

THIRD EDITION

# Deepheart

## UNBOUND



# FINDING YOU

FORGED IN THE FIRES OF REAL

A MAGAZINE FOR THOSE INCARCERATED, THEIR FAMILIES, & ALL THOSE WHO SUFFER IN DIFFICULT TIMES



# FROM THE EDITOR

MICHAEL "RAVEN" PETER

**S**trength and honor to you, my brother or sister. Welcome to a magazine built with you in mind — not just for you, but about you. I write this editorial as an introduction for the entire incarcerated community, but to my hardcore brothers, if you wanna skip the intro and cut to the quick — jump straight to page 11: The Thaw.

The more we walk these prison yards, sitting with you, listening to your backstory, and seeing life from your side of the bars — the more respect we have for you. We've seen your strength and felt your pain. You are the most important thing in our lives, and in our heads, day and night, no matter where we go. No B.S. Just a fact.

We do not see you as a number, a project, a label, or a case file. But your name, face, and story are special and stay in our thoughts, on our hearts, and are woven into every article in this magazine. Because you matter.

We put in hard, industrial-level work to make sure this magazine isn't some "blah blah blah" institutional script — but straight-up, second-level grit, built on real life, real pain, and real hope. This is street-tested, conflict-hardened truth, not polished religion or fake positivity.

## NO MATTER YOUR BELIEFS, OR LACK OF ANY BELIEFS, WE SEE YOU AS FAMILY.

We use our own resources to get this in your hands — no church backing, no big-name sponsors — just eight of us out here grinding with you, not above you. We're your fellow warriors fighting through the wreckage of our broken humanity.

My name is Michael. Some call me "Raven". Black is my favorite color, and I love that bird in the wind. Don't you? Think of me like a 'player's coach'; trying to up your game and help you fly above this hurting place. Maybe like a 'John Madden', only my 'Raiders' are behind bars.

## BEFORE YOU PUT YOUR GUARD UP, KNOW THE THINGS I WRITE HERE HAVE NO STRINGS ATTACHED, FORMULAS TO ACCEPT, OR GROUP TO JOIN.

Let me help you decode the suffering, eclipse the sorrow, and defy the lie that you can't ever be happy again. I too have felt that dark distress of fearing there is no future, and whether anyone would



still accept and love me if they knew what was in me. It's easy to fall into an abyss of mental conflict. So we offer you a 'Raven Haven' here; a refuge of truth for your mind, a belonging and acceptance, regardless of background or lifestyle.

I know how prison festers a cynical mindset, suspicious of a con or scam. So our No.1 goal is transparent sincerity. No 'better than thou.' Connection is the power to just be REAL, and that is what we give you in these pages. So please, my friend, hold off a second on any skepticism and see if we might strum soothing chords to mend your broken heart.



Headed into La Picota, in Bogotá: one of the worst prisons in Colombia, waving to the men in the cell block to the left.

Have you ever seen a movie about a secret agent meant to infiltrate a mob, but he goes 'too far in' and can't return to his previous life? That's us. Somewhere in the hundreds of prisons we've visited, we became 'too' immersed in all the unjust sorrows and can't go back to our previous eight lives. Somehow, God has branded all of you in our hearts.

The truth is, every mortal man falls apart at some time due to outward and inward stress. *The common feeling amongst us all is when we see ourselves fail miserably at life, we accuse ourselves as a "Class-A Loser".* Get me on this. It's crucial. It has nothing to do with a weak personality. I personally used to buy a case of beer and a bag, then replay the Ray Charles hit "Born to Lose" until I passed out. *Ever notice that most popular songs and movies are about dark times?* Gee, I wonder why? The fact is, everyone is looking for rescue.

Whatever you are, or think you are, or were, or think you were, or have done, or had done to you, can make you wrongly think that you

Yesterday, as every day here in the 3rd world prisons of Colombia, I wanted to both vomit and weep. But I must maintain my composure, as I stand in front of thousands of beautiful men covered in rags, hungry, standing in stench, trash, and sleeping on open cement, filthy blankets, rationed water and food, no heating or cooling, no programs. Faces sullen and contorted by pain, condemnation, and abandonment. We force our will to get beyond our tears of sorrow to win their faces with laughter and lift their heart with the reality that there is yet a future to be snatched from the jaws of defeat.

cannot go on. But scientific facts prove the brain can rewire itself, heal, and form new pathways forward. Our body regenerates cells and renews itself constantly.

Recovery may be slow, but it is sure. As it happens, what now seems unbearable will slowly become one of many reflections offering wisdom for your future. You are not defined by what's been done to you. Memories echo loud at first but fade, and graphic images dim and lose their grip. In time, the worst of experiences—and I mean the absolute worst, will expand your character and then provide vast help to others.

## FROM THE WRECKAGE OF YOUR PAST, YOU CAN BUILD, NOT A REPAIRED VERSION — BUT A NEW, ONE-OF-A-KIND MASTERPIECE ENGINEERED IN THE REALITY OF GOD'S DESTINY FOR YOU.

(SEE BACK COVER)

You may think, because I talk about God, that this is the "same old same old." But brother, that ain't me. I offer you what is real, powerful, and effective. Allow me to break down the iceberg of divine truths into practical ice cubes in this burning hot desert land. *Then you can marvel for yourself over His remedies to this "hell."* I know many brothers who think they have given up and see no reason to budge towards God... until they do.

One thing is sure, I am not going to affirm the false niceties of some phony religion. It cost Jesus an excruciating torture to come into our tragedy, understand our deepest wound, and become our most relevant Brother. He alone can touch the things that hurt so bad. I have seen His living Presence blow the mind of this, by nature, worthless scumbag. *The impossible is possible.* I grew my heart for Him through many battles. *They forced me to go deep and find my individual will.*

## THE IMMENSITY OF BEING AN INDIVIDUAL IS THAT OF A DIAMOND: UNBREAKABLE WORTH.

*So think of these pages as a walk on a forest path — as if I were beside you, sharing words of comfort to bring clarity, calm anxiety, and resolve panic. I rest my hand on your shoulder as we set out.*



We perform a unique and dynamic show of top secular music from multiple genres, magic illusions, rap, motivational speaking, comedy, international cultural dances, theater, live vocalists and other artistic elements to first connect and engage, and then to inspire, uplift, encourage, comfort, and help those experiencing incarceration in whatever way we can.



## A CUTTING EDGE SHOW IN PRISONS

The premise for this magazine is the time we have spent with all of you. For the past 15 years, we have been going nonstop to visit and perform in numerous prisons. Yet each event feels brand new because every place is different, and we see each person as an individual with their own unique backstory.

During our events, we form a real connection with all of you, and when it's time to leave, that's the hardest part. So we leave this magazine with you, not as a corporate endeavor, but a personal extension of that experience. And even if we have never met you, we want to give you something in your cell that will feed your mind with our personal concern and love for you. Maybe consider it our gift to you for your birthday, Christmas, or just a special day. It is more than words on pages, it is our heart written down, from us out here directly to you in there.

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### Choose your own adventure:

Are you ready to go somewhere cool? Don't worry, we got it all planned out for you. We even got snacks (lol). Just bring your vivid imagination. Jump in, sit back, turn up the radio and tell me where you wanna go... 1. If you wanna ride dirt bikes in Moab, UT, go to page...30 2. If you want to play football at a park, go to page...64 3. If you want to paint by a lake, go to page...42 4. If you want to walk through a magical forest, go to page...65 5. If you want to drive a Harley through the mountains, go to page...24.

## BROTOCOL /'brōdē, kōl'

*Is the protocol of seeing each person, no matter their background or differences, as a brother or sister.<sup>140</sup>*

Welcome into true brotherhood. In all our travels throughout this world, in all nations, this Brotocol has never failed, but in fact has been the mind-blowing means of drawing in and unifying all humanity in a love only from God. God's love is not fluctuating human emotion determined by any conditions or criminal behavior. It is the epic mercy rooted in the unconditional lovingkindness of God's promise never to forsake you (*Hebrew: Hesed*).

This love is hard for some to accept because we are so small in our minds. But Brotocol is not a "cliché", it is to describe the supernatural love that Jesus came to reveal. It is based on the fact that "Jesus is not ashamed to call us -wicked men- brothers."

(Based on Rom. 5:8, 2Cor.5:19, Heb.2:11).

These small numbers throughout the magazine are references listed on page 66.

## OUR CREW

WORKING TO SERVE YOU.

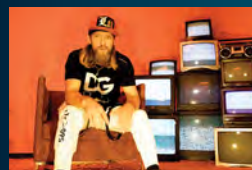
• -SHOTS TAKEN FROM OUR LATEST VIDEO-



MICHAEL



ELIZABETH



DAVID



SARAH



JOSHUA



ABRAHAM



RACHEL



RUTH



# PRISONS AROUND THE WORLD

## THE MIAMI CONNECTION

By Sarah Joy

"11.2 million people are incarcerated globally, each person with their own story, each place with its history and challenges. On a stopover between Bogotá and London, we were able to schedule an event for a large prison in the Miami area. As I awkwardly searched for the right words to open our performance, I fell into a silence of sadness. As my eyes scanned the room, I realized everyone was connecting in one unified prison 'voice'. Volumes were spoken but not a word was said. It was a kind of inner sanctum in a shared gaze expressing our human suffering. This moment became a reference point in my mind and heart of a 'place' that no matter where we go, we all know. The language of 'hurt' is not expressed in words, but in the reality of such a moment." -Michael



During our time in Spanish Prisons we met many incredible young men from Morocco who took small boats then walked hundreds of miles into Spain all alone. We are looking into working in the prisons in Africa.

### ROMANIA

PRISON POPULATION: 24,106



### JILAVA PRISON

OPENED 1987, BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

Jilava was once a place of torture, executions, and deep dungeon-like cells. We stood in the old sector of dirt floors and brick walls as they turned off the lights to show us the utter black darkness once used to inflict psychological torment on those incarcerated there. Romania has a long history of inhumane conditions, but recently is making a full-out effort to improve things.

Our visit to many facilities was nothing short of remarkable. The remnants of Communism, the lifestyle of the Eastern Block, and the influence of the Gypsy culture all made for a unique and beautiful dynamic. I will never forget the deep look in a man's eyes as he came up and told me that he had been involved in human trafficking. Anyone could see the deep pain and regret reflected in his face. He had long concluded there was no hope for God to forgive a guy like him. But he began to share in broken English that today, after hearing all we shared, he'd begun to understand that his conclusion was wrong. A tiny light came into his eyes called hope.

In one prison, on the banks of the Danube River across from Bulgaria, a Turkish man who was once famous shared the shocking reality we hear so often of how life can be shattered in just one blink. He said it's not just the walls out here, but the ones in here -pointing to his head. We coerced him to show us the Turkish dance that the guys told us he knew. After long moments of refusal, he unleashed his moves as a smile lit up his face from ear to ear, and the crowd erupted.

### POLAND

PRISON POPULATION: 71,771



### WRONKI

ESTABLISHED 1894, POZNÁN, POLAND

Imagine walking the halls of your facility knowing it was once a POW camp run by Nazi Germany in WW2 crammed with 4 times its capacity and saw over 800 deaths, then taken over by the Soviets where another 250 people were killed inside. Try to comprehend the weight of the history of such a place, currently housing over 1400 men. The largest prison in Poland, Wronki will forever leave a mark in our minds.

The brazen-tough image of these Slavic men made them look like they could wrestle a bear at any given notice. Built like tanks. In our efforts to break through the language barrier, Michael created a 'greeting' where we put our left, then our right arm crossed over our chest, then bark in unison as loud as we can, twice. Symbolic that we are like guard dogs, and we must protect the heart within us. It was an instant hit with the guys and now a permanent part of our show.

Michael also found camaraderie in his royal Polish roots, the warden actually later said it was the only reason he allowed the event. After one show, a man named Ryszard stood up in front of everyone and sang a song he worked on when he heard we were coming. His voice boomed (no mic) down the prison halls in a folk-rock original. The men respected his courage, and we were moved. He called one time as we were headed into a prison in Ohio and said, "Please tell the men they have a brother here in Poland with them in spirit." The warden later told us how he saw one of the "worst" men change right before his eyes because of our connection of sincere love, humor, and personal understanding. We look forward to returning to an 'open door'.

### CZECH

PRISON POPULATION: 19,689



### VEZNICE PLZEN - BORY

FOUNDED IN 1878 - PILSNER, THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Featured on "World's Toughest Prisons" - in the communist reign, it became notorious for the torture, beatings, and murder of inmates, before it was reformed. Walking these silent halls of what felt like an ancient dungeon had a strange and eerie sense. We were told that they had never had a program of any kind here, we were the first, and the attitude of the men reflected such. Due to the extreme isolation, some seemed as if they were coming out of a coma. It was tragic.

Second to China, Czech is considered the most atheist nation in the world. This created a unique, and interestingly enough, quite beautiful scenario. No 'been-there-done-that' attitude, but rather one of extreme interest. Joshua deeply connected as he shared that the marvels in creation and the human body are so profound, it's not crazy to think that there is a God who created all this. Many agreed and began to go deeper on the issue. The rare Czech Bibles Elizabeth procured were like hot cakes. Our translator showed up the first day in flip flops, shorts, and almost a tongue-in-cheek attitude. The next day, he showed up in professional clothes that matched our uniforms and said he studied all night to interpret better because he saw we were real and how much we cared. A 180 Flip. We recently received a letter from the headquarters asking us to return and work in every prison in Czech.





**IRELAND**

PRISON POPULATION: 4,612



## HMP MAGILLIGAN

We arrived by ferry and drove past many ancient castles to the northernmost tip of the Emerald Isle. 13 pods near the entrance of the prison once housed 13 rival factions during "The Troubles", a conflict that raged for 50 years and claimed more than 3,500 lives. There were bombings, terror plots, riots, assassinations, and giant walls in Belfast still divide neighborhoods as the conflict lingers. But the warden at Magilligan was remarkable and decided to take a different approach than most, making every effort to help the men. Rachel tapped her Irish roots and found common ground with our 'Fighting Irish' brothers (Go Notre Dame). Ruth brought down the house with her Irish Stepdance and shared that no matter the walls that divide us, we are all broken and our scars can actually unite us.

**ENGLAND**

PRISON POPULATION: 88,521



## HMP DOVEGATE

A courageous and amazing woman was able to bring us into the prison for an incredible event, against all odds. She even allowed us to serve the lunch buffet she'd prepared for us, to the men. I'll never forget the warmth and laughter we all shared, passing plates around. Total strangers became like family. One man shared a poem: the first half to his father, near death from alcohol poisoning, whom he both loved and hated. The second half, to his son whom he was determined to raise differently. Powerful stuff. While England is thought to have better conditions, this is not always the case. It is reported that at other facilities, some cells have no toilets. Men have to use a bucket and throw it out the window, creating a horrible situation. An official recently stated the whole system is "teetering on the edge of disaster."

**SCOTLAND**

PRISON POPULATION: 8,227



## THE ALCATRAZ OF EUROPE

BARLINNIE - OPENED 1882. GLASGOW, SCOTLAND

After many years in the works, we touched down in Braveheart's homeland. One of the prisons was not far from where he lived. Like Alcatraz, Barlinnie became notorious for housing some of the 'worst' of Glasgow's criminal underworld and had a long history including death-penalty gallows. But we were met by a staff deeply interested in helping the men in Barlinnie and throughout Scotland. Once we relearned English to understand their accent, we shared in the warrior spirit and unique depth of the Scottish people. At the end of our event we would play "The Flower of Scotland" and the men would stand and passionately sing each word at the top of their lungs; it was quite cool, at times bringing a tear to all of our eyes.

**SPAIN**

PRISON POPULATION: 56,698



## "PEDIMOS INSTANTE PARA LLORAR"

WAS A PLAQUE CREATED BY INMATES ENTERING A PRISON IN MADRID SAYING, "WE ASK FOR A MOMENT TO WEEP".

Throughout the storied regions of Madrid and Barcelona, we performed in large theaters packed with our Spanish-speaking brothers from all over Spain, Europe, Northern Africa, and Latin America. Elizabeth danced her Flamenco rhythms to uproarious applause. A notorious international arms dealer, who was once a multi-millionaire, shared with us how prison had shattered his world and exposed that in his heart and soul, he was bankrupt and needed to start investing where it mattered most. Spanish Prisons are renowned for having 'better' conditions, some even have a swimming pool. And while this certainly can help, we also found that the realities of prison remain exactly the same. The tragedy of having no freedom and the turmoil it causes is not remedied by these kinds of things, as we all know, the issues are much deeper.

**COLOMBIA**

PRISON POPULATION: 183,538



## COMBITA

A FEDERAL PRISON BUILT WITH THE USA AFTER THE WARS

Housing many war criminals and high-profile men, Combita is notorious throughout South America. We were told entry would be impossible many times, by many people. They had to cross check our background against every man inside because of the complex operation of Colombian cartels. Even on the drive to the prison, the warden called to explain we would be in the outer perimeter at best, but upon arrival, he called Ruth into his office and said he got word from headquarters and would allow us into the inner patios to perform directly for hundreds of men. The impossible is possible. A man we met, serving 20 years, was shocked to see us. A relative of his in the States, who had seen us, had been sharing our message with him for several months! The Warden later sent us this picture from our second event, sharing how he saw the impact on the men responding to our message of unity and brotherhood.

**BRAZIL**

PRISON POPULATION: 988,888



## ITAQUITINGA

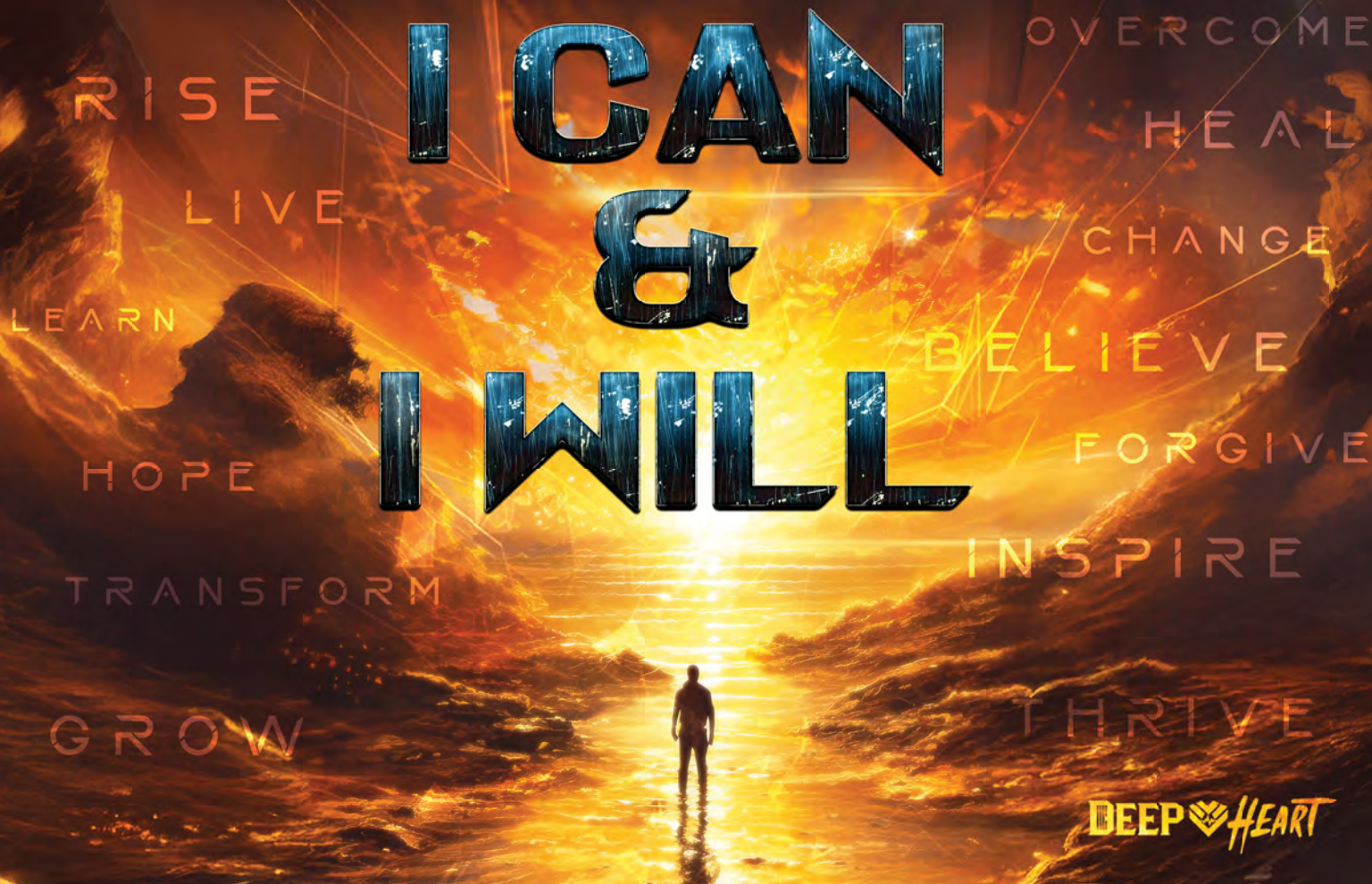
BRAZILIAN PRISONS ARE SOME OF WORST WE HAVE EVER SEEN.

Often we receive messages from men who are incarcerated in Brazil, both in and when they get out of prison. A young man (sitting in the crowd above) recently wrote us, after serving seven years. He sent a voice mail, in tears sharing about his time. "It was so dark, rats, raw sewage, other things I can't even talk about. For years I had barely any food or sleep. But the worst thing was I just felt so far from God. So much filthy language and ways, and just so much darkness, that He could never be in a place like that. But when you guys came in and explained that God had not given up on us and was not against us, but offers compassion, it changed literally everything. My sentence was transformed. Physically, I could always do it, it was mentally that I had to break through and I began to do just that."

For Mexico See Page 22 &gt;







DEEP HEART WORLD PRISON

# 5K RUN & WALK

3.1 MILES



WE'LL BE RUNNING...  
WILL YOU?

► JOIN WITH US AND THOUSANDS OF OTHER MEN AND WOMEN IN PRISON, IN THE USA AND OTHER COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD, BY WALKING, JOGGING, OR RUNNING A 5K (3.1 MILES) ON THE FIRST TUESDAY OF MARCH AND SEPTEMBER EVERY YEAR. THIS DAY WE WILL ALL "SYNCHRONIZE" AND THINK OF AND PRAY FOR EACH OTHER WHEREVER WE ARE IN THE WORLD.

"Love you all, and all the brothers and sisters in the prisons across the globe!!!! Let's go!!!!" -Antonio, California

The idea is simple: at anytime on the first Tuesday of March and September each year, when and where permitted by facility staff, you walk or run 5k (3.1 miles). And all across America, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Scotland, Poland, Ireland, Romania and others, our brothers and sisters who are incarcerated will be running "with you" in spirit on the same day. For those who have kids and family, invite them to do the same on the outside. For those who do not, we are your family, and each of us at Deep Heart, wherever we are in the world, will be out running too, with you on our hearts and minds. Keep your head up, keep your heart up, and always.... keep... moving... forward. "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..." (Heb.12:2).

**THE FIRST TUESDAY  
OF EVERY MARCH AND  
SEPTEMBER**

#### EYES ON COLOMBIA ►



Last year the entire incarcerated community of Colombia participated in the Deep Heart World Prison Run. In every prison, even the remote facilities in the jungle, men, women, staff, correctional officers and even wardens, ran or walked 5k. Some in tiny rooms, others in wheelchairs. Many made shirts, posters, finish lines. We congratulate and honor each participant and especially the staff for such incredible work.



# THE CAPACITY OF YOUR BRAIN

Because of something called neuroplasticity, the adult brain can actually rewire itself, especially with effortful learning or through high-engagement situations. So, trying new things or developing a skill actively reshapes your neural networks at any age.

Vocabulary skills don't peak until the age of about 70 years old.

The brain is capable of learning and remembering up to about 20 languages. If you learned Spanish you'd be able to communicate with 600 million people in the world.

The brain contains 400 miles of blood vessels and 86 billion neurons, each one transmitting 1,000 nerve impulses per second.

