, psychotic individuals without a soul. Hence the reason I'm writing this book. What do they expect, for us to be perfect like them? Again, we are still people with rights and we still are remorseful and apologetic. Some inmates just need an allowance of time for all this to set in. Are you not just as capable of making anyone of the same mistakes we all have? Yes, you are. No matter how inferior you feel to others. Remember karma? Yeah, watch out. When she bites, she bites hard. Do you think we criminals just woke up one morning saying, "I think I'll break the law today?" No, we didn't.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (*KJV*, Eph. 6.12).

You don't have to believe me, but many people are testament to this very serious circumstance. If you've never experienced such situations then be thankful you've never felt nor seen their presence. Yes, I believe these spiritual principalities exist. They are more powerful than we are and can easily pull you under and destroy you. If that's God's will, of course. In my case it isn't yet. Though imagine you're outside your body watching your soul being drawn from your physical form. Yes, watching this in my dreams was horrific. Seeing oneself being pulled away from all they loved, from all they had, from every amount of comfort and hope into utter despair. Not only was I observing this, but I felt it. I will always remember these nightmares. My previous wife should remember them too. They began in mid-summer 2013 and lasted through to my incarceration. Sometimes I can still feel their presence, watching me and waiting for me in the shadows. Tempting me to be disobedient to God. However, we can have a power; a form of strength—a weapon—a force field even they can't penetrate. Though like me you must not only believe because of the conviction in your heart but because of this raw and awesome power of

our almighty God in heaven. His "mysterious ways" surround us every day. We're told exactly how to protect ourselves, too.

Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand the evil day, and having done all, stand (*KJV*, Eph. 6.13).

Once again, you may not believe in my God, but you had better believe in something. Why? Because your flesh is powerless against all spiritual forces. If you're the type who "needs to see to believe," be careful about what you ask for. I once thought this same way and God allowed me to see the error of my ways. Now I'm wishing I wasn't so arrogant.

Think of self-defense in this manner. Everything man creates, builds, invents...etc.; he does so with the intentions of protecting it from something else. Every design has implemented criteria and/or inspections to ensure it can hold up to something more powerful, whether this other "something" is man-made or not. Even our individual countries build themselves to defend against one another. So then, what protection do you have for your soul? What can protect our soul? Here's a clue. It's nothing man-made. Only something unseen to our eyes yet seen through the conviction of our hearts.

## Reality Check III Self-Reflection

Time. What does it mean to you? In some cases it's not always a good thing. If you receive too much of it, your mind may seek alternate areas of refuge. Determination will fuel our cranial pistons to achieve maximum potential, once our fears have been ignited. Remove the spark and we'll starve to death, thus craving the mind's most valuable resource. Thoughts. They are like food to our minds. Our adventures, dreams, drama, gossip, local news are all the direct reflection of what we experience every day. We lose these, and we lose our sanity. They keep our measly little minds ticking day after day. If we lose the pure and just things of life, we will unknowingly replace them with subtle, meaningless substitutes.

Isolation for any extent of time can be seen by some as joyful. A time to yourself to relax with no screaming kids, no bills, no chores, just you and pure serenity. Now flip the script. We don't have any of these blessings in here. Isolation in here can be an endless terror. There's a difference between self-isolation and forced isolation. Then there's the worst kind, solitary confinement. For instance, when you're punished or even just placed on suicide watch. I've experienced both. They're cold, demeaning places even our laws protect animals from, yet we accept it as punishment for inmates.

When I was interrogated December 2013, one of the detectives got personal with me. He levelled with me, saying: "We can help you." "We don't just throw people in prison anymore and throw away the key." "We get them help." Bull shit!! I fell for his good cop routine. Not because I was naive, but because I was looking for help. It's amazing I've made it as far as I have, no thanks to the system.

Everything in life seems to be surrounded by or at least connected to time in some way or another. Whether we acknowledge it or not, time will always exist, right? As I look at my watch the seconds, minutes and hours are continuously in motion. Yet I am motionless staring at it. No matter how still I am, my watch keeps an accurate reading of time. Time does not stop for anyone or anything. Even if *my* watch breaks, there's another out there still ticking. Though you really can't observe time. Possibly by a sunrise, sunset, through someone's aging yes, but time is sneaky. Time is like your shadow after dusk. Time is our friend on some days and our enemy on others. Depending on how you view it, time can be quite daunting. Then again, it makes a difference if you are given ways of distracting yourself from time. The less you focus on time, the more insignificant it becomes in your life. However, if you deduct these time-distractions, you're left with none other than the presence of time. Therefore, creating the atmosphere for mental degradation. If I am correct, time with no distractions (i.e., TV, rec time, radio, art supplies, commissary, programs, education, newspapers, magazines...etc.) would be equal to solitary confinement. The lack of mental exercise would be equivalent to lacking physical exercise. Wouldn't it? So why would our imprisonment/punishment be to physically and mentally be harmed? Is that justice?

Another example of how precious time is starts with my explanation of reflection. When you hear this word you may imagine a mirror or your reputation. In a mirror you may see your physical appearance, but that's external. What about a mirror for your soul, your character? Who are you really? I remember during my time in the hole I became aware of who I am. I had no



time-distractions. Just my room and myself. I had to even beg for a Bible. After a few days of introducing myself to my new surroundings, I realized it was the perfect time to lay back and "talk to myself." In a way you could say I interviewed myself. I became aware during this interview of my strengths, weaknesses, beliefs, desires, triggers, my breaking points, my joys, my failures, talents, abilities and most importantly my purpose in life.

Without knowing your purpose in life you become blind to all things around you. You pointlessly wander from one origin to another. Our life is meaningless until we endure such a period when our existence is questioned, causing a catastrophic implosion of our consciousness, thus awakening our soul. What a revelation it is the first day you become aware of *your* purpose. Your mentality begins to stabilize. You become motivated to conquer your goals. You feel emotionally restructured. Spiritually, you finally become at peace with yourself. The exhausting battle within you subsides. Your physical health becomes a primary importance to you. Success is now within your reach.

## Reality Check IV Self-Awareness

Actions "do" speak louder than words. However, what if we were to *put* your actions into words? A description of what you see in someone else or what they may see in you. Your character defined by another. Does it really matter what other people say about us? Should we care? Does what others see in us compare with what we see in ourselves? Should it? Can we even trust others to give an honest representation about us or how we've lived our lives? I would hope we can trust some. Yet others will lie and deceive us.

The lip of truth shall be established forever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment. Lying lips are abomination to the Lord; but they that deal truly are his delight (*KJV*, Prov. 12.19.22).

Here we are instructed to speak the truth of others.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor (*KJV*, Exod. 20.16).

You may feel you are doing the world a favor by lying or deceiving others, but you are actually throwing a wrench into the gears of God's will. Basically, it's you defying His word and believing you take precedence over Him and others.

With their words, the godless destroy their friends, but knowledge will resave the righteous (*New Living Translation*, Prov. 11.9).

There is a pact between our Savior and us. Meaning, those who lie against us only temporarily get their way. This situation becomes a lesson for both sides, the deceiver and the deceived. In the end, the righteous prevail and the unrighteous reap what they have sown.

As a Christian we believe our heavenly Father is faithful and just. We can rest assured He will deliver us from a fate man tries to carve upon our headstone. Yet too many of us try to carve our own existence. We take the gift of free will for granted. Just because you can choose your own will doesn't mean you should. We are walking contradictions. Our actions rarely align with our words. Our opinions of self should be a replica of how others perceive us. Sometimes people even see better versions of us than we do. Being aware of who you *really* are depends on the multiple outlets you discover necessary in which to define your consciousness. Keep in mind, to fully understand who you are is to accept the reality that others may know things about you which you don't know. Remember we talked about angles before. Their point-of-view is one you

cannot see but will be heard if only you ask. Listen to the opinions of others, be aware of the indifferences, edit out the deceit, and generate a conclusion based on the facts. Be careful not to assume you know yourself so adamantly.

## Defining You

Before we begin defining *you* let's cool down a moment and establish some ways to better "furnish" your experience in prison. With this knowledge you may just cancel your reservation. Maybe we can compromise on some areas within you needing to change. Can you think of some necessities one would need for a better lifestyle of the "not so happy and grateful?" Let's look at some areas in which a person should focus to change his/her life. Below I've enclosed a few definitions for you to easily refer to in this chapter:

Characteristics: distinguishing traits, qualities, properties.  
Demeanors: outward manner, behavior toward others.  
Disrespectful: lack of respect.  
Cynical: contemptuously distrustful of human nature and motives.  
Arrogance: an attitude of superiority manifested in an over-bearing manner.  
Distrustful: having or showing distrust (lack of confidence).  
Generous: a noble or forbearing spirit, liberal in giving.  
Overbearing: tending to overwhelm, overpowering, decisively important.  
Submissive: submitting to others.  
Egotistical: the practice of talking about oneself too much.  
Obnoxious: deserving of censure, disgustingly objectionable  
Contemptuous: manifesting, feeling, or expressing contempt (lack of respect).  
Self-centered: concerned solely with one's own desires, needs, or interests.  
Controversial: of, relating to or arousing controversy (opposing views).

Some of these traits, though normally seen as negative, can actually help you maintain a well-balanced technique to survive in prison. They must be used wisely of course. You must consider yourself as equally important as the next, or you'll be used as a doormat. Once you're a doormat you're almost always *the* doormat of a specific tier, building. Then you will need to take a stand for yourself to prove you're not a doormat or until some other moron takes your place.

Let's face the truth. Everyone alive is in some sort of prison; although, we inmates have to face the reality of a physical prison. Some prisons are better than others. Some have better and more amenities. Some you should fear and others not so much. Even some prisons become a positive experience. For this to occur you will need to be humbled. Being humbled can be a life-altering experience, too.

Allow me to clarify why you might want to humble yourself. Perhaps you are disrespectful and will draw unnecessary attention to yourself and those around you. The last thing you want to do is show up on the guards' "radar." As I've already discussed through my experience, there are a lot of egotistical people here, especially including staff members. Once you enter into any occurrence it's difficult to assess how it will play out. Of course you are responsible for your own actions, but another's intentions are clueless sometimes until it's too late. As any good mother would say: "Mind your manners." Speak your peace but do so without disrespecting others. It may not be seen this way everywhere, but it does take a stronger man to walk away from a negative encounter. Collect your thoughts and then after a reasonable amount of time the issue should be easily solved.

The next two characteristics are like a brother and sister. They have similar relations but are also quite different. Being cynical or arrogant in general stirs up a lot of unwanted attention. Daily struggles can arise almost as if they are warranted. They also cause added stress. You can easily lose friends or associates from one day to the next. Trust me, *we* have just as many topics to argue or debate over. They may seem irrelevant in here, but a person's opinion alone could cause a tremendous disturbance.

To put this as simple as possible, one would believe there are only so many cynics and arrogant people able to fit in such a space. For example, if Terrence, Tori, Tommy and Tim always think they are right, where does compromise come into play? You're right, it doesn't. So, learn to be open-minded before you come to prison. Your struggles in this area would more than likely be gentler on you. Your corrections would come from family and friends with care and concern instead of from those whom you don't really know. So, express yourself and your views but accept the reality others would like to express theirs as well, doing so in a respectful manner.

One of the most highly sought and reputable characteristics is trust. As prisoners, all we really have is "our word." To be distrustful in a sense is to believe others are below us. Not being able to be trusted could be quite detrimental to your existence in prison. The last thing you want is to over-look the importance of trust, thus volunteering yourself for added, unwanted negative attention. Your choice.

As in all areas of life, trust must be earned. It almost becomes your reputation and in prison it will define you. You'll be labelled a snitch or bad money. In some cases people will just over-look your entire existence. As if you are invisible. As inmates, we rely solely on one another. This may not seem believable, but it is definitely true. Every inmate has another inmate he "hopes" will have his back if things get rowdy. A loner in prison is the same as calling him/her prey. You won't last long trying to be your own everything. Plus, eventually you will need something someone else has. Trust me!

Speaking of prey, prison is comparable to the Nature Channel, specifically a jungle or safari. Do not be at the bottom of the food chain, no matter how generous you want to be. I am naturally a giving person. I never use to be but once I was humbled, I began to care for others more than myself. Remember, you have equal rights just like those around you. However, it's up to you to defend them. Of course you may have a friend or so who may help you in doing so, but don't be weak. Look out for yourself too. I've learned this myself. Learn about those around you. I'm not saying to believe rumors but investigate your own way. For example, it may seem to some I don't pay attention to "the talk of the tier," but I hear everything. They are only being fooled by my acting skills. I am very attentive but happen to have an excellent filter. I am also an impressive puzzle solver. I hear things I don't care to hear, but I am still being aware of them in case something is to go down. So, be clear, your generosity needs to be limited and kept to yourself. Don't allow yourself to be deceived by those who will only take advantage of your genuine concern for others. Christian or not, know when to say no.

Being generous can be seen as one being submissive. This may be an opportunity for you to be a little more over-bearing, not too much. Just enough to stand your ground and put others in their place if need be. Be firm in your beliefs and your stance but respectful of others. There is no reason for any inmate to yield to another. You must always be vigilant, especially when you start feeling comfortable with your surroundings. You do not need to blend in or conform to the ways of prison, but you must be mindful of them.

Now what could possibly be the problem with someone being egotistical in prison? Isn't this showing confidence? Isn't confidence a good thing? We need confidence to reach success.

You're just being concerned with your standing in life, right? Wrong! If you're egotistical you show a lack of concern for others. Only you matter to you. No one person is more important than another. "All lives matter." We all serve a purpose and deserve the right to fulfill it. No one person should deny another his God-given opportunity to reach his/her goals. Don't be another's stumbling block. Instead you should help them build themselves and reach their goals. You may just be the structure they need in life.

Overly concerning yourself with just **you you you**, may actually even be hurtful to you. Helping others may just be the experience you need to be humbled, thus starting your journey of change. Wouldn't you want others to care about you, to be concerned about your necessities? I thought so.

Another demeanor I would like to discuss parallels a person's maturity. It would be the act of being obnoxious. For some reason I associate this word normally with children. In some cases this fits. Some inmates just can't sit still. They have to know everything or at least *be* into everything. There is a time to goof off, a time to be quiet, a time to listen, many times to learn, and a time to mind your own business, to allow reality to set in. Face your denials, learn from your mistakes and chill. Plus, being too obnoxious can also draw too much attention, the wrong attention. I advise you to heed my warnings unless you decide to make the same mistakes I made. Prison is no playground and recess is not in session.

Being contemptuous and self-centered are reflections of some earlier characteristics. Maybe I am repeating myself using other words, but you must grasp the importance of why. There's another similarity here. People concerned only with their reasoning, ideas, concerns...etc. are normally disrespectful to those around them. Each of the characteristics I am defining becomes a coalescence of imperfections describing the perfect "what not to be." Once again, "Who do you *want* to be in prison?" and "Who *will* you be in prison?" Will you be the direct reflection of who you were on the street? That may not be in your best interest. It is your choice of course. I suggest you choose wisely.

You honestly do not know what each person is dealing with. Some of them may not be able to cope. Then you come along and ignite their last nerve. Others may be on medication and snap out at you. Prison is not about how much *more* time you can get. Your sentence is your time to reflect on your character, an opportunity to rise above what you once were. It's a time to correct your issues, a time to be at peace with yourself and recognize the importance of being at peace with others. This will place you in a safe haven of contentment. "Humble yourself or wait to be humbled."

I believe this world needs to consistently be in balance. When something is off kilter, something will happen to bring it back to order. Call it karma, or even God, but no matter what, it happens.

Now let's review. Be respectful, be generous enough to earn trust yet not foolish. Keep others in mind. Try not to offend others, though some people are relentless, impossible to please. Be rational and use your better judgement per situation. Pay attention!

In conclusion to my defining of these topics I would like to consider one more. Being controversial. This can be an extremely misleading talent. We see controversy all over the world, society, the news. Rarely do we ever see a positive effect coming from it. Of course we each should stand firm, but there's no need to be argumentative about it. Master the skill of conversation without controversy. Allow others to speak while you listen. If someone else only wants to argue they're right, walk away. Some people can't be reasoned with. Your demeanor,

your characteristics *will* define you. The key to successful controversy is consideration, continuous and careful thought regarding another person's opinions.

## Accountability

In life we are given several moments to accept our faults and make amends for them. We often overlook these times or just blatantly ignore them. Though they always come back and reveal our ignorance or lack of attention.

Accountability: the quality or state of being accountable; esp.: an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions.

I believe it is safe to say accountability is a matter of maturity, though even this isn't true in some cases. What does accountability mean to you? How would you define it? If a person can't accept their wrongs should they even be credited for their rights?