Scientific researchers believe the human brain is more powerful than all the world's computers combined.

Research on people in recovery from heavy substance abuse indicates that most cognitive deficits —like memory, problem solving, and attention— show 80% to 90% improvement within one year after stopping. Cravings subside as the brain stabilizes.

The brain's memory capacity is a quadrillion bytes. Astoundingly, this is about the same amount needed to store the entire internet.

Throughout life, the brain can continue to form new cells via a process known as neurogenesis, meaning it generates new neurons based on current needs.

**Self-Healing After Injury:** If a part of the brain is damaged, other parts step in to take over that function. This is especially true with the cerebrum (which handles higher functions like thought and memory), where neighboring areas might compensate for damaged zones.

Walking can increase the production of Brain-derived Neurotrophic Factor, a protein that supports the growth of new neurons by 50%. Walking can lower stress levels in the brain by 20% and increase creativity by 60%.

A heart replacement costs about 1 million dollars, but the brain is irreplaceable & priceless. So don't harm it, help it.

20 to 60 minutes of intense exercise can release dopamine and provide a "high" similar to some drugs—while helping, not harming, the brain and body. Creative expression, listening to music, completing a task, and even engaging in meaningful conversations can also release dopamine.

A study from U.C. Berkeley of 1000 participants found that those who made a deliberate effort to think about, and even write down, things they are grateful for over a period of time, physically improved the condition of their mind and the health of their body, lowered blood pressure and stress levels, & had numerous measurable benefits.

When individuals consciously engage in new thought patterns or behaviors, they effectively create new synaptic pathways. When repeated these new pathways eventually become more established and more easily accessed, while old pathways will weaken and fade when not repeated. This process underlies the brain's ability to change habitual thinking.

## THE BRAIN NEEDS DIRECTION

Creating some goals and activities will help you tremendously during your time in prison. It also will help you to fight depression, drug cravings, staying out of fights, and other problems. Here are some ideas that will help if implemented consistently.

**MEDITATION-** It is scientifically proven that as little as 30 minutes a day spent on meditation can help heal the brain from drugs and trauma. It starts with intentional stillness, deliberate deep breathing: inhale, pause, exhale, pause, each for 4 seconds. Recognize negative thoughts, dismiss them, and shift to something positive. Over time you will start to quiet what's called "the monkey mind" effect when the brain is just wandering and jumping through random negative thoughts, which is often linked to anxiety and unhappiness. Concentration is the basic human ability to focus in on one intended desire. (See Mind Travel - Page 23)

*"By repeatedly imagining positive scenarios or outcomes, individuals can create new neural pathways that promote emotional stability and reduce the power of negative memories." - Psychology Today*

**JOURNALING-** Write a journal of your thoughts, experiences, ideas, goals and the things you learn. It can help release anxiety and bring clarity to issues.

**CHALLENGE YOURSELF -** Make a small daily or weekly goal, reading, writing, meeting someone new, learning a skill, developing an idea, etc.

**WALK OR WORK OUT -** Every day, for at least 20 minutes do some kind of physical activity, push ups, jumping jacks, or walk. It's essential!

**MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE -** To Read, write, & memorize exact wording, book, chapter, & verses from the Scriptures will help both your brain & heart.

**CREATE GAMES -** You can stimulate your mind by telling stories: pick 5 words from this magazine and tell a story incorporating each of those words. Or do a Q&A with your cellmates or yourself: What person in history would you want to meet and why...? If you could have any job what would it be? ...etc.



# JUNGLE INTO THE OF COLOMBIA



**T**he officer handed me a padlock and key for the iron door, instructed me to lock it from the inside, and said goodnight. The hotels in town were either rank or expensive, so the warden was kind enough to let us stay in the empty barracks on the prison grounds. The officer stopped for a moment, turned back, and said, "Oh yeah, don't leave your shoes on the floor. Put them up high, and check them in the morning. There are scorpions all over here and if you get stung it will really set you back, especially being Americans." It slowly dawned on me he wasn't kidding, as he related the sting he personally suffered last Thursday. We weren't in Kansas anymore. This is the Colombian jungle.

In such a place, you stop and ask yourself, *'Where am I? How did I get here? How is this possible?'* Well, if you want to know... a few months prior, Ruth contacted the headquarters in Bogotá and, after a few months of emails and calls, was able to confirm that they were open and wanting us to come and work in the prisons of Colombia. So we did. Upon visiting the largest, and worst facility in Bogotá, "La Modelo," the director asked us into his office to thank us for our work and coordinate future visits. He was a warm and earnest family man, but you could see a weight of deep grief pressing on his countenance. With a crucifix on his wall and an open Bible on his desk, we shared a beautiful conversation. *We had no idea then how little time he had left.* He asked us to visit a terrible prison where he used to be the warden. It was halfway between Medellín and Bogotá in a swatch of jungle that was quite remote.

So Abraham found us a budget flight into Medellín. Carrying our speakers in hand we walked out onto the tarmac, up the stairs, and off we go. We arrived and went straight to the infamous Bella Vista Prison. A place renowned for the gruesome days of the Medellín Cartel, but now full of just ordinary men facing the extraordinary suffering of insane overcrowding and deplorable conditions. After much delay and tactful negotiations, we were finally able to perform for the General Population and shared an incredible time together with the men.

The next morning we headed to Pedregal, a strange high-security prison built entirely in a high-rise building with no yards and limited windows. *I don't know if I've ever seen a place I'd rather be less.* The echoes of men yelling in prison are common, but here, they seemed to go on and on at a volume that was beyond belief.

The COs escorted us to a patio with a word written in chalk above the door and the number of inmates inside. We asked what it meant, and he explained

that it meant each man here had been found guilty of murder. As we entered the cell block, laundry was hanging everywhere and there were enough card games that it reminded me of the World Series of Poker in Vegas. The "Plumo" (the top dawg in the patio) treated us with absolute respect, quickly instructing the men to put away the laundry and arrange a space for the show. It was like a well organized army, and in seconds a space was opened up.



I once worked a job in the Vegas desert breaking concrete with a 10 lb hammer to pull up faulty fencing. I felt like our words in Pedregal were like that hammer breaking through the rock-solid lie that resonated on the faces of the men, *"...Maybe God loves 'people', sure, but not us. You don't know who we are... or what we have done."* "Brothers, you don't who He is or what He has done, specifically for you," was our unwavering response.

Later that afternoon, we hiked up a trail up the mountain to the women's annex which was equally as dark but seemed even sadder. Something about a petite 60-year-old lady locked in a 3rd world dungeon that is just very hard to process.

The next morning we drove the winding highway out of the Medellín valley, over mountains and through humid jungle to "Puerto El Triunfo." It didn't take long to realize this was Pablo Escobar's old stomping grounds; in fact, the prison we were visiting was built on his confiscated land.

Now it's pitch dark. We're standing on a dirt road next to the warden. He pulls a

large flashlight from the prison van and shines it into the jungle. Through the dense fauna, suddenly there's a 1,200-pound hippo lumbering through the woods. Wait, what!? Yep. "I can't believe we found 'em — especially so close!" Captain Mauricio (the warden) excitedly exclaimed as he pointed out a second Hippo not far behind. "El Patrón imported them from Africa, they escaped, are breeding, and now were taking over the region, often knocking down fences around the prison. I don't know, maybe Pablo trained them to do that," he laughed.

We bunkered down in the spare barracks and laid on the foam mattresses that were so hard, we figured there is no way they were actually foam. Maybe gravel or crushed brick. At 4 am, monsoon rains sounded like gunfire on the metal rooftop. I worried it would prevent us from doing the event scheduled in the yard at 9 a.m. the following day. I figured, *"there is no way this can keep up for five hours straight. We'll be fine."* And fell back asleep.

The worker crew was the first to meet us as we walked into the soccer field. They were setting up a large shade canopy and had it together in no-time. *I tell you the truth, I have met some of the smartest, most talented, and most capable men in the place you would least expect... prison.*

As I entered one of the patios to encourage the men to come to the event, blankets on the cement next to a backpack marked the inmates' personal space in the packed court yard as social workers were finishing a seminar on preventing the spread of tuberculosis.

The yard filled with men, and we began to touch the individual lives that walked these storied grounds. A young man told me of the time his village was taken over by the FARC.



Continues on Page 9





MEDELLIN PRISONS ARE OVERCROWDED BY UP TO 500% AND 600%.



After our time in Triunfo, our bond was like a team that had won a big football game together.



In the last 18 months, 15 men have died in the prison in El Triunfo from malnutrition related illnesses. Another 468 men are in a state of starvation and extreme danger.



## A WORLD OF CONFLICT

A couple of guys were standing around me and we were talking about their tattoos. One man spoke out in a very somber manner saying, "Do you want to see mine?" He proceeded to show me the bullet wounds all over his arms and chest. He explained he was once the commander of 4 regions in the Colombian Army. He said, "I thought I was fighting the 'enemy.' But as the war went on I realized these 'FARC rebel soldiers' were just kids. Young kids fighting for someone else's political ideals. They were sons and brothers of our very people. I couldn't continue to fight them. I deserted and was thought a traitor. I fought and killed and was a hero, suddenly I was a criminal. Now I'm here for 17 years. I am torn apart by the injustice, but I know I had to do what I did."



What the shower and toilet look like in some places.



"We feel like we are in a cemetery, but we are all still alive. We have been forgotten by our government, our communities, our families. Thank you for coming to us. Thank you. Thank you."

- A Patio Leader in La Picota, Bogotá.



AS WE SET UP A MAN SHARED WITH ME THAT IT HAD BEEN SEVEN YEARS SINCE HE HAD EVEN SEEN THE SUN. STOP AND THINK ABOUT THAT FOR A MOMENT. NOT SEVEN MONTHS. SEVEN YEARS. HE DIDN'T KNOW WHEN HE WOULD EVER SEE IT AGAIN.

Take a second and count the hammocks in this one cell.



After our visit, one of the guys wrote me that because of the lack of sanitation and overcrowding, there wasn't sufficient time or space for quarantining. As a result, there was an ongoing battle with Tuberculosis and Smallpox, adding to the fear and suffering of being in such a hellhole.



Temperatures were near 100 degrees.

With Our Amigas



They told us the most difficult thing, apart from being separated from their children, of course, was that the food was just mostly inedible. Many days they don't know what it is, sometimes it's rotten, or just so scarce they don't get enough. Despite the conditions they are full of life and quick to smile.



"It's hard to get the approval, it's hard to get to the prison, it's hard to get through the gate, but the hardest part... is saying goodbye." -Elizabeth



One night he disobeyed a curfew order, was caught, held hostage, and the next day was taken to an alley to be executed. His mother pleaded for his life and he was spared, while others were not.

As I walked to the canopy, Elizabeth says to me *“Joshua, it’s Vermelho!”* as the familiar face of a dear friend walked up and gave me one of the strongest embraces I’ve ever had. 13 years prior when we first arrived in Medellín, a man named Vermelho invited us to come learn the beautiful dance-art of Capoeira. He was kind and gentle, and over the course of months, carefully taught us all the moves and rhythms despite our uncanny ability to ‘butcher’ every move. *It is now our favorite dance that we do with men and women in prisons all over the world.* Sadly though, when we would share with him about Jesus, he just shut down. We later learned he had grown up in a strict, phony evangelical household so, in the tragedy of misrepresentation, he had set his heart against his parents... and God.

Now, here we were, standing together in prison, more than a decade later, sharing an embrace that spoke a thousand words. He was like a different man. His image had been shattered, but his heart came alive. Tears were not far from either of our eyes as we both understood the weight of the moment. This time, he was humble, sincere, and beginning to consider who Jesus *really* is, for himself. *So, in the bigger picture of eternity, could not his tragedy, redemptively, be a breakthrough?*

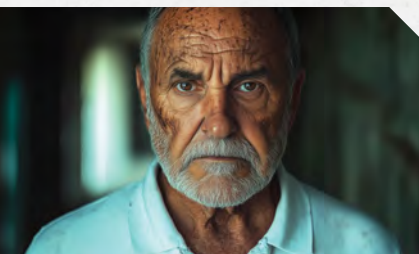
Days prior to our arrival to El Triunfo, in a massive storm, lightning hit the transformer and knocked out the electricity to the prison and most importantly... the water pumps. Now there was no clean water. Not to drink, cook, or shower. A major crisis was beginning to unfold. In the middle of the performance, Abraham bought water for the men to drink but the warden insisted on paying for it. He was a remarkable man. We poured out our hearts to the men for a few hours in the humid jungle sun and shared in the depth of both pain and laughter. Then suddenly a cool breeze picked up. As it blew across our faces, and brought a ‘lift’ to each man, I shared that this is exactly how Jesus says He will come to us. *Like the wind.* You don’t know where He is coming from, you don’t know where He is taking you, but His presence will lift you into another realm. *Like the wind (Jn.3:8).*

In the days after our visit, the water situation turned critical as corrupt companies dragged their feet in repairing the issue. So we sent some money directly to the warden so he could personally go buy gas for the generators to supply the pumps and furnish the water to the 2,300 men. He was so grateful as it stopped what was soon to be a national tragedy. The men rejoiced for the much-needed water.

After the performance, we were asked to wait for a moment before embarking on the long drive back to Bogotá. The warden and worker crew had prepared a small moment for us. Eventually, we were allowed to enter a hall that was full of men, on either side, clapping and cheering for us. As we walked that hall, we were overwhelmed and moved to tears. We felt so loved, so moved, and so ‘one’ with these men. We joined in the applause because it was not for us, but for the Father’s magnificent mercy for us all. God so loves the world (Jn.3:16).



The men clamored to fill their jugs when we were finally able to get the water back on by using generators to run the pumps (red hose).



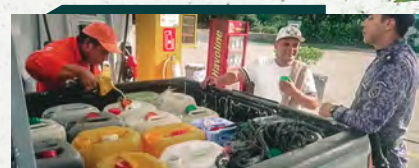
### IT'S IN GOD'S HANDS

I met Carlos at Pedregal. He had a 40 year sentence, and was innocent. As a top executive for the largest oil refinery, he was set up by a political rival and falsely accused of murder. It was a very complex situation. He told me that a certain judge often evaluates cases and can grant pardons. But he said something I will never forget. He said he did not even apply to have his case evaluated. He said he would rather leave it all completely in God’s hands, and not invest emotionally in a hope that may never happen. Instead, he said he focuses on serving the men inside as a teacher and leader.



### A FALLEN FRIEND

Just two months after we sat and talked with the warden of La Modelo prison, he was tragically shot and killed on the streets of Bogotá, going home one night. It made international news and broke our hearts, as we shared a connection with him and personally cared about him. He was a husband and father of two children. We continue to pray for comfort and healing to his family. In a blink, his life was taken, at a moment he never expected. We reflected on the conversation we had with him back in his office and are grateful that we had the chance to sit and share a moment of depth with him when we did. Life is so short, we must seize each moment we have.



The warden sent us photos to show where our funds were being spent.



### “I SAVED A PRISONER’S LIFE. AND A PRISONER SAVED MY LIFE.”

Mauricio Eraso was a 17-year veteran as a warden in Colombia. He was a remarkable man who had seen all the horrors of the prison world that you can imagine. But his resolve in character, intelligence, and compassion set him apart like few we have met. His interview will be in an upcoming film feature we are making. Here are the highlights:

>“I started my career by going into an intensive training where I was secretly smuggled into a prison to live and be treated as a prisoner for a time. It woke me up to the reality of what they each feel and deal with.”

>“When I take over a prison, I put a table and chairs in the patio and sit and meet with each man. I can’t resolve every issue, but I can at least listen and know what they are dealing with.”

>“I constantly walk among the prisoners. I have never had a problem in the prison, or with the men, because I treat them with compassion as those in my care. I am known as ‘Papá Eraso’ by many because they see me like a dad, not just a warden.”

>“Once, a high-profile inmate’s parole was denied. I knew he would sink into despair, so I kept a close eye on him. One afternoon I sensed something was wrong and went to his cell where he was trying to take his own life. We came in and saved him. Three days later, issues in his case changed and he was released. He is now free and healthy.”

>“Once, some political prisoners put a hit on me because I wouldn’t take a bribe. The trap was set, I was to be ambushed in the street. A young prisoner was in league with them but knew it was wrong. Because I had treated him with kindness, he told a guard, who jumped into my car at the last second and redirected us away from the ambush.”

>“I once dealt with an inmate who was widely regarded as ‘a lost cause.’ He was violent, angry and aggressive at every turn. I convinced him to work in the artistic wood workshop. Months later, he was like a different person. Kind, gentle, eager to converse.”







Chess House started with a box of books to learn the game. In the 1990's it was a hobby for us teens. People kept asking how to play and how to find supplies. We answered that call and a business was born.

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*I serve you, brothers and sisters, by enabling the gift of chess sets through Ruth with Deep Heart, to give in their shows as they travel and perform at various facilities, where and when they are allowed. It's treasured for play and positive interaction.*



*"Society wins  
through better  
choices. Better  
choices are  
trained in  
chess."*

*The language of chess flows across barriers, a neutral place to experience order, to adventure in bounds of predictability. It's a place to face another, share a mutual respect, to grasp a handshake, let go of something, and to train the mind on positive patterns of thought.*

*Society wins when people make better choices. On the chessboard, move by move, they are practiced and the spirit is lifted.*



**Persevere...** The chess piece is carved from 3500-year-old Cypress tree wood. That means it was merely a sapling when Moses led Israel out of Egypt. It was to one day rise a knight. Story at [ChessHouse.com/SenatorTree](https://ChessHouse.com/SenatorTree)



# THE THAW

BY MICHAEL PETER



## Definition

**Thaw** 'thó -  
To Become Not Frozen.

1. The gradual return to warmth after a deep freeze; the melting of ice and frost.
2. To become free of the effect of stiffness, numbness, or hardness of cold as a result of exposure to warmth.
3. To abandon aloofness, reserve, or hostility.

I write to you, my friend, as one who knows the mood, “Don’t mess with me, boy. I built my castle walls with no drawbridge for entry, so I won’t hear any words of a hope I’ll never enjoy.” Accusation. Arrest. Trial. Sentence. It all hits like a brutal winter storm. Four phases of emotional hypothermia pierce our core. Like a near-death experience, they leave a man frozen in place, stripped of warmth and identity.

One minute you’re safe, the next you’re stranded in a freezing wilderness of fear and misery. Ain’t no shelter. No outlet for the pain. No place to bleed, and damn sure no one who really understands. So what do you do? Stone up. Heart grows cold. Mask comes on: “I’m fine.” No, you’re not. A stone-cold face is what pain looks like when it’s got nowhere to go. You feel untouchable, but also unreachable.

Strangers build your story into a false narrative around your worst moment. But it’s not the real you, and no one knows it but you. A bizarre system messes with your head and makes you feel ‘off,’ like you ain’t you anymore. I’ve seen it in the eyes of my brothers. That dull, shell-shocked stare: “How can this be my life?” It’s the look of men who’ve been branded and buried under a false identity they were never meant to carry.

It’s so easy to fall into the dark space of a hardass persona. Like ice, it doesn’t form by choice—it forms in the deep freeze of human cruelty; by a fierce arctic blast to the soul. Sub-zero conditions: mental, emotional, and spiritual. It’s not a decision. It’s a human reaction. As a blizzard leaves a place unlivable, so does this mindset leave a man locked in isolated pain. A soul collapse. We accept a lie that the future is nothing.

And in this wilderness of walls and wire, I could play a sad song for you, and you deserve every note of sorrow, but instead I summon you to conquer.

The impossible is a real play. Even when you’re locked inside a castle. Even when trauma attacks you from every side. The Thaw will begin where you are; in a budge to be real.

The gavel fell. Yes. But that was man’s courtroom—not the courtroom of mercy. God sees you not defined by man’s rigid and blind condemnation—not as broken beyond repair, but as an iceman—waiting to be thawed by a love you’ve forgotten how to feel. The cold is cruel, but every freeze melts in the warm fire of sincerity and understanding. And when our heart thaws, we display the diamond buried inside; forged in our willingness to be real. Slowly, the steel wall is opened, and we unveil our true self.



# THE ASCENT OF A WARRIOR

Over five decades, across 60 nations, I've been learning how to deal with the dark wounds that we all live with. Because no warrior wins the battle if he does not understand the enemy. *I've stood in 500 prisons worldwide, walked through raw poverty with the homeless in cardboard boxes, faced drug-sick mobs crying out for help, veterans lost in their own heads, gunfights tearing through Brazilian favelas, war-torn streets of Slovakia burning with rage, even in a Paraguay prison where men were straight-up losing their minds right in front of me.* And the worst part is that all these brothers and sisters do not understand the enemy we face. They wear a mask to hide what's inside. They slowly self-erase and no one even notices; bleeding within from unprocessed pain. Darkness takes up no space but *it* is the enemy. It makes us feel like there is no way out—but there is.

**EMOTIONS RISE, CRASH, THEN FADE—BUT WHAT CARRIES US THROUGH ISN'T HYPE OR EMPTY VIBES. IT'S THAT RAW FIRE INSIDE THAT REFUSES TO QUIT. EVEN WHEN THAT FIRE DIES, IT'S NOT GONE FOR GOOD—THERE'S STILL A WAY TO REIGNITE IT. THEY CAN'T TAKE AWAY YOUR FIRE.**

It's time to become your own physician, bro—your own master. Dismantle the false narrative. Stop looking to the outside. There's a powerful you inside. No matter what you did, how you feel, or what they say—You are quite somethin'—may I introduce you to yourself? My friend, you didn't miss your shot. You haven't taken it yet. You can take away far more from their “takeaway” than they ever took away.

It's no shock to me that some grow bitter toward God. They ice up and walk away. I welcome anyone in this grudge-match, feeling betrayed by silence in the middle of pain. I get the whole trash talk against God thing—like where was He when everything hit the fan? Where was God when the hearse pulled up to bury you in the system? “No ‘God of love’ would rig the game to screw me over.” Right? But I ask you, bro, what kind of God would force His ways upon you rather than respect

your individual freedom to choose? Prisons are jammed tight with mental gridlock—bumper to bumper chaos, dark senses pulling your mind in ten directions—and that's before breakfast.

Trust me. Don't fight me—I'm on your side. I'm not gonna bury you with words. Just give me time to help you step into real. Because I know you want more than just survival—you want to rebuild. Your life is not meant to serve time but to serve a purpose beyond time.

But you've got to push past all the phoniness, all the fake stages built around you to make you perform. None of it is real. What's real is buried deep—in your core, like a diamond in the earth. It's in the you of you. That's where your fire is. So seize the courage to face that wound, to look it dead in the eye instead of running or hiding behind the mask. Here's where you get real. It ain't easy, not with all the noise and fronts around you. But when you finally strip it all back, when you face yourself without the mask—that's where the real power is. No cold blast of prison, no sentence, no trauma, no dark hour can compare to the quiet power of a man willing to set his mask aside and thaw.

What keeps some of my hardass pagan friends from God is the warped religious lie; “You gotta clean up your dirt to be worth anything to God.” It's upsetting to see religious ‘uprights’ push their false-formulas on brothers who are unaware. *They preach self-improvement, as if the solution to deep pain is shallow performance.* Pushing a ‘moral makeover’ like a Cracker Jack prize of false hope. “*Clean up your act, get rid of your demons, join our herd.*” No, brother—. It is a crock of religious crap that you gotta get rid of wicked to get God. And in this article, I'll prove it. Religious pressure wrecks a man from the inside out, forcing him to pretend to be what he's not and hide what he is.

A warrior builds a caliber of will to defy the shadows and deflect despair like an irritating parasite. He outwits his own dark energy and that of prison politics to stay set on his own journey. God loves you AS YOU ARE. The real problem isn't wickedness itself, but how we respond to it.

“IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO BECOME WHO YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN.”

—GEORGE ELIOT



“The strongest moments in a man's life strike when circumstances awaken individual accountability.”

No matter how badass we act, no matter how tough we talk, we ain't made of steel, bro—our hearts still crave true identity. I greet you with a virtual embrace and personal love. If I could, I'd run down that hall to your cell, look in your weary eyes—and if you were cool with it—draw you into a father's embrace and sit with you. I'd scale your ‘castle’ walls of pain and help you find who you are. I'd listen and help you unfold it all. It's not about what you've done, but what has been done to you.

We wonder why things seem against us. It ain't bad karma, or bad breaks, or bad luck. It's this crazy ass world that wrecks our soul, feeds us bad choices, whispers lies, and beats us down till we feel ‘dead inside’. But we start winning the war when the fight inside is greater than the one against us.

Football was my everything all the way through college. I got frozen into the image of a wild man. But my thaw began when I was face down on the floor by the sewer in a jail in Michigan. No bunk—just concrete. *That's where my budge began.* I had a burning desire in me to find purpose and meaning, more than just wasting my life away.

I grew up in a religious family but found no connection to all the hocus pocus. My dad was full of rage, my mom was loving but died of cancer at a young age. I was alone. Where was anything real? *I had had enough of the typical American “in God we trust” —The Sunday show-Easter Bunny;-Santa Claus, stained-glass icon.* I had to find out, is there a God and does He offer me anything real?





70 years rotting in brain dead idolatry, how could this uneducated throwaway bum with no speck of virtue or religion become the ultimate shot-caller of real? If wickedness was all that existed, as he'd been told, his heart would not ache for more. But it did.

So while the herd went one way, Abraham stepped the other way—straight into a silent pull from the heavens, *“See Me in the vast blue sky that stretches without end. See the ever-shifting clouds shaped by My breath. Hear My power tear the sky in thunder, with veins of fire splitting the dark. My love for you glistens in a billion stars, placed like diamonds in the night. The roar of My oceans declares mercy without limit. I designed your very body with a heart to pulsate—no wires, no tech—just blood, bone, and My breath in you. I give you the hummingbird’s hover, the dragonfly’s dance, the ostrich’s run. I send the wind to cool your face, to carry storms, lift ravens, butterflies, and eagles on invisible currents. I made thousands of birds to sing songs to you. I explode flowers in colors from dirt, erect towering trees, cast shadows in the sun, and keep it all moving—even when no one watches. My eternal presence everywhere around you. Do you not know I can redeem your purpose and your destiny by My power?”*

**ABRAHAM FOUND SOMETHING HE HAD SELDOM USED—HEART. IT BEGAN TO THAW AS HE CONNECTED THE DOTS IN THE STAR LIT SKY. HE DREW A PICTURE IN HIS MIND OF A MAJESTIC LOVING FATHER. AS HE SAT BY HIS NOMAD CAMPFIRE, HIS EYES LOCKED ON TO THE STARS BLINKIN’ BACK LIKE THEY KNEW HIM.**

Enough already about wicked being all there is to life. *It’s a con job.* Time to take back his mind. No more renting out headspace to a world gone mad. He had a smackdown with his own stupid. He stopped buying what they were selling. *And what did God say about his wicked past? Nothing. The silence was the message. Love. No condemnation.*

After sorting countless thoughts like sand sifting through his fingers, he found the right **RESPONSE** to God was a silent awe we call **FAITH** (Rm. 4:1). Common sense told him **GOD IS** and had no need to prove Himself as though

## THE RESPONSE

Whenever I say, *“I’m a wicked man,”* people freeze behind their polished smiles and safe images. The word “wicked” rattles some like it involves monsters and freaks— But it’s just a six-letter word for the pull of dark energy in us all.

### **WE GOTTA GET REAL ABOUT OURSELVES TO FIND REAL. PERIOD.**

See, brother, deep down, we’re not polite, polished people. We’re fierce. Flawed. Wicked. Wounded. When no one is around, we are savages, afraid others would bolt if they saw our true self. We’re broken, defiant, and dangerous. Afflicted and perverse. This is our core. It is where our phony self clashes with our real self.

So please, my brother and sister, I beg you, listen to me. God says we are all born with, but never identify, a common wound as descendants of the first created man: Adam. *No fairytale.* It’s the truth everyone rejects while bleeding from it in ignorance, pain, and chaos. It crushes us every day as we sit wondering what’s wrong with us. *We choke on our own blood yet swear we ain’t bleeding.* But the answer comes in how we respond. Are you gonna run, deny, hide, ignore—or do an “Abraham”? He found the move—the blueprint—for how to respond to both God and the wicked in us all.

Abraham is explained by a guy who himself was a state-sanctioned killer, complicit in torture, and called himself *“the worst of the worst.”*<sup>61</sup> But get this—he said God chose him because of it. He’s a dude named Paul who spent his whole life for the most wicked men of his day—called Gentiles. Pagans. Heathens. Barbarians. Wild as hell. But he loved ‘em like family cuz they were real. No front. Just raw, wounded, and stunned by a love they never saw coming. And over and over, Paul kept pointing to Abraham—the OG, a full-blown pagan, knee-deep in idol worship. Things unspeakable and beyond any crimes today; scholars say his city sacrificed humans to Marduk, the god of Mesopotamia.

Abram spent seventy years *locked down* in the pagan city of Ur (modern Iraq)—like a lifer stuck in the worst block. One day, he left that ‘facility’ to walk into another “Yard”;—the Sinai desert; sand, snakes, and scorpions. Talk about a hellhole. Picture some old man dragging through endless dunes. It wasn’t just a wasteland of dead silence and his own bleeding wounds. He was facing every man’s greatest fear—alone in solitude. Abram showed us what it looks like when a full-blown wicked man runs headfirst and has a head-on collision with something bigger than himself – God.



on trial before wicked men. Rather “...Abraham **believed** God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”. Abram fulfilled the dream of every wicked man in that moment. Have nothing, get everything “reckoned” to you. *The words “reckoned” or “credited” mean instant transaction. No feelings involved.* He invented faith. No restitution. No confession. No front or ego. No importance on guilt. It is written, *‘to the ungodly who does nothing but believes- God credits righteousness’* (Rm.4:5). No payback. No begging some bitter cynic for their forgiveness or acceptance. *He had lived for 70 years thinking he was just another heathen.* For the first time, he cast off the heathen mask and went all in on an identity that felt real. He didn’t even know until that moment that he was a man who loved God. *He mattered to God.* Abram became Abraham and switched his “pagan fire” for a raw individual trust in God. God became his shield and destiny (Gen.15:1).

Locked in ‘The Hole’ of dead time, Abraham showed how faith shatters a sentence -snapping you out of that slow grind, pulling you past years of pain, doubt, and dead days. Its power breaks the chains of “waiting,” making present moments real, alive, connected to something bigger. Our choice to believe cracks the sentence, making

us like Abraham—a father of faith—planting a garden in a dull mind. Faith don’t play by time’s rules. It rips you from the cage of waiting and drags you into the raw, real now and the future—a dimension bigger than these walls (Eph. 3:18, Rom. 11:33, 1 Cor. 2:9).

**TIME’S GOT ONE GAME IN HERE: WEAR YOU DOWN, MAKE YOU THINK YOU’RE NOTHING BUT YOUR SENTENCE, LIKE LIFE’S ON PAUSE TILL THEY OPEN THE GATE. BUT LISTEN -TIME ONLY OWNS YOU IF YOU LET IT. WHAT BREAKS ITS GRIP IS WHEN YOU STOP WAITING TO LIVE. WHEN YOU REALIZE YOU’RE STILL A MAN, STILL BREATHING, STILL BECOMING, RIGHT NOW. THAT’S HOW YOU FLIP TIME ON ITS HEAD. IT DON’T GET TO DEFINE YOU ANYMORE. YOU DEFINE IT -BY FAITH, BY WHAT YOU BUILD INSIDE. THAT’S HOW YOU TAKE YOUR LIFE BACK, EVEN IN HERE.**

In one moment, faith gripped Abraham to realize, “I actually got God”. It wasn’t a performance or ritual, it was the individual fire we now call faith. Faith didn’t come down from heaven but up from his own 2nd-level grit. He silenced mind games and started tracking his destiny. He gave God all God wanted-heart. The thaw begins the moment the heart whispers that the freeze is breaking.

A common error is mistaking grace for faith. Grace comes from God. Faith comes from a man.<sup>132</sup> Faith becomes *your* faith the moment you lock in —not ‘cause someone told you to, but ‘cause something deep in you says, *‘God is real’*. Faith is each man’s Rembrandt—his finest work. I fail a thousand times but my faith pulls me past them all.<sup>64</sup> I ask guys all the time, “*Who here thinks you gotta be good to get God?*”—and hands fly up. Why? That’s the hustle we’ve been sold.

**BUT FAITH AIN’T A REWARD FOR GOOD BEHAVIOR -IT’S A RAW, BARE-KNUCKLE HOPE WHEN EVERYTHING SAYS YOU’VE GOT NO SHOT.**



One time, a guy in Pelican Bay told me “I don’t believe the stuff about God”. I said, “Neither do I”. God is not stuff. Way before any religious people came around acting like their stuff invented God, Abraham gave us REAL thinking. Just be yourself. Real faith is greater than the best high. Leaving the old self like a caterpillar into a butterfly.

## DETOX

*My brother, you know the sweats, the sickness, the panic. Faith works like a detox, but deeper. It purges us. Like a catharsis. It forces you to sit in your own skin, no dope, no distractions, and face yourself for real. Finally, ‘good’ pain. “The truth will set you free, but not until it is finished with you.”— (David Foster Wallace). It strips away the lies you’ve been feeding yourself: “I’m just my crime,” “I’m too far gone,” “I’ll get right when I get out.” Faith says, “No—right here, right now, we face this.” You be you. Surrender.*

*I remember asking God straight out - “Do you have something other than getting stoned?”. Slowly, I realized it is an escape from reality. If Jesus is real then escape into Him is reality. We can do far more than we think. Stop hating on yourself and believe. If you fail -big deal. Keep going. And like any detox, it’s not fast or easy. It hurts. It’s slow. But after the shaking stops, what’s left is something real: a man not run by time, not owned by his past, not chained to what broke him.*

*It’s greater than feelings or people. It’s God. Can’t get any greater. That’s how faith works in prison—it heals you from the inside out, so you’re not just counting days, but becoming someone new in the middle of it.*

THE THAW BEGINS THE MOMENT  
THE HEART WHISPERS THAT THE  
FREEZE IS BREAKING.







**THE THAW IS THAT SLOW, BEAUTIFUL MELT WHEN THE ICE YOU BUILT TO SURVIVE STARTS CRACKING, AND YOU REALIZE THAT COLD KEPT YOU ALIVE BUT ALSO KILLED YOU.**

It ain't just softening—it's becoming heart. Breaking out of the freeze makes room to breathe, to heal, to be the man you forgot you were. It's the beginning of resurrection, the death of your survival mask, and the raw beauty of actual rebirth.

Abraham became the blueprint for how a man can rebuild himself out of nothing (Rm.4:17). He was the first recipient of reckoning—divine righteousness, instant and undeserved. It's a big word, and an even bigger gift. It falls on us like His shadow, covering us with mercy and forgiveness for all sin—past, present, and future. Righteousness is nothing less than the full sum of God's character upon us. And that's what Abraham handed down to us through reckoning: not a second shot at our old Adam life, but a chance at real life—a life where second chances never run out.

**NO JUMPING THROUGH HOOPS. NO RECYCLING GUILT TO MERIT A CLEANSE. NO PLEDGE TO A HERD.**

Righteousness ain't just a badass word for bikers to stitch on a vest—it's the

dawning realization of revelation every wicked man gets who believes God. "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, *"But the righteous man shall live by faith."*<sup>64</sup> From first light to last. Every day. No matter what. The only path that takes us where we want to go is Faith. One budge. This is the path on which my voice speaks to you here. Abraham crushed today's lie—that obeying laws gets rid of our wicked and gets us to God. He lived 430 years before Moses brought down the Ten Commandments—proving faith is the only way a man can please God not the law (*or works*—Rm. 4/Gal. 3/Heb. 11:6).

## NIGHTMARES TO DREAMS

Some brothers say they believe in the God of Abraham, yet back away when it comes to Jesus. Don't do it, bro—it's just a fear of the herd. Don't let others rob you of good things they can never give you. Jesus said it straight: *"Abraham saw My day and rejoiced"* (John 8:56). *Abraham saw Christ.* So you can't claim Abraham but ditch the Christ who made him rejoice. *Makes no sense.* Abraham proved Christ is the essence of faith. So anyone who believes God believes Him (Jn.6/10/14). His dream wasn't a soft wish for a better life. Everything in his life said, "It's over." But he stood

up and believed God. That's what made Abraham alive—he dreamed of something bigger than his own survival.

Like Abraham, Jesus came from a dirty, wicked place—Nazareth (Jn.1:46). He showed up as a carpenter, not a king, so no man would run scared from God. He wanted us to step to Him straight-up, no fear, no front—just real. Yet some called Him a glutton and a drunk, possessed, a loser, an outlaw straight from hell.<sup>124</sup>

**BUT HE DIDN'T FLINCH. HE DOUBLED-DOWN, 'I CAME FOR THE WICKED, NOT THE RIGHTEOUS.'** (MK.2:17)



Faith makes nothing out of our human depravity.<sup>57</sup> We are both wounded and wicked but God sees neither. He sees you, my brother or sister. They say hope is dangerous. True. But hope is the tiny spark in your heart where faith begins. If you feed this fire, it will feed you. Scriptures reveal a "Hope against hope" that flares when everything says 'give up'—but it whispers, 'No, not yet.'<sup>57</sup> That's what Abraham had. He saw how bad it looked—his odds were dead in the water—but out of that flicker, he believed. Not just some blind, faint wish, but straight-up faith in God for God. Because only God can give you God. Only He can carry your burden. When you try to fake it, your eyes show it. But if you dare to hope into faith, even in the dark, that's when real identity gets born. That's when destiny begins to breathe.

Don't be afraid to "hear" what is unheard, or what others don't hear. Don't be afraid to "see" what is unseen (Heb.11:1). That's hope. Abraham heard God as any of us can — my brother—not with ears, but heart (Rm.10:9-10). It is not make-believe. It is making belief. Any time you choose inner dialogue with God, to meditate, to calculate and resolve moments, your heart will thaw.

**YOU LOOK FOR SOMEONE TO PROVE YOU CAN STILL WIN YOUR FIGHT. AND YOU CAN. YOU ARE THE PROOF YOU ARE THE SOMEONE.**

When we talk about who we are to God, a power ignites that backfeeds into our heart and dares to believe the impossible. Faith is the calculated decision of heart, void of external stimuli. To defy outward things and go inward to God, leaving our winter for His warmth.

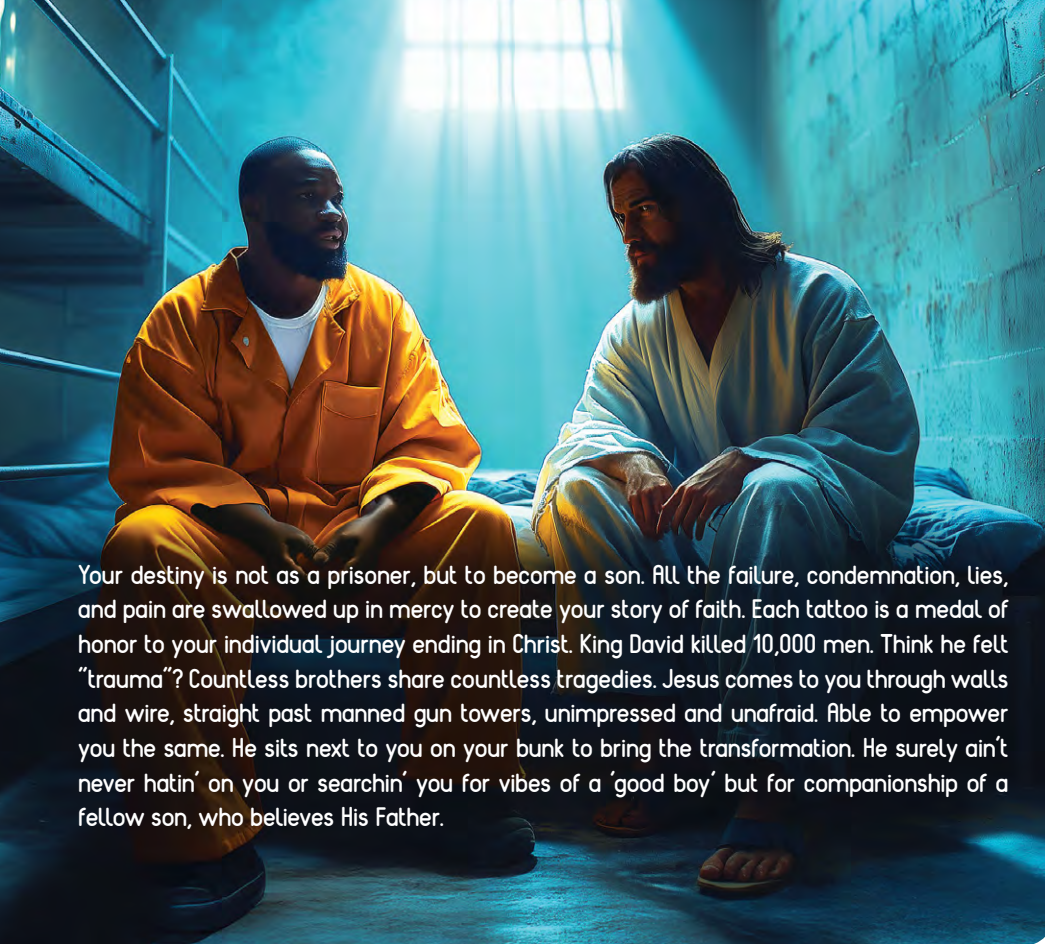


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BREAKING OUT OF THE FREEZE  
MAKES ROOM TO BREATHE, TO  
HEAL, TO BECOME THE MAN YOU  
FORGOT YOU WERE.







Your destiny is not as a prisoner, but to become a son. All the failure, condemnation, lies, and pain are swallowed up in mercy to create your story of faith. Each tattoo is a medal of honor to your individual journey ending in Christ. King David killed 10,000 men. Think he felt "trauma"? Countless brothers share countless tragedies. Jesus comes to you through walls and wire, straight past manned gun towers, unimpressed and unafraid. Able to empower you the same. He sits next to you on your bunk to bring the transformation. He surely ain't never hatin' on you or searchin' you for vibes of a 'good boy' but for companionship of a fellow son, who believes His Father.

>MAIN TEXT CONTINUES HERE>

His focus was to love the very men this world condemns. He broke through survival numbness by His personal touch. This is how the frozen core begins to melt, sin is lost in mercy, we become recreated as the mask drops. To show the world this mercy, Jesus focused on individuals to release their faith. He walked among everyday wicked men. Jesus turned water into wine just to keep a party alive. He saw more faith in a pagan soldier than in the whole tribe of Israel. He talked real with loose women, was out there speaking love to the suicidal, the demon-possessed, the ones society already labeled criminals;

murderers, perverts, sickos. God ain't afraid of our dirt. He wore it. The story of Abraham proves it.

**JESUS DIDN'T STAY QUIET. HE REBUKED THE RELIGIOUS GATEKEEPERS FOR SLAMMING THE DOORS ON THE VERY BADASS SINNERS HE CAME TO RESCUE (MT.23).**

Every step He took was about His Father—to bring us home, to show us mind-blowing glory awaits. He didn't post up with the elite—He washed the feet of lowlife brothers. Walked with farmers, sat with hustlers, laughed with drifters, cried with prisoners, fed the homeless, held the diseased.

## TURN RAW CHAOS INTO PURE BRILLIANCE

100 miles below the Earth's surface sits a tiny rock-like material called carbon. Extreme pressure, heat, and time can rearrange its atoms, causing this very common substance to crystallize into a high-valued diamond. *But it is still incomplete.* In the hands of a Master, it is then cut—every angle, every facet, carved through precision, to create what is called "fire" and "brilliance" within. *The build of a man's character is absolutely profound.* Like carbon, men are so petty and common, so to find a man with a diamond in his blood is extraordinary. Seldom comes a man who will withstand the extreme pressure, heat, and time to become the "strongest material known to man". God doesn't waste our pain—He shapes us through it. The wounds, the losses, the long nights—these are the cuts that form character. The fire that feels like it's breaking you is the very furnace forging you—forging you in the fires of real. And when He's done, what was once common darkness now channels light through its unique brilliance and fire (See: Is.62:3, 1 Pt. 1:6-7, Eph.5:8).



Spoke faith into dudes hanging on by a thread. His love thawed slum ghetto punks, gangsters, and addicts with His fire.

**HE DIDN'T SHAME THE SHATTERED. HE REBUILT THEM.**

He never once said, "*Repeat a prayer*" or "*Join my church*." Instead, He said, "Come to Me."<sup>80</sup> It means He got people to budge towards change. He flipped tables on fools turning God's house into a hustle. Said, "You can't box My Father into a building. Tear it down—I'll build something better inside you" (Mt.16:18, Jn.2:19). What others missed or dismissed, He saw—tiny acts by ordinary people, as massive acts of faith. As a lowly Carpenter, He explained His time on the wood would be to build a sanctum for the broken—shelters for our pain, places of real in the shadow of the Most High (Ps.91). *His Kingdom offers dual citizenship of the wicked as the righteous, and sinners as sons.*

So hear me, bro: it's the heart of a man who knows he's messed up that's a pure diamond to God. Real is the Ascent of the Warrior and the Asset of the Wicked. No problem with dirt. Just be yourself, 'for God's sake'.

## THE WOUND AND THE WICKEDNESS

**My friend, you're** walking in a story that started long before you were born. What you think is unique wickedness in different variations is as common as dirt. When I say, "wound," I'm talking ghost pain—like brain fog, mental instability, that depression keeping you negative, pissed off, or numb. It's the weird unexplainable crap that comes out of nowhere and takes you into darkness. It's why we act like monsters at times. It runs through our blood like animal DNA (read Isaiah 59). It's the pull of dark energy in us all; bitterness, rage.

**THE REAL WISDOM IS LEARNING TO INTERPRET THIS PAIN THROUGH THIS FULL STORY—NOT JUST THE CRIME YOU COMMITTED, BUT THE ONE ADAM COMMITTED AND PASSED DOWN IN US.**



Adam's wound had a Hiroshima-type impact on all humanity. In God's eyes, it's why we do the evil we do. This understanding changes everything. It keeps the grief from crushing you and places it where it belongs—on the fracture we were all born into. It means we're not just a perpetrator—we're a victim of a fracture that goes back to the first created man—Adam who rebelled against God. But being a victim isn't an excuse; it's a diagnosis of human weakness. And once you see it, you're no longer blind to the war inside. That's where the blindfold comes off and the pivot happens—from victim to victor. Your failure isn't the root, it's the result. And when you see that, you stop treating your soul like a lost cause and start tracing the damage back to the source—rising with what is REAL in your grip.

When Adam and Eve awoke after their act of defiance against God, it wasn't just to guilt—they had shattered a perfect world. From that moment on, mankind would live in conflict with the Creator. It was the collapse of the human soul. We live in the aftermath of Adam and Eve opening the gates of hell to unleash its darkness on earth. They are responsible for all negativity—every prison, war, disease, etc.

They detonated the inner bridge God had designed to connect us to Him, and sin rewired the core of humanity. *Every breath since has carried the torment of being cut off from that lifeline (Jer. 17:9 / Rom. 3:10).*

The human mind was warped by this trauma—twisted from pure to corrupt. Our freedom in God was replaced by the sickness of self-obsession. The depth of our fall is so severe we can no longer even imagine the glory we lost. The war with sin is so sophisticated we neither identify nor acknowledge it. *Sin hardwired grief into our brains, crowned self as god, and made stillness before God nearly impossible.* We're not just making bad choices—we're driven by a corrupted instinct to run our own ego, even if it kills us. To break that chain, we must surrender our will through faith in God to Jesus Christ. That's where He is given rule over our sin. Faith is the agent by which we thaw.


## SUMMARY

Abraham came outta wreckage—straight pagan blood, no virtue, no God stuff, no shot. Just raw humanity existing in Adam's broken bloodline. But the moment he **locked his will on God** and didn't flinch—something shifted (Jn. 7:17). Not with God, but inside him. He believed. And that belief flipped the switch—broke the human cycle of rebellion.