Obviously we should all take an account for our actions. No matter what our mistakes are. We need to own them. As my father mentioned to me during a visit once: "We will all be judged for each thing we do in life." "So why not confess our sins now and get some of our reaping (of what we sowed) out of the way?" In other words start paying off debts. The ones we owe our Savior, for His precious blood. In a sense, by the time we reach heaven we could be paid-in-full.

Now we can't really pay off any of our sins (debts) and our gift of grace and mercy cannot be earned. It is freely given. However, our confessing and repenting proves we are holding ourselves accountable and no one else. We may think no one knows all the wrongs we've done in our lives, but God knows. He knows where we are innocent and where we are guilty.

Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall (*New International Version*, Ezek. 18.30).

For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (*NIV*, 2 Cor. 5.10).

When you take accountability in your life you develop a sense of understanding. You learn your purpose and develop a higher integrity within. During one of Charles Stanley's devotions I observed last year I learned about a few reasons people avoid accountability, such as ignorance, fear of exposure, fear of rejection, feeling self-sufficient, pride, and you obviously doing something wrong ( Stanley, Charles F. *Charles Stanley Handbook for Christian Living*. Thomas Nelson, pp. 381-384, 2008)<sup>7</sup>. Every inmate, let alone person, can connect to one or more of these faults. But once we recognize which ones affect us, we can then learn to reach beyond this, thus healing ourselves.



Charles Stanley also suggested in this lesson about our often times needing an accountability partner. I was in a Christian-based program when incarcerated at SCI called Celebrate Recovery. Having an accountability partner was crucial to its success. Proven worthwhile to this program and explained by Mr. Stanley such a partner must exhibit certain criteria. This partner should be one who is walking in the spirit, be trustworthy, give you Godly scriptural advice, give freedom of self, have the courage to confront you, be forgiving to you, and be sensitive to your feelings (Stanley, Charles F. *Charles Stanley Handbook for Christian Living*, Thomas Nelson, pp. 381-384, 2008)<sup>8</sup>. Though we must learn to be accountable in life on our own, starting out with a friend who you can trust to assist you seems beneficial. As Christians we are entitled to do this anyway for one another. I recommend this partnership to anyone interested, each helping the other take responsibility of their life, their actions, and their words.

To learn more about this topic and many more life values ask around your institution about which channel In Touch Ministries is available or ask a family member to look online at [intouch.org](http://intouch.org). His teachings are well worth it and have been an inspiration to me.

## Behavior

Take a few moments to yourself now and try to imagine what type of behaviors might help you successfully complete a term in prison with little to no repercussions. Remember, your behaviors are the effect caused by your thoughts set in motion. Take for instance someone stepped in front of your view while watching a game. Depending on *how* you think and *what* you think will decide your next action: your behavior. Though you're immediately assuming "everyone is attempting to aggravate you" is a sign of negatively thinking. Keep in mind, you do not know where the person is in their mind. They may be unintentionally blocking your view. Maybe they only moved in your way trying to see better themselves. Either moving yourself or kindly bringing the issue to their attention would be your best solutions. Just taking a moment to think before acting will greatly influence the outcome. We all have triggers, moods, emotions and sensations which can easily get out of control. This is why they need to be acknowledged and dealt with appropriately.

Upon first waking up in the morning and right before bed I am normally grouchy. These are two moments I have difficulty keeping myself *in* character. Therefore, I have to stay focused and be prepared for such an unexpected occurrence. Once again, we can't control others, but we can control ourselves. This is my personal obstacle. I must approach it with caution and confidence, with patience and endurance. In time I will overcome it. But choosing to over-look any fault on my part is not only ignorant but worse than a negative action. Your goal is to control *you*, your temper...etc. Compromise continues to be the key. Without it, would be like throwing a match into a barn full of fireworks. All will go haywire. Compromise means giving others' ideas a thorough examination. Believe it or not, you will sometimes be wrong and your ideas won't be what are best for a given occasion.

Each of us should know what pushes our buttons. If you don't, start a daily journal. Write down everything you can about situations you face. The answer to what caused you to get upset will show. If you don't want to do this, then seek advice from your closest friends, associates. Most will know.

My advice when you know your triggers is to stay away from them. To give you an example, I love playing sports, games...whatever. However, I am highly competitive. I am slowly growing out of this and have recently learned to humble myself during them, but previous years I could not control my actions very well. I was ignorant of my triggers. I always blamed other people for getting a rise out of me. So once I realized what the *cause* was, I could begin controlling the *effect*. Then I stayed away from anything competitive in this environment. No football, no softball, no basketball and definitely no playing cards or even chess. This sort of became my way of placing me in a "time out." A "time out" to reflect on my behavior.

As you can see when you encounter situations in life, it's best to have as many tools in your tool belt to conquer the problem. We might eventually build up a tolerance to an *old* tool, so it's best to have other options to rely on. Maybe it's just time to retire some of your old tools and replace them with new ones. Change is good and inevitable. Understanding when it's time to make a change means you've accomplished a task most neglect. You know you. You know, above all, your weaknesses and can openly admit when you're wrong.

Here are a few behaviors I have experienced, followed by some ways I personally escaped their vicious cycle. A cycle I felt compelled to continue in, which almost became detrimental to my health and safety.

(anxiety, depression, being over-stressed, having a low self-esteem, paranoia, delusions, substance misuse, binge eating, anger, fatigue, self-inflicted pain, suicidal thoughts, guilt, shame...)

Let me just start with depression because I believe this would be the number one negative issue of mine, leading to many others. At least it's comprised of many others. My depression is an effect, caused by my negative view of myself. My thoughts became so negative of myself I spiraled down into the deepest pit of hell I've ever seen. I am currently still crawling up the ragged walls of this pit stretching for a new ledge as I climb. Each page I write I become closer to my victory, closer to recovery. Full recovery.

The first issue you must be aware of is that you are in a cycle. One you cannot control. You will need help. Just like any drug problem or addiction you become addicted to your inner voice. If you continually allow yourself to feel like a failure, you will be a failure. At least you will be in your mind. Just because you feel like a failure doesn't mean you are. Remember, we all have a purpose and special abilities to complete it. But if we don't believe in ourselves we will accomplish nothing. For example, I've spent countless hours sitting in my cell or laying on my bunk saying to myself: "Who's really going to read this crap?" "Why would anyone take my advice?" "I'm just a worthless person wasting perfectly good oxygen!" One day I woke up in this mood deciding I was in need of help. So, I called my eldest sister for advice. Hoping my just hearing her voice (she sounds like the radio host Delilah to me) would cheer me up. Halfway through our conversation she says, "Have you finished your book yet?" I of course told her I haven't and gave her my pathetic excuses why. Being the incredibly smart and loving sister she is, she said, "Honey, just write it." "Don't worry about who wants to read it or who will read it." "Even if you don't sell one stinking copy, the point is, you accomplished one of your personal goals." "This is about you and your dream." Then she continued on lifting my spirits and boosting my esteem. Thank God for older sisters. He actually gave me two and to this day neither of them has given up on me. They constantly compete together in their giving me inspiration to never give up on myself. Though it's been almost two years since I began this book, I am still inspired by them, by others and I am eager not to let them down.

This leads me to my next point. When you begin to think in a negative way, stop and ask yourself, "What would my family or friends say about this issue?" Pretend you're having a conversation with them in your mind. Someone you respect. Someone wiser than you. What do they tell you? What does your instinct tell you? Most often when we are down-in-the-dumps we ignore our rational thoughts. We sugarcoat them to believe what we want to believe. Often we are lying to ourselves trying to adjust our behavior to match our deceitful thoughts: "I feel tired, so I'm going to act tired" or "I'm angry, so I'm going to act angry." Doing so gives off the wrong vibe to others which causes conflicts.

I remember describing to my wife and a physician once that when lying in bed I would scream to myself to "get up," but I would just continue to lie there inside myself as if not existing, without any self-control. Almost like someone reached into me and flipped a switch off.

I thought nothing. I felt nothing, so I was nothing. To me, depression is like mental sticky traps put down to catch mice, except they caught me and left me fighting, kicking, and screaming in my mind. I just couldn't free myself. I needed to seek assistance. Depression became my drug. It became my escape. It even later became my excuse to not face the challenges before me. I was so caught up inside my mind I actually caused my own destruction. I am where I am because I lacked the confidence and will power to fight for my life. After all, my life was worthless, remember? That's what I thought every day. I deceived myself into believing this. I gave up on myself, which in turn means I gave up on my wife, my son, my daughters, my parents, and my whole family. Most importantly though, I gave up on God. Big mistake! He has a way of putting us in place and it doesn't always feel gentle. I remember my dad quoting to me as a child saying, "Son, you reap what you sow." Every time I heard him say this I would shrug it off in my mind. God sure does work in mysterious ways. Do you believe in our reaping what we sow? That's the same as karma. "You get out what you put in."

So here's a bit of proof some things just don't click in our life until God's will intends them to. I know what reaping and sowing are. I've heard the parable saying,

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap (*KJV*, Gal.6.7).

Of all places, this verse clicked while I was shut-up in the bowels of "the hole." Once again being chastened for not controlling my mouth, the Lord mocked me instead. He made a fool out of me, just to open my eyes to another part of His scripture. This is truly amazing. This just shows how puny we are. How insignificant we are, yet what an important role we play in His master plan. Yes, we have free will as mentioned. However, our free will is limited. It is actually limited more than you know. If you and I had absolute free will we would be as powerful as God. But we are not. We are led only by ignorance when we turn from Him. Our will can lead to generic happiness and/or destruction. His will leads us to fulfill our purpose whether we agree with it or not.

A different perspective of following His will instead of yours reminds me of a specific scripture and how I experienced it's meaning in my life.

For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow (*KJV*, Eccles. 1.18).

A few years ago I remember getting this overwhelming desire to learn. One so powerful I actually began exceeding at my job. My craving for knowledge intensified so much I was led to making a career change, requiring me to go to college. Me college! "Bring it on," I thought. I was ready and eager to go. Of course my negative side said, "Thirty-four years old and now you want to get smart." So I humored myself. I enrolled and began college.

After my first semester I had four "A's" and one "B." My "B" was in composition of course. I'm sure any editor would agree on why. Anyhow, I did my homework with a passion I never knew I had. I walked into each class with a smile on my face every day. I put every effort into

every test, report, speech, research, PowerPoint...etc. I was not the top of my class, but I was certainly in the top ten. Even my teachers loved me. Why is this so astounding? I went from a 1.75 GPA in high school back in the 90's to a whopping 3.92 GPA now. I used to hate school, and I never used to do homework. It felt as if something took control of my life, leading me to become a better me, a successful me. After all, that's what I had always wanted. Don't we all? We want to be noticed for our hard work, dedication and our motivation. I was surpassing every one of my goals. There was no stopping what I could do or what I could become. So I thought. I became so caught up in myself I lost focus of every other task around me. Every aspect of life to me changed. I went from rarely paying any attention to myself, to it's all about me. My arrogance was bleeding out my pores.

Unfortunately, I wasn't aware of this downfall until it was too late. I put so much effort into learning I was taking away from my family and my job. My responsibilities didn't decrease when I was in college, they increased, yet I poured all my apples into one bucket. All I had wanted to do was fill my mind and make my family proud of me. I had an enormous void I was trying to compensate for. Why wasn't I able to see this issue? Why was I allowed to be blinded by my own growth of knowledge? I believe now it's because I took all the glory for it. Not once did I thank God for the hunger to learn and his quenching my thirst. After all, He *was* answering my prayers. Therefore, the more wisdom I obtained, the more grief I had to deal with.

See, prison became my ground-zero. As if pressing restart on your video gaming console. Thank God I was given this opportunity. He could have chosen to let me continue on a path of destruction. Not all are as blessed, "praise the Lord," I am. Take a look back at all the behaviors I listed. Each of these came from a depression I fell into because I believed prison was a result of God *not* loving me. I actually had it wrong. I didn't believe in myself, in God's purpose for me. Sometimes we have to encourage ourselves. You won't always have someone physically by your side. Let Christ be your best friend. He is always by your side. Together, you will become the perfect you.

Your testimony is a collection of your weaknesses as well as your strengths and accomplishments. There is more to each of us than the daily gossip entails. "You are strong, determined, successful and worthwhile, because God made you so." Believe it, become it. Start your exit strategy to the new you today. If you think the waters going to be too deep, and you're scared, you'll drown. So, either don't go swimming or bring some floaties. Anticipate where you want to be, where you should be, set that place as your next destination and navigate to it. Your estimated time of arrival is only configured once you're in gear and heading toward your goal. If you're not ready, get ready. Just like any other struggle in life *you* must motivate yourself to the extent you're disgusted with where you currently are in life. Do yourself a favor for a change. Stop succumbing to your own self-degradation. Embrace the core of your true being, giving way to a new strategic opportunity that will with-stand and weather all storms. No current will overcome the new you. You won't submit to any tide. Stand firm, knowing you will succeed. Believe in yourself. Furthermore, know that your loved ones are looking forward to the new you. Accept this change in your heart. Reconnect with those you've lost, make amends to those you've hurt and forgive those who have hurt you.

Speaking of behaviors, I was given some advice once that I thought was ludicrous until pondering upon his words for a while. This gentleman said, "Grow a beard, let your hair grow out, sit back and relax, make a bucket list of what you want to do in life, set some goals, make a few friends, and make the best of a bad situation." In other words, he was telling me to "let be, what will be." Never have I grown a full beard until I came to prison. Quite frankly I love having

my beard now. Never have I been able to relax on any one thing without stressing over another. I have learned a few lessons in life.

I have also learned how to be my own entertainer. For instance, "one night in my cell I became the leader of a group of vigilantes, sending them off into battle..." not really I'm just kidding. However, I have told myself a few stories out loud. A few people have said they like my short stories. I use to tell my son some made-up stories, and he would laugh and giggle until he fell asleep. Sometimes he would awake and say, "Tell me another one, Daddy." God, I loved making him smile and laugh himself into a peaceful sleep.

The key here is to expand your imagination. Anyone can *be* anything or *be* anyone. You're the creator of a story in your mind. There is no end to one's imagination, but there is a beginning. You must start one, that is. What happens behind your eyelids is like Vegas— it stays with you until you divulge the information. The bonus to an imagination is you may discover you have some hidden talents. Your imagination and gift of mental creation is not to be confused or thought of as a childish act. I wasn't fighting gummy bears behind my eyes. Though if I were sure sounds like a yummy experience. "Sorry, I love gummy bears!"

My depression began well before I was aware of it and ready to admit it. I remember noticing many physical and mental side-effects, wondering what was wrong with me. Not only did I go from physician to physician, I volunteered myself as a guinea pig for medications. I even went through some tests to medically clear me, such as an EKG, CAT scan, stress test...etc. Every test came back with the same result: "You're perfectly healthy," they'd say. Even my blood work came back normal except a few marks low with my T3, diagnosing me with an under-active thyroid (later, a few years from then I would come to know this was what was causing most of my problems).

So the doctor would place me on Synthroid to adjust my thyroid levels and sent me on my way. Over the next few months and even years I felt the same way. I was so lethargic I felt I was dying. Very abnormal for me.

The first diagnosis physicians gave me was depression. That never went over well with me, let alone my wife. I would diagnose myself now as having had a mid-life crisis. I had overloaded myself with way too much stress. I was bound to crack. Well, I cracked alright. My marriage started failing, my relations with my kids became rocky; I became distant from my family and hid inside myself. I was a mess. I had plenty of people I could trust, but I just would not open up. I was too prideful. I did not want them to know I was falling. So I put on a smile and hid in the icy blue waters of my heart.

Depression is caused by a hormonal (chemical) imbalance which alters your psychological perception of things around you. This is strictly my opinion, based solely on my own experience and understanding. The only way to stop it is to merge the gap or replace the void. Medically, they prescribe you an anti-depressant which gives you this missing chemical. This is a bridge over your mental gap. The problem is they are man-made and come with too many unneeded side-effects. You bridge one gap just to create other gaps. Sometimes these depressant meds can actually deepen your depression. "Suicidal thoughts and tendencies should **never** be a side-effect for an anti-depressant." Suicide is the epitome of depression.

My main issue was I became habitual to my depression. Without it I felt abnormal. Let me further explain, "I was addicted to my own torture." I wasn't me unless I was unhappy and depressed: miserable. I forgot the old joyful me and replaced it with such a pathetically miserable fool. I looked for ways to increase my misery, like an addict searches for crack, heroin, cocaine, etc. I needed my fix. Why? Remember, I didn't feel I deserved to be happy. Unfortunately, I was

dragging all the people I loved down with me. Part of me wanted to get help. I wanted to tell my wife or even my best friend: "Hey, I know what's wrong with me." "I'm having suicidal thoughts and afraid I'm going down the wrong path." "I'm having desires I've never had before." "I'm ashamed...help me."