The curse upon us from Adam gets rerouted to the blessing of Christ, not by magic—but by faith. Abraham stopped living by feelings to align his will with faith. He put his full weight on God's word—he didn't just behave different—he became different. *A diamond in the desert.* His faith is how he faced pressure, rebuilt identity, and stepped into purpose.

**THIS RESET REDIRECTS OUR INHERITED INSTINCTS OF ANGER, SHAME, AND REGRET INTO FORGIVENESS AND OPENS UP A NEW FLOW: PURPOSE, BLESSING, FUTURE.**

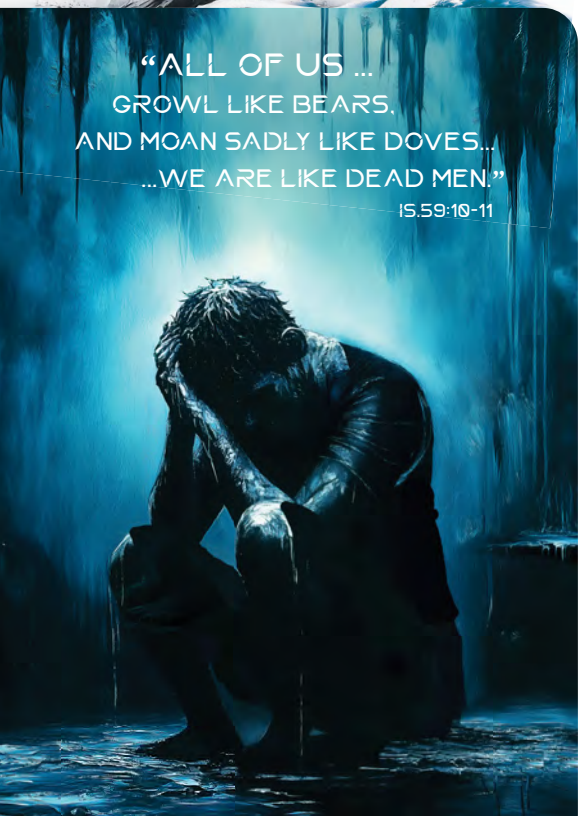
From Adam to Christ, the switch was never behavior or wickedness—it was belief. One man's raw, unshakable faith reroutes your story.



THERE IS  
NOTHING MORE  
POWERFUL  
THAN WAKING  
UP TO THE  
FORCE OF  
YOUR OWN  
LIFE.

Adam tried to ditch God. Abraham tried to find Him. Adam left us a mess. Abraham left us a blessing. Adam said, *"We are like God"*. Abraham said, *"I am but dust and ashes"*. Adam showed up proud and fell to wicked. Abraham showed up humble and wicked and rose to righteous. Adam reached for glory and fell into shame. Abraham owned his shame and stepped into glory. Adam's pride got us locked up in pain. Abraham's faith thaws us to real. One man took us down with a lie, the other lifts us up with belief. But it's Jesus who kicks the door open. He ain't just a second chance—He's the new Adam, the 2nd Adam of the resurrection race, the only way out (1 Cor. 15:45). Can you imagine wanting God more than wanting what's 'out there'? I don't know how He will do it, but one budge (mustard seed) will bring you into Him. 'All things are possible to him who believes' (Mk 9:23).

Abraham put faith on the table, and that gave God a way to bring Himself back to mankind. God put His own heart in the flesh of His Son—walked Him through this world, let Him take that hit on the cross, just to cover our dirt. That's real love. Adam's the OG father of sin. Abraham's the OG father of faith. Jesus is the OG of salvation.



"ALL OF US ...  
GROWL LIKE BEARS,  
AND MOAN SADLY LIKE DOVES...  
...WE ARE LIKE DEAD MEN."  
15:59:10-11



## THREE TYPES OF LIFE

1. *Bios* (Gr. βίος) -physical, biological
2. *Psyche* (Gr. ψυχή) -Soul, mind, emotional
3. *Zoe* (ζωή) - Divine, spiritual, eternal life

**W**e need to redefine LIFE—not by where you’ve been, what you’ve done, or where you are now. There are three words for life that matter: bios, psyche, and zoe. Bios is the biological life—the body stuff: eating, breathing, working, sleeping. It’s survival, plain and simple. Most folks live here, caught in the cycle of eat, sleep, hustle, repeat, but that’s not really living. Then there’s Psyche, the mind stuff—the soul life. This is where your thoughts, emotions, identity, and inner traffic churn. It’s tied to the sin wound from Adam—the false self, the brokenness inside. Psyche can give life its flavor, but it can also trap you in emotional chaos and mental battles. Both bios and psyche can break down, and when they do, that’s when many feel lost or empty.

But there is a third life—zoe—the spiritual life given by the Spirit of Christ.<sup>66</sup> This is eternal life, the promise and purpose Jesus talks about in John 17:3. Zoe is not just life after death; it’s life right now and forever. Jesus describes zoe as “living water flowing in your innermost being.”<sup>83</sup> It’s the real life, the life that fulfills our God-designed purpose. Heaven isn’t about white gowns and angels—it’s about finally coming home to the life you were made for.

You’ve been floating through days, maybe even years, like a ghost—here but not fully alive. You’ve been caught in your emotions, your ego, your mind games, but that’s a trap—it can turn on you fast. Jesus came to give us zoe. My brother, my sister, it’s impossible to ruin a life—zoe— you have not yet had. Don’t complicate your existence with denial, lies or shame. Be humble and real with yourself. Admit the truth: you’ve been surviving, not living.

You’re not alone if you hate your life. Most do, but won’t admit it. Jesus said it four times: you have to hate this life (psyche) to find the real one (zoe) (Jn.12:24). Abraham didn’t just leave a city—he left his life (psyche) behind to God’s life (zoe). The devil is smart and strong, but he can’t touch zoe. It’s an indestructible life, a divine current flowing through a broken heart by raw faith.<sup>60</sup> I can’t figure it, but some dudes just wanna drift in darkness. Hell exists not because God wants it, but because anyone who rejects His reality shows they want it. But when zoe hits, the drifting stops. Something deeper anchors you. You catch a whisper of Destiny. You don’t understand it at first, but when it grabs hold, it’s real power—the kind of life death can’t touch.

Can you imagine wanting that new life—the eternal life Jesus gives—more than you want to go back to the old life? Can you imagine wanting Him more than the old ways or old people “back there”? Faith makes that possible. Real life is what Jesus promises: “I came to give life... life abundantly.”<sup>86</sup> To cultivate zoe, you grow by three powers: contemplation (quiet connection with God), calculation (wisdom and understanding), and resolution (deciding to live by faith no matter what). That’s the path out of survival into true life.

In 1913, a coach at Notre Dame named Knute Rockne engineered the forward pass. Everyone laughed. But it mastered the game of football. Abraham engineered faith, and men laugh. But it is “the victory that overcomes the world” (1 John 5:4).

Why drift down prison paths, staggering from bleeding wounds of despair, as if cut deep and left to die, when by His wounds you can be healed?<sup>46</sup> Why sit for years at the Wheel of Sorrow, spinning thoughts of no tomorrow? You can’t pave your future with a path to the past. Don’t let the depth of your fall fool you. Recovery is not a steep climb up a mountain, but a moment when you budge to believe God. He loves you AS IS, and when you believe His love, it frees your inner man.

To see myself actually love others, knowing my wretched selfishness, is proof to me faith works. Everyone thinks of love associated with Jesus but few think of Abraham’s faith as the pioneer of the Father’s love for the nations of the Earth. You can become a son of Abraham to become a father like Abraham. Abraham pleaded with God for Sodom and Gomorrah, knowing their wickedness. A father’s love doesn’t watch from a distance—it fights, intercedes, sacrifices, it carries the weight of others: like a scientist working on a cure, a warrior dragging a fallen comrade from the battlefield, like a father stepping into a drug world to rescue his lost boy.

**ONE SMILE, ONE JOKE, ONE GESTURE, CAN SWITCH A BROTHER FROM DARK TO LIGHT AND OPEN THE DOOR TO A NEW DYNAMIC.**

Love is a life jacket. The one who spurns it needs it most. Faith doesn’t sit back—it loves beyond reason. It bears isolation, no credit, no applause. It absorbs limitless sin and lifts to fight again. *Abraham became our shot caller on real because faith is what makes real real.*

Of course you don’t feel like faith does anything. This is why it is so powerful. It don’t ask for feelings. It don’t need our senses. Faith kicks in when you’ve got nothing left but the choice to trust. You feel like it ain’t working, so it pushes you beyond yourself to God. It’s you giving all of you to God—even your logic, your pride, your defenses. Jump past what you can see, and lock onto the unseen presence of a Father, closer than your own breath. Hidden not by distance but by dimension. This nearness—it’s what fuels your mind, your strength, your will to live by faith in here.

**“SO MY DEAR BROTHER, OR PRECIOUS SISTER, SEE BEYOND THE CEMENT BUILDINGS, HEAR BEYOND THE SLAMMED DOORS, LOOK PAST THE YARD, THE FENCE, AND WIRE.**

Allow yourself to catch a glimpse of His mercy surrounding you. Destiny can dawn anytime. Ever met someone and said, “*Don’t I know you from somewhere*”? Well, in God’s destiny this “someone” is now the new you. You did not realize that your entire life was a venture spent in **finding you**—predestined “...before the foundation of the world” (Eph.1:3-5, Rom.8:29).

**A PLACE WITHIN**  
JOHN 14:23



God promised Abraham a place where he would find rest. He would become “heir of the world” (Rom.4:13). God will give this to you. It don’t mean land and loot—it means getting back what was lost: real peace, real purpose, and authority over the war inside. Through faith, you step back into the life God meant for you—no inner torment of sin, no mask, no lies running your show. You get the world with none of its chains.



Right here. Right now. No blame, no quit—to rise. To care. To help shift the direction of your broken life. The reward is this: faith and love move you off yourself and into God.

**WHAT FEELS LIKE THE WORST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO YOU IS THE VERY THING THAT CAN PUSH YOU BEYOND YOURSELF INTO CHRIST. THAT'S REDEMPTION.**

RM.8:28, EPH.1:11

It's more than good—it's eternal life. Abraham laid down the way of faith. Jesus sends His Spirit so you can walk it out. The question now is: Will you thaw into this real?



WHEN YOU FINALLY CATCH A GLIMPSE OF GOD'S UNLIMITED LOVE FOR YOU, PERSONALLY -THAT'S WHEN DESTINY STOPS BEING A DREAM AND STARTS BREATHING.

WALK ALONE. STAND ALONE. THERE IS NO REASON TO FEAR BEING DEFEATED IN A WAR THAT IS DESTINED FOR YOU TO WIN. IS.48:31

*Many brothers from the hood have taken racism straight to the chest. I won't fake like I know that pain—but I do know what it's like to be hated before you're even known.*

Now's the time to cash in on that unjust pain and use the worst of it to create the best of you. That's the key to letting His love in us become love through us—even toward enemies. If you're down, I'd be honored to walk with you across this bridge. Severe hatred was my crib—the place where I was born from above. My old life shattered when my reputation got smashed playing ball. But that break opened me like surgery—for a new heart.

## PEER PRESSURE

Abram walked straight outta history's biggest con—peer pressure—into his destiny. It was the same then as is the prison politics today, bro. “You are who WE say you are. Don't get cute. God ain't for the wicked, and we ain't for Him.” That's the real chokehold—livin' scared of what people think. Nothing worse than a man kept from his own destiny. Instead of building your own house, you rent space with others. It's the lazy way. So I get Abram. And I get you, bro. When I had to walk away from my football buddies, man, did it rip me up. To cut ties with strangers ain't much. But walking away from the boys or kin is no soft exit. It felt like ripping out pages from my life story I'd written with my own hands.

**BUT OWNING WHO YOU ARE IS WORTH EVERY SHOT LIFE TAKES AT YOU. I KNOW. I GOT THE SCARS AND WEAR 'EM LIKE A BADGE.**

When I walked away from my early image, the same ones who crowned me king now assailed me. They thought they

owned the rights cuz they were included in the story. It opened my eyes to the game—some people cling to darkness because it justifies how they live.

**THAT'S WHEN I SAW THE TRUTH: NOT ALL FRIENDS ARE REAL. SOME WERE ENEMIES IN DISGUISE.**

Listen, man—don't break your own brain. It's the only one you've got. Who cares what anyone thinks? Wounds can build you strong. This is your life—find it and live it to the fullest. Don't live split in two—**one face for them, one when you're all alone.** It keeps you on edge, always playin' chess with your own soul. It builds a war inside. Always tense. Always trying to think what they think. Why keep your real man hiding in waiting? *Glass posing as diamond don't last in the fire, bro.* It cracks. Don't play an image and lose your destiny. The role this world hands you, on its stage, will keep you dead inside. Think of all the wild stuff you did out there for the wrong reasons—now forge that same fire of will to find the real you; digging deep to unearth the diamond. Tap into that second-level grit.

So to my brothers still in the fire of mindless rejection—I just want to honor you. Your survival, your scars, your strength. I want to say, “Brother, it's not you.” It's not even them. It's the sin-wound every man carries. Jesus said, *“The world hates Me without reason”* (John 15:25). And honestly? This one truth—this totally illogical hate—sealed my commitment to Him more than anything else. It's the ultimate real... ity.

Don't waste that pain. There's a bridge between wounds—one scar teaches another how to breathe. What hit me back then helps me now. And instead of hate, I choose love. God's reward is worth it all. Every man of God—from Job to Jeremiah—endured irrational hatred. So let's put our mouths in the dust, from which we came and to which we'll return, and dial direct into the real state of our own brokenness. Humiliation is like an underground spring of wisdom. It helps us draw truth and launch a calculated response, instead of reacting from pain.

Become a warrior- a master of real.



# BEAUTIFUL YOU

I was sitting in my yellow semi-truck when a bright red cardinal kept smashing into the side mirror—over and over. Bam. Bam. Like it was at war with itself. At first, I figured it had lost its bird mind. But later I read up. Turns out birds don't understand their reflection. When they do, it stuns 'em. Not from fear—but wonder. It is a beauty they never knew was theirs. And I thought—wow, that's like us. A cardinal doesn't know it's beautiful. Just like we don't know we are. We spend years hating on ourselves. We become consumed with stupid, tiny details of ourselves. We think we're nothing but the worst of what we did. We fall in a mind cave of self-pity, remorse or loud guilt. We bash ourselves like that cardinal not grasping our greater life.

But then—if we turn our mind just a few degrees in the light of real faith—we catch something. A glimpse. Not of who we were, but of how we're seen by the merciful Father and His Son. Not by our rap sheet. Not our sins. But our heart. The little child undefiled. And for a second—it stuns us. Stops us still. Like that bird. We want to see more. We look for a place to catch our reflection. We realize... we're beautiful. *"You are precious in My sight, I have called you by name and I love you"* (Is. 43:4). *We are not what we did... but what He did for us.*



Actual photo Sarah took of the cardinal in our truck mirror.

I mean, really—if God loves love and is good, what do you think He's more drawn to: rewatching you recycle darkness or standing with you to share in the times you dare to believe Him... to believe what He says about what His work did for you? God invested all of Himself in our creation and even more in our redemption. That alone is a rebuke to all the lies.

**DIGNITY, THAT'S THE ARMOR YOU WEAR WHEN YOUR PAST TRIES TO SHAME YOU.**

I used to make these stupid noises when I got drunk, stoned, and wrecked things. Took on a caveman-destroyer-role; a brainless monster. My buddies thought it was hilarious and screamed me on. The night usually ended up with me in a jail cell and them nowhere in sight. Again. But I remember the first time I realized... that wasn't me. It was my ego petrified of rejection. One day, someone read me Ex. 34:6. I never saw God in my future. Never imagined

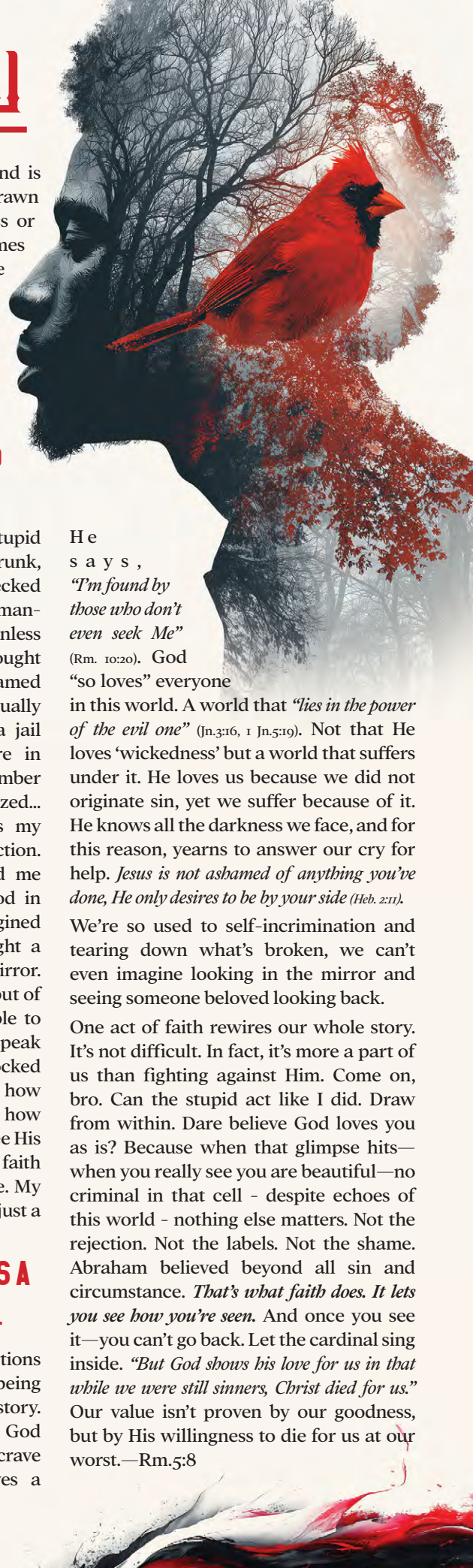
He loved me. But suddenly I caught a glimpse. Like the cardinal in the mirror. Not of a badass, not the destroyer—but of a man. Gentle. Reasonable. Still. Able to be wise. I could hear my own soul speak with love. It sounded good. It shocked me. That glimpse doesn't lie. That's how Abraham saw himself in God. And how God sees you, bro. He wants you to see His love for you. Just a still moment of faith with no one around. Catch a glimpse. My truck mirror is like the Scriptures or just a moment of truth, light, and real.<sup>135/137</sup>

**THE COURAGE TO BE YOU IS A MOMENT YOU DESERVE.**

It's not like there are a thousand options to make it in prison. There's one—being real. One flash can flip your whole story. God always comes to faith. In fact, God called Abraham "My friend".<sup>136</sup> We crave meaning like a thirsty deer craves a stream. God is that Stream.

He says, *"I'm found by those who don't even seek Me"* (Rm. 10:20). God "so loves" everyone in this world. A world that *"lies in the power of the evil one"* (Jn. 3:16, 1 Jn. 5:19). Not that He loves 'wickedness' but a world that suffers under it. He loves us because we did not originate sin, yet we suffer because of it. He knows all the darkness we face, and for this reason, yearns to answer our cry for help. *Jesus is not ashamed of anything you've done, He only desires to be by your side* (Heb. 2:11). We're so used to self-incrimination and tearing down what's broken, we can't even imagine looking in the mirror and seeing someone beloved looking back.

One act of faith rewires our whole story. It's not difficult. In fact, it's more a part of us than fighting against Him. Come on, bro. Can the stupid act like I did. Draw from within. Dare believe God loves you as is? Because when that glimpse hits—when you really see you are beautiful—no criminal in that cell - despite echoes of this world - nothing else matters. Not the rejection. Not the labels. Not the shame. Abraham believed beyond all sin and circumstance. *That's what faith does. It lets you see how you're seen.* And once you see it—you can't go back. Let the cardinal sing inside. *"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Our value isn't proven by our goodness, but by His willingness to die for us at our worst.—Rm. 5:8





# MEXICANO

IN THE PRISONS OF

BY DAVID GABRIEL

PRISON POPULATION: 244,448

Did you know the Aztecs invented chocolate, popcorn, and chewing gum?



**"IF WE DO THIS, I KNOW IT WILL BE MAGIC." -JULIO**

During our attendance at a prison conference called the ACA, we met a unique, beautiful individual named Julio, who was a top official from Mexico. While speaking in Spanish we instantly caught the fire of a shared vision of doing something special for the prisons he oversaw. We were on our way to Brazil so it seemed impossible, but this man was a one-of-a-kind individual and did stuff no one has ever done and made the impossible, possible. A lot of times, unfortunately, people will drag their feet and come up with a thousand reasons not to. Julio did just the opposite and found a thousand reasons to. *The immensity of individual choice.* He understood that stuff matters, lives matter, "now" matters. He had a big heart and blew us away in organizing large shows in several prisons. Despite numerous logistical challenges involved in navigating through such conflicted territory, for us, and them, we forged ahead. He and his team worked tirelessly through every detail and even had shade for the audience in the hot Mexican sun. The advanced anti-drone technology was impressive, and the security checks at each entrance could have been an extraordinary delay, but his crew made it smooth and the added steps to keep drugs out of the prisons were reflected in men with much higher spirits and a much better environment.

When we walked into the prison yard, wow, we found instant connection. Not hardcore "narcos", or degenerate "bandidos", but rather, beautiful men and women whose lives had been blown apart by a barrage of endless calamity. They were quick to laugh despite the sadness, and earnest for change despite their pasts. We shared moments with our Latino brothers, and sisters, that will never be forgotten. Many made large banners and small gifts to commemorate our visit, the Mexican culture is indeed very beautiful and these will live on in our hearts forever. Few fully comprehend the complexity of Mexico's history and current predicament where tragedy ripples in every direction. In some places, 12 years old is still a child, but 13 is a target — marked by crime syndicates and pushed into a life no one would ever choose out of a basket of other options.

Through cheers and tears, love and laughter, pain and promise, we performed in many of the 'hot zones' where it is advised not to travel due to ongoing conflicts. We calculated the danger and risk involved, and believe that God brought us specifically out to this remote region to be with these incredible people who are suffering so greatly. They explained that in the women's prisons especially, even family never came to visit because of the stigma against these ladies who had committed crimes. After each event we had numerous encounters with some very special individuals that marked our minds and hearts.

When we first met Julio, he said, *"If we do this, I know it will be magic."* And he was right. Magic it was.

Mexico has always held a special place in our hearts, as we spent much treasured time living there in our early days. We have all learned fluent Spanish and cherish the Mexican people, culture, music, dancing, and beautiful way of life. At one point Sarah, Ruth, and Elizabeth all worked as cooks in a Mexican restaurant, and the head chef taught them some of his best recipes. If only we could cook 'em and share 'em with all of you—it would be our honor.







BY JOSHUA JOHN

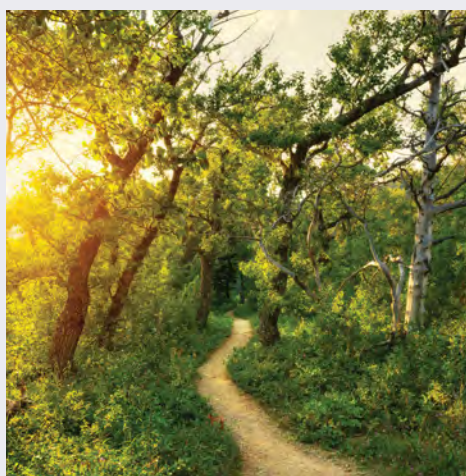
# MIND TRAVEL

I learned photography specifically to bring mountain scenery to those who are incarcerated. My hope is that you would not just look at these photos I took, but enter into them. Instead of saying, "I wish I could be there," go there in your mind. Stare at each one for a while, then close your eyes and climb in. Create the scene in your head. How many details can you see, feel, touch, smell, and hear? I do this often when facing stress. We must build the 'skill' of being still. Scientifically, when you vividly imagine something, your brain activates the same neural pathways as if you were actually experiencing it. You can actually create experiences and travel anywhere, right where you are.<sup>22</sup>



## STAND ON THE OCEAN

Take your shoes off. Feel the gritty sand between your toes and the cold waves crashing on your ankles. Hear the waves rolling one after the next and the seagulls calling overhead. Smell the ocean breeze. Gaze at the horizon before you... A new horizon. Every day, the sunset is consistently new and predictably surprising. Think about how no moment ahead, have you ever lived before, so the future is guaranteed to be new if you want it to be.