Why didn't I confide in them? I found my fear. I was afraid to admit I was failing at being me. I was afraid to tell them about the thoughts I was having. I was afraid I would lose them. At one time I actually thought I was possessed because I couldn't control my thoughts. Hurtful thoughts too. I did, however, try to tell my wife, but it came out the wrong way. She'll know what I mean *if* she ever reads this and God knows too. My clues were just too subtle or were they?

Once when conflicted with too many issues and an argument with my wife, I locked myself in our bedroom with a handful of nasty pills. Prior to that I had attempted to take my own life several times. However, I was too much of a coward. I failed at suicide because I knew it would hurt people and possibly kill my mother. See, I care so much about others I spare them the grief and face my own miseries. Does that sound stupid? Arrogant maybe? Maybe this is God's way of keeping me around: guilt.

Anyhow, I believe I already lost the trust of my wife, my best friend and God. So I let life play out. I had already failed and lost the love of my life and my Punk (a nickname we called each other). I had succeeded at filling the hunger of my depression again. I knew I was coming to prison. My sins had caught up with me. Yes, God forgave me, but now it was time to face the heat. By God's grace and mercy I am still alive and able to write this compilation of testimonies. In doing so I have learned to be grateful for all I have, including my own life. I am my own worst critic, but I am also my most important asset.

My life's usefulness, my pains, my pleasures and my writings will not be in vain as long as one person who reads this grasps his own reality and changes for the better. I hope to draw others out of their depths from which scarred me, to ease their suffering, to know "everything will be okay."

We can empathize together, build an army to defeat the evil principalities which enslave us. Break free of depression's bonds and give strength to your neighbor and him to his/her neighbor. Shatter that addiction because it will only devastate you and drag you under. You have the power within you to reach the surface of a new beginning. Remember to embrace your positive affirmation. "I am strong." How do I know this? Because God made me so, and I believe in myself. "I am determined." Why am I determined? Because God gave me a purpose in life, and I will fulfill it. "I am successful and worthwhile." Why? Because God gave me the motivation and inspiration and because I believe in me. I want to achieve my greatest potential; therefore, I will. You are going to battle yourself every day, but once you arm yourself with the right weapons you will overcome and prevail. The things in life which protect you will do you no good hanging in your closet or lying on the floor. Put your armor on and stand firm. Envision your success.

Read Ephesians 6.10-17 for how to put on the real armor, the armor of God.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness. And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all,

taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God (*New King James Version*, Eph. 6.10-17)



## From the Gate

If I knew then what I know now this is the advice I would tell myself: "Stay calm, keep your mouth shut, mind your own business and do not be a snitch." I know the guards are simple people just doing their job. So let them do their job and you just do your time. Don't make life harder on you because you want to get back at them. They are either going to be power-hungry, conceded, lazy and not worth their paychecks, vengeful and vindictive, or if you are lucky, decent guards who do their job correctly, efficiently and leave you alone. This is a rare commodity though. Either way, the state pays them to do a job, and you are on the wrong side of the gate to argue. Simply talking to the guards could label you as a snitch. Only speak to them when it's absolutely necessary.

We can all easily define the word snitch. It's defined by the Collegiate Dictionary I've referred to as: one who snitches, tattletale. Nobody likes a tattletale. Use your common sense, your discretion on a case-by-case scenario. If you see something and open your mouth about it then you've just become part of it. Don't invite yourself into other people's problems. However, I am not telling you to be a coward either. It's your choice whether or not to interfere with an issue you disagree with. Just choose your battles wisely.

My advice in this chapter has a sole purpose, to assure your survival. By survival I am referring to you existing with little or no problems. Only you can choose to adhere or ignore my warnings.

There are multiple housing units in each prison. I happen to be held in a maximum security prison. Your status depends on where you will be held. I am currently working my way back to medium security from a maximum status. A few different types of housing units are as follows: maximum- which includes the hole, the SHU, the MHU and I believe mental health housing unit, medium and minimum. Some prisons even have a merit status for inmates with an outstanding record with little to no disciplinary issues. Most cells in maximum security units have a bunk bed, a sink, a toilet, a desk and some sort of locker. Your decorative attire consists of orange pants and a v-neck. Other prisons may use multiple varieties of colors, styles. Either way you're dressed to fit an image they exploit to the public as "highly dangerous individual." Though most of us in orange wouldn't care to harm anyone but those watching over us, due to their inhumane and disrespectful actions towards us.

There has always been a divide between guards and inmates. This isn't so unusual; it's a common issue. Isn't this the history of America though, slaves verses their captors?

As I've mentioned previously, a positive in any isolation housing area, you become closer to *your* higher power and get to know yourself better. But after a reasonable amount of time alone, negativity *can* set in. Let's leave some room for hope. I thank God that this issue with "solitary confinement" is finally being addressed by our government (Breslow, Jason. "What Does Solitary Confinement Do To Your Mind?" *pbs.org*. Frontline, April 22, 2014. Accessed 30 Nov. 2017)<sup>9</sup>. (Boghani, Priyanka. "Reducing Solitary Confinement, One Cell at a Time." *pbs.org*. Frontline. April 18, 2017. Accessed 30 Nov. 2017)<sup>10</sup>.

I am not the most law-savvy person, but here's a little more advice for you. The judicial system we are bound by is crooked as hell from an inside perspective. I pray you never have to witness this but if you are, please be careful what you say, write and what you sign. Most

importantly "know your rights." Learn the rules of your prison and study the law. Each prison by law must afford you the opportunity to some sort of law library. Learn to defend yourself. This is where I have failed miserably, and it has cost me plenty of money and years. Don't count on others to do your bidding for you.

Along with knowing your rights, be careful not to let the system or other inmates become too overbearing. Stand your ground about your beliefs and about your crime. If you are guilty it will find you out one way or another. It always will. If you're innocent, remain innocent and never give up fighting for yourself. **DO NOT** accept a plea if you are not fully guilty of everything you're charged with. Don't allow any public defender to accept defeat on your behalf. The majority of the time they want you to take a plea, any plea, so they can get paid and move on to their next case. No matter your crime, know your rights.

Be honest with yourself about your crime. Don't live in darkness. Your crime does not define you unless you succumb to it. In other words don't become habitual. Learn from your mistakes. Take control of your life and change from the ways that got you locked up. Dispose of your old ways and walk in a new light.

When you first arrive at prison you will find at least one of the following: trouble, yourself, or God. I eventually found each of these. The last two kept me from finding the first one but on a few occasions. Normally we find ourselves first. This becomes a time we "look in the mirror." We see ourselves for who we really are and who we should be. Sometimes when we recognize our true reflection it threatens our continuance on living. Hence the reason most resort to in-house drugs or medication. Just sit back and don't get yourself into too much action. Be observant and take in the reality of your new environment. Once you have a better understanding of those around you, then and only then, will you be able to fully respect other individuals. Remember, "Do your time not somebody else's."

## Connections & Disconnections

One of the worst parts of being incarcerated is being disconnected from all those who we once were connected with. Whether married, engaged, single or not, we all have people in our lives that we cherish. The problem is we realize their importance the most when we become detached from them. While imprisoned we feel frozen in time. Our life doesn't stop but enters into a whole different dimension parallel with our old life. We are sort of transported to this other dimension yet still feel we are part of the old life. As if we are split in two. We have to learn to adapt to a completely new environment while trying to hold on to what we remember of our *other* life. This often feels like we are being pulled away from everything we know and love, only to be forced to accept the new reality we are unfamiliar with. The only circumstance I can relate this to would be a child pulled away from their parents only to be re-rooted into another family. Given only minimal occasions to speak with their true family but infinite time to adapt to their new one.

If you've never experienced such a situation imagine for a moment what it would truly feel like. How would you react? Would you be acceptant of your new family? Would you rebel? Maybe you would just succumb to the change and accept what is. I highly doubt it. Most, if not all of us, would kick and scream to get back what we lost. We grow quite attached to many things in life and none of us practice the inevitable disposition of loss for fun. It's common to feel a sense of discomfort when faced with this scenario, despite who we really think we are. Some act tough, pushing aside this discomfort, pretending to enjoy our own sufferings. Deep within our souls we all despise losing what we once gained.

There are also many other perspectives we must take into consideration. First and foremost is how our loved ones compensate for losing us. Remember, we're incarcerated and there isn't much we can do to help them. Yes, this is extremely difficult for us but imagine for a moment how they must continue without us. Their lives have changed dramatically too. If you're married or in a relationship when incarcerated, they have to return home without you. They have to wake up every morning only to see your side of the bed empty. They have to work just as hard, if not harder being left without you. A majority of the time they are also innocent from your imprisonment. Your incompetence caused them to suffer, to lose time and memories with you they will never get back. How can one ever make amends for such an excessive amount of ignorance? The truth is, we really can't. The time is lost, but you're not. The only possible resolution that could barely even be sufficient of an attempt to make amends is to change your ways. Biblically, we say "repent, ask for forgiveness, refuse to ever step foot into the skin of your old ways, get help from available sources, and most importantly accept you screwed up."

Each of us had dreams and life-long goals we wanted to accomplish. There is never a wrong time to start, nor is it ever too late. Accept the reality of what is and move on.

I will be first to admit it though. My number one fear is being alone, away from family and friends. Seems to me this is a test I've been given many times over in my life, each one being more severe than the last. I've been away from my family when serving my country. I was alone when moving to start a new job. I've experienced being left alone when my wife was deployed in Afghanistan. I've been away from my children several times through a past divorce. And now I am experiencing loneliness from many family and friends, which I believe is the most difficult I've faced. Each of these experiences has broken me yet strengthened me.

With all sincerity, I hope we all are able to leave these walls, never to come back. I pray we become stronger physically, mentally, emotionally, and especially spiritually. I believe a wise individual will profit more when he accepts his own ability to change himself. The weak fall apart, but the strong hold on tighter.

Now let's look at your incarceration from a single person's point-of-view. What do you really have to lose? Nothing, right? Wrong! Imagine what you could be if you weren't behind bars. Where would your family be? I bet they would have a lot less stress than they need.

Stop thinking of lateral resolutions but focusing on consequential solutions. Everything's not all about you. Even if you have a life sentence, you still have a life to make amends and change. Do it out of respect for yourself. Don't give up because I guarantee your family won't if you keep giving them reasons to believe in you. Find common ground between you and your conflicts. Take the time to stop being a victim and making victims. Others feel your loss too. Some of them have a testimony you couldn't even imagine. One you would never survive.

Those of you who have someone to go home to, perk up and get home to them. Those who don't, get out there and build yourself a family, friends. "Man was not intended to be alone."

And the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him (*NKJV*, Gen. 2.18).

Make today the day you start your life over. Pray and ask God to come into your life. Ask for His forgiveness. Then follow where He leads you. Begin to care, open your heart, admire others' abilities, and see them for who they truly are. You will be surprised what you can learn from other people once you open your heart.

You'll know within weeks of who will stand by your side. If they don't stand by your side, they would've eventually left you on the outside. Your strongest supporters will always have your back. They would walk into a burning building if they knew they could save you. These are the family ties to keep, to be grateful for. Do not build barriers between you and them. This will not help you nor will it help them. However, you need to prepare yourself in case you're put in a position to lose anyone.

Let's consider some ways to help you stay connected and learn to accept the disconnections that are inevitable. Staying connected will be your responsibility; however, you can only do your part. If others aren't responding there is a reason. There is always a reason. Don't get caught in the "what-ifs." There are way too many to consider. You'll lose yourself. I've been through enough of them and they defeat you from the inside out.

Your options may be limited so don't ruin them from the beginning either. Don't become the problem, solve the problem. Don't complain because now all the sudden, "No one has time for you." Did you take time to be there for them before your incarceration? Remember, as children of God we are all able and willing to do whatever we want. Our primary instinct is to please ourselves. We have to be willing to go beyond our conceded human greed.

Our primary goals should be to be thankful to our Creator for our existence, to worship, love and abide in Him, to love one another as we want to be loved, and to continue teaching this to all who will accept it. Many people mock the Bible and the belief in God. This surprises me because the main teaching from it is, "love one another." Is being loved or loving another really so

wrong? I guess some believe so. If we all would express the love in our hearts, there would be little to complain, argue and fight over.

We each have a responsibility to one another whether you want to accept it or not. What affects one affects us all. If you allow yourself to lose control you may end up taking others down with you. This cycle could spread like wild fires. So don't be the wind fueling the fire. Be the extinguisher that smothers its existence.

Think of it this way. When you climb a ladder to a towering height, what's the first thing someone would tell you? That's right. They would say, "Don't look down..." The same goes for prison but in a horizontal perspective. We should say, "Don't look outside the gate..." "Why?" It will only slow you down, cause you to lose focus on your goals, depress you or something more extreme. While on this side of the curtain try your best not to imagine what's backstage. Your time will come when you can go home. Until then, focus on this moment in time and on what you are able to control. There's no better waste of one's life than trying to fix what you can't reach. Let it go. Stay in contact with others yes, but don't allow yourself to over-stress *any* situation outside these walls. There's already enough to deal with in here. All you have the power to do in here for loved ones is give them emotional, mental and spiritual guidance.

## Loyalty and Relationships

We all know life is full of ups and downs. We all know what it's like to have friends and enemies. We all know life would be more efficient if we had fewer enemies and more friends. Me personally, I prefer just a few friends and strive to resist from making too many enemies. However, some things are just out of our control. In this chapter I'm not going to teach you how to make friends or how to keep from making enemies. Your demeanor and how you treat others will do this for you. What I am going to express is my opinion on what shouldn't cause you to lose friends, family members, and make enemies. For example, your very presence in prison should *not* influence them to leave your side. Then again, this act of betrayal just proves who is a loyal person and who isn't. See, we all do dumb stuff but does this really give them the right to toss us to the curb? Think about that for a minute. In the meantime, let's define the word friendship.

Friendship 1: the state of being friends 2: the quality or state of being friendly: Friendliness 3: Aid

Now, since most definitions include another base word, let's define the following:

Friend 1a: one attached to another by affection or esteem

Friendly c: cheerful, comforting 2: serving a beneficial or helpful purpose

So in other words, a friendship is a bond between people who have esteem (value) in one another who are comforting, "serving a beneficial or helpful purpose."

A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need (*NLT*, Prov. 17.17).

Here's my question, if a friend is supposed to be loyal and comforting in times of need, why do friends abandon us when we need them most? So what if this person allegedly robbed a bank, was charged with DUI, was dealing heroin, committed murder, molested a child or whatever the case may be? You leave their side because you believe you're better than they are? I can understand you being disappointed in them, ashamed of them, but aren't you further condemning them by betraying your friendship in them? Does that not put you in a compromising situation? Of course it does. We've all had someone abandon us at least once in our lives. It's devastating. So why would you willingly volunteer this suffering on those you once called your friend?

See many people use the word friend lightly. But friendship is a bond between people. Sure you have the right to pick your friends and dismiss those you deem less worthy but to forsake

someone who has been in your life for many years, who has always been there for you when you need them, and then when you make a mistake, they just walk away and ignore you. That takes a skill I hope I never achieve. If that person was a true friend, a real "best friend" they would take on every challenge you face because they would always be by your side.

In life we have to take the good with the bad sometimes. There isn't a single one of us who doesn't have a past and/or baggage. In my opinion, friends should be forever. But they're not. Some friendships it seems we grow away from. One party may move away and eventually you both are distracted by life and you move on. This I understand. But I definitely cannot understand why I seem to lose friends with every mistake I make in life. It must be nice to be perfect. Though I will admit, I have become a better friend with everyone I lost. Their distasteful actions show me what not to be. So for those of you who know I'm talking about you, thank you for your valuable lessons. And I forgive you and will never forget you. I remember every one of my friends. They are each uniquely different. Whether male or female you each will always hold a place in my heart. Some of you just tend to take up more space in there than others.

Many people may not agree with me on these points and may feel inmates deserve to lose their friends and more because of their crime. To believe this and to not understand why a friend should stay by an inmate's side leads me to believe you lack the ability to forgive and the knowledge of forgiveness. This seems to be quite prevalent from what I see in the media and actions of many inmates' families. There is so much ignorance in this it makes me sick. Especially when a Christian family turns against such an inmate perhaps yet portrays themselves as a true follower of Christ. Remember those bracelets that had the letters "WWJD?" Well, "what would Jesus do?" Would He forgive or would He shun such people? If you're reading and studying the same Bible I am, I believe there are many examples of what you **should** do. Maybe you should read more carefully.

Put your own earthly desires, thoughts, and emotions about others aside for once in your life. Don't define your family members or friends by one simple (or explicit) mistake they made in their life. See them for the person they truly are. Don't judge them by one action but by the multiple actions they've enacted their entire lives. In other words, view them as a whole. Don't focus on their negatives and overlook their positives. That's just ignorant. You don't want to be seen this way so why would you view them this way?