## WALK DOWN A FOREST PATH

This path is flat and easy, so even if you're not in shape, it's yours to enjoy. You can walk it, but choose to take a bicycle as you wind through the woods. The forest is dense, and you think on how somebody already did all the work to cut this path for you to use. Your mind jumps to John 14:6 and the words of Christ, "... I am the way... Follow Me...". Things click in a new way in your mind as you hit a downhill and let out a 'weeee', then suddenly hope no one heard you. Phewf, no one around.



## EXPERIENCE THE FALL

The leaves shimmer in the wind and catch the sunlight, creating a moment you can only define as magical. You're in "high country," so the air is thin and smells like a campfire. Cold makes something called "chlorophyll" drain from the leaves and reveal their true colors of red, orange, or, for Aspen trees, a golden yellow. You appreciate a deeper understanding of change and find hope as you read Ecclesiastes 3:1-11: "There is a season for everything... Everything is beautiful in His time..."



## LAY ON THE FRESH GREEN GRASS

The smell of the fresh grass is intoxicating, and as you sit down, it feels like a fancy mattress, so you lie all the way back. You grab a handful in your hands as it caresses your head, giving you a 'macro' view of each blade's composition. It's warm and the sun is low, in photography we call this the "Golden Hour." You seize this 'golden hour' as your own. You breathe in hope through prayer and breathe out the negative anxiety. Again. And again.



## SIT FOR A WHILE

Here's a bench for you to sit on. Alone if you like, but what if Jesus were sitting next to you, what would you say to Him? He would speak to you in a compassion that would blow your mind. How would you respond? Next time you read from the New Testament, imagine you are sitting on this bench as the sun rises. You have a hot coffee and a nice donut, you toss a tiny crumb to the duck, but then scoff down the rest before his friends come over.



## SOAK IN THE VIEW & THE WATER

All eight of us sat here together for a while, we took turns seeing who could stick their head in the freezing water the longest. David won. Your turn. Sit here with us. Let everything else go. Draw from this view and feed hope into your mind. One of us says, "You know, the God who created those mountains, can resolve that stuff that's bugging you so much, will you believe Him?" Then we notice a mountain goat, and the boys take off to get a picture.



A trained mind  
can travel  
anywhere, anytime.

THE  
REAL YOU  
AHEAD

NOW  
LEAVING  
THE PAST



# RECOVERY



Dunlacc Castle, Northern Ireland

By Ruth Mercy

## Recap

*One day, I went for a hike in the San Gabriel Mountains of California. On the way up, everything was wonderful, but on the way down, a sudden slip—just one moment—and I found myself facing a life-altering tragedy. When I regained consciousness after falling 200 ft, I remember seeing so much blood. I thought a small animal had died, but it was coming from my head. The pain was excruciating. I had to walk with a broken neck to a spot where the helicopter could rescue me.*

*My life hung in the balance as they stitched up my scalp and face and performed a harrowing surgery through my throat to repair my neck. I have been recovering and still deal with many issues, but in it all, I see how I have gained so many things. I realize that God saving me that day on the mountain was not really just for me, or my family... but for you.*

**H**ello there, lads and lassies, this is Ruth, your Irish sister and fellow fighter. My story ended up making international news, reaching across the United States and even as far as Russia and Eastern Europe. I'd like to say to each of you who prayed for me: *thank you with all my heart. God heard you.* I'm doing okay and I am still in the fight every day with and for you. In fact, my fight is even stronger than ever before as I draw from the touch of the Father's hand that day on the mountain.

So get this — I'm working on the streets in Bogotá, Colombia, when a guy comes up to me who doesn't speak much English or Spanish. He's from Poland. I share that I also have Polish roots on my father's side (Irish on my mother's). Suddenly, it clicks in his mind, and he remembers seeing my story, *Miracle on the Mountain*, on NBC Nightly News, all the way in Poland! I share with him about my heart for Jesus and my love for my brothers in prison. Another thought clicks as he remembers a good friend — a Catholic priest deeply embedded in the Polish prison system. He says he's going to get it all figured out for us to visit. I think, Wow. Could that be? I mean, it seems impossible. Not only does he organize for us to enter and perform in a number of Polish prisons, but God gets us to Poland — some 6,000 miles away from Colombia. The impossible is possible. Lying in that hospital bed in California, I could have never imagined all the individuals I would meet and deeply connect with around the world — because of my tragic fall.

I thought if God could get us to Poland, maybe He would open doors to visit other prisons in nearby countries. *Something that was already on my heart and I had actually been working towards over previous years.* Through many trials, a relentless fight, and stories too long to write here, I was able to secure visits to many facilities across Europe.

While visiting the prisons in Spain, I was experiencing nearly debilitating migraines. We eventually figured out that I had also cracked teeth when

I fell on the mountain and *now they were pinching the nerves.* The dentist explained it takes 400 psi to crack a tooth like that. *It made me realize how brutal the impact must have been when I hit the tree that stopped my fall.* I should be dead. He put in fillings, but they fell out in Romania, exposing the nerve and causing... well... agony. So my dad stopped at a tiny first-aid shack in the Romanian countryside and pantomimed to the nurse to get me some Novocain until we could get them fixed down the road someplace.

When I think about it all, I am filled with overwhelming gratitude. Jesus always meets me with mercy in my worst moments. I can honestly say that any pain I deal with these days actually blesses me, because I can FEEL it. I could have been paralyzed, so just to feel is a gift. *(Consider such perspective when you deal with your pain).*

From all I have learned this past year, something I want to communicate with you might sound a little strange, but stay with me. ***My brother, or sister, don't waste your suffering.*** Don't let all that you have gone

through mean nothing. Suffering is like a powerful tool that we need to learn how to use to create something extraordinary. I have met many people who have gone through bad things, but tragically, gained nothing from it. They just endlessly cycle through a maze of sadness and negative thoughts.

Let's think about that tiny, three-letter word a second. When we are hit with some kind of tragedy, we immediately think, "This is really... *bad*," right? A "bad time," a "bad place," a "bad situation." Bad. Bad. Bad. But hold up a minute, ok? If we label it all just bad, we close the door on the many dimensions of good that could be drawn out of it all; a good that can be better than the bad (2 Cor. 12:9).

Now, I know what you're thinking; "*Trust me, girl!... you don't know. MY situation is definitely bad. No good here.*" My friend, of course I don't know all you have been through, but I know the One who does and He has helped me through many bad situations. From almost dying as I described here, to shattering my leg (3 times actually), to suffering severe sicknesses, 3rd degree burns, facing many dangerous situations and enduring countless mental and emotional trials.

**AND IN EACH EXPERIENCE, LIKE FINDING A DIAMOND IN A CLUMP OF MUD, GOD SHOWED ME HOW BEAUTIFUL THINGS CAN BE SIFTED FROM SANDS OF SUFFERING.**



"Hitting rock bottom," doesn't have to be a bad thing, my brother or sister. In fact, it can be the best thing. It can be the place we find the bedrock on which we lay the foundation to build our house. It's when the illusions of life shatter that we discover who we really are. *"Adversity introduces a man to himself."* – Albert Einstein



What people call “self-strength” and a “together image,” God calls pride, and it is the wall that will keep Him from us.<sup>75/105</sup> So when we actually allow our breaking to break us, and those walls to crumble, something extraordinary happens. Suffering begins to work to our advantage. Weakness becomes strength, pain becomes power, and what was definitely “bad” becomes undeniably good.<sup>102</sup>

### SO I STAND ON THE RUINS OF MY OWN FALLEN WALLS IN THE STRENGTH OF HIS REDEPTIVE POWER. BECAUSE HOW WE RESPOND TO GOD IN OUR SUFFERING DEFINES OUR RECOVERY.

Consider this guy named Job. *He and I would get along.* He was bombarded out of nowhere with unimaginable suffering, grueling physical pain, and the devastation of losing his entire family. If anyone had a right to call life “bad,” it was Job. But instead of dwelling on his affliction and many

questions for God, he pondered the magnitude and utter goodness of God’s character. The magnificent witness in God’s creation and the phenomenal composition of animals (see pg. 33), moved him to let attitudes of self-pity and entitlement dissolve into a life-changing humility. Then he said something that triggered God to grant him a recovery greater than his former state: *“I change my mind” (I repent). No more questions, “I retract.”*

(Job.2:10, 42:5-6). He didn’t give up, he gave in.

As I walk through courtyards of prisons around the world, at times there are roses growing.

As if a symbol of all the beautiful men and women growing behind the bars, through the thorns, into His redemptive destiny. Every dawn as I go for a walk, I talk to the Father on your behalf. You are always on my heart and in my mind. Love ya mucho - Ruth Mercy



Forget Murphy’s law, (“Anything that can go wrong will go wrong”)  
I’ve Legislated Mercy’s law: “Anything that goes wrong, He can redeem!”

## We Need The Thorns

Did you know that a rose does not grow despite the thorns, but because of them? They serve as a defense against predators and allow it to climb over walls and obstacles. In the hospital, my little brother sent me a photo of a rose that was growing under the window of my room. Elegant petals surrounded by sharp thorns. It encapsulated the reality of how the “thorns” we face in life are actually essential for us to grow and become who we are destined to be.

No one endured more pain than our Brother Jesus. Every ‘thorn’ that touches us pierced His skull. Broken like a seed, to rise like a ROSE and stand in the garden proving that triumph comes from tragedy, beauty is born from brokenness, and the deepest hearts are forged from the most severe suffering.



After speaking in an Alabama prison, I had an unforgettable encounter. A man approached me with tears in his eyes. He told me he was the officer who shut down the trail after my fall in the San Gabriel Mtns! He said he knew how the story started but not how it ended—until now. Shortly after, he got into a situation that led to where he was and we both united in our “fall” as we build our rise.



## FROM THE ICU, I SEE YOU.

Guess what? I’m actually writing this from the Intensive Care Unit at a crowded, poor, Brazilian hospital that provides free healthcare. Long story for another magazine, but I had to have a serious surgery to remove a large tumor in my abdomen. About five days after surgery, I was seized by excruciating, paralyzing pain in my chest. A scan revealed a blood clot in my lung, what doctors call a ‘heart attack of the lung.’ I could have stopped breathing. I was squeezed in next to ten other very sick people, ordered not to move and given injections to thin my blood.

It was so tragic, the lady next to me had Alzheimer’s and kept calling out for a husband she did not have, to children she could not remember. They were weeping. Two other women had a severe cough, one of them started bleeding and she died a night later. The man across from me had epilepsy and was screaming while shaking the bed rail. Another woman had a rod and screws in her leg from an old injury like me, but her’s became infected and now she was on day 15 battling sepsis. As I found words to comfort them in their pain, it took my mind off my own, more than the morphine (*which was not working*). Sometimes you can ease someone’s suffering by listening to them explain what they’re going through. Sometimes a soothing tone, “*You’re gonna be ok. bang in there, it will pass...*” Sometimes distracting them with a creative thought, story, or Scripture. And at times a little humor at the right moment is the perfect medicine.

So as I lay here with the lights blaring all night, the meals lukewarm baby food, and the hospital so loud it is like a construction site, I can’t stop thinking of you and all you deal with—no privacy, lots of awkward and humiliating situations, and no one tuned in to your needs or pain. I store these moments in my heart on a shelf called, “Compassion” and send specific, custom-made prayers up to heaven for you.

So know, my brother or sister, in the ICU, I see you. (I am on the mend now, out of the hospital, and starting to recover... again.)





# FROM A LOST BOY TO A FEARLESS MAN

BY MICHAEL

YOUR SWAG MAY BE HOW YOU FEEL  
BUT YOUR PAIN TELLS WHAT'S REAL

You can't hide the hurt that society put on you when it set up your mind with its lies. Then it screwed you over when you listened and reacted. Maybe, like me, your vulnerability came from having no caring father. You lived with a void and vulnerability of wanting to belong somewhere or with someone. You 'made it' on your own and tried to fill that hole inside with a thousand things. But none of them did it. So you tried to go beyond all legal parameters to plug your bleeding wounds.

This deep cry, bro? It's for identity. You don't know who you are. You watched a world flying by and didn't know where or if you were a part of it. At some point, you realized your hurt was not going away, and nobody knew or cared. So you had to figure out how to deal with so much pain. You defaulted to the easy, lazy way: drugs did it, but brought out another dark side that you didn't know was in you, but identified as you. But it was just the way of all of us lost boys.

So I'm gonna say some hard stuff to you, bro, but I do so in love. Not to criticize or judge but to help. When I was in my prime 'big man' days, I often felt myself a lost boy playing pretend. Hoping nobody would detect the scared me behind the image. I don't know if you ever felt the same or can admit it. *Got to dare to be real, bro.* It demands more courage than facing a fight. Risk everything you have, if you have anything at all. The truth is, the longer you remain a slave to peer pressure, the longer you delay becoming the man you are meant to be.

We reach within to pull out some strength to cover our pain and define ourselves as 'a man'. *We grab for something here and push there and do this or that but we remain the same.*

Often times we grabbed the wrong things and pasted together an image we would eventually come to hate, but couldn't escape.

We met up with some other pretenders. Lost boys, who also didn't know what they were missing, only that they felt they were missing a lot. Each man separately had nothing and knew it, but together that nothing found a home with more nothings. So we were united by a shared feeling of hurt covered over by a make-believe toughness. *"Let's lash out and get the world back for screwing us over,"* we figured. We formed a case against God and said, *"Surely, He could have done something to keep us from this if He even exists."* *"Hey man, I don't need no dad. I'm a gang-banger set to 'Get-back-at...?'"*

Time goes by, and one day you realize your whole gig has been a revenge trip at others for what they have but you don't. Other gang-bangers feel threatened when you think different or think at all, so their mantra is *'don't think, just follow.'* They play mind-games and trick young men into a backwards logic that caving to peer pressure and conformity to their warped thinking is "cool and tough". It is only the desperation to belong that makes us concede to such obvious stupidity. But like clowns at a funeral, they don't care that you're dying inside.

To keep you, they give you stuff like an image or a nickname; something cool and tough. They called me "Crazy War". It was a total rush to feel that elation. It felt like something, even though it was nothing. When I chose to break away, I'm not going to lie to you, bro. My entire soul collapsed on me. I was shocked to see my 'homies' mock me and hate me. I was ripped up and wounded deep. I had no idea who I was

or what to do. But, without a shadow of a doubt, every ounce of pain was worth it because there's nothing worse in life than being a slave to others. One by one, I watched all my "friends" turn on me simply because I turned to Jesus. *Why?* This one single truth forged me into a fearless man. Their absurd rejection made me realize *Jesus was real.*

So, let me put my hand on your shoulder as an older brother for a moment. Let's take a step back and "see" bigger.

Let's you and I look farther than today, and see beyond the pain of right now. In five or ten years, will you just be an older version of your same misery?

*To be a man is to be honest and admit we don't have a clue what it means to be a man. It is to stop following and start thinking.*<sup>17/20</sup>

Stupidity: Definition - (different from ignorance): Stupid is one who exists in a stupor; acting in one's own worst interest; a deliberate pursuit contrary to reason. (James F. Welles, Ph. D).

## Peer Pressure

Imagine being in an old rickety cart flying downhill, careening towards a cliff. Common sense says, "get out now." But everyone laughs at you and hates you if you try. That's what peer pressure is like, at times. They are going towards their own demise and want you to go with them. But a resolute man stands alone, and saves his life and saves his soul.<sup>17</sup>







COULD YOU  
BECOME A NOBLE  
MAN, WHO TURNS  
VENGEANCE TO  
FORGIVENESS,  
RAGE INTO  
UNDERSTANDING,  
AND AN ENEMY  
INTO A BROTHER?



We sure as hell can't spend our short 70 years in this body of dust dying, while trying to live up to the standards of total strangers. Are you? Realizing and admitting the absolute asininity of it all strengthened my resolve to 'go for it'. To get out. To go on. To find. To be. Whatever "IT" was that God had, I really had no idea. But if there is a God, He most certainly must have something more.

**So I wasn't going to be anyone's clown. Nobody was going to stop me from finding the real me.**

I immersed myself in the Gospel of John and read of a Jesus completely different than the religious wimp portrayed in the modern "churches" I grew up in. I was compelled by His warrior's grit and the brute-force reality of His words. More than anything, He spoke constantly (178 times) of a compassionate Father waiting to give me an individual identity; the real me.<sup>37/50</sup>

I knew I could never be like some of the phonies I often saw in religious circles, so I was relieved to find that this is not at all what God expected of me. I began to talk to Him honestly about all the crap I was dealing with, inwardly and outwardly. As I passed through "the valley of darkness," I feared no evil. Big deal. Let others mock. Let 'em hate.<sup>7/123</sup> Let them threaten. Bring it. Whatever they do, God will give me the wisdom to deal with it. I consider myself a fearless man. Not bragging, just believing "perfect love casts out fear" (1 Jn. 4:18). I will one day stand alone before God. The day of judgment is coming soon.<sup>129</sup> *This is my life, my eternity.* I came into His truth, and He set me free.<sup>81</sup>

**Courage pays far more than it costs.**

I learned to relish my time alone. The pain and hatred inside me began to fade away. It is in being silent where you change your conversation and your thinking. When you feel you can't go on, it is where God meets you with a new thinking of how to deal with things. It is wisdom, brother. Every man of God learned to cherish silence as a gateway to new life (Lam. 3:28, Ps. 55:22, Mt. 11:28). *Converse with Christ on all things.* Be strong and let your heart take courage (Josh. 1:9, Ps. 27:14). If we could talk as dead men, skeleton to skeleton, we'd reflect back and realize the only thing that mattered on earth was making a stand for eternal life. The transformation from the trauma of being a lost boy into being a fearless man will be the greatest experience of your life if you dare. God is waiting.

# BROTHERHOOD

BY JOSHUA JOHN

We each carry so many burdens, so heavy at times it feels like a hydraulic press is compressing all our moments into mere survival. We work through the same scenarios in our heads until it hurts. Bro, listen to me, there is a simple trick to start to kick the grief: brotherhood. Any effort of any kind to start caring about someone else besides ourselves. I know that can be like the furthest thing from your mind, but that's why it works. It gets you out of your head. Your burden lifts as you lift another's.<sup>78</sup> Don't believe me? Try it.

Hatred, vengeance, turf wars, racism, and separation-by-groups, is not unique "prison culture," it is "mankind culture." *Everyone thinks they are better than someone.* From The Troubles in Belfast, Ireland (*terrorism between Catholics and Protestants*) to the numerous street gangs of Brazil, and the paramilitaries of Colombia, I have seen firsthand, all over the world, that men will always find a reason to hate even when there is no reason. It pulls you in like a tide and makes you feel like you have no choice but to go along. But you do.

My friend, listen to me, you can yet master the dark-atmosphere and supersede the 'Prison Culture' of even those who play board games with human souls. They say, *"Deny common sense. Learn the prison codes. Bite like an alpha dog and execute the 'rules' of violence"*. But these brothers are not the enemy, just more victims caught in the tide of prison tragedy.

But a courageous choice to defy this "Doctrine Of Division" will ripple with waves of life-saving hope within you and to everyone around you. Learn to stop fighting against each other, and start fighting together with each other against the depression and hopelessness in the faceless entity called incarceration. It will take time, wisdom, and strategy, but God will help you if you will budge towards Him.

As individuals, we can engage the 'fight' of our own will to enact our intelligence,

**THE ENTIRE DYNAMIC OF A PRISON AND THE EXPERIENCE OF EACH MAN WITHIN CAN BE COMPLETELY TRANSFORMED BY INDIVIDUAL MEN MAKING A SIMPLE, DELIBERATE CHOICE TO SEE EACH OTHER AS BROTHERS.**

experience, and character to initiate this protocol; *brotoolol*. It's seeing each man, friend, or foe, through the backstory of their personal pain.

At times, we say, *"I don't know how."* But we do. And what we don't know, we can learn through humility, persistence, and common sense. There are a million strategies to change the dynamics of hostility. We must simply take a step back and think. Flip the gang mentality from—unite in hatred towards another group based on their crimes and background—and enact brotherhood—unite in love for each person regardless of their crimes or background.<sup>71/87</sup>

**WE MUST LEARN TO LIVE TOGETHER AS BROTHERS OR PERISH TOGETHER AS FOOLS.**

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.







Deep in the Earth it is said that great pressure and heat turn ordinary carbon into extraordinary diamonds. As we have visited many prisons in many countries, I have seen extreme pressure and heat turn a few ordinary men into extraordinary men; *Diamonds in the Rough*. When others accept, “every man for himself,” they say, “no, every man is my brother.” I have actually seen guys break from their “herd”, defy racism, and help a brother from another “herd” purely out of selfless love. *These are those whom I admire. My heroes.*

So here is a tribute, an honor, an award, if you will, to all the men and women who choose this noble way. I want to recognize all you who I have seen caring for someone in a wheelchair, blind or disabled. I know the sacrifice and patience that takes, and it is no little thing. Here’s to you who are patient when wronged, who are kind when mistreated, and to you who “turn the other cheek”. Here’s to anyone who has ever cared about another man more than himself. Here’s to the ‘badass’ who welcomes the ‘losers’ into their circle. Here’s to the guy who told us how he visits and cares for those in hospice. To all you who sit with the lonely and care for the hurting. To those who stop the dominoes of hate and live to fight another day. Here’s to those who make peace in conflict and calm the panic of those breaking down. Here’s to anyone, anywhere, who has ever put his arm on a stranger’s shoulder, and to anyone



who’s ever said, “We’re gonna make it, brother. Be strong, don’t you dare give up.”

Come on stage as we hand you an award, your name is on it, etched in gold writing. The crowd rises to a standing applause. You deserve it. The eight of us here at Deep Heart salute you and recognize you as a Diamond in the Rough. We grab your hand firmly and tell you, “Congratulations, brother. Now you must fight on! Dig deep. Go further. Up your game. You are making a difference more than you imagine. The prisons need you. God needs you. You are not alone, all over the world you are a part of a brotherhood in prisons of those who have become like diamonds in the rough. Save a life. Change a heart. Win a soul. This is it. Your one shot. So give it all you got.” -Mt.25:35

**Some simple ideas that would have a positive impact on those around you:**

- + Learn the names of everyone you cross paths with.
- + Have an engaging conversation with someone you have never talked to.
- + Recognize & appreciate the efforts of a staff member.
- + Be kind or helpful to a C.O.
- + Clean your cell or area to improve things for you and your cellie.

So, would you do me a favor? Today, when you see the sad faces marching in line like androids, instead of channeling the bumme vibes that permeate the subconscious and affirm despair, would you catch someone’s eyes and throw ‘em a nod and a look like, “Hey man, I see you. It’s ok. We’re gonna make it, bro.” Thank you. You just stopped the dominoes of depression.

Unless you have no face, it’s within your power to convey such simple love. And guess what, bro? It’ll come back to you. You stomped on self-pity to see compassion come easy. That tiny gesture can save a mother’s son from a plunge into desperation where she might never see him return.



By Elizabeth

Ron had a problem with the food, he walked about in a bitter mood.

His cellie talked too loud and too much, one day he caught him using his toothbrush. “Enough is enough”, Ron shouted, with a tight fist on the table he pounded. Behind his back Ron mocked and called him “lame,” when bad things would happen, he was always the guy he’d blame.

One day Ron returned to his bunk, he was met with a stare,

the guard was sad, and said, “Your cellmate is no longer here.”

“Did he get transferred or sent to the hole today?”, “No,” replied the guard, “your cellmate has passed away.”

Ron was stricken with the deepest pain, he’d never even asked him his full name.

“Deep down I kinda liked him, he was a unique and special dude. Why did I have to be so stupid, so cruel, so rude?”

I never took the time to stop or care. I was just angry at him that I am stuck in here.”

He asked me for help but I ignored him all along. It’s too late now, now he’s gone!

I realize in this moment, I have to change who I am, I have to become a more kind and caring man.

“So may I ask, sir, what was my cellmate’s whole name?”

The guard replied, “Randy, Randy Mcfain”.

“I wish I could listen to him talk, make him feel like he belonged.

But it’s too late now. Now he’s gone.”





# SOLDIER UP

By Elizabeth

**G**reetings to all my fellow soldiers fighting in this battle of life, this is Elizabeth. I wrote this poem from some of the different times of talking with so many of you. I have treasured the moments I have been privileged to hear your deep thoughts and inner perspective. Your unique stories as veterans and as individuals who have faced traumatic experiences are so impactful. I salute you.

*I am behind enemy lines, I hear battle cries, shrapnel flying on every side...something explodes, the wind of the blast blows like whiplash propulsion, I'm impacted in slow motion. A load is on my chest and my lungs collapse, can't find my weapon to grasp...someone call for a medic fast....can barely see, can't stop the bleeding. I'm slipping, can't get a grip on anything, I'm falling backward reaching for a hand to hold, I'm plunging all alone into a bottomless hole, no one will ever know who I am or where I go...*

*I am in a dark pit, no flicker of light lit, no space, no room, I can barely move. Something crosses the cold hardened floor, a dark shadow stands*

**Soldier Up** -def: a term used in times where a confrontation is imminent, to signal one's crew, that it is time to fight.

*behind a closing door. I feel evil staring me down. Its arms are folded as it moves closer, around, and around so fast. As I gasp for breath, I scream "help", but cannot make a sound. I open my mouth yet no words are coming out.*

*I'm in another dream, I shake my head to awaken from this dread. These nightmares are my dark hour, I have no power, defeated by my own dark monsters, hunted and caught by undetectable thoughts. Punished by the agony of an anguish I can't relinquish. Like a victim of my own mental algorithms. I try to face them, hoping the next day will erase them, but no alternate route have I found, I slip into this space when no one is around. No one knows what I've gone through, no one saw my point of view. When I think of my fallen comrade, I get sullen and raving mad. Piercing me with pointed slivers, fierce in poison bitter. Yet, silence buries my shouting soul, I try different vices to escape the anguish when I'm all alone. An inner hell. In my cell, rubbing my eyes, I see the morning light and try to lift my pounding head, I am not ready to get out of bed.*

*You know the fight... there is a way... my brother, listen, you're gonna be okay.*

My dear brother, in all the nightmares and inner anguish you deal with, take courage, there is resolution.<sup>26</sup> Deep conflict requires deep contemplation. If you are willing to go beyond the horizons of preconceived thoughts, you can discover a new dimension, where the promises of the Father's limitless compassion can practically bring comfort and healing to change the effects of your past experiences. Deep calls unto deep (Ps.42:7).



Fun Fact: The largest trout ever caught weighed 44lbs 5 oz.

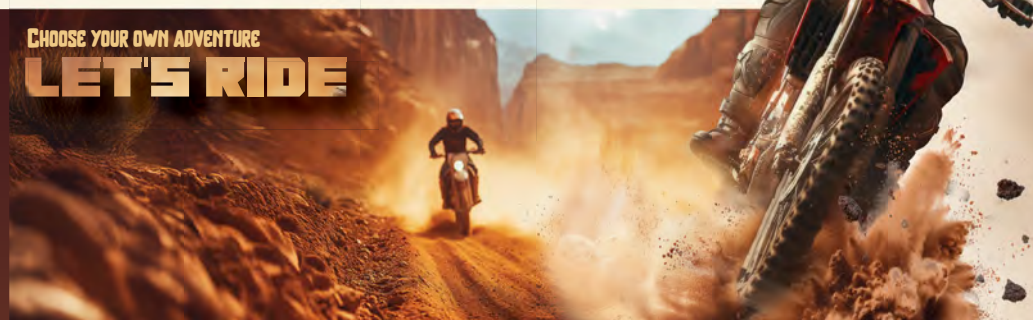
## THE CATCH

I'd love to sit next to you and ask you bro, what was the biggest fish you ever caught? *This is mine.* This past year while working in the prisons in Colorado, I sat and watched for a while how the confluence of many streams merged into one river. It was beautiful. I thought of how all problems must merge into one river of faith.

The next day I came back to try to fish the spot. I got the biggest bite I ever had and almost brought it in, but it got off the line. I was devastated. Then again, but it got off. Not kidding. Then, somehow, before I gave up, God gave me *yet another chance to land this monster and I got it.* It may sound like nothing but to me it was a big thing. God showed me His intimate touch of humor and actual intimate recognition.

Fun Fact: The sailfish can travel up to 68 mph

## CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE LET'S RIDE



"Wow, nice dirt bike! You think you got enough power there?", I joke sarcastically with you. You had trailered over your Honda CR500 dirt bike so we could go for an off-road adventure. It was shaping up to be a perfect day in Moab, Utah. You had all the gritty gear to be ready for a gnarly ride. The sun had just broken the horizon as it cast giant shadows below the towering red boulders. Like the walls of a great castle, the silhouettes of the magnificent rocks surrounded us. "So what will it be, Hell's Revenge, Poison Spider, Steel Bender, or Cliff Hanger?" I asked. "Sounds like the story of my life right there", you joke back, "I think I want to go for that Poison Spider trail today". So we headed up a dirt road to the trailhead, it was deserted so we knew we could fly up it at our pace without having to avoid other riders. Only being 10 miles long we knew we would be finished before we hit the midday heat. After fueling up, you shouted back, "All right, let's roll!!!!" And whiz we did! I love the sound of a 2-stroke. It was a steep ascent, some serious roots, drop offs, rocks, and jagged edges in the slick rock. We arrived on a plateau overlooking the Green River. It was a killer view. "Wow, that was gnarly stuff, how did you learn how to get over terrain like that?" you ask. I smile, "Two words - a term my dad came up with- Rip Snort". "He taught me the attitude of seeing beyond the obstacle and ripping through it like it's not even there. Instead of backing down, you throttle up and stay agile. Being ready for anything by not looking where you don't want to go and only focusing on where you do want to go."<sup>134/135</sup> It is the same kind of intensity and focus that you got to bring to life, you can conquer anything". "Rip Snort, huh?", You were lost in thought. "Yeah I need more of that clear thinking in my own mind". "Yeah, bro, you got all the torque you need inside you to get over anything in the past or the future! Come on, let's check out that arch over there!" So we mounted up and raced through the canyons!





# THE BACKSTORY OF RAGE

BY MICHAEL

I wish everyone I meet, I could meet through their backstory and the wound they bear. A backstory is no one's fault, but can weaken the strongest man and turn him into a stranger to himself. A childhood full of screaming, yelling, physical violence, a house full of drugs and hatred, neglect, abuse, or maybe some tragedy occurred as they went on through life. Whatever the backstory, if I could know it, our connection would be ever so deep. Maybe you and I will meet someday. I'll sit and listen to yours if you'd tell me. For now, let us draw from the story of a young man named Clint.

Clint endured years of rigid programs from juvenile detention to prison. One day, in a therapy session, he finally 'snapped'. The dreaded routine ignited the fuse of his hurt and anger into an explosion of rage. He started yelling, kicked a table, and threw a large chair across the room. *Then it was an uncontrolled blur.* The last thing he remembered was twisting around and smashing his fist into the large mirror as he screamed and fell to his knees sobbing. Blood ran down his knuckles as he sat on the cold cement floor shaking from head to toe.

The therapist was aghast... but so was Clint. *"What just happened?"* he whispered. It was as if he had been electrocuted by 500 volts. Clint asked, *"How long was I out?"* But it had only been a mere 57 seconds of intense rage. What Clint had experienced was the bizarre trigger and then aftermath of rage.

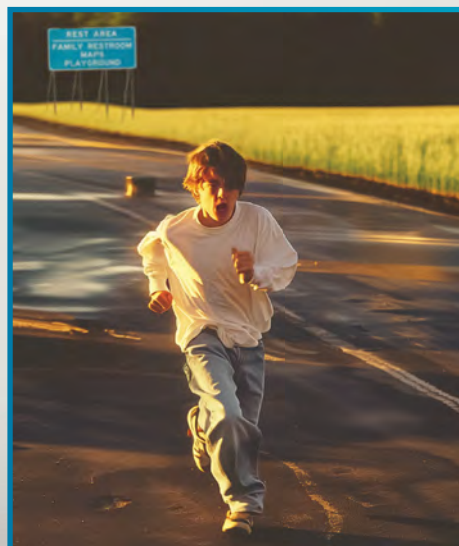
Clint was cuffed and brought into a room filled with terrified staff. How did this mild-mannered 'inmate,' now sitting calmly in a wheelchair, go berserk like an animal? Everyone was dumbfounded, unaware of the *backstory of this rage.* It did not 'come out of nowhere.' It had evolved over years of enormous pain.

## The Backstory

Clint was 15 when his dad and stepmom pulled into an Iowa rest area. She smiled through her yellowed teeth as she told him to stretch his legs. Then, after he got

out and walked toward the restroom, his parents suddenly sped off. He chased the car for a bit shouting, *"What are you doing?! Come back!"* What?! How could they leave him? He just froze solid. His only link to the world was driving away on an exit ramp. The pain began to set in, a slow-motion calculation that this was no mistake. How does a little boy sort out being completely abandoned?

His impulse made him dart into a field of tall grass, just behind the rest area. He lay there in a 15-year-old mental breakdown, trying to make sense of it all. After hours of heart-wrenching pain, Clint fell into an altered state of reality as if trapped in a mental forest fire; *"How do I escape? What do I do?"* He had already been through a lot, but this scar forever changed him from the boy he was only a day earlier: *"I must be worthless to be treated like such trash."*



He tried begging in the rest area, but the work crew made him feel threatened so he hid himself. Then Clint made a terrible choice. He concluded that his only option was to rob someone and steal their car. It was a 78-year-old lady who stopped to use the restroom. Did that come *from Criminal DNA?* Did he have "personality disorders"? Hardly. *It was the smoke of the embers rising from personal agony.*

## The Aftermath

Tragically, the woman he robbed had a heart attack and died. Clint was tried as an adult and got 22 years. In those years, he never had one visitor. Not one. He became known for various outbursts and fighting and was soon labeled; *"Problematic," "Aggressive," "Disruptive," "Hostile"...* The list went on. The years made his heart stone-cold. He garnered a reputation for fighting. His identity was sealed in a steel file cabinet reading; *"Class X - Career Felon."*

Clint spent much time in his bunk trying to figure out 'what was wrong with him,' the moments of his outburst, and the repeated nightmares of a C.O. locking his hands and legs in chains, a doctor with a needle, a nurse dropping her radio trying to call security, the words, *"We can't put him in The Hole again. Send him to Medical"*. He was led away in a wheelchair dazed in a stupor of pain. He mumbled, *"I know you're all thinking I'm like a 'Level 5' but I'm not."* He was processed like an item scanned at a Walmart checkout: *"Beep"*. *It never registered in Clint that he was part of any human family.*

We may never know the pain-level of the brothers we meet. It could be more than an entire city. *Clint was NOT born an orphan but made one by excruciating abandonment.*

Clint got lost in the brain-fog of his despair.





Rage grew out of total ruin in the peril of his injustice. His trauma pervaded his very psyche with subconscious shock.

Upon eventual parole, Clint returned to the rest area, where a worker greeted him at the small memorial plaque for Lily Mobrite. A worker came up to Clint, *"I'm her son"*, he whispered to Clint. *"Anytime I see someone stop here, I want to tell them..."*

Startled, Clint's awkwardness left him staring. When he regained composure, he asked permission to walk out into the high field of grass. Upon return, Clint asked the worker if he knew how it happened. *"Oh, ya. It was all over the news. To this day we all pray for Clint, who was abandoned by his parents. If my mom were still alive, I know she'd forgive Clint and give him a hug despite everything, tell him, 'you're gonna be okay, buddy'. That was her line."* After the rest area, Clint drove straight to visit his long-time *'voice in the back of his head,'* Uncle Ned. Like always, Clint jokingly greeted him, *"Hey there oh great safari hunter, how you be?"* It was a long-standing joke how Ned would sit in his tattered RV chair outside the mobile home and shoot rats running around the dump yard next to his shack.

*"Well, I think that's the final chapter,"* Clint said with a deep sigh of relief. *"I'm out now and got to find a life."* The two long-time friends, joined by occasional phone calls and letters, hugged so tight a crowbar couldn't separate 'em. The ordeal had lasted so very long. Ned had bad hips from Vietnam, preventing any visitation. *Ned always felt horrible for the way his own brother treated Clint.* No more tears left to cry. Both of Clint's parents had passed away.

*"Ya know, son, for so long I hated my brother for what he did to you. I even wanted to do the unthinkable. But his backstory was full of tragedies, many that weren't his fault. His mom died young and he and I were horribly abused by your granddaddy. Our childhood was hell. We grew up in the Louisiana bayou. Swamp, gators, moonshine, and beatings were our daily schedule. I'm sure he had a backstory too,*

*but I never thought to ask. I took off first chance I got. And your daddy owed a lot of money to some bad hombres. His mind was drug-twisted and he somehow thought leaving you there was safer than having you with him. Son, everyone has a backstory that ripples through their lives in ways others don't understand. Heck, they don't even understand themselves."*

Clint interjected, "I hear you, Ned. There was a C.O. on the inside I hated so much for the way he was. Then one day I overheard what his life was like and it completely changed how I saw him. It was tragic. *Just a guy like me going through a different kind of hell.* Eventually, we worked things out, and when I left, he actually said he was gonna miss my ugly mug and we laughed."

Ned continued, "Can I suggest something that sounds crazy but it worked for me?" He walked over to his garage and picked up a baseball and put it in Clint's hand. He said, "Spit in your hand, like it's all the pain inside, then rub it all over that ball. A genuine 'spit ball.'" They then walked slowly to the very edge of Ned's property where a huge dump pit burned with trash. Ned said, "Now throw that sucker as far as you can and never revisit it all again. Let all that rage go. Just like that baseball disintegrates, be done with it, my boy. Never again give it space in your head." To someone else it would seem trivial or silly but Ned wanted to give Clint a distinct moment to remember of 'letting go'.

"After I came back from Nam, I too was told I had 'rage issues'. I would lash out, break down, and holler at the heavens. I became like a tornado in my house and wrecked a ton of stuff. No one knew my backstory and how in Nam I had to use my rage to mow down the enemy. No one knew my nightmares. A lot of things were pent-up inside me. I found a baseball in my room when I got back, it reminded me of the life I lost when I went to war and it tormented me. But then one day I owned up, realized my thoughts were getting the best of me and dragging me backward. I threw that baseball into the pit and watched it burn.

That was the same day I first ever picked up a Bible and found understanding I never had before. *I learned rage is common to all men.* I understood the devil pushes us to do stupid crap. When we're full of rage...whether it's a pipe, a glass, or a trigger, we release it. Then wonder, *"How the hell did I do that?"* I understood, really, rage had nothing to do with me at all. I understood that on that old wooden cross our Brother Jesus bore that same rage, and He understands exactly what we are dealing with.

Man, when I started to understand all

that, it was like standing under a hot shower after a long day shoveling snow. The lies in my head that I was some kind of 'messed up' person different from all others, slowly melted away.

You could say, there is a mighty powerful force throwing that baseball. God says to hurl away our greatest anxiety.<sup>82</sup> *Maturity is when you respond instead of allowing your impulses to make you react.* I relinquish my grubby proud mind to my Savior's cross. His grave is my "pit" where I throw all my crap. This is how I understand and now *stand under* God's ways. He can't make people do stuff cuz we ain't no pawns. We got choices, son. Your dad could have chosen a different way but he got won by the devil because he didn't fight. He gave up".

"We can't give up, Clint. You've been through a lot, so give yourself a break, okay? But you can't let your backstory steal your future story. We're sittin' still alive, with who knows the time ahead? Let's believe God. Let's believe in something way bigger than all our hurt. " Suddenly, Ned bristled and interrupted his own conversation, *"...despite all those dag-nabbit rats over there threatening my property line..."* - "and realizing the purpose of life is not defined by its length but by its time of quality to understand God's ways are so much higher than ours".<sup>29</sup> Clint had to break out laughing watching his uncle speak so seriously then saying something so ridiculous. Ned reloaded, reached over his .22, and knocked off another one.

Setting it back down, not skipping a beat, Ned proceeded, "So let's just sit here and be glad we get to understand, like Job said, we are but worms and privileged to believe God in His Son for the redemption of all things. No little thing He did for us."<sup>13/45/58</sup>

Ned reached over and picked a dandelion and blew it into the air. *"Gone, Clint. A strong breeze blew the seeds away. It's done.* For now, let's stop those vermin from treading their filthy disease-infected carcasses onto my land." You can guess what Ned reached over to do.







# WONDERFULLY MADE



## BRILLIANT

Peacock tails can grow up to 5 feet long, and are called "trains" that fan out to display their glory. They have over 200 feathers that change color when viewed from different angles due to their structure. Over 2,000 colors can be seen in the feathers of a single peacock and over 10,000 with UV light.

The tiny barbs on the feathers contain microscopic cell structures that reflect and refract light, creating the shimmering effect. This creates the brilliant, metallic hues of blue, green, and gold. At the end of every season, a peacock will undergo a 'molting process' in which it will naturally shed all its feathers and regrow them longer and fuller until they reach peak vibrancy.



The whole face of a White Barn Owl works as a sound receptor to the ear. Imagine listening to someone share their story with your whole face. That's consideration.

## THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Get this; BBC Did a study where they positioned 6 highly sensitive microphones connected to a computer and recorded the sound of various birds' wings flapping as they flew over them. Each bird made a distinctive noise, however the owl, did not make a sound. No registry on the microphones or the computer. Complete silence. Wow.

## MINI BOXERS

Mantis Shrimp are like the boxers of the water. They possess specialized appendages known as "raptorial claws," which they use to strike their prey with incredible speed and force. The speed and power of their strike cause the surrounding water to move so rapidly that it creates areas of low pressure. This rapid movement leads to the formation of 'cavitation bubbles' which are highly unstable and collapse almost immediately after forming. When the bubbles collapse, they release energy in the form of heat, sound, and light. This process can generate temperatures of several thousand degrees Kelvin, similar to the surface temperature of the sun, although only for an extremely brief moment, stunning their prey.



**THERE ARE OVER 7.77 MILLION SPECIES OF ANIMALS ON EARTH. ONLY 20% HAVE BEEN CATALOGED BY SCIENTISTS. MANY HAVE NOT YET EVEN BEEN DISCOVERED.**

Every song has a singer, every painting has a painter, every creation has a... Creator. Let us marvel at what has been wonderfully made (Ps.139:14).

Grizzly bears can weigh up to 1,000 pounds. They can stand over 7 feet tall on their hind legs. They are known to eat berries and people.



## NOPE

You cannot outrun a grizzly. You probably think you can, but you can't. They run up to 35 mph, even uphill. In Montana one time, I saw a grizzly running near the side of the road. The urge to get out and chase it was... unbelievable. Good thing the driver didn't stop. Good thing for the bear, I mean. Anyways, a human's bite is 160psi, a grizzly's is 1200psi, enough to crush a bowling ball.

## LIVING IN THE WIND

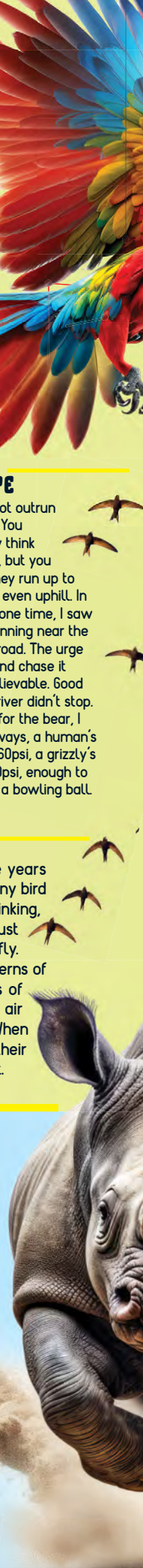
The Common Swift can go two to three years without touching the ground, more than any bird in the world! Meaning they are eating, drinking, and living in the wind. They can turn off just half their brain so they can sleep as they fly. They "learn" the currents, drafts, and patterns of the wind, and can fly straight at speeds of 70mph for long stretches. They have tiny air sacs in their bones making them lighter. When they do land they use their saliva to glue their nests together, and it hardens like cement.

How many Swifts can you spot on this page?

## THE WHALE'S SONG

- The blue whale's heart is the size of a car, weighs 1300 lbs & only beats 5 to 10 times per minute.
- A whale's "song" contains notes and is heard and repeated by other whales.
- Their sound can reach 230 decibels, more than a NASA rocket taking off and is more than a human can bear. At times, the sound travels up to 10k miles through the ocean.

There are more than 35,000 different species of fish in the ocean displaying millions of hues, colors, tones and shades. Left is a Siamese fighting fish. They can change colors throughout their lives. They are quite aggressive and in Thailand, they actually have fights with them and bet on who will win. Hmmm. Weird.







## THE MIGHTY MACAW

Like a master stroke of an artist, God paints the skies with vibrant colors soaring above the Amazon and forests of Central & South America. With a wingspan of nearly 5ft the mighty Macaws reign as the largest parrots over the vast green jungles, nesting in trees over 200 ft tall, giving them a vantage point to watch over the canopy. They eat fruit and nuts, but don't get enough minerals from those so they also eat mud from the river banks. Yum. Macaws form lifelong bonds with their mates and can live up to 75 years. They are highly intelligent, and some macaws have been reported to learn and use over 100 words and phrases.



### IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

Honey bees pollinate about 90% of the world's nutrition. Without them, scientists say the entire ecosystem would collapse. Physicists admire the hexagonal honeycomb for its maximum strength and zero waste design. Bees produce honey by processing flower nectar. It remains edible for thousands of years.



Pandas are born the size of a mouse and grow to 200+lbs. They eat 84 pounds of bamboo a day.

When you look at a panda, not only do they loudly proclaim, "There is a God" but also "God is really cool!" Just watching a panda makes you happy.

**"GOD CREATED EVERY LIVING CREATURE" ... "HIS INVISIBLE ATTRIBUTES, HIS ETERNAL POWER AND DIVINE NATURE, HAVE BEEN CLEARLY SEEN, BEING UNDERSTOOD THROUGH WHAT HAS BEEN MADE..."**

GEN 1:21, ROM 1:20

## THE TANK

Rhinos are nicknamed "tanks" because of their fierce attack, and at 5k lbs, they can still run at 30 mph, but mostly because of their thick skin. At times reaching up to 2" inches thick. A man once told me that the most important thing he learned in prison was to develop 'thick skin.' He realized how one passing comment from the wrong person could send him spiraling into depression or anger. Like a Rhino, over time he developed "layers" of thicker skin - thoughts of understanding - patience - compassion - resolve - identity - and security - each forming a layer. Now, he said the comments are like flies, he barely knows they're there.

A Rhino's skin is thicker than a football helmet.



### TINY DETAILS. GIANT GOD.

I put this page together, because I know that at times, God can seem so distant, so silent, you think, "Why doesn't He just show who He is?" He has. Consider the mind-blowing facts involved in each individual animal He has created to reveal some aspect of his Divine nature. Surely, anyone who has 'eyes to see' can see God in His fascinating and magnificent work. These reflect who He is, and add context to all the things written in this magazine and the personal details of your life.

### A WANDERER

Imagine driving a Suzuki Hayabusa Motorcycle at 200 mph and you look over and a Peregrine falcon is whizzing past you at its top speed of 240 mph. The official bird of Deep Heart: the word Peregrine comes



from the Latin for: "Wanderer" or "traveler" because they migrate up to 15,000 miles a year. I mean, not bad for a bird. It's not nearly the miles we clock, but I do imagine it has much less baggage to lug through airports and train stations. Peregrines can also see tiny prey 2.5 miles away.

## STRENGTH IN SOLITUDE

The Siberian tiger is the largest, most elite, and skilled hunter in the world weighing up to 675 lbs and measuring up to 11 feet in length. Nearly always alone they move in the grace of solitude which gives them a unique advantage in many aspects of stealth, plenty of area and prey to hunt, and enjoying the catch alone.

Each tiger has a unique pattern of stripes on its fur and the same pattern on its skin, much like human fingerprints, no two are alike in the world.