We should all see family as a gift freely given to us by our Creator. In other words, they are friends we don't have to work to gain their trust, love, respect, compassion, understanding...etc. It should just come naturally. As I said, God freely gave them to us. We didn't choose them... God did, which means He believes they are an intricate yet relevant means to our existence. We need to be grateful for them, respect them, and never abandon them. Yes, I know some family members can test you beyond your ability. This is when you need to ask God for strength and give Him the chance to deliver. Each test your family or friends put you through gives you a chance to grow closer to them but also to God. When you abandon them, you abandon God.

Through these past paragraphs and throughout my entire book you, the reader, may feel I am speaking harshly about families. Though, I'm not referencing my own family but the families of many inmates I've met in here. Unless I specifically say so, I am speaking for others. I happen to be blessed with an amazing family. I just happened to have been most of the problem when it came to my upbringing by my family. I was stubborn and wanting to be too independent. I tested each of my family members to exhaustion. Though I pray they know now how much I love them and are grateful they never gave up on me. Some inmates in here aren't so lucky. Some were abandoned as children and others were raised by parents who constantly undermined them

leading them to believe they are worthless and will never amount to anything. My advice to these inmates is to believe in you. To find something you believe in and fight (not physically) to bring success into your life. You will only amount to what you allow yourself to become. Start with your foundation and build a firm ground beneath you mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Once your foundation is intact, you can extend from there.

Now let's talk about enemies. This will be brief because I don't believe anyone should have enemies, let alone pursue any means to promote them. In other words, you should either have friends, family members or the unknown. The unknown category is people you've not quite convinced to becoming your friends. Once you place people in the enemy category, it's difficult to remove this from your memory. Plus, to accept persons as enemies gives placement to the devil in your heart. As long as you do not create this file, you won't be able to fill it. Although, we all have already created this file, let alone set aside an entire vault in our memory for such people. My advice for you now is to go through this, making amends and forgiving them all. Then delete the file. Do this now and don't procrastinate. The longer you hold them captive to this negative mental dungeon, the more difficult it will be to release them. Finally, don't accept the possibility of making any more enemies.

Some of you wonder why people automatically "find God" when they come to prison or find themselves. Why is this? Let me put it mildly, it's because we finally see ourselves for who we are. Also, the extremity of the situation opens our eyes. This is something I wouldn't wish on anyone, yet it becomes a blessing in disguise. Many of us inmates will admit our lengthy sentences showed us things we would have never seen had we been given less time. The problem is we are the only ones who see this. Our loved ones can't see it because they aren't going through what we are. On the contrary, they are facing their own form of punishment which they are more than likely innocent and not deserving of. Which brings me to ask an important question: "Should our court systems take into consideration the burden and impact a lengthy sentence will have on the convicted felon's family?" or "Do you believe the convicted felon's actions are probably an indirect or direct response to the upraising and development implemented by the family, thus not warranting any such mercy by the courts upon sentencing?" Well, I have my opinions on this matter and believe if you look at the situation fully and consider all outcomes, our justice system could easily handle this in a respectable and proficient manner. Families of the convicted are never taken into consideration and only what the courts feel is justice for the victim, coinciding within the parallels of the law and what they feel is adequate at the time of sentencing. In my opinion this proves our justice system is one-sided, unjust, and ignorant. Aren't we all Americans and bound by a justice system, entitled to be equal to all? Isn't our country "One nation, under God" ..., et cetera? Didn't our "Founding Fathers" base the foundation of our country on truth and God's holy word? In other words our justice system binds itself to the teachings of our Creator yet defies them entirely. Therefore, I should not be bound and restrained by such an unjust and unworthy system. Unfortunately, I am. Unfortunately, my family has done all they can through this system, but now we rely solely on a better system. God's righteous order.

Those who haven't left my side—my A-team, inspire me and encourage me every day. They give me strength and courage me to do my time wisely and are the very insurance I need to leave prison one day a better man than when I came in. If you have exhausted all means in making amends with your family, keep praying and never give up on them. Ask God for His will to be done in your life. I know He's doing so in my life because I've never had such strong bonds with some of my loved ones. For example, my dad. He and I had a falling out in 2005. We rarely



spoke until the day I got incarcerated. Because of this suffering, this trial, we have learned the true meaning of father and son. God does work in mysterious ways, if you let Him.

## Memories & Experiences

Memories. Just one more source to expand our degree of potency, what we retain about life, about our relations...etc. For instance, there are two things which create our existence: memories and or experiences to create them. Without these, who are we really? Every step in life is an experience, and once completed, becomes a memory. Sometimes in life our worst memories override our good, in which we tend to only remember the bad ones. For our memories to "stick" they must stand out. For example, my dad used to play a memory game with my sister and me. He would place random items in a brown paper bag. Then he would allow us to peek into the bag for a few seconds. Then we were to write down what we saw. Each time he would increase the time allowed to see the items until we saw every piece. This is how he would help us improve our cognitive awareness.

Obviously, there isn't much I can explain to you about memory. You can look it up on the Internet. You're privileged more than I am. However, I do want to encourage you to use your memories as a tool. Add this tool to your tool kit.

Yes, memories can upset us, leading to anxiety and depression. But that's *your* problem. I don't mean to sound rude, but if your joyful memories bring you displeasure then you have them filed wrong in your brain. Joyful memories should be placed where you can readily find them, to remind yourself of great times and bring hope for future ones. If all you see is misery and dreadful times, then your mind needs a complete overhaul. For others to see the good *in* you, you must acknowledge it and bring it to light. Nobody knows what's buried in the depths of your mind. Examine yourself and let those joys float to the surface. Goodness is not a weakness, even in prison. Joy isn't either. You're not in prison because you were too holy or righteous. You're here because you messed up. The memories you have of your crime do not need to be an anchor tied to your ankles or surging waves crashing salt water into your lungs. Calm that inner storm as Jesus did. You are in control just as He was over the sea. Embrace your inner strength and break free of the bonds holding you back. No, I am not encouraging you to escape prison. Your outer walls will be removed once you remove your inner walls. The entire structure you've depended on must come down and be rebuilt. Somewhere along the way you skipped a step or were cheated the proper materials to pass life's inspection. Rebuild and do so now. Flip through your memory file and find your weakness. Then strengthen it. The current in this world's stream is only becoming stronger. You must solidify your soul to meet the standards of our ever increasing universe.

Personally, my memories were torture to me until I found remedy to convert the pain from them into true joy. Reminiscing over my past memories, I began sinking into a selfless, pitiful vat of depression. Everywhere I turned was a memory of either being happy with my children, my wife, friends and other family. "Hello, you idiot!" I would scream to myself. "These are wonderful memories." "I should be grateful I remember them."

Memories should be able to be viewed in your mind like pictures. Once you close your eyes you capture each moment behind your eyelids. Becoming an escape from reality into the depths of my memories. Thrilling my soul. Now thriving on every fume of every fiery sensation. I can remember the smell of fresh air, the freshly fallen leaves in autumn. I can feel the cool moisture of a winter's first snow and taste the pureness of the snow landing on my tongue. I can smell the scent of my wife's perfume lingering as we lean together to share a kiss. I can feel the presence

of my son's hand in mine, seeming so small and fragile while we walk around our neighborhood. I can feel the tension in my chest when my daughter falls off her scooter, scrapping her knee. I feel the genuine warmth of a greatly needed hug from a loved one who always melts my heart when she's near. I can remember the exact moment I met my eldest daughter; the innocence in her eyes and desperation to be loved. My mind may fool me at times, but each memory is still bonded, molded into my soul. They are what fuel my motivation. Our memories are God's blessings to us and we should cherish them as so.

Memories we wish to never experience again are there for a specific reason. To scare us from ever indulging in such acts and to steer us away from certain places or individuals. They're warnings. Find peace with what you store in your head. Enjoy this gift rather than seeing it as a curse. If you do not respect these memories God gave you, they will be lost forever.

While I walked around and around in my little cage this morning with the warmth of God's brilliance shining upon me, an epiphany came to mind. For years I have struggled with why I have troubles remembering so many of my "greatest" memories. I'm not exactly sure of the science behind it, but I believe somehow, some way, I am protecting myself from myself. Over the years I have clouded my conscience with the belief my most memorable experiences cause my depression, thus not permitting me to enjoy them, for fear I will "hurt myself" or stumble deeper into my state of depression. Maybe even God has His hand in this as well.

From a toddler I can recall my elders telling me to "be patient" and to "cast my burdens upon the Lord." Along my journey of aging I believe I began casting the wrong burdens. I've grown quite attached to people, places and things. During their loss I excessively reminisce over them and become depressed. I believe my subconscious won't allow this anymore though. If I ask God in prayer to take away my burdens and my burdens are those memories causing me grief, wouldn't you believe God would grant such a prayer?

"Our Father which art in heaven..." is a Father of love. He sent His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus Christ then became our advocate through his blood and God's grace and mercy. Our Lord and Savior is our comforter.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation (*KJV*, 2 Cor. 1.3-4a).

Therefore, my assumption God would comfort my soul even though it may be by removing my fondest memories—temporarily—of course, could be factual. When I am strengthened to my fullest potential and can weather any storm, God would definitely restore the most treasurable possessions of my mind. We must also be obedient and serve only God. He reminds us of this often. Our affections should be focused on Him and heavenly things, as Colossians 3.2 states. We are to let the "peace of God" rule in our hearts, as Colossians 3.15 states. Our flesh and bones are only temporary. Our life on planet Earth is our mission. We must succeed in all areas to receive every reward we can possibly achieve. We should want to make our heavenly Father proud of us every day. Awakening every morning thankful to serve Him and praying every night to be given another day to do His will.

Our life, as I stated above as our mission, has a time limit. Our days are numbered but unknown to us. You have no clue when your time is up. God wants you to choose Him by faith, by obedience to His word, by trusting in Him. He doesn't exactly spell everything out for us in

"lame" terms. No, he had His word written in parables and ancient Hebrew text. Later being translated, by those He chose, into common English.

So we have an excuse to break the commandments of God, right? Wrong! There's no excuse you could possibly come up with to refute this. I'll tell you why. Written in *KJV*, Romans 2.14-15 boldly states:

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, those, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another. (*KJV*, Rom.2.14-15).

Inspired by our heavenly Father, Paul wrote that perfectly. For a brief description of why we don't see the truth or hear the gospel when it's spoken, clearly refer to Acts 28.27.

For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them. (*NKJV*, Acts 28.27).

So what's my point you ask? Our memories and experiences are a gift given to us by God. We are to live wisely, insuring our experiences through life are memorable and worthy of His praise. Then we can reflect back on each one of them, using them as stepping stones to reach greater heights.

For my strength is made perfect in weakness (*KJV*, II Cor. 12.9b).

Eventually my friend we will reach the top, climbing over our mountains. Our Lord will carry us the rest of the way into heaven. All we have to do is keep climbing over life's jagged edges and around the bends of our fleshly desires. Your dedication will not go unnoticed. Many await you beyond the clouds to embrace you and praise you when your time comes.

Now that we covered some memories, let me give you some experiences I will never forget. So let me tell you what a person does when confined to a 7' X 13' cell all to one's self. Sometimes we panic, sometimes we feel psychotic and sometimes we even find a certain person who is completely at ease, like a past celly I had. His nickname was NASCAR. He use to ask me to read the Bible out loud for him. Crazy fool kept falling asleep though.

What you do is completely up to you. The question is, "Are you fearful of being alone?" How about, "Do you *need* human companionship?" "Are you the type of individual who becomes claustrophobic in confined spaces?" I sure hope not or you will definitely not be able to handle this. It even took me quite a while to reach my own personal level of contentment.

Depending on which prison a person is at the following may differ. Where I'm located there are approximately 314 blocks placed strategically around you in a not quite complete rectangle.

This forms 7' X 13' room. There is a window measuring about 5" wide X 4' in height on one end of your cell. You are closed in by a 2" hollow steel door. The door consists of a 4" by approximately 2' glass window, and a 4" X 16" mini-flap used to give you your food tray and medication. White-washed cement-block walls painted an awful cream color are somewhat abrasive, showing signs of peeled paint.

So, now you have a clear image of the structures which hold us in every day and night. Let's have a go at what's in each cell awaiting your stay. There's a stainless steel sink and toilet combo unit spaciouly designed at an angle welcoming each passerby a preview of your lower extremities. Above this there is a glazed steel mirror depicting signs of hatred for one's image. Directly to your left three inches and slightly above your mirror is an air vent gently exhaling a fresh scent of last week's stale laundry and three-decade-old moldy dust bunnies. Quite appealing (complete sarcasm). To the right of the mirror beholds the "smaller" exit vent which graciously inhales your daily finest. Both these mysterious voids can also be used to transmit messages from one source to another. Often times a person might wonder if these voices heard through the vents are actually external or internal to your own thoughts. I personally prefer not to use this form of communication; although, it is like having your phone on speaker and having 4-way calling. These vents connect the floor below with the floor above. Four cells connected to each vent-way. To reach any other inmate outside this local connection you must use "SOT-DC," which is interpreted by me as "Screaming-Out-The-Door-Crack." In my opinion this form of communication is beyond annoying.

A lot of thought and preparation was implemented into the design of the unique and exquisite shelf and stool-styled desk. It appears to be handcrafted sheet metal by a master welder to perfection. The stool part consists of a polished spherical, metallic 1940's hubcap. Let's just say, "Sitting on this for more than an hour can and will cause soreness of the inner dimensions of your gluteus maximus." So, you've been warned.

Your last but not least residential antiquity would be nothing other than your highness's best—your bed—or should I say "slab of steel bolted to the wall with a deformed, mold-ridden mat desecrated by thousands of prior inmates." Can you say pubic-hair central? I apologize, we do get a sheet to cover the mattress. So your face is at least one hundredth of an inch away from the filth while we rest our little heads at night. Did I mention the plush and tender carpeting on the floor? Ahh...that's because there isn't any. Just a waxed cement floor.

Such a cozy atmosphere and priceless furnishings do actually bring a peace of mind. Until you acknowledge their existence again. Let's just say that a 45 degree toilet seat at 3 a.m. is generally not on my Top-10 greatest experiences. Okay, it may not be quite that cold, but it sure feels like it.

Generally, as adults we've faced enough trials and have been given enough experience to reach it through one level in life after the other. Soon thereafter we learn to accept reality and face it. But in prison, life is completely different. We do as we must. We almost have to just accept the loss of everything we've ever worked for. No one in here is really watching you. No one really cares what you do. Seriously! The other day a gentleman hung himself in the very place I am right now, the hole. I'm not sure how, but that's irrelevant. Supposedly, there was a complete investigation into the cause...etc. and SCI was not found at fault. Of course, why would they be? It's not as if it's their job to protect and watch over us. Their job is really only to count us and to ensure we haven't escaped. Guess we are just a number to the system.

This was obviously, a form of his creativity though not a good one. Inevitably the worst got the best of him. As I've heard said here quite a lot, "he couldn't handle the door." What the hell

does that mean anyway? It means being alone while your world/ life is being destroyed, loved ones leaving you or thinking the worst of you. All you've worked for is lost, sucked down the drain and your confinement to less than 90 square feet. Being trapped in your mind all day with your worst thoughts.

Most who can handle the above have either been down awhile or patiently are facing their time day by day. Others who easily face this are those with nothing to lose and those not affected by doing time. For example, a habitual criminal, whose life is a constant mess of turmoil, hate, and lack of compassion. They become a pawn played on life's chessboard. They exist only to exist and only to cause others grief and stress. This of course is my opinion, only because of how some inmates act. For example, the prior celly of the man who hung himself. I was told specifically from the celly that he told the guy he should hang himself. That his life wasn't worth living. Imagine the "what-ifs" in this situation. May God bring peace to his family.

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (*NIV*, 1 Cor. 10.12-13).

## Faith & Beliefs

The following will be a short chapter. Not based on a lack of relevance but because I've informed you plenty of times already of my beliefs. To reach a wider audience, I do not want to infringe upon others, causing them to stumble. Though I may add a few resources for those who care to learn more.

So, whether you have a spiritual foundation or not, I would only ask you: "ensure you have a reasonably structured and firm foundation." Believe what you must, but always be true to yourself and others. Know others won't always follow your lead. Be acceptant of this and in your own way "pray for them." Don't condemn them for having their own opinion. This is actually a gift freely given to the human race. Our free will. Our country, America, is founded on it. However, recent events in the news all throughout the world, this foundation is being severely attacked. Though we are raised through our own heritage and/or religion to believe we are right and our ways are most beneficial. "Who gives any of us the right to rule over another's free will?" Slavery was supposed to be abolished, yet our country is allowing it mentally and spiritually. Though the majority of physical slavery has ceased, there are still forms of it in America, but the terminology is changed to cover-it-up. Our common sense and our common knowledge should expose the ignorance of these ways. The issue that causes most to suffer indifference from others and their beliefs is fear. Fear others will convert them. Fear others will be right and we'll be wrong. Maybe it's fear they *are* wrong, and they'll be punished in the after-life for being so ignorant to the correct ways. Your foundation should not be built on fear. If it is, it will surely crumble. What do you fear? Do you fear "fear" itself like Harry Potter was predicted to have when facing a Bogart? Do you fear death? I surely don't.