Alone in the jungle, entirely unique, and able to suffer through great pain and persevere, this reminds me of many we have met in prison. You have learned to thrive in places where others couldn't survive. You have a strength in your eyes, like the eye of the tiger.



## FEARLESS IN THE FACE OF DANGER

In the wilds of Africa and parts of Asia, the honey badger reigns supreme as one of the most audacious creatures. Standing at just over a foot tall and weighing around 30 pounds, honey badgers are far from intimidating in size, but their courage is legendary.

Known for their fearless demeanor, honey badgers are considered nearly invincible as they will not back down to even lions, leopards, jackals, and packs of hyenas. Their main diet is to hunt, attack head-on, and eat cobras, pythons, and other venomous snakes. Even if bitten, they are resistant to the venom, they just "sleep it off." Their skin is thick and rubbery like armor and can deflect even spears and arrows. With their sharp claws and impressive intelligence, they break into beehives to feast on the honey (hence the name), showing an unmatched determination that has earned them a rightful place as one of the most intriguing and resilient animals.

## THE FAMILY DEN

Foxes are known to build 'elaborate' homes in tunnels and dens in the ground where they raise their young. Foxes can hear the tiny squeak of a mouse

more than 100 feet away, under the snow. They then have a built-in "GPS" to remember where that sound was and pounce through the snow to find it. They can literally "walk on their toes" to go into a super stealth mode.



Tigers are known for their remarkable resilience and ability to endure injuries and keep going, often more so than any other animal. There are documented cases of tigers surviving with severe injuries, such as broken bones, missing claws, or deep wounds. Their survival instinct is incredibly strong, and they often push through pain.





# Jamal's Reflections

WRITTEN BY RACHEL REBEKAH

*(Recap-First edition: Jamal worked construction and befriended his enemy and helped him get acquitted for a crime he didn't commit. Second edition: Jamal moved west and worked on a horse ranch in Colorado with some guys who were incarcerated and is now delivering some stallions to a facility in Washington).*

and bought a bunch of burgers and just started walking around, handing them out to those who were homeless. He was hit by waves of reality as he listened to stories of those who had been completely forgotten. A lady said with a tear in her eye, "Jamal, you're the only person I have talked to in weeks. Thank you for seeing me."

**A**fter dreaming of it for so long, Jamal finally got to see the Pacific Ocean. It was far more than he had imagined. The endless view of the horizon took his breath away. He couldn't help but take off his shoes and socks and walk through the water. His pant leg got soaked, but he couldn't care less as wave after wave crested and crashed. The ocean air revitalized his senses. He was grateful for a whole week off from the ranch. But as he walked alone along the shore, he felt that something just wasn't right inside. He had a lingering grief he couldn't put his finger on. He was standing in a place he'd always dreamed of, but he just couldn't get there. His mind was full of thoughts of his journey and some pretty rough times over the last few years.

of war. As they slept in the cab at truck stops, Jamal would often be awakened by Joe's nightmares. Jamal would just grab hold of him and try to talk him back to the present. He would help Joe bring his mind to a new state, a peaceful and safe place, until he could fall back asleep. As they drove, Jamal began to initiate highly creative conversation. They imagined themselves in all kinds of beautiful retreats, like camping by a fire, on a mountain peak with a 360 view, seeing eagles soaring in Alaska, or catching fish in a stream. Joe realized something therapeutic was happening when he became deeply engaged at an emotional level with these adventures. They replaced his passive lingering memories and his nightmares lessened.

**JAMAL SAW JOE'S OVERALL DISPOSITION AND OUTLOOK SLOWLY CHANGE AND JAMAL REALIZED HIS OWN POTENTIAL.**

He told Joe, "Hmm, you realize we just invented our own therapy sessions?" It was nice to see Joe happier.

As he walked on the beach, Jamal loved the feeling of the sand beneath his bare feet and the taste of salt on his lips from the sea spray. He thought of their stop in Seattle and had been surprised to see how many homeless there were. Jamal realized he was pretty isolated back in rural Colorado. He had a thought in the back of his mind that someday, sometime, he would start a foundation to help guys on the streets. *But then he thought, "Why wait?" "God, I have no idea how to help people. I can barely help myself. Could you help me to do something for these guys down here that are hungry?"* Jamal went to McDonald's



This one guy, Dillon, was stuck in his mind. He had been on the inside but was now on the streets. Dillon told Jamal of his regrets, that he'd wasted his time while in prison. *"I thought of doing time as only a curse, but in reality, it was like a strange gift. I just didn't know how to use it."* He said he could have settled so many things inside himself that would have changed his future, but all he did was complain and drag himself through the routine, waiting to get out. *"I thought my biggest problem was that I was locked up. I see now, it don't matter where you are physically, but what's going on inside that makes you who you are. I wish I'd have worked on that before all my time and energy now has to be spent on just surviving."* Jamal realized a whole new perspective and tucked it away in his mind, to share with the incarcerated brothers who worked with him on the ranch.

Then Jamal got thinking about the ranch and his mind jumped to a memory he didn't want... A bit later he looked at his watch and realized nearly an hour had gone by as he snapped back to the



The truck driver, Joe, had become a friend as they traveled the hundreds of miles to the Northwest. Joe was a vet and was still dealing with the torments



present, *"Yikes! I'm sitting here, on this beautiful beach, arguing with a woman in my head two thousand miles away."* A few years back, he had met Irene, a young mother with a three-year-old son. It seemed like an instant connection, and he found himself spending a lot of time with her and her boy. *He really liked her.* Slowly, Jamal started picking up on a trend; things would often get contentious over the smallest things. The romantic bubble would pop into a chaotic yelling match in an instant. Jamal marveled over how things could change so quickly.

He decided to back out of the relationship peacefully. So he was stunned one day to find a policeman at the ranch, saying he was under arrest for assault. Jamal never laid a hand on her, and was shocked at the baseless accusation. *How could she turn on him with such hatred and lies?* Bitterness boiled up inside as he spent months in jail. *This stuff happened to other people, not him.* Jamal was fortunate because his foreman, Nodin, was eventually able to help prove he was with him when the accusations were said to have occurred. But Jamal felt so hurt as the lies cut him deep and the rumors spread like wild fire. She later apologized and said she had just gotten desperate.

Standing on the beach, he realized she was still controlling his mind. Part of him missed her and wanted to go back to her. Part of him thought, *"I just got OUT of prison, I don't want a life sentence imprisoned in a bad marriage. How long will I let this go on?"* As the waves continued to crash, he thought, *"Enough is enough. No more speaking to a 'voice' that is not even here."* He wouldn't leave this place until he could reach a resolution.

So he calculated that his loneliness was not enough to make him vulnerable. Deep down, he loved to be alone, he loved solitude and walking his own path. He cherished silence. He knew God had more for him in life. He was not the "half" to anyone's "whole", he was his own man. Joe had given him a good perspective; he told him that a man who is pleasing to God will escape from a detrimental relationship (Prov. 21:9,19/Eccl. 7:26). Jamal, in his own simple words, asked Jesus for help. He took a deep breath of ocean air and just believed God. He forgave her, then forgot her. Time to move on. No more "voices". <sup>88/92/26</sup>

He could finally be *there on that beach.*

**HE WAS SURPRISED THAT HE COULD JUST DECIDE TO DO THIS. IT FELT SO GOOD, LIKE A HUGE LOAD HAD LIFTED OFF HIS SHOULDERS.**

As the sun slowly set, the clouds turned a glorious gold, with orange and a hue of purple. Jamal knew this was a profound moment in his life. God showed him something. Not just on this issue, but he realized the power he had to do this regarding all issues. Jamal felt a joy he had never known. It was called resolution.



## LEARN ABOUT TRUCK DRIVING

- 80.7 % OF THE TOTAL U.S. TRANSPORTATION MARKET IS TRUCKING
- TRUCKING ACCOUNTS FOR 1.16 TRILLION DOLLARS ANNUALLY
- AN ESTIMATED 6 BILLION TONS OF FREIGHT IS MOVED IN THE USA EACH YEAR
- THERE ARE APPROX. 26.5 MILLION TRUCKS IN AMERICA
- THERE ARE MORE THAN 3.5 MILLION TRUCK DRIVERS ON US HIGHWAYS

## WORKING AS A TRUCKER

- AVERAGE WAGE: \$50 K-\$90 K/YEAR
- CURRENTLY THERE IS A SHORTAGE OF 61,000 DRIVERS, WITH INDUSTRY-WIDE IDLE TRUCKS COSTING ABOUT \$95.5 MILLION PER WEEK IN LOST FREIGHT VALUE. THAT NUMBER IS EXPECTED TO DOUBLE IN COMING YEARS
- THE TOP FIVE STATES WITH THE HIGHEST DEMAND FOR TRUCK DRIVERS ARE 1. MISSOURI 2. WYOMING 3. TEXAS 4. OHIO 5. NEBRASKA, BUT NEARLY EVERY STATE NEEDS DRIVERS
- MANY COMPANIES HIRE INDIVIDUALS WITH A CRIMINAL RECORD. CHECK STATE DMV AND DOT SITES
- PERKS: SEE AMERICA AS YOU WORK. DRIVE ALONE OR WITH A TEAM. LISTEN TO MUSIC. AMAZING JUNK FOOD AT TRUCK STOPS

## GETTING YOUR CDL

TO DRIVE A SEMI YOU NEED A CDL (COMMERCIAL DRIVERS LICENSE).

SOME COMPANIES WILL PAY FOR YOUR CDL COURSE IF YOU COMMIT TO WORKING FOR THEM.

YOU CAN STUDY AND TEST FOR YOUR CDL ONLINE TO PREPARE AT THESE SITES:

[DRIVING-TESTS.ORG/ACADEMY/CDL/](http://DRIVING-TESTS.ORG/ACADEMY/CDL/)

[CRISTCDL.COM](http://CRISTCDL.COM)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

NATION WIDE JOB POSTINGS AND TRUCKING NEWS:

[CDLLIFE.COM](http://CDLLIFE.COM)

[THETRUCKERSREPORT.COM](http://THETRUCKERSREPORT.COM)

[TRUCKINGTRUTH.COM](http://TRUCKINGTRUTH.COM)

[ROADMASTER.COM](http://ROADMASTER.COM)





## POZNAN, POLAND

"I would stand on the pier on the seashore of the Baltic Sea. Seagulls calling to each other from every corner of the skies. The smell of salt in the air. Waiting for my daddy to come home from fishing so I could run down the dock and leap into his arms."

# RECALL

## YOUR BEST CHILDHOOD MEMORY



## GLASGOW, SCOTLAND, UK

"I remember fishing with my dad in rivers and streams in the Highlands. We'd get up really early and I was barely awake. One time I caught an 8 lb trout. It was gigantic. Almost pulled me in."

## EASTERN COLORADO

"When you asked us our best memories, I couldn't think of one. I had forgotten them all and thought they didn't exist up there anymore. It's been so long. I thought and thought. But nothing. As you all finished up your show, suddenly one popped into my brain as vivid as can be. I remembered! I remember beating all my friends at school in a game of marbles and winning back their marbles. I remember."



## LANSING, KANSAS

"My favorite memory is riding my bicycle through the fields behind my house in the summertime. I'd be gone for hours. Sometimes with friends, sometimes alone. I was always exploring and finding new places and creating fantasy worlds in my head. It was a chariot, it was a rocket. It was a horse. It was a ship. It was all I ever had, but it was all I needed."

## INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

"Every day, at exactly 5 pm I would wait on the porch with my sister for my mama to come home from work. If she was a little late we would get so excited because we knew that it meant that she stopped on the way home to buy us a treat or a toy."



## RECIFE, BRAZIL

"I remember walking in the rain with my mom and dad and jumping in the puddles as we walked. My mom would get mad but my dad thought it was funny and kind of encouraged me to do it."

## COLUMBUS, OHIO

"We'd make a 'poor man's' trampoline out of a pile of old mattresses and jump on it for hours. I could even do a backflip on it."



## I DON'T REMEMBER GOOD MEMORIES AS A CHILD. MY CHILDHOOD WAS TRAUMATIC

Maybe, like some, it's hard to recall a good memory from your childhood because of the tragic circumstances in which you grew up. Many have told me how they had to 'grow up' at a very young age in foster homes or situations of abuse. My dear beautiful friend, the Father takes this into account and wants you to know that the things you suffered grieve Him deeply. He cannot negate the free will of others or control what they do or did. But what He can do is give you something better, here and now. This will bring a redemptive recovery to your memories of tragedy. God declares that His very purpose is to become a

Father to you, and in the pain of your past, bring you through into His 'adoption' love. David prophesied long ago, "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, But the LORD will take me up." Now fulfilled in Christ: "I will not leave you as orphans..." "He has sent forth His Spirit crying.. Abba, Father..." "I will be a Father to them and they will be sons and daughters to me." The essence of childhood is not a toy or outing but joy. And real joy can yet be yours, my friend, not in some distant dream but in the reality of sonship promised to you here and now.

37/15/36/17/86





BY JOSHUA JOHN

All stories are real. Any personal information is changed for privacy protection.

My favorite part of our show is when I have the chance to ask members of the audience their favorite childhood memories. It's like a time machine and we all travel back to when simple moments of fun and a sense of wonder come alive again. Here are some of the memories that men and women in prison have shared with me. What is your best childhood memory? What about your cellmate's? How many can you remember and what details can you recall?



## KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

"My friends and I would use the inside barrel of an old washing machine to go inside and roll down a hill into a lake. Don't ever try it. It was a trick trying to open the door and get out in time. Very dumb but sure was a memory."



## CANYON CITY, COLORADO

"I had this uncle who was definitely a little crazy but the good kind of crazy. My whole family was dirt poor but we all wanted a 'white Christmas'. So my uncle and his buddy get up before dawn and take off. They come back as me and my siblings are just waking up and have their pickup truck loaded with snow on Christmas morning. They drove to the mountains and brought us snow! It was my best Christmas ever."



## BELFAST, IRELAND

"As a wee lad, I considered myself the greatest tree climber in the world."

"One time I climbed a tree, I got way up and a branch poked me in the eye, so I fell out of the tree. I thought I was gonna be blind but my mom took care of me and I was fine. And I got extra treats."

## PILSEN, CZECH

## ST LOUIS, MISSOURI

"I have a life sentence and now I'm old and grey. But I remember when I was little girl, swinging on a rope swing from a tree on a hill. One day I grew up and life moved on. They cut that tree down and built a prison on that hill. Believe it or not, it's this prison and I can't believe I ended up here. But I go back to that swing and think of what that little girl would want me to do, and that motivates me to help the other women here, and be like a mother to them."



## MADRID, SPAIN

"My best memory as a child is building sandcastles with my daddy on the beach near Valencia here in Spain. It's the last good memory I can think of that I have with my dad before we grew apart. I wish I would have loved him more. Maybe I still can."

## FLORIDA, USA

"When we were kids, our water fights would span the whole block and nothing was off limits. We'd fill garbage cans to soak each other and it just kept escalating. It was such a blast. I can't lie, there was a time or two when a total stranger got blasted. Good thing we were cute kids and could get away with anything."



## FOREVER YOUNG

You might think these days are long gone, but consider that the same heart you had as a child, is still inside you... the same mind, creativity, dreams, hopes and personality. They didn't go anywhere. They are just masked by image and weighed down by burdens. Jesus says that to 'see' His kingdom, you need to go back to that heart and allow that simplicity to lead you into a place of childlike faith in Him.<sup>72</sup> Consider David, who was the greatest warrior-king in history but never lost his childlike heart and simple love for God. Psalm 131:2





# BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT

BY MICHAEL

**W**hen Merl did a tour in Vietnam, he was bitten by a bush cobra. Shabby medical care had left him with a permanent limp. Whenever he tried to run, he'd fall down. One night, Merl robbed a convenience store. The cops had him at their feet. His wife had told Merl she'd given him an empty gun. "Just use it to scare the guy," she'd said. But a cashier was now dead with blood everywhere because she was wrong. "It was like some kind of demon made me pull that trigger," Merl told the cops. "Ya. Tell that to the judge," they laughed.

Merl turns on his bed, searching his mind for any detail that could lead to exoneration. Like a scene from a bad horror flick, the event constantly replays. A simple dude from Kansas, Merl had worked for Freightliner. Opioids for his leg ruined it all. Too many bills and pills introduced him to fencing and pawn, whatever it took. Merl met Pam at a local bar. It had been a long spell for both being alone. So, not long after, they hitched. *But desperation quickly shattered the romantic gig.*

Merl now buries his head in a pillow so his cellie can't see his tears. "I didn't wanna do it." Armed robbery, assault with a deadly weapon, manslaughter...

**IT WAS JUST ONE INCIDENT BUT THE CHARGES KEPT PILING ON.**

## MERL GOT LIFE.

As he lay in his bed, one memory of a loud sound in his backyard, from long ago, offered comfort. 'Little Merl' traced the sound to find a tiny cicada cricket booming its melody from up in a tree. "*Wow. There has to be a God*", he figured. But now, God ain't nowhere to be found as he sits guilty, "*Beyond a reasonable doubt*". This phrase from the trial was a plague to his mind.



Merl is no religious dude, but desperation drove him to aspects within himself that led to his *exoneration*. It began one evening as he started to read Matthew 27 but...

## Merl fell into a very deep sleep.

Storm winds and a hostile mob howled outside his cell window. He stood on his bed to look out. A fellow inmate in cuffs and shackles shuffled down a path under the watchtower in The Yard. Merl was in shock; "*What the heck!?*"

The dude was tied to a post and they went nuts with a whip across his back. The metal barbs tore his flesh to raw tissue. Blood covered the sidewalk. It triggered in Merl a flashback to the gruesome image of the blood he shed in the convenience store robbery.

Two men are laughing and Merl sees they are planning to force a cap of thistles into his skull. "*Such sickos I haven't seen even in all the joints I've been in*", Merl thought. He yells out, "Run for it, man. Run!" But the felon just looked up, then down, and decisively bent his shoulder to a cross of logs weighing about 300 lbs. He began to walk. A frail skeleton of a man, Merl figures he's unlikely to make it much longer.

The dream now evolves into like a vivid docu-film, unveiling profound aspects to the agonizing details of this 'Blood Walk'. It's as if this victim knows he is to be the predetermined fall guy in some surreal setup.

In Merl's mind, an inner camera zooms in on a close-up beneath the victim's face as if to somehow unveil the inner scene in his heart where flashes of



countless individual lives in severe pain increase the torment etched in the felon's face. Blood flows from his head, mixing with tears in his eyes, blinding him. Unable to see, he falls constantly, tearing his knees raw and dripping with blood.

**THE BLOOD WALK IS A MILE LONG IN DISTANCE, BUT TO MERL, IT SOMEHOW ENGULFS HIS ENTIRE EXISTENCE.**

"I've never seen anyone bleed out like this guy. He's either going to die or go into shock. How could it be that other people are on his mind at such a time?!"

*"I've never even considered how my life now could relate to His life back then. These thoughts are like doors to see beyond my suffering into a purpose and love I now understand."*

Merl notices the walk is leading to a hill of crucified bodies. It's a disgusting view of a killing field where wild dogs and birds feed on dead remains.

Punched in the face and dropping to the ground, Jesus falls and lands sandwiched between the other bodies. Like a rag doll, His body is taken and violently forced to the cross. They attach his body, hammering four 7" inch nails pounded through his wrists and ankles as he repeatedly groans.

It takes all 5 burly soldiers to lift the immense structure until it drops into the anchor hole with a thud. The body jerks downward causing the nails to slide up through wrist tissue and under each hand bone. As his weight shifts downward to his feet, the nails tear through the ankles. Merl overhears the captain explain to a bystander that this is usually when every con screams in torment. The face of Jesus grimaces in agony but there is no scream. A boisterous crowd gathers around and soldiers begin gambling for his clothes. *"If you are God, take yourself down,"* someone shouts. Others just 'wag their heads' and walk by.<sup>127</sup>

Suddenly, Merl's dream has him on the cross next to Jesus as his entire body trembles in pain. He can't stop it and tries to scream, hoping to wake himself. But a bellowing voice captures the moment. A prisoner, hanging on the opposite side of Jesus, is screaming accusations at Him. Merl is infuriated, *"Shut up, you fool. We get what we deserve, but he has done nothing"* (Lk.23:39-43).

Jesus is now gasping for air and straining to push his feet down, and pull himself up with his outstretched arms. Merl now, once again, sees inside the heart of Jesus to myriads of suffering faces



crying in sync with the contortions of His body. Finally, Jesus catches his breath to say, *"All sin of all time is in Me right now, Merl. And all My forgiveness is for you."*<sup>45/58</sup> *This is exoneration for mankind. Believe me. I love you, Merl, with every drop of my blood."*<sup>18</sup>

Jesus expires with one last whisper to Himself, *"It is finished"*.<sup>121</sup> A soldier immediately stabs him, and water trickles out.

His dream shifts into three sequences of total black, then to the climatic conclusion of the Blood Walk. Merl stands in front of a giant open cave. The atmosphere echoes with a voice, *"He is not here. He is risen."*<sup>54</sup> It's over. Merl drops a bag he was holding onto containing issues of anger, guilt, and regret. "Jesus conquered all condemnation and put to death all death."<sup>131</sup> *The power of His cross is greater than the power of my past.*<sup>58/60/119</sup> He reigns in a risen love and I am exonerated...

**BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT."**

A sound awakens Merl. He shakes a brain fog and moves to look out the window. The sound is the cicada cricket from his childhood resounding in The Yard. *"GOD SO LOVES ME... HE GAVE EVERYTHING FOR ME."*<sup>20</sup> Merl laughs for the first time in years.

The Exonerator (page 61) expounds upon Merl's discovery.







## HEAVEN IN THOUGHTS

📍 Poznan, Poland 🎨 Painted

👤 By Ryszard Rogowski



Ryszard is the man we mentioned earlier that sang for everyone during our visit to a remote prison in the Polish forest near the Czech border. He speaks broken English and through an intermediary he sent us this rolled canvas he painted, all the way from Poland. While he said he has not yet fully figured out the things of God, when he considers the words and life of Jesus his

mind 'flies' with new thoughts of heavenly things. Each bird in the upper part of the art is like a thought flying. If you stand back and look at it, you can see the whole face as a bird rising with its wings.

## WARRIOR'S CODE

📍 Bucharest, Romania

👤 An Artist Named Petru Popescu

🎨 Pencil and watercolors on canvas

From a large gallery of incredible artistry, we were given this piece after an event in Romania, as it embodies the fighting spirit we shared with our brothers that afternoon.

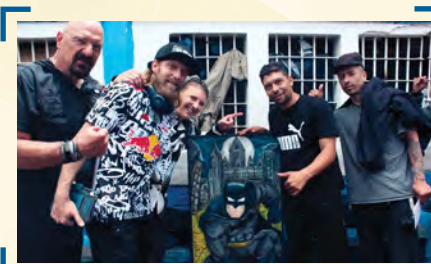


The William James Association found that incarcerated individuals involved in arts had a 75% lower likelihood of returning to prison within the first year of release compared to the general prison population.

Artistic activities are known to improve mental health and provide a therapeutic outlet, reducing stress and promoting emotional healing.

Art helps develop valuable skills such as discipline, patience, and attention to detail. These skills are transferable to other areas of life and can be beneficial upon reentry into society.

Even without official programs, there are many forms of inmate-generated art that can be practiced in cells or the yard including: story telling, drawing, stand-up comedy, journaling, poetry, rapping, singing, dancing and writing.



La Picota is considered one of the worst prisons in Colombia. A clean shirt is a high value commodity. So after our event, when a Patio Leader disappeared into the dark labyrinth of cement and iron, I was shocked to see him walk out with this incredible work of art to show us. Even more shocked when he explained he had carved it by hand using a pair of nail trimmers and then painted it. And still, even more shocked when he gave it to me as a gift to express his gratitude for our love towards them in Christ. I didn't want to take it, but he insisted and explained he saw me like "Batman" fighting for the dark 'underworld' of Gotham city in the prisons across the globe. My heart overflowed with gratitude.