What is death? What is it to you? Death is either the ending for some or the beginning for others. So I ask, "What is there to fear?" If it is your beginning, you can only gain more than you now have. If it's your ending, you will no longer suffer through a treacherous life. Even if you are very wealthy and living a life of pure joy, common sense clearly explains there's an ending to your amusing ride through life. There's no choice in death. It inevitably will come no matter how you prepare, what your opinion is, whether you fear it or not. So once again I ask, "What is there to fear about death?"

Should we really tremble and cry because we will no longer exist? Is it honestly righteous to fear the loss of possessions, fame, or our standing on Earth? I don't think so. That's cowardice. I do not fear death. I do not fear man. I do not fear Satan or hell or any other meaningless soul on this Earth. I fear God only. He and He alone decides whether to condemn my soul or raise me up. "Wisdom is strength, strength is knowledge and knowledge is discernment in the sense of God's word."

Here are a few principles I learned while watching the In Touch Ministries on television each Sunday morning (Stanley, Charles F. *30 Life Principles*. Harper Collins Publishing, 2008)<sup>11</sup>. This list of life's principles is just the beginning of what you'll learn from not only Dr. Charles Stanley but also from you becoming dedicated to your studying of God's word. Take the time you have now; the time you've been given to do some good in your life.

## **Life Principles to Live By In Touch Ministries**

Charles F. Stanley

1. Our intimacy with God—His highest priority for our lives—determines the impact of our lives.
2. Obey God and leave all the consequences to Him.
3. God's word is an immovable anchor in times of storm.
4. The awareness of God's presence energizes us for our work.
5. God does not require us to understand His will; just obey it, even if it seems unreasonable.
6. You reap what you sow, more than you sow, and later than you sow.
7. The dark moments of our life will last only so long as is necessary for God to accomplish His purpose in us.
8. Fight all your battles on your knees and you win every time.
9. Trusting God means looking beyond what we can see to what God sees.
10. If necessary, God will move heaven and earth to show us His will.
11. God assumes full responsibility for our needs when we obey Him.
12. Peace with God is the fruit of oneness with God.
13. Listening to God is essential to walking with God.
14. God acts on behalf of those who wait for Him.
15. Brokenness is God's requirement for maximum usefulness.
16. Whatever you acquire outside of God's will eventually turns to ashes.
17. We stand tallest and strongest on our knees.
18. As children of a sovereign God, we are never victims of our circumstances.
19. Anything you hold too tightly you will lose.
20. Disappointments are inevitable; discouragement is a choice.
21. Obedience always brings blessings.
22. To walk in the spirit is to obey the initial promptings of the spirit.
23. You can never out-give God.
24. To live the Christian life is to allow Jesus to live His life in and through us.
25. God blesses us so that we might bless others.
26. Adversity is a bridge to a deeper relationship with God.
27. Prayer is life's greatest time saver.
28. No Christian has ever been called to "go it alone" in his or her walk of faith.
29. We learn more in our valley experiences than on our mountain tops.
30. An eager anticipation of the Lord's return keeps us living productively.



## Humbling

The basic key to anything in life is patience. We've all heard this word so many times in our lives; you're probably as disgusted as I am to hear it more. Though it's necessary. Imagine patience being second to the air we breathe. To give you a proper insight on humbling yourself I would naturally turn to the Bible. For example:

Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up (*KJV*, Jas. 4.10).

When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom (*KJV*, Prov.11.2).

...and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (*KJV*, Luke 18.14b).

These are only a few scriptures which explain the necessity of being humble in all areas of life. To be humble basically means to surrender yourself to something. Not to be arrogant or prideful. To place others before you. A person of faith would embrace this wisdom because they are already familiar with it. If you're not a person of faith I hope the resources and words within give you the validity necessary to open your heart.

Throughout my thirty plus years of living I have come to the conclusion most people care less about humbling themselves. They are unfortunately forced to. We say we simply don't have the time or don't see the importance in doing so until it's too late. I believe we all possess the skill needed to do so on our own. I also believe the majority of our intentions are pure, yet we still do not accept to be humbled. We fight it. I know I do. I've wanted *my* dreams and desires. I've stepped over whoever got in my way of achieving them. Have you ever done so? How do you feel about it now?

I hope you haven't, but we are similar in more ways than we accept. As a spiritual man and firm believer in God, I know *He* will humble me if I become too proud. If I don't acknowledge *His* influence through us. I am living proof of this. I am a very stubborn man; well, I was until He humbled me over and over. I obviously wasn't getting the point. The times I felt the most prideful, arrogant and boastful in my life *He* knocked me off my throne. Why? I did not humble myself to *Him*. I did not give *Him* the praise, the glory He righteously deserved. We must realize this or we risk losing everything. As I've mentioned, God has willed me to write this book. It's a form of therapy yes, but it is also a lesson I must learn and share with others. My stubborn attitude causes me to fight writing this every day too. Humbling yourself has never been easy nor will it ever become easy.

Some of you may venture through life as an independent soul seeking your own desires. You believe the world is at your taking and nothing is more powerful than you.

No one can teach, preach, or explain anything you don't already know. Many men before you also were brought to their knees thinking this very strategy.

Although it took me about 15 to 20 years to realize this and to open my eyes to what God was telling me; I can honestly admit I am a better man, now that I can see. I am humbling myself now "to you" and "for you." Many like myself have paved a new path, providing a smooth road for those to follow.

## **Being Open Minded**

I am not a mechanic nor do I have a degree in electrical engineering. Just seeing a mess of wires can frustrate me. I am also no brain surgeon, rocket scientist, and I do not work for NASA or the CIA. However, this does not mean I couldn't have one of these successful careers. I simply don't have the necessary desire to fulfill these positions. My will, my purpose, is meant to be fulfilled elsewhere.

We are each born with unique talents, skills and gifts from God to perform in specific trades. These areas are what truly define your purpose, your uniqueness. Sometimes we don't know our full potential let alone our purpose. We may become too focused on things placed before us as distractions, thus veering from our goals, our destiny. You might see someone else doing a specific task, excelling at it and envy them. This envy can blind you from your own true abilities. As plumbing to masonry vary so do each of us. Keeping an open-mind allows for broader expectations: goals.

We must find the art within our own spectrum by examining our role within the whole existence. This can only be accomplished by accepting the truth; we may not know what's best for us. Listen carefully to the whimsical notes of correction, discipline and multiple possibilities spoken from the musical instruments playing in your symphony of a life. Hear each tune. Accept the pitch and vocalize your truth with grace, to reach one harmony.

## Perception By Way of Others

There are many things I've learned in life that I should have learned a lot earlier in life. However, there is a time and place for everything. Today may be your time to recognize certain obstacles in your life, or tomorrow may be the moment you finally realize your potential. Our problem with not seeing what's in front of our face can be as simple as our desire to please those around us, instead of living our life by God's will, appeasing Him and living for ourselves. Now, I know someone out there will misunderstand the point I'm making and completely do the opposite. So let me clarify. "Living for ourselves" does not mean to be greedy and walk over others. Absolutely not! When I say living for ourselves I am implying you focus on you. We must get our lives in order first before we can do anything for anyone else. Your priorities should always be God first, you second, and then comes your family. ....etc..etc. Placing God (or whoever your entity is) first ensures your ship will sail in the right direction. Then of course you would be the captain, following God (your compass) and the passengers aboard are those you are to lead to the Lord. Does that make sense to you?

In other words, you can't allow others to constantly be trying to steer your life for you. Everyone will have a somewhat different approach to how you should live your life. Their perception of you will also be different and often misleading. You need to be the captain of your ship. It's that simple. Yes, you can listen to the opinions and advice of those around you but come to your own conclusion. If not you will be allowing others to dictate your outcome. If where they feel you should be in life turns out wrong, it will mainly affect you. Not them. Plus, only you will learn God's purpose for you. He's not going to hide His will from you while telling everyone else. He speaks to you through your heart and conscience. So listen to Him. If we human beings would give our Creator even a shred of the time we give to our own sins, life would be more pure and genuine. The problem is we tend to only listen to that divine presence in our thoughts when we are not getting our way.

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures (*NKJV*, Jas. 4.2-3).

Now this chapter can also be defined in another way. Your reputation. I for one would like to say, "Don't fret about your reputation, especially the one given to you by non-believers." However, I can't just leave it at that. As inmates, whether Christian, Muslim, or Jewish, non-believer or whatever, our reputation will follow us wherever we go in prison. Of course I would not let this justify your behavior or your actions. I would still say be conscious of how others perceive you. Whether you're seen as a threat, a snitch, a loner, or whatever, you only have control over your actions.

As a Christian, my goal, or better yet my responsibility is to emit a specific presence about myself. I'm not to appear prideful or arrogant. I'm not to be seen as one who is submissive to the ways of this world but to be seen as a wise, genuine, respectable man of God. This of course would be my being as Christ-like as possible. "Do I appear that way?" You ask. No, not exactly.

Not by many people. Some inmates see me as a wise individual with high morals, and others just think I'm weird. Unusual. Not the norm. For example, my current celly doesn't understand why I won't get high with him. He thinks because I won't do my time his way—the way a normal inmate should—that I am abnormal. Well, let me tell you something my friend, "this must mean I'm doing something right in my life." Praise the Lord.

You might ask, "Would I like to sit back and get high in here?" To be honest, there are parts of me which would love to chill and be one with my fellow inmates. But then my rational sense kicks in and I realize this would be me living their way. Yes, it would probably make my time in here a little mellower. Imagine though all the negatives that would come from my submitting to this sort of pressure. The real question I ask myself when faced with such dilemmas is, "Will it help me reach a personal success in my life or will it hinder my efforts to be better than who I was before I was incarcerated?" This is really two questions in one, but I combine them with the expectations of getting a yes/no answer. If my answer to any situation results in this question other than a yes (first part) and a no (second part) then I have a problem. For example, getting in fights, doing drugs, and other negative behavior will not help me reach a level of personal success and will definitely hinder my efforts in changing who I once was.

Prison is normally seen as a punishment to most. It's true; it is in a sense punishment. However, it should, in my opinion, be seen not as a punishment but a second chance. The time you're given should not be used to demoralize a person nor dehumanize them but to find their purpose in life, to rehabilitate them from whatever they became, whether from childhood neglect and abuse, negative detrimental influences or their sinful desire to seek vengeance upon others. No matter what caused a person to "transgress" the law, our duty as children of God is to forgive them and help heal them. A huge part of healing someone is assisting them in finding their true path in life.

Though I've gotten slightly off topic, allowing other people's perception of you to define you and accepting this "as is" can seriously screw up your life. Once again, listen to others' opinions, their advice...etc.... but come to your own conclusion. Pray about what is said. Pray about your thoughts and ask God to allow you to shine your true light for others. Remember, God gave **you** your own free will. He gave this gift to *you* because He wants you to freely choose to do His will, which is the correct will for your life. Imagine how wonderful the world would be if we all accepted God's will for our lives. Think about it.

So I leave you at the end of this chapter with one question you should ask yourself daily, "What should I be doing with my life now that later I may wish there were time-machines so I could go back and change it?"

## Building Strength

"Your Honor, I stand before You with my client (*insert your name here*), my son/daughter, whom graciously serves and adores You." "Father, his/her sins have been cleansed by My blood and by Your mercy." "I ask Father, You embrace Your child and welcome him/her into Your arms, the kingdom of heaven."

Doesn't sound like the typical arraignment or preliminary hearing does it? Sure doesn't. See, man's law is not forgiving. Only God's law is. Once you're cleansed by Christ's blood your sins are washed away. "Our Father who art in heaven" can't see any wrong in you because Jesus Christ, our advocate, represents us. He's a divine and heavenly friend to the judge. If you're good with Jesus, you're good with the judge, His Father. Imagine that, finally being part of the "elite" group. You will be, if and only if, you believe *in* Him and surrender *to* Him. Ask for forgiveness; believe Christ is God's son, sent to be the blood sacrifice, for the cleansing of our impurities, furthermore, being baptized for the remission of your sins. Nothing is ever truly cleansed until it is thoroughly washed.

Being obedient to the word of God will forever protect you from the realm of death in this world. Eternal life, love, joy, and peace will encompass your soul, leaving behind our useless and sinful flesh. Our body is only a vessel. Just like an automobile, it is useless without the engine, so are we. Our soul is our engine. As in a vehicle being made better by upgrading the engine, God's word will do the same for you. Not only will you get better gas mileage, your overall performance will astonish and surpass those around you. The same can be done for you. All you need to do is put on the new body of Christ. Give yourself a tune up. Don't put on shiny hubcaps and a few pinstripes. Do it right. Don't be fake. God not only sees through it, so do we.

For the Lord sees clearly what a man does, examining every path he takes (*NLT*, Prov. 5.21).

Remember, no matter what changes you make to yourself, others will always be the first to judge you. Before you fear this read the following scripture.

You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuses! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things (*NLT*, Rom. 2.1).

Remember "karma," and "you reap what you sow?" Either way they will get a taste of their own medicine. I know this because I am as we speak...well, while I write. My judging others so much condemned me. I'm now pleading for my own forgiveness. May God have mercy on my soul.

As I believe, there's no wrong time in your life to change, but now is always better than later. Had I changed earlier in life, I would have never fallen into this specific predicament. Had I been more passionate about serving God's will and less adamant about my own, prison would not be

my current abode. Once down a narrow path it becomes even more difficult to see the signs around you.

We all judge. This is part of our genetic make-up, our sinful nature. However, as we become more aware of ourselves we can start directing our thoughts better. Then asking God to forgive us. Each time we catch ourselves casting judgement on others we should chastise ourselves. Not to physically harm ourselves but acknowledging our wrongdoing. Eventually this will help you cease from judging as much. This takes time. Most of us don't realize we're judging others at times. Pay close attention to yourself one day and I'll bet you notice even a slight amount of it.

This is not impossible to accomplish. Once again, overriding all negatives with positives can help you with this task. Also realizing, "since we are all uniquely made by God, judging someone for what they look like, how they dress, the mistakes they make...etc. is actually judging God for His choices and designs." Who are we to judge and what amount of our opinion is relevant to God's plan? Most of us judge because of envy, jealousy, or out of pure ignorance of another's life. Each of these are a sin and also not acceptable in God's sight. Each of these could also label you a busy body. Do you know what that means? It means you are more interested in trying to fix others' problems than your own. I bet if there was a "National Look at Yourself Day," the world would probably stop spinning. You have three hundred, sixty-five of them each year. Why not use at least one of them on yourself. Looking at your own reflection: issues. Study it closely and you'll begin to see your spots and blemishes. Those are your faults, your sins: the areas in need of cleansing. Whatever you think you're doing to currently cleanse yourself must not be working if you're too concerned with others' problems. This includes every single one of us. No one is excused.

Who can say, I have cleansed my heart; I am pure and free from sin? (*NLT*, Prov. 20.9).

The problem is, too many people do not look in their spiritual mirror. No, seriously, look again. Now that you've looked, let's find some ways to overcome your fears, fix your issues, and work on getting you balanced. Then and only then can you help those you love. Not before. A drowning person can never be relied on to save someone else. So let's save your life first.

There are many techniques people use to calm themselves, to enable them to think clearly. A few are meditation, prayer, visualization, breathing exercises and yoga. Some may even use art as I do. Any positive exercise that helps you build strength is encouraged. You should pick something comfortable for you. No technique is suitable to all. Once you pick yours, make sure you educate yourself about it as much as possible. Currently, I have no access to the Internet but for those of you who do, use it wisely. Keep in mind these techniques offer better results when practiced in a peaceful environment; although, mastery of your skill will allow you to perform them anywhere.

Let's briefly discuss what each of these methods includes. For instance, there's prayer. Prayer is basically your opportunity to speak personally and confidentially with *your* higher power. The object of prayer is to "humble"—give yourself over to your higher power. In a way you are venting. You are releasing your stress and tension by giving it over to that source. It's actually easier than putting words on paper. Some even see prayer as a way to connect with your soul: your conscience. Just relax, close your eyes, and speak within your mind. Preferably only in suitable areas, of course. Not while driving! Prayer is best when you can give all your attention

to it. You can pray anywhere, anytime, with your eyes open or closed. Though being fully submissive in prayer leads to better communication.

Now let's talk about another favorite of mine, meditation.

Meditation: 1. To engage in contemplation or reflection 2: to engage in mental exercise, for the purpose of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness.

As you can see, meditation includes prayer, visualization and some breathing exercises. However, I'm sure we all get the silly picture in our minds when someone mentions meditation. "Hummmmm...!!"

With meditation you are focusing on slowing your heart rate to lower your stress and built-up tension. People meditate for many reasons. Some could include preparing for a speech, to calm your nerves after an intense phone call or meeting. Maybe, as I do, you want to clear your mind, so you don't flip out on someone. Maybe you will use meditation to relax your breathing to decrease migraine pain. I do this too. Practicing meditation will help unclog your mind, soothe pain, and prepare you for the next tense situation. Remember, our goal with meditation is to reach a sense of humbleness.

Personally, I have never done yoga and I've previously mentioned my use of art for therapy, so let's look at our final source, visualization. This I also use quite often.

Visualization: 1. Formation of mental visual images. 2. The act or process of interpreting in visual terms or of putting in visible form.

In other words, visualization is meditation through imagination. For instance, in my circumstance I am in prison. I am away from my family and friends. However, using this method I can close my eyes, relaxing my body, altering my focal point, and imagining I am walking down the beach holding hands with my wife or playing Frisbee with my son. You could imagine you're out boating, fishing, or swimming. While using this as a coping method you can mentally visualize whatever your heart desires. You can imagine eating whatever, being whatever, and seeing anything. If you can imagine it, then you can see it.

Our imaginations and capabilities to imagine are endless. Nobody can take this away from us. This is *your* escape from reality. However, keep in mind your visualizations are **not** real. This is only a coping method, not an alternate reality to live in. You must have a sense of control when doing this, or it can become a false reality you become addicted to, which can lead to depression...etc. The actual *use* of visualization won't lead you down a negative path. It's your abusing it that can. I have in the past few years, until recently, used visualization and became addicted to it. This became my **only** way to see my children, my parents, my sisters, to relive memories with them. I couldn't go a day without wanting to dive deep into the false reality of their physical existence within my mind. Eventually, I had to face my denial they were gone and climb my way back into the true reality. I had to convince myself the recent memories of my being with them weren't real and move on with my life until they truly came back. I allowed myself to be tricked by my lack of will power: strength.



I've already discussed visualization as a means of mental escape as well as meditation so let's journey now through an adverse form called retaliation. I know what you're thinking, "How can this be intuitive and inspiring?" Well, for the record it isn't, but it is still a way some inmates cope, keeping their mind off the four letter word called "Time." As I mentioned earlier about the mirror in our room, we often picture the person on the other side normally as the victim. It's true. Then again, some may even visualize their reflection as an enemy. Though no matter how many times they punch, scratch, or cuss at it, it's always themselves who get the blunt of the pain. This is a perfect lesson in life for one to learn. No matter the situation, just assume it will hurt you more than the opposing person. This may just keep some people from enacting revenge. Obviously if you're alone you can't do any harm to others, or so we hope. This however doesn't mean your mind can't wander to the dark side. Remember, what we think in our private thoughts we will still be held accountable for one day.

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel (*KJV*, Rom. 2.16).

Demented thoughts, at one point during my previous years, drowned out my fine character, allowing me to feel the generic satisfaction of reaping my own ending of specific persons. Self-worth and lack of will-power were my weakest links, overtaken by my desire to extract my own revenge. Here's a strange comparison, having to do with things that are generic. For instance, craving a brown-sugar Pop tart by Kellogg but instead the store only has the "generic brand." See, I hate generic brands because they never taste right, but they will temporarily satisfy your craving.

So, same theory with the same result except it's only a temporary fix to the solution. Fortunately we're given "time," which allows us to calm down and seek more rational ways to dissolve our anger. Though not all inmates use this time wisely and allow their anger and need for retaliation to overcome them.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith (*NKJV*, Gal. 6.10).

Do not say, "I will recompense evil"; Wait for the Lord, and He will save you (*NKJV*, Prov. 20:22).

He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly (*NKJV*, Prov. 14.29).

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath (*NKJV*, Jas. 1.19).

Be angry, and do not sin. do not let the sun go down on your wrath, (*NKJV*, Eph.4.26).

I've learned most things the hard way in life though as I'm aging I am learning more to take things in stride. To listen more to my conscience and not to act on anger. Remember, retaliation against others **will** teach you many lessons, however, adhering to my advice and above scripture will be a more promising and less painful lesson. With the evil thoughts I've entertained in this place I could definitely be worse off than I am, let alone writing an entire series of psycho-analytical, prolific and yet preposterous, unethical anomalies.

So please be careful my friend. Once your meditation, whichever method you use, soothes you, let go of it and face reality again. Keep at it. Speak your positive affirmation to yourself and keep striving to reach your goals. Imagine your success and *never* give up.

# Motivation

Motivation 1a: the act or process of motivating b: the condition of being motivated 2: a motivating force, stimulus, or influence: incentive, drive

What is motivation? How exactly does it work? Can we get a prescription for it? I thought so for quite some time. But actually it comes from many things around us. There are many ways and many forms one can be motivated by. Some people are even their own motivators. Seeing how I am constantly criticizing myself, I need to turn to my support team at times. They help me see my achievements. They push me almost every day to succeed. Some of them I've met in here, but most are family members who know the real me. They know my strengths and accept my weaknesses. They've seen me rise to my full potential and even witnessed my fall. The glory of it all is they've never left my side. Not once did they stray away. They, my support team, have given me courage, strength, and belief I must never give up.

Notice I have only mentioned what's positive about my situation. We all know by now negativity does not, nor will ever, promote success. Unless you're searching for negative success. However, we have to at least acknowledge the negative to see the positive. They both exist, but only one motivates you. There is always a balance of the two in life. Too much of a positive will lead to pride. Too little may lead to depression or worse. Find your balance in life and strive to keep it. Accept your faults, your weaknesses, and build on your strengths. Use your building blocks, unique to you, to create your own masterpiece. Others cannot do this for you, though they can assist. It would be a shame to waste what's so freely given.

Although there are many ways to be motivated in life and even our support team can be helpful; we must be our #1 fan. If we do not assist in our own motivation we will ultimately fail.

Let's examine the base word in motivation, "motive." Then we can ask these questions: "What is your motive in life?" "What causes you to wake up in the morning?" "What do you need or desire in life?" The answers to these questions are what will motivate you to succeed. Motivation is a personal act or desire. It's internal, not external. So you must start with the force within you. Your soul. Your conscience. What is it telling you, you must do in your life? Are you even listening to yourself, or are you just floating through life on auto-pilot?

Once you know what your motives are, what drives you to continue existing, you will be able to reach your goals, thus becoming a success at fulfilling the will you're destined to accomplish. If only you'll let this understanding of motivation lead you. I guarantee your life will change for the better and those around you will reflect this change as well.

## Staying Focused

How do I keep myself focused? By my looking beyond the horizon of what my sentencing may accomplish, remembering my goals: my purpose. These are only a few ways to stay focused, but they seem to be the ones with the best results. Even though some people are impatient and can't grasp the purpose of my gathering information, I continue to strive forward, retrieving my research through my God-given gifts.

Let me tell you another short story about me. About when I was born. This should give you some insight on why I have such endurance in life.

I grew up in a very small, insignificant town in Ohio. I was a bit sheltered but well loved by my family and friends. I never thought of myself as important in life, just knew I existed. My immense heart, motivation, inspiration and joy to be active kept me out of trouble but eager to take on any challenge.

After trying most sports, I felt I was just an average person who would never see victory, the joy of winning, being the best at something. However, my mother's advice gave me the boost I needed at this desperate time. She said, "You may not have found the sport *you* are best at, but don't give up." "Keep trying them all until you find it." Well, I did as she said. Track became my sport. Of course I could play the others, but I was only average at them. But track took me above and beyond the mark of being just average.

Though I wasn't always even at this average mark. I was born well below it. Still to this day I am unaware of what the defect is medically labeled, but I was born with my legs "flopped out to the side." I wore casts on my legs the first six months of my life then graduated to braces up my legs, bolted to my baby shoes. I had these braces on my legs until I was about two years old. I guess I was sort of like a "baby Forrest Gump."

These leg braces interfered with many aspects of my younger years. I was seen as an overly-heavy baby, not by my weight but by my leg braces. No one wanted to hold me or carry me around. This of course did not slow me down. To get around I would use my arms and scoot around on my butt. Eventually, those dreadful entrapments came off. When they did, my legs were stronger than ever. All I wanted to do was run. I grew up in a neighborhood consisting of mainly my entire family. Typically, we would all walk to one another's house. My legs got me from house to house quickly. Did I mention I lived in the country? My one cousin's driveway was a quarter of a mile long.

Once I found out track was my sport, my running seemed to finally serve a purpose. I was actually given a reason to run. I was not the quickest of runners so short distances lost interest to me. But long distance allowed me to run longer and further, burning off excess stored energy. In a typical track meet I would run no less than four miles, which is quite a distance. Unfortunately, my bad choices in life never allowed me to go far. However, I learned valuable lessons from them. The main lesson I learned was, "How to stay focused." For instance, as an athlete running lap after lap, your heart beat elevated and in competitive mode, you are focused on one thing—winning (or at least finishing). Without this full concentration an athlete would not meet their personal expectations.

So how do we relate the above scenario to a situation such as prison or to life in general? Why would anyone sentenced to prison need the ability to stay focused? Easy, you might not be in prison had you focused on the right path. Furthermore, you will only walk out these gates,

never to come back, by realizing the relevance of staying focused. In my experience I've seen what losing your focus does. What a lack of determination can bring. Here is an example of my losing focus. It's a short clip I pulled out of my journal. See if you can relate and if you can notice where I went wrong.

Thursday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014, 1 p.m.

To whom it may concern,

Today once again I spoke with my wife, after calling my dad. He's at my house picking up my stuff. Yeah, that's right. My stuff! I was on the phone trying to convince my wife to stay by my side. She of course refuses to do so and pleads it's not fair to her. Although true, somehow she feels it's fair to me. I refuse to sit here lying to myself about her remaining by my side. She's abandoning me, let alone dishonoring *her* vows. Who am I to speak though? Obviously, I am the one to blame and the only one at fault. Just because I was blinded by all the stress in life and fighting for our future. Despite this fact my utter exhaustion of life, I'm being punished for doing what's right. "Story of my life." Do you know what's funny about all this? I still told her I love her, I'm still here for her, and I forgive her for her current acts. I also told her I would still wait *for* her. The funny part? She's already screwing somebody else and is moving away with him. Both of them just reached my Top-3 Most Wanted List. That's right! How dare she think she can just quit on me, denying me my own son and walk away. I don't think so! I normally don't have a vengeful heart, but something just clicked in me the other day. Sure I was upset when she told me she found someone new, but when my best friend verified this, proceeding to fill-me-in on the juicy details, my anger was set in motion. While I was under the impression she was being "a good and supportive wife," she wasn't. She was only wearing her wedding rings during visits to see me, then removing them when she left. Do you have any idea what I want to do to both of them? I could explain in graphic detail; however, I won't.

Can you "feel" the hatred I **had**? Imagine you're feeling this. Try imagining how you would hold this back. This kind of anger could lead someone to actually following through with their revengeful thoughts.

Can you see my frustrations? Can you see where my focus is and where it should've been? For the record, I do not feel entirely the same now. Thank God. Do you see my point in why I included this journal entry during *this* chapter? Writing this story I struggled to keep myself focused and on topic. It's extremely difficult to control your thoughts in a stressful environment; but I shouldn't struggle this much. There's just too much to consider, too much to stress over, be concerned with, too much to upset and depress a person. Things just flash through my mind over and over again. My ideas all seem to just merge together like a traffic jam in my mind. Better yet like the hooks we used to hang Christmas ornaments, when they get all tangled up during storage (I swear a little mean elf or gremlin would sneak into my attic to tangle them up just before the holiday). Then my emotions get involved, causing a glitch in my ability to stay focused. I am certain this is what keeps me awake most nights. Tossing and turning until someone finally pulls the plug connected to my internal source of agony.

This of course might just be the reason I use to sleep countless hours during the day or at least pretend to. This place is allowing me too much time to "think" and not enough action time. We currently only receive about one hour out of our cells for exercise...etc. My social skills are decreasing as well. Prison tends to make the power of communication quite difficult at times.

Now can you see my lack of focus? Do you understand why this is? Can you relate? Consistent reminders can help in this area. Constantly reassuring myself what my purpose is at

every opportune moment helps me stay on track. Perhaps it's my ambition to help others or to get my point across that keeps me from tripping myself up as much. Then again, it could be my finally realizing I need to make use of my time behind bars and actually live my life.

Imagine yourself without any responsibilities besides personal hygiene, no job, no bills, no need for insurance, let alone any form of transportation, no need to cook or even do your own laundry. Sounds like a grand vacation, right? Not even close. All those wonderful burdens I just mentioned, we take for granted every day. All it takes is **one** mistake and they can all be gone in an instant, along with our material things, family and more.

Did you know, as men, we are sight-oriented? We especially need to focus on the finer details of life. Women tend to be geared more toward feeling, their emotions, or their sense of touch (Amen, Daniel, MD. "Women Have More Active Brains Than Men." *J-alz.com. Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*. Volume 60, Issue 2 September 2017. Accessed 30 Nov. 2017)<sup>12</sup>. Each and every atom, which holds our meaningless yet explicitly designed existence together, serves a purpose whether you believe so or not. We are an intricate puzzle only one can complete. The only way this is possible is by surrendering your will. A reality is only clearly seen when one allows an image to be brought into focus. "A lens out of focus captures a blurry image." Is your life distorted as the above picture would be or have you adjusted the lens in your life?

## *The Power of Change*

"Here today, gone tomorrow" has a whole new meaning this side of freedom. Reminds me of my school days. My family moved a lot when I was young, so I unfortunately never kept the same friends. Every so often it seemed life would shed itself of what I finally became comfortable with. Not just the friends too, but my room obviously changed, the house, my neighbors, the entire environment I had adapted to. Over and over again I had to readjust to my surroundings. The town changed, the grocery stores changed, my teachers changed, and even my church changed. Change became an event I hated but soon became addicted to. If change didn't come in a specific amount of time on its own, I would compensate for its lack of arrival. When things didn't change I became weary. Though in here, the fiery dooms of hell, change *is* the norm. Expect it my friend. It will come while your back is turned; it peeks its creepy little deranged form around the corner grinning at you awaiting your gentlest state of mind. Sort of reminds me of when I would scare my mom when I was a kid. I got such a kick out of hiding behind a corner or crook in a hallway and as soon as my mom came into view, I would jump out and go "BOO!" She would scream at me saying, "One of these days you're going to accidentally get smacked, so stop it." Eventually I grew too old for this.

As I mentioned, change in prison is a normal daily activity. The part that bothers me the most isn't the cell changing or moving from a top or bottom bunk or even changing housing units, this is inevitable. What I have the most trouble adapting to and understanding is the loss of a good friend and/or family member.

Now I know I came to prison alone and I will leave prison alone, but I believe God places specific people in our lives with intentions. There has to be a reason for everything, right? The book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible is authored by one who states over and over how our lives are vanity, vanity—meaningless. What does he mean by this? If our life is meaningless, why would God send His Son to die for our sins? There has to be a reason for everything, for life. If not, what's the point in my existence or even yours? There just has to be a reason for everything we face in life, if not, why would I feel saddened when a good friend walks out of my life? Why would anyone care if they ever became alone without friends or family? There would be no need or care for supporting others. What would be the point in caring at all if there isn't a reason, a purpose, and a divine plan for you and me? Believe what you want but consider all options first. Why must we face the loss of our friends and family? Why would we grow attached to people just to feel the amount of emptiness we feel when they are removed from our lives? We can't be like our pets, lying around patiently awaiting our owner's return. We are an independent people. Life goes on. Time **never** stops.

Every moment is inevitably replaced by the next. Should we just ignore others to keep ourselves from bonding? Should we separate ourselves from all possible ways of social activity? Absolutely not. We need one another's companionship to survive and maintain a healthy life. I have tried and tried to be as anti-social as I possibly can. People still come to me for advice or just to talk. I catch myself doing the same thing. Now that I am locked up in a cell by myself I crave a good conversation. When someone I've known for a while leaves, I become filled with grief. Why? I barely know these people. Why should I be concerned with them when God's will places them elsewhere? Why do I keep accepting fate's form of torture? Why do I allow myself to become so attached to people? The power of change stirs deeply within us all. Some fear it,

while others like me, look forward to its assistance in helping us escape from ourselves, from our lives, from our pasts. What power does change have over you?



## **Conforming Is NOT Positive Change**

Take a few moments to yourself and let's see if we can truly understand the meaning behind "not conforming."

Conform: 1. To be similar or identical: to be in agreement or harmony.

In other words, to conform to something is: "to act in accordance with its standards or customs." Now, using my situation as an example means to become like a prisoner, seeing, how I am in prison. However, just because one is arrested and placed "behind bars" does not mean they should act like an animal.

Society has formulated its own opinion of the prison system, its residents. Unfortunately, most of them are quite ignorant of our "ways of living" or our "instincts needed for survival of this system." I've heard family members constantly alleging they are fearful for my well-being. They've obviously watched too many movies. Their minds are polluted by the false image given by the justice system, the media, and other forms of society. First of all, "this is not a movie." This is real life my friend. I'm trying to warn you and educate others. The so-called "justice system" we are to abide by *is* creating more criminals than the opposite. Anyone can commit a crime, a felony; all that's required is the right ingredients, the right circumstance. Not all crimes are intentional. However, what's done is done. When these gates close, your fate is inevitably sealed.

Some of you believe the system works. You believe those found guilty must be guilty and those who "take a plea" are even guiltier. The system is rigged my friend. You'll only agree though when you have to fight it. I will admit, I too *was* as ignorant and sided with the law.

This is exactly the problem and why I encourage you "not" to conform. Do not allow yourself to become the criminal the system wants you to be. How you act in prison can alter your chances of ever being released from any given institution. Your freedom is yours to gain again or lose forever. I know someone is saying "prisoners have rights too; it's not legal to keep their rights from them based on how they live." Whoever says this is ignorant of what goes on behind the slinky fences.

I compare our atmosphere to the ocean and our survival depends on whether you can swim or not. Everyday there's a chance you'll drown, and everyday you're given the opportunity to "save someone else from drowning." Only when our sentence is up and we're released do we actually reach the shore. However, we were so adapted to our "way of life on the water;" we have to readjust to life on land.

The comparison above could range in time from a day, a month or even a life time. How good of a swimmer are you? How long can you wade-in-the-waters? Strangely, the time you stay afloat won't really exist. All we are given is time. Therefore, our only way to cope is not to acknowledge its existence. We are frozen in time (at least I am...). Our arrest date becomes a moment we're frozen in time, until a later date when we will unfreeze it and continue life.

You may be asking yourself, "What does any of this really have to do with conforming?" Well, to be honest, just thinking these thoughts keep me from conforming. Other inmates tend to see this as a vacation or even a family reunion in some cases. They perform the same routine of nonsense every day. Don't get me wrong though, I enjoy a good card game and conversation. However, I cannot see myself wasting my life doing so every day.

Many prisons give you multiple opportunities to enrich your stay while locked up in their institution. This is not the case where I am. I am currently held at James T. Vaughn Correctional Center in Smyrna, Delaware. There are barely any programs for rehabilitation and educational opportunities here. There are so few, prisoners took hostages last month, making international headlines. Do you know what they asked for? The demands were for more education and treatment programs. To learn more information about this go to (McCain, Monte. "Delaware Prisoners Demand Education, Rehabilitation." *prisonlegalnews.org*, March, 2017, page 30. Accessed 30 Nov. 2017)<sup>13</sup>.

"Who goes to prison for an education?" Some argue this point saying prisoners have more educational opportunities than high school graduates. Come on, really? Those of us incarcerated may not have "the right" to an education, but if society wants us to be rehabilitated before being released among them, it sounds beneficial to both sides.

Those of you who are behind bars and not seeking any education, I ask you, "Why not?" You have the time and it would be productive to do so. Don't just accept your time as a moment to catch up with old buddies. That is conforming to the ways as a prisoner. Even lifers and those on death row should look to enhance their knowledge...etc. Be a mentor to others around you. Your accomplishments did not earn you a "life sentence." Your ignorance did. Change that. Change you. Don't accept defeat. Don't let society have the upper-hand. The majority of society thinks we are scum, and we should burn in hell. Don't conform to this nonsense. Imagine just for once *if* we could change their perspective. Re-write the definition of a criminal. Reverse the statistical stains we all share.

How do you know if you're a conformer or not? Look around you. Who do you hang around? What actions do you partake of on a daily basis? What's your attitude? You don't even need to ask *if* you're one who conforms. You already know. You also know whether you'll ever change your bad habits. Are your actions generated by your hate, your anger, about your arrest, what you lost, who screwed you over, how you're going to enact revenge upon them...etc.? Let it go. That's my advice to you. LET IT GO. You're right, there are many things you can do about it, but there are also many things you **should not** do about it. When you conform to the ways of a prisoner you conform to the system, thus being the very reason the system was created.

## Agree to Disagree

I simply had to add this title as a chapter because of recent experiences with a new celly. It's obvious every day is a new challenge and not a single moment goes by anymore where I am not eager to meet these challenges head on. Although occasionally one may come across a person who is utterly impossible to communicate with. People who are so incredibly full of themselves they overlook the possibility of anyone else's opinions. And God forbid even the thought they may be wrong once in a while. These people have such a high esteem for themselves and no matter how convincing your factual evidence of any given point may be *they* will be right. At least they will continue to believe so.

Have you come across any individuals like this? Well, I have a few times in my life and I'll admit it, they are the type who can actually frustrate me beyond my breaking point. So I've come to the conclusion I must "agree to disagree" with them. Meaning, if I am incapable of explaining my point and/or unable to understand his/her point I resolve the issue by compromise. Of course, this is how I see it. As a compromise. However, my current celly feels it's a cop-out. He believes it's my way of "quitting" an argument and this really upsets him. See, I hate controversy. He loves it. There are many people who love a good argument. I am not one of those persons. My opinion is, if you and I cannot see each other's points and an argument, debate...etc. ensues then I will end the conversation for the time being. I mean, why would anyone get any enjoyment out of a conversation which isn't going anywhere? This makes absolutely no sense to me. Now, I'm not against a good debate or if someone wants to argue their belief about something. But when a person is butting heads with someone else and neither side is going anywhere, someone needs to stop. There needs to be a moment or so to refresh one's thoughts, to gather new data and then maybe continue the conversation. Though of course be mindful of the definition of insanity:

Insanity: 3a: extreme folly or unreasonableness b: something utterly foolish or unreasonable.

Many people attribute Albert Einstein as saying: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." In other words do not continue arguing the same points expecting a different result.

So to "agree to disagree" isn't you conceding to your opponent nor is it stating you are correct. As I said earlier, it's a compromise. Unless you're arguing about a topic you have absolutely no clue of with another person who is obviously more educated in said topic, then you will more than likely make some valuable points. In other words "agree to disagree" means you concede to one another. You willingly end the conversation in a tie. As in you are mature enough, humble enough, and most importantly respectful enough to admit the other person is a worthy opponent.

There is no need to have such a competitive mentality that you feel you must win at everything. It's okay to lose sometimes. It's okay to tie. Sometimes "a win" is more worthwhile when you see the joy in another person's eyes when they actually win. I remember being quite competitive myself. I am sure even my own kids can remember this, especially

when playing video games and some board games. I loved to win. The feeling deep within is indescribable, but I now get that same feeling when I see others win. I no longer have that deep desire to be above others. I want the joy that comes with seeing others reach success. Seeing others reach their goals. Seeing them grin ear to ear knowing they're better than me at chess, basketball, handball or whatever. Being number one has a completely new meaning to me in life. I've actually learned how to place others before me. This was a tough task, but it was definitely worth learning. I guess the old adage is true, "you'll never truly know what it feels like to win, until you lose."

## Judgmental-Justification

Although the title of this chapter seems confusing and possibly is even an oxymoron. I labelled it so for just that reason. The idea just came to me one day. In other words, its ignorant meaning parallels our justice system and the way society sees reason in our law. For example, they are led to believe they are being protected from crazed animals, lunatics, even to be acceptant about the law being "bent" to put said crazies behind bars. Another example is best described by how those who are facing indictment are pre-labelled by alleged facts and weighed down by pleas, other so-called facts, held prisoner by bail (although innocent until proven guilty) and constantly undermined, scrutinized, and otherwise held as a convicted felon. How does this portray a person is truly innocent until proven guilty? This is just my point; they don't! They are not held by bail because they are thought to be innocent. We are presumed guilty and treated as if we are guilty, thus denying us our right of innocence from the beginning.

The law should not govern and protect "the people" by undermining its own purpose. This is why "man's law" is so difficult to comprehend. There are way too many loop-holes. This is exactly why some innocent people spend years behind bars for a crime they never committed, and the guilty party responsible never pays for their mistakes. Another example is how money can buy you less time, get you a better plea, and if you have enough, get you off altogether (Rikken, Maarten. "Two in One: Differences in the US Justice System for the Rich and the Poor." *researchgate.net*, April 14, 2016. Accessed 30 Nov. 2017)<sup>14</sup>.

In my opinion, murder is murder no matter who commits it. The same goes for rape, robbery, drug dealing...etc. The crime itself is the same no matter the case. However, the person committing it will never be the same. Each case should be viewed as such, differently. Never through the eyes of another case. This is nearly impossible though. We humans have emotions. We're judgmental people. It's impossible to view a case and not show bias. It's inevitable. For example, a male judge may be more lenient because he considers a what-if scenario such as: What if this was my granddaughter...etc.? On the contrary a female judge sentencing a male may be stricter because she may have a different what-if scenario such as: What if this happened to my child or someone I care about...etc.? My point? There isn't nary one of us who can honestly claim we would oversee and enact "true" justice on another without bias. Impossible!! I do not care how "honorable" of a judge you are. I guarantee you are guilty of such an injustice. Though not entirely your fault. Some yes, but most only battle the same demonic principalities us inmates have had to face and of course will continue to face.

So while you're judging another person and condemning them for breaking the law, keep in mind where you are in relation to your own sins. Don't be a hypocrite. A perfect example of this comes from when I had a trivial argument with my eldest daughter once. I use to tell her, "Do as I say, not as I do." Yeah, we all might be guilty of this. Even I heard it growing up, which is probably why it is part of my defense today. However, I was wrong. I was instilling in my daughter the "okay" to be a hypocrite. Not intentionally of course but ignorance is no excuse. That's justifying my actions. To justify something is to prove or show where you might be right. Our very law teaches us to do so. We are trained to justify why we are being judged. The very foundation of our justice system is corrupt which means the foundation of our country is also corrupt. Just look at how our country is governed. Open your eyes to see we are currently a nation of injustices. Why else do you think our country is in such a state of turmoil? You might

say, "It never use to be." Well, exactly my point. The more **you**, the people, educate yourself about American law the more our country will change. The real question is "Will it change for the better?"

As I've written several times, whether in this book or elsewhere, we cannot be a country who lives in fear of their own people. Whether born in America or known as "an immigrant," educate yourself. Learn at least this one very valuable lesson "healing others helps the economy." Punishment through injustice creates more havoc and only elevates our economic problems. Don't be a fool and believe everything our justice system, a.k.a. government, tells you. Investigate things yourself. Find out if people in your local prisons are being rehabilitated and prepared for their reentry into society. If they aren't, here are two reasons why you should be concerned. One, your very own tax dollars pay for it. Don't you want your tax dollars used wisely? Second, the majority of those "criminals" will be released one day. Wouldn't it be more beneficial of a process to prepare them and possibly even alter their perception, by being a nation that cares? Remember, whether they are criminals or perfect law-abiding citizens such as you, they will **always** still be people. No life should be valued less over another. If you do not feel this prior statement is true, I pray God helps you see where you're wrong. Keep in mind, I once thought just like you. Praise the Lord for showing me the way.

For more information on how you can be a part of a positive change for inmates, our economy, and express yourself to our government, here are a few sites you can search. For those of you without Internet, you can either ask a friend or family member to look the sites up or if you want, have someone look me up and I will find a way to get whatever beneficial resources I can to you. Hopefully, by the time you read this I will be a free citizen. If not, we'll find a way.

1. [famm.org](http://famm.org) (Families Against Mandatory Minimums) A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization fighting for smart sentencing laws that protect public safety.
2. Link of Love Support for Families with Incarcerated Loved Ones( on facebook.com) Located in Smyrna DE, provides resource information and support to the families of incarcerated men and women, prisoners, and ex-offenders in giving them vital information. Lori Alberts (leader of this group) also, heads the Prison Advocacy Support Team and Partnership in Reentry. These groups are very helpful (to both prisoners and their families) specifically, for anyone in DE.
3. [NARSOL.org](http://NARSOL.org) (National Association for Rational Sexual Offense Laws) Fighting to restore dignity and constitutional rights to millions.
4. [DARSOL.org](http://DARSOL.org) is the DE affiliation of NARSOL. This group seeks effective, fact-based sex offense laws and policies which promote public safety, safeguard our liberties, honor human dignity, and offer holistic prevention, healing, and restoration. Most all states have their own affiliations of NARSOL.

5. [prisonfellowship.org](http://prisonfellowship.org) (largest faith-based prison program in the U.S.). This group is active in many prisons throughout the country. They believe a restorative approach to prisoners, former prisoners, and all those affected by crime and incarceration can make communities safer and healthier. This ministry is founded on the conviction that all people are created in God's image and that no life is beyond God's reach.
6. [prisonprofessors.com](http://prisonprofessors.com) Shon Hopwood, Michael Santos, and Justin Paperny provide free content to understand prison and sentencing. They also provide consultation to help with presentencing and sentencing. All three are ex-federal prisoners who have authored books to help prisoners and former prisoners and are strong advocates for national prison reform. They are on [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com), You Tube, and do podcasts on iTunes...
7. [sentencingproject.org](http://sentencingproject.org), The Sentencing Project is a Washington, D.C. - based research and advocacy center working to reduce the use of incarceration in the United States and to address racial disparities in the criminal justice system.
8. The Voice of Victory Prison Ministry, located in DE, dedicated to reaching prisoners across America, provides Bible study courses for the incarcerated and help to prisoners upon their release. Russ Kessler, Voice of Victory, P.O. Box 718, Greenwood, DE. 19950, Victory Baptist Church, [vbcbridgeville.org](http://vbcbridgeville.org).

## Manipulation-vs.-Honesty

Is there any honesty in manipulation? According to *KJV*, Proverbs 12.17.

He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit (*KJV*, Prov.12.17).

Therefore, one should always strive to reach for the truth in any matter. One who is easily able to manipulate others may believe they have a gift. This may be so, but it's not a gift I would pride-fully boast about. The power of deceit is of the devil. Notice the root word in devil is evil, and these ways lead to death. The question we encounter is "Is manipulation actually lying?" One could argue the rearrangement of the truth doesn't make it a lie. "Tell that to Eve, who was easily manipulated by Satan."

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life (*KJV*, Prov. 4.23).

In other words, your heart leads to your actions and your actions justify where your heart is. If you enjoy fooling people, you eventually will end up tripping yourself up in your own foolishness. There's no wisdom in foolish ways. Our purpose is to seek wisdom and knowledge. Not just to edify ourselves for our own sake but to embrace one another. Honesty is the main key to freeing your soul.

In the Epistle of Paul, the Apostle, written to the Philippians he wrote:

Whatsoever things are *true*, whatsoever things are *honest*, whatsoever things are *just*, and whatsoever things are *pure*, whatsoever things are *lovely*, whatsoever things are *of good report*; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things (*KJV*, Phil. 4.8).

This very verse defines explicitly where our minds should be focused at all times. Keeping your thoughts pure will keep your image pure. Thinking only of truth will help you not only "be of good report" to others but also to yourself. Dishonesty will eventually persuade you to not believe in your own words, therefore not allowing you to accomplish much in life. Honesty is another key element needed for you to tame the fiery flames effervescing your soul.

Have you ever heard of "the golden rule?" Do you know what it is? Do you know where to find it? Well, my friend, it's in the Bible.

Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. (*NLT*, Matt. 7.12).



I could give you several resources to refer to about being honest to one another but not too many "honest resources" about manipulation and its positive effects. Why? Manipulation is a sin. You know whether you are manipulating others too, and I hope you'll change your ways. There can be nothing eternally rewarding that would come from such deceit. Only the devil could promise such lies, and this would be him manipulating you.

## American Punishment?

What is adequate punishment? Do we even have a clue? Are we really worthy of implementing such judgements? Is isolation humane or inhumane? What does it truly mean to be isolated? Can isolation actually heal criminals? Is isolation an adequate punishment? How much isolation does it take to break the average person?

Think about these questions for a moment. Are you struggling to come up with an answer, or are they "easily" answered by you? Should the isolation differ per person, or should there be a designated isolation period per incident? Should others who do the reprimanding face their own isolation period so as to better understand the physical and mental complications of its side effects? I believe no one, not even a judge, should sentence a person to any type of punishment until he or she demonstrated a true understanding of its effects to another's sanity. Of course, many will disagree with this statement, most likely victims.

Think of it this way, a significant percentage of "felons" were victims at one point in their lives. So the American way is to punish the victims who have been over-looked and denied their right to a just life? Once you're broken, they throw you away and later complain because now they have to support you. Do you have any clue how perfect I thought America was growing up? How precious freedom was and how "my country" would fight for me through any means. I know I truly grew up blind and sheltered believing the crap we are fed through media...etc. How they emphasize and highlight one side of a story.

I've learned in America one receives justice if you can buy your way out. All of us who weren't born into a "life of the rich and famous" just get whatever is thrown in our face. Explain how this is what our founding fathers imagined for the American people?

You may feel I am "justifying" this scenario because I am in prison. Well, you're permitted your own opinion, but that is just not the case. There are just too many forms of punishment in our world currently and not enough forgiveness. There's almost absolutely no understanding. Of course there are many who do try and comprehend the troublesome mind, but it's just too complex and not designed for us to unravel.

Punishment is an extremely touchy subject in our country. Though mainly when it concerns minors, elderly, animals and other countries, there is so much sympathy toward those I've just mentioned. Here's my question though, "At what age or circumstance do we become less important as an American?" Even the caging of animals is more important to most people than the caging of their own kind.

Recently, I've read American prisons are now being forced to reverse the use of isolation as punishment i.e., doing away with solitary confinement or whatever (Pendergrass, Taylor. "What Can Reforming Solitary Confinement Teach Us About Reducing Mass Incarceration?" *the marshallproject.org*, October 13, 2015. Accessed 30 Nov. 2017)<sup>15</sup>. That's ironic. At what point did they lose their common sense? Seriously! Prison in itself is isolation. I obviously didn't come to prison willingly, nor to make long-lasting relationships. The majority of my fellow inmates I wouldn't befriend on the outside because we simply live differently, yet we are to coexist together in small isolated compartments. We're crammed together in tiny storage units, basically, and kept from our families and friends for excessive amounts of time. This strategy isn't working well, obviously.

Though I have a theory. Long-term prison sentences shouldn't exist, except in cases where individuals just don't get the point. In other words, they keep committing the same crime over and over or even those who just want to be your average career criminals. All others should fall under a new and improved "second chance" law. Not a free pass but they should be sentenced less than any minimum mandatory. Though this sounds like the easy part. What's difficult is the work which would follow, reexamining cases, offenders and the seriousness of the crime. Many inmates are "labelled" violent and are tame as a mouse. Violent people are violent by nature on a regular basis. They come with a rap sheet. It's as if violence is woven in their genetic makeup. I also believe first-time offenders should never be held to a minimum mandatory. That's insane! No wonder people become repeat offenders—they do the majority of their time after the first offense. After that only in small increments.

This country is so demanding. I'm in awe so many people flock to America. I suppose the opportunities out-weigh the bad. Then again, immigrants have better chances at reaching potential success. Our country is designed this way. Though it seems Donald Trump and his newly elected are against immigrants as a whole, parts of our government are actually quite supportive of them. Many benefits and monies are in place to enhance their livelihood. After all, a large percentage of Americans are immigrants. However, when it comes to breaking the law, thus being punished, America chooses no favorites. Once you've committed a crime, you're placed in another category—a different form of outsider. Whatever you've gained prior to your arrest you will more than likely lose, apart from your family. Thank God the government can't take that away, though they try.

Here's the reality of this whole situation. For those of you who have gotten away with crimes, such as drunk driving, abusing your kids, assaulting a spouse, drug dealing; (this includes you contributing to minors for sexual favors), habitual speed limit breakers, those of you who don't pay court fines...etc., remember this, "You could be here." There are many of you out there who are judging but just as guilty as any of us. Do you know the difference between you and me? Only one thing: placement. You don't imagine being in here because you feel you're untouchable; you'll never get caught. Here's the real difference. You have everything to lose and I have everything to gain.

You may never see my point on this matter until you're entrapped behind these same four walls. The more you place yourself above others, the closer you come to falling. Everyone who's been burnt by the system knows exactly how I feel. Look at the statistics. There are more groups generated present-day because so many Americans are becoming a product of the system. Isn't that pretty sad? That to truly know the country in which you live you must become a by-product of its misconduct: "a statistic."

As I've mentioned, I have no Internet access in the current prison system I am being held at; however, I recommend you use yours wisely (if you can) to educate yourself about the American prison system. Check out some documentaries of PBS such as Frontline and/or any other program dedicated to ensuring citizens have an eye-opening experience. Some of these films take you inside prison walls so you can have a visual perspective of what inmates experience every day. You just might find yourself being more lenient or "forgiving" when you can actually witness the type of punishment you encourage our country to uphold.

## Knowledge Thru Education

Obviously we gain knowledge through experience in life and especially through educational experiences. Enclosed you'll find a short list of the programs available at my current location. Yours will vary based on your location as well. However, I wanted to at least show you some programs exist and whether or not they are properly taught and implemented, their intentions are to assist you through a rehabilitation process. You of course have to be aware of their existence and be willing to engage in them.

No matter how intelligent you feel you are, there is always something you don't know and there will always be something to learn. Take advantage of any and all courses, programs...classes, or whatever your prison labels them. Once again, be open-minded and at least give them a chance. If you struggle, ask for assistance. Don't be one of these prideful men (or women) who veers away from something beneficial merely because you lack the patience to learn or because you feel you won't grasp what's needed. There are many inmates and/or staff capable of helping you. You need only apply yourself and ask.

1. (AA) Alcoholic Anonymous
2. (AVP) Alternative to Violence Program: Basic and Advanced
3. Chapel Programs- depending on your religious preference
4. ESL (English as a Second Language)
5. GED (General Education Diploma)
6. Green Tree- program designed to address substance abuse
7. High School Diploma
8. Keyboarding/Employability and work maturity skills
9. Key Program- designed for those with drug and/or alcohol dependencies
10. MHU Programs- mental health classification courses (not in class)
11. SHU Programs- mental health classification courses (some in class)
12. Thresholds- a decision-making based course
13. Transitions- a required program for all sex offenders
14. Vocational- Automotive, HVAC and Plumbing
15. Anger Management- program on learning what triggers your anger.
16. Celebrate Recovery- program designed to help you forgive yourself.
17. Kairos- Christian based event bringing you closer to God.
18. Victim's Impact- focuses on acknowledging your crime through your victim's eyes.

\*All programs subject to change based on availability of staff.

## Accepting Who You Are

As children we were all taught to play the game hide-and-seek. I'm sure you each enjoyed this tactful game as much as the next, but it wasn't the best game of influence. No matter where you hid, you were eventually found. The same goes for life. You can't hide from your sins. They will inevitably find you out. Not only will your sins be brought to light, so will *you* entirely. People will see the real you no matter how hard you try to hide from society.

In other words, be who you're meant to be. Don't hide behind a false reality. If you can't be proud of who you are then you probably need a positive change. I'm not recommending you become someone else but to change your core principles so you can live a less exhausting life. Why? Living a life of sin is very exhausting. Trying to be something God never intended you to be is even more tiring. So, if you're constantly fatigued and have no energy, you're probably living outside the perimeters God created for your success (unless of course you have a medical reason). Then again, even some of our medical issues are a direct relation to psychological depletion.

So let's keep this chapter short and sweet. Ask your friends, your family and even ask yourself, "What am I good at?" Finding the skills you possess will start you down the right path to who you really are. Remember to be humble. Accept the insight from those around you. They know things about you, you aren't able to see. They may even see some flaws you are oblivious to. I recommend for anyone to read the book of Proverbs in its entirety, focusing on chapter fifteen, verses thirty-one through thirty-three.

The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility. (NKJV, Prov.15.31-33).

Among these influential pages you just might learn a thing or two about yourself. Be susceptible to change. Positive change. God never created any of us to be evil nor destructive. We became such on our own from poor choices and the devil's deception. Flee from the devil's ways and accept who *you* are. Accept God created you for good and serve Him proudly, willingly. Trust me, the perks are much better and are eternally rewarding to your soul. Keep in mind, your flesh isn't you. It's only the wrapping paper. Enclosed is your soul. This is you. This is your conscience. This is what you need to protect. This *is* "who you need to accept."

## Lonely & Lusting

I've spoken a lot about being trapped "inside my own mind" while incarcerated. So let's talk about what goes on in my mind, behind my eyes. Let me give you a brief tour of my sin, my struggle. Before we delve deep into such an abnormal paradox, let me prepare you with some scripture which may shed the light on what I'm dealing with. The following can be read from the *NLT* version of the Holy Bible.

But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart (*NLT*, Matt. 5.28).

So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust and evil desires... (*NLT*, Col. 3.5).

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the spirit. The sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God (*NLT*, Rom. 8.5, 7-8.).

...you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do (*NLT*, Rom. 8.12).

Do not let your sin control you as I have for many, many, years. I've struggled with this for decades but have been in denial of its very existence. This is understandable though. We all face some sort of sin. You can read further chapters in the book of Romans explaining such. You don't have to believe in the Bible to gain knowledge from it. Believe in what you choose but know this, whether it's fictional or nonfictional, "it speaks the truth." Why else would so many people feel obligated to prove it wrong? They are afraid to face *the* truth. Its truth.

Loneliness can lead to multiple forms of lusting. In my opinion, lusting is a sexual desire, a need for something you don't have. In other words you are coveting something you want before you ever receive it. Sort of like a craving that festers in your mind. You're imagining how you would feel if it were yours. Picturing your interactions with such a thing or person. Then again, lusting isn't only sexual in nature. It's just another form of envy. It's an incomprehensible desire that builds within the confines of your imagination. We all imagine fictional realities. An imagination can create success, but the wrong imagination will develop a dangerous level, which you may never come back from.

Lusting is an addiction. There may never be a medical term for it and science may never accept it as a curable disease. However, those of you who can relate with what I am saying know how important this is to be understood and how important it would be for us if others were more open-minded towards the power lusting has over our lives. Like any addiction, once infected, it's

almost impossible to cure. Why? Once again you're going to hate my answer to this but... "society...the media...TV...Internet..." everything around us fuels this eager irregularity. It's probably safe to say every person alive has lusted at least once in their life. It's nearly impossible not to lust. Although, some people are weaker to its constraints and unable to break free of them. They become entrapped. Then, all they have to do is open their eyes and each vision portrayed is like fuel being thrown into a fire. Once those images are burnt into their mind's eye, they replay over and over. The more fuel thrown, the hotter the fire. No matter how hard we try to "cleanse our minds" this perverse nation keeps exposing us to utter turmoil, further prohibiting us from ever overcoming this weakness.

This nation wants to condemn the likes of us, but we are all one in the same. You're no more innocent than I am. You only convince yourself you are. You're lying to yourself if you believe you're innocent of this. Let the truth set *you* free. Admit *your* faults and stop pointing *your* finger at those of us whose sins have been brought to the surface. I am working through my sins; I am acknowledging their existence, pushing aside the shame and remorse, and coming to realize my God forgave me. I have released the shackles of my sins and am accepting my spiritual freedom. The freedom I deserve. The freedom you deserve too. The freedom we've earned.

....and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (*NLT*, John 8.32).

I use to misinterpret this scripture. I had believed it meant that my telling the truth would save me from any trouble I caused without receiving punishment. I was wrong. This scripture ultimately means to be true to yourself, accept you have faults. Free those burdens. The many burdens you carry, constantly being dishonest about who you really are and where you've gone wrong in your life. If you're lonely and lusting you are probably carrying too much. Scripture says we won't be given more than we can bear, but this doesn't account for the burdens you place on yourself.

Now I've already explained the confines of where loneliness can draw you but mixing this with lusting can and will cause you to reach new heights never before witnessed (or maybe I should say, "lows"). Be careful my friend, all forms of lusting are wrong and detrimental to your soul. Lusting is an extreme example of you not being satisfied with what God has already given you and your lack of patience for what He may give you. I am not judging you my friend, nearly giving you some strict advice I wish I would've followed. Be grateful for what you already have, adamant about who God wants you to be, honest with yourself and those close to you and formulate a life of giving rather than receiving. The best cure for anyone is an open heart. So open your heart to others.

Finally, do not dwell on the shame that comes from the recognitions you will face dealing with your sins. Face them with strength and confidence, knowing you're one step closer to being healed. As I phrased earlier, shame and remorse are part of the process. Without this step you will not successfully heal. Embrace this chance for you to change. As with any raw process, you must allow yourself to be refined of impurities, to reach the core elemental iron God intended and designed you to be. This "smelting" process may be painful. You may suffer quite more than expected. However, the lustrous outcome you will portray will be pure and just. Give it a chance my friend. What do you have to lose? Are your impurities honestly that important to you?

## My Accomplishments & Goals

To inspire you and encourage you, I have included below a few of my accomplishments and some other goals I'm currently pursuing. Now, I did not list them to brag in any way. Some of you have probably exceeded my list. However, for those who feel overwhelmed and lost with your time, relax. In order for you to be successful you have to set goals first. So as I just mentioned, relax. "Stress doesn't equal success." Give yourself some credit. I know there are many things you *want* to do, but let's focus on what you *need* first. Nobody earns a trophy before winning the race. To win the race you need to practice religiously. You will definitely have to sacrifice, so prepare yourself. For example, I am days away from completing this book as I write and I am still fighting the urge to quit. But I'm no quitter so don't you quit either. You will of course need countless hours of focus and dedication, but it will be worth it. I am "days away" from not only reaching a goal but fulfilling a dream.

When others are not around to encourage and motivate you, do so yourself. Remember, this is your goal, not theirs. They owe you nothing, but you owe it to yourself to prove your full potential is obtainable.

So make a list of goals, schedule how and when you will reach them, an increment at a time, and pace yourself being careful not to overburden yourself with daily tasks. Feel free to make some of my goals your own. Maybe one day we can share our stories, or who knows, I just might be reading your book soon.

### Completed:

- Prison Ministries Degree
- Tempo and New Start Programs
- AVP, basic and advanced programs
- Victims Impact Program
- Written #16 poems, #3 songs and #2 short stories (and still writing)
- Read over #140 books since incarcerated

### Currently Working On:

- Writing my first book and seeking publication on-line
- Art Portfolio
- Forgiving myself
- My confidence and self-worth
- Associates Degree

### Future Goals

- Write and publish second book: on-line and hard copy
- Bachelor's Degree in Ministries and Business
- Start program and housing for released sex offenders, including accessible services for *all* inmates...etc.
-



## My Apology

Being incarcerated can really change a person, but it mainly depends on what type of person you were and whether you have a "heart." Although I am aware my being locked up affected many others, it severely affected me. This episode, occurrence, experience, or whatever you choose to call it, changed me entirely. As with the Grinch when he stole Christmas, my heart has grown beyond capacity that I believed it was capable of. In doing so, I not only recognized my wrongs, but "I felt" them. I felt their effect on my life, my loved-ones and my relationship with my Savior. The constant shame, remorse and pain are almost unbearable. It actually was for quite some time; however, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; along with a few family members, shown me the way out of my "pit of despair."

For those who have devoted so much and sacrificed so much, in my time of need, I am grateful for you. In doing so much for me you never once asked for my apology. Though, here it is anyway, "I *apologize* for my sins, which brought me to my knees." "I *apologize* for not only letting you down but failing you." "I *apologize* for succumbing to my temptations." "I *apologize* for doing unto others that which I would not want done unto me." "I *apologize* to anyone who has become a victim by the ripples of my poor judgement." "You know who you are and if this applies to you." Furthermore, "I ask for your forgiveness, your prayers and another chance to make amends to all those who I have hurt." May God grant me such a chance.

## Epilogue

Well, there you have it my friend. The question now is, "Will you take heed?" I sincerely hope you will. Encourage those around you, and you will see the significance this has on your life. If you know someone who's a repeat offender, this item will make a great stocking stuffer (hint... hint). Whether this written compilation or of another's, it would be beneficial to introduce such testimonies and advice to positively influence your loved ones. We need to give guidance as early as possible. We need to warn others *before* they make their first wrong decision. Though no time is better than the present time.

Through my own blunders and countless hours of homework, you're given another resource I never had. Use these formulas of life I've placed before you. Don't be foolish like I was and feel you must go alone, making and learning from your own mistakes. That became my first mistake. Of course you will make some mistakes, but some should **never** be made. You have the option to enter your own digits into life's calculator or to let someone else do it for you. Though you're responsible for the sum, so choose wisely.

With every mistake I've made in life, God's given me at least one blessing to keep me hopeful. Imagine the blessings I could have secured had I only followed His will. We all know "His will" whether we choose to believe so or not. Our hearts hold the very key we've all been searching for. Open your heart, take hold of that key, and open the door to your endless possibilities.

We are the total of our many parts. Each part in life's journey makes and breaks us to solidify our finality. Your core is introduced to life's blacksmith, bent, beaten and shaped to perfection. Others may not believe so but you're the "sole" survivor of your life each and every day. Nobody else could take your place, nor could you take theirs. Your sufferings secured your strength and pressed you against the mold God intended you to embrace. Be thankful. Be proud. You're right where you're supposed to be, right?

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