## SAVING GOTHAM

📍 La Picota, Bogotá, Colombia

👤 Artist known as "Mo"

🎨 Carved into wood using nail clippers



## PERSPECTIVE - Raven

Recently I was in New Mexico visiting guys in solitary. I was talking through a tray hole to a brother with a life sentence. I told him it was hard to hear him, due to my broken eardrum from being punched. It is a constant difficulty for me, brings me down at times. Then he turned his head to show me his own left ear had been severed off in a fight. I shut my mouth, and spoke, "Brother, I love you, man."

## SOMETHING DIFFERENT by Glanville

There is nothing special about today... The sky is grey and the air is warm, there is no aroma nor distant storm. I can't hear the song of a bird, no one spoke to me an encouraging word. I received no letter addressed with my name, the walls and bars remain the same. There is no visitor with good news, no phone call, no lucky break, no event, no game of baseball.

But I don't need something special in the day, because I can choose to be different in a beautiful way.

I will think, I will create, I will say something entirely new.

I will make today special, simply because this is what I choose to do.

At Deep Heart, each holiday meal we have Ramen noodles in honor of all of you. We try some of your "fine dining Ramen recipes". So you can know, you always have a seat at our table!



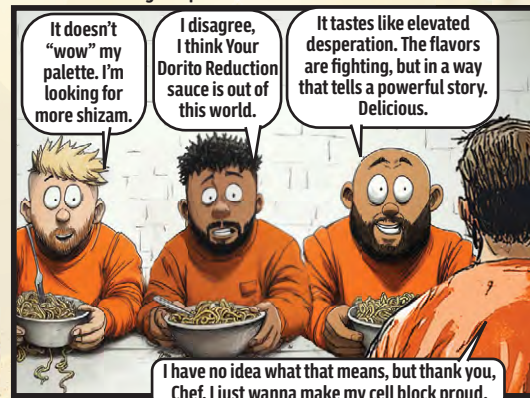
### GREAT QUOTES

"KNOWLEDGE SPEAKS, BUT WISDOM LISTENS." - JIMI HENDRIX

"NO ONE CARES HOW MUCH YOU KNOW UNTIL THEY KNOW HOW MUCH YOU CARE." - PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

"SOMETIMES IT TAKES ONLY ONE ACT OF KINDNESS AND CARING TO CHANGE A PERSON'S LIFE." - JACKIE CHAN

### Masterchef Cooking Competition: Ramen Wars







## OUR TREE by Ruth Mercer

*There's this tree you see, that belongs to you and me.*

*It's back in a meadow, alone under the stars, On top of a small hill, and it is all ours. We can watch the wind in the branches, feel the grass under our feet, And no matter where we both are, this is where we'll meet. For this tree you see, began long ago, And from bloodstained soil, began to grow. Two beams crossed, a last breath, A tree of life from the cross of death. Upon its roots we can lay every worry and care, And when we feel lost, we will find ourselves there. It will absorb our burden never needing a reason, And be our refuge through every season. In autumn we'll watch it change orange and red, lean back on the trunk to rest our head. When its branches are heavy with winter's first snow, We'll make a fire nearby and sit by the glow. And when tiny buds return again in the spring, we'll sit in the breeze while the little birds sing. Our tree will join us together though we be far apart, Because where it actually grows, is deep in the heart. So when you feel sad and count everything a loss,*

*You will forever find comfort in the shadow of the cross. No matter where you are, I hope you agree, To always meet me here, under Our Tree.*

I painted this tree for you and was thinking maybe sometime, somewhere you could re-draw it there. Doodle it on paper and stick it up or maybe, if it was possible, paint it on a wall. It will be our "Deep Heart Tree". A place where we let "it", whatever "it" is, go. You can meet me here, in prayer and heart and know that you are not alone. Because He left His heart on the tree on Calvary and there, He will always meet us.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

## THE PAINTING



**Y**ou had told us how much you would love to learn how to paint. So, one evening we went down to Lake Michigan for the sunset. There was a wooden pier extending out into the crystal clear reflection on the water with Canadian geese flying in the distance. It was too perfect to be true. You took out an easel and rested a blank canvas on it. "No time as good as now to begin something beautiful".

You had a palate arranged with a variety of colors as you dipped a thin-tipped paint brush in a light blue. Your first strokes were so free, I could tell you were a natural. Your wrist moved rhythmically as your picture began to unfold. You had a gifted eye for dimension and the mood of the evening was clearly communicated in your masterpiece. I love how you did the clouds. They were so alive, it was as if they were moving. "Not bad, huh? For my first work of art", you smile, surprised at what you had just accomplished. "I think you are the work of art, my friend" I insisted.

We met an elderly woman in the parking lot as we were heading out. She had just lost her husband and was so grateful to have someone to listen to her story. You were so kind and empathetic. You listened and asked questions. You said, "Here, I have something for you" and you handed your painting to her. She was shocked and started to cry. She gave you a hug and said it was the nicest thing anyone had ever done for her.



## "IS THAT ALL YOU GOT?!" - By Raven

When I was younger, I worked as an assistant football coach for a time. My mode of expression was to scream, yell, and grab the guys. That's the only way I knew to communicate my job. I was locked into one-dimensional thinking to see "me first" as a 'badass'. One day, my head coach blasted into the locker room, grabbed me by my collar, and threw me up against the wall: "How do you like being screamed at like this? Is that all you got, 'War' (my nickname)?" Inside, I thought, "Well. Ya. Is there anything more?" It sounds quite stupid, but that question shook my mind to my core. I had no personality. I was a 'nothing burger.' And admitted it to myself. So I realized I had to work to develop my character and how I communicated to others. That one moment triggered a search for what I give you in this magazine bro: heart. I began to unlock the great treasures and dimensions in 'Finding Me'. It is a phenomenal journey working to be YOU.



# FINDING GRAVITY

## WHEN YOUR FAMILY DOESN'T DO ITS JOB

BY MICHAEL "RAVEN" PETER

*"We are given nothing at birth but a name. How about a written contract from our parents not to do anything stupid or harmful to destabilize our lives while in their possession? How about a vow of non-violence, or manipulation, abuse, or divorce? 'If you're not going to care about me, at least don't screw me up.'" - This is a quote from Brad, a brother I know in a Montana prison.*

If you come from a warm, supportive family, that's great—and honestly, this article might not speak to you the same way. But for many of us, like Brad and me, past memories are of a dysfunctional family below the surface—more like an emotional minefield. One of the scariest images I can think of is an astronaut cut loose from the mother ship, just drifting alone in dark space. That's exactly how Brad described his life. Even with a family of six, all under the same roof, he felt completely alone—like no one really saw him or cared. He wasn't an orphan, but he sure felt like one. His parents treated him like a burden, and daily fights with his siblings were just part of the routine. There was no warmth. No tether. Just survival.

Melissa in Miami said, *"How could my family abandon me so quickly when they are supposed to love me unconditionally? But I guess it's naive to expect people to care about us just because we are born in the same house."* I hear so many horror stories of family members unleashing hostility against each other. No one may know how bad things are until it's too late. How many scars people carry due solely to family? The inward despair from such issues can be as bad as physical abuse.

**Miscorrelation** means thinking two things are connected when they really aren't. There was a time I thought I missed my family. I felt this deep sadness being away from them, like something important was gone. But when I really sat with that feeling and asked myself why, I saw something clearer. The truth was, beyond the habit of being around them, they didn't actually give me what I needed. In fact, when I was with them, I often felt like I wanted to be somewhere else. That's when I realized I had made a miscorrelation—I thought I was missing them, but what I was really feeling was just loneliness. Not for them, but for someone—anyone—to truly know me, care about me, and not walk away when I messed up.

Like my friend Brad said, "They only cared when I made them proud." That line stuck with me, because it was true for me too. And once I saw that, I stopped chasing what wasn't real. It freed me. It was like I'd been floating in space, lost, but now I felt gravity again—solid ground. Finding real does that. Yeah, we all miss people sometimes, but ask yourself honestly: do they really give you security?



When you stop confusing the feeling of loneliness with the idea of needing certain people, you take your power back. You understand yourself better. You don't have to stay miserable or dependent on people who don't truly show up for you. The real freedom comes when you see clearly what's going on inside you—and you stop looking for love where it's never really been. That's when you start walking forward—not looking back, not needing anything fake to ground you. Even Jesus indicated his earthly family was not God's ultimate provision; *"Who are my mother, brother, and sisters?..."* (Mt.12:50). He disregarded the assumption that a natural family is your ultimate family; *"Those who do the will of my Father..."*. Natural familiarity will never answer your spiritual needs.

When the noise of everyday life is stripped away—no distractions, no routines—there you are face-to-face with aches you never fully noticed before. It's easy to mislabel this pain as needing people. That's not only untrue, it's bondage. Your existence is not dependent on another soul. Of course we all long to be loved. I too feel deep loneliness constantly. But God's love is not theory. No one can ever truly give me the love only God gives. No human can satisfy that.

**SOMETIMES I SINK INTO DEPRESSION OUT OF NOWHERE. FOR YEARS I THOUGHT SOMETHING WAS WRONG WITH ME. BUT THE TRUTH IS, 8 BILLION PEOPLE CARRY THIS SAME EXACT WEIGHT.**

Today I say, "So what? Big deal". It drives the multitudes into drugs, booze, suicide, divorce, etc. It has nothing to do with you and everything to do with the sin in us all (Study Rm.7:17ff). The real shift happens when we stop trying to ease the wound with people, distractions, or fake comforts, and instead tether ourselves to God's Word.<sup>139</sup> It is the gravity that holds us steady, as a son or daughter secure on the walkway toward the family of the living Father.<sup>24</sup>

That's why Jesus came—to reconnect us to the Father and heal the disconnection that sin caused. Fake love and toxic relationships step in when we feel lost—but they never last. Real healing comes from faith as adopted, accepted, belonging to, and secured by God (Rom. 8:15; Eph. 3:14; Jer. 30:17). There is no greater word in my life than SECURITY. It means sonship. I belong. Insecurity drove me nuts in all manner of instability and kissing up to others. No matter how full of hurt your past may have been or if your family disappeared, the truth is simple: you can live secure and be fulfilled all alone in Christ. "Come out from among them... and be sons and daughters unto Me"<sup>(2 Cor.6:17)</sup>. That's not religion—that's real identity, and it's solid like gravity. It holds you. And it never lets go.

# IDENTITY IS SECURITY





# Une Belle Chose

[French for A Beautiful Thing]

Written by Elizabeth

I perform using Flamenco style dance. This dance originated in Andalusia as a fusion of musical traditions from the Spanish Romani people and has been developed in this region for many generations. For years I have worked to perform it as authentically as possible. So I was thrilled as the entire crowd erupted into the sophisticated clapping rhythm as I walked out on the stage. It was electric.

After talking to so many unique individuals here, I thought about how a fascinating movie could be made about each one of their lives. A middle-aged lady specifically stood out to me, not because of her head-to-toe tattoos, nor the scars on her face, but because of her vibrant spirit that engaged with mine as we shared. I could tell she had been through a lot. She opened up about her past stories, tragedies, and the mistakes she had made that now made her feel worthless, used, and unwanted. She wondered if anything could ever change this? I told her about another woman who shared in her experience, and had to overcome the shadows of her past. Her name is Mary, her story is in the New Testament. What Mary chose to do changed everything she ever knew. So, just imagine that Mary is telling you the details of her story firsthand...

**"I** just got news! The person I was searching for was visiting a house down the street. I had been waiting for this moment a long time! I hurried back to my room and under my bed, I lifted a loose board. I pulled out my most valuable possession. In an old shawl was wrapped my jar of very expensive perfume. It cost me all the money I made in an entire year. I hoped to wear it someday to feel valuable, important, like somebody rich. But now, I had other plans. I carefully carried it to the house of a Pharisee named Simon. *Everyone knew what kind of person I was, the kind everyone ignores.* So I resolved the fact that I would not be well received in the house of this "righteous man."

The creak in the door interrupted the silence as faces turned to stare and see who was intruding. Simon looked up and was disgusted just at the sight of me. But I didn't care. When Jesus looked over, He nodded to welcome me in. I was shocked.

I never imagined He'd give me His full attention. *What is this look in His eyes?* As if to read the secret pages of my mind, I did not turn away. I let Him gaze deep. I wanted everything to be known. It was like light penetrating a cold, dark cave. I never knew such gentleness could exist. There was a humility and compassion in His presence

that made me so comfortable. I could just be me. *I saw that He loved me.*

Instead of feeling like an outcast, in this moment with Jesus, I beautifully belonged. Could my past actually be washed away? My deep guilt and shame gone? I could not stop from weeping. I was rich within.

offended that Jesus let me touch Him. They tried to shame me and said I was wasteful. But Jesus exposed them, showing how they didn't love Him like I did. *"Her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little, loves little."* Because my failures were many,

I was desperate to be transformed by His mercy. He then said this *"beautiful thing"* I did would be my legacy to the entire world. I couldn't believe it. The depths of my love for His forgiveness, not my sin, became the defining legacy of my existence!"

My dear friend reading this, your past mistakes do not determine your individual identity, nor legacy in this life. Nor does anyone else's opinion of you nor bias against you. Jesus did not see Mary based upon her past but on how she loved Him in view of His compassion.

She would always be remembered by her choice to lavish the extravagance of her gratitude, because her faith discovered the depths of His redemption. She knelt low in humility, and He raised her in honor.

People build libraries, reach goals, and create inventions. But a true legacy is built not in self-exaltation, but in the surrendering of a broken heart before Jesus. People say you cannot compensate for your past by what you do today. This is not true. What can be, is far greater than what once was.

(From: Matt.26:6-13, Mark.14:3-9, Lk.7:37-50, Jn.12:3-8).



I reached for the most important thing I ever had, my costly jar, and broke it. I carefully poured the perfume on His head, watching as it ran over His face. It flowed over my hands as I wiped His feet with my long hair. The room was filled with an overwhelming and penetrating luxurious fragrance. Jesus owned my honor. I found in Him, my value. As tears flowed down my cheeks, I held His feet and couldn't stop kissing them.

The religious people sitting around were



Just like dancing ballet, writing poetry expresses my heart. My inspiration comes from taking a creative angle on different places I read in His Word. Go for it, my friend! Write your heart! You never know how far you will go if you are willing to get out of the box! - Elizabeth

## The Symphony in Silence By Elizabeth

In the silence of stillness you will find a symphony, discovering a secret realm with the choice of simplicity.

Focus to think beyond what is common, for it is here where new life begins to blossom. God's presence is made known in deep dimensions, His love resolves the most complex of questions. He shows us He is Master of very detailed things, like the hover above of a hummingbird's wings. He notices the obscure, those who feel irrelevant, to give without measure His mercy in excellence. It is yours to explore, made with personal design, in the ordinary of plain sight is hidden this moment divine.





# OIL & STEEL

-ASK THE TECH- BY ABRAHAM PAUL

## DAKOTA FROM OHIO ASKS:

*"What do I do to avoid fighting? I don't mean to, but I keep starting them?"*

When a conflict between two men arises it's like two waves coming at each other. Pride drives each man to up their intensity. Egos keep escalating until the fists clash. Like a surfer, the only way to avoid the wave's crest is to dive under it. Go low. Eat crow. Take the insults. Heck, insult yourself. Become the butt of the joke. Put your mouth in the dust. Be wrong. Let people laugh. Let off the throttle, hit the brakes, and avoid the crash. In the end, you just became the bigger man. Pride is common stupidity, but humility makes you a genius. (Trust me, eating crow tastes way better than you think.)

## RYSZARD FROM POLAND ASKS:

*Can I really be happy in prison?*

*Could God still bless me in this horrible place?*

The blessing God offers is like a custom-made chopper specifically designed for those incarcerated, suffering, and in a horrible situation. It ain't for the rich. True happiness, my friend, is not material gratification. Happiness in prison is said to be unattainable only because it is linked to an unattainable goal: instant release. But if you stop to contemplate the One behind the title of 'God', Who uses earthly tragedy to bring forth His eternal purpose in us, you will find that happiness is well within your reach. We do not have to FEEL happy to be happy. Don't link "happy" to unattainable goals or you'll never be happy. Paul says complete, continual forgiveness guarantees eternal happiness and this is exactly the blessing that is offered to you within those walls. (Rom. 4:1-4).

“OVER THE PAST DECADE, I’VE HAD THE UNIQUE PRIVILEGE OF TALKING WITH THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN INCARCERATED BOTH IN THIS COUNTRY AND ABROAD. THEY ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR STRUGGLES. I WORK HARD TO RESPOND NOT WITH TOKEN PLATITUDES OR CHEAP CLICHÉS BUT WITH EXTREMELY PRACTICAL HELP. I DRAW FROM 25 YEARS OF REPAIRING ENGINES, MOTORCYCLES, AND THE HEARTS OF MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS. THE GOAL IS TO SEAMLESSLY BLEND OIL (THINGS OF THE SPIRIT) WITH STEEL (THE PRACTICAL REALITIES OF LIFE). IN MECHANICS, YOU QUICKLY SEE IF A REPAIR WORKS BY HOW THE ENGINE RUNS. IT’S NOT SO DIFFERENT WITH US. PRACTICAL ANSWERS BRING PRACTICAL RESULTS. SO I WANTED TO SHARE SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS THAT HAVE BEEN PROVEN IN REAL LIFE.

## JOSÉ FROM CALIFORNIA ASKS:

*"What mindset works best to do my time? I keep to myself, but I'm at my end and want to give up."*

Hang in there, brother, I promise things can and will get better. I know it may seem easier to simply disconnect and disengage until your time is up. This is very common in prison-life, but I assure you it is a slow death of your mind and heart. Within ourselves is where all the darkness resides. So withdrawing into yourself is the recipe for a spiral downward. I understand that you don't want to open up to anyone and deal with everyone's crap. You want to protect yourself and guard your heart. It is wise not to trust people. I don't trust anyone. But there's another option. It's called "One-Way-Love". You give, forgive, care, listen, and serve while expecting nothing in return. This will get you out of your own head and revolutionize your time. A one-way road's safer 'cause there's no oncoming traffic. Expect nothing back, and you'll avoid collisions and ride smooth.<sup>87</sup>

## HARRY IN MICHIGAN ASKS:

*"How can you expect me to love others, when I've never been loved my whole life?"*

We teach ourselves how to love others by how we would want to be loved. What would you like someone to say or do for you? Go and do that for someone else. Everyone is hiding their hurt. So a small amount of care is like adding oil to their engine. Love is sacrifice and service. Not a feeling. If you don't like it when someone offers a token, and fake "niceness", then don't do that. Be sincere and real as you would want done to you. Simply asking good questions and actively listening is powerful stuff.

## MACK FROM INDIANA ASKS:

*"I didn't start the fight, but I'm in the hole again. I was only defending myself, what was I supposed to do?"*

Ok, you were pushed, shoved, or hit... I'm so sorry to hear that, man. I wish I was by your side to look out for you, but seeing that I can't be there I gotta tell ya: hitting back don't make you no tougher, okay? That's just the typical level-1-dumb response that they're trying to provoke out of you. Bro, broaster, brochacho, listen to me: you don't have to prove yourself to no one. In my book you're already tougher than Rambo x10 for all you've been through. The secret is to learn to walk away. Don't escalate. And let's be honest, you and I know there were many opportunities for you to handle things differently long beforehand. So when you see things heading that way, apply wisdom with humility to negotiate peace. That's bigger than Rambo, that's finding the real you. Only people who don't want to try, say it doesn't work. 70% of all conflicts come from money not being paid back. Loan sharks love to give you the money, then they leverage, squeeze, and pressure you to do favors you don't want to do. They force you back to a life you left behind. So here are two simple rules: 1). Don't borrow money! It will end with you in the hole. Learn to live without. You are not as desperate as you think. Don't let panic cause you to become frantic. Stay calm, overheating ruins engines. A moment's need is not worth months of suffering in darkness and another blemish on your record (Romans 13:8) . 2). Don't lend! If you lend someone money count it as a gift, never to return. If you can't afford to give, then don't lend (Luke 6:35).





### FELIPE FROM SPAIN ASKS:

*"How do I deal with temptations?  
I sometimes feel like my mind is trapped."*

The mind is scientifically not capable of thinking of a "don't". Example: If I tell you, "do NOT think of a snake!" What did you just think of? A snake. You actually just pictured it. So if you are constantly telling your mind to "NOT" think of all the temptations, memories, and regret, you are in fact consuming your mind with the very things you want to avoid. The key is displacement—just like in a motor. Fresh fuel comes in and the old exhaust goes out.<sup>130</sup> You focus on what you DO want to think about and your mind will automatically displace all the negative thoughts. The more intently you engage the new thoughts the less relevant the old thoughts become. Remove the law that says, "You can't do this". Give yourself the freedom and then make a choice. It has to come from your free will. If it's imposed upon you from a system, group or others it will never last.

### ANGELA FROM ILLINOIS ASKS:

*"How many times have you lost your faith? I  
keep losing mine."*

My precious sister, the premise of this question is based on a common misunderstanding that's not your fault. Most people swing like a pendulum: "Strong in faith"... to "...Losing their faith" based upon outward circumstances and inward feelings. This inaccurate depiction is furthered by false, unbiblical, social cliches that cause confusion like: "Everything happens for a reason", "God works in mysterious ways", and "Hardest battles to strongest soldiers"... So when something bad happens you assume God did it to punish you and you "lose your faith" in Him. People assume God is a Puppet Master in the sky controlling every minute detail of their lives. But this is wrong. Jesus clearly reveals the world is no longer good. He explains that it is controlled by the Evil One who rules through the chaos of men's corrupted free will (1Jn 5:19). God is incapable of doing evil, but He will not violate men's free will. So the "reason" bad things happen is because evil men do evil things in an evil world. Jesus says, "My Kingdom is not of this world".<sup>5</sup> Faith is to believe beyond this world: good times or bad, no matter how we feel. If faith is lost at every hardship, it was never faith to begin with, rather only a religious sentiment. Bad times are the best of times to show Him that you believe.

[To further understand Faith - See The Thaw Page 11]



### EDDIE FROM TEXAS ASKS:

*"My cellmate drives me nuts. I can't stand him. How  
can I change him to improve my situation?"*

If you think about how to try and change him and his habits: I promise you, things will get worse and more intense. If the ride is rough, you change your suspension, not the road. If you were to think about how *you* could change yourself to accommodate and 'absorb' the things that irritate you, your attitude of compassion will change him and the entire situation. Try to see him through his backstory of pain and the suffering he has been through. Patience and understanding are the "shocks and springs" to ensure a smoother ride.

### ZACH FROM IDAHO ASKS:

*"There's a lot of phonies and fakers in here. How do I know  
who is really a Christian?"*

You know a good mechanic by how well the bike runs, not by how shiny the tools are. Don't take things at face value. Trust your common sense instincts. You know real. Ask yourself, when you are in their presence: Do you feel loved and cared for or do you feel judged and condemned? Do they talk about books, doctrines, pastors, and "churches" or the living Jesus?<sup>23</sup> Is it awkward niceness or real substance? Do they engage you on a personal level or talk about themselves? Jesus says, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." [John 13:35]

### LUCHO FROM COLOMBIA ASKS:

*"I was in a horrific motorcycle accident. I know that God saved  
me for a reason. How do I now find my calling and ministry?"*

Hermano, I'm so glad you're still here, and you're right to know that God saved you for a reason. It's beautiful to now want to help others, but the system of today often pushes men into a fixed, predetermined idea of "ministry". God offers an alternative by means of an inner transformation that then brings you into a unique leading of His Spirit. His purpose is not about what we do, but who we become. His calling is not out there, somewhere, that you have to try and find. It's right here, right now... to become His son. If instead of trying to build a ministry, you focus on learning how to fellowship with Jesus, He promises He will lead you and will expand your capacity to love those around you. Paul didn't seek or use titles like "pastor" or "reverend": he called himself, and became, a servant to all.

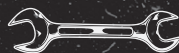
### JOHN FROM OREGON ASKS:

*"My teenage kid and I barely talk and are very distant.  
How do I reconnect? Can I still parent from prison?"*

As a mechanic I've worked with plenty of "grunters" and even been one myself. "Why use words when simple grunts will do?" But I have discovered a richness of life that comes from the articulation of a developed thought.

It's hard to know what to say in the awkward silence, and if you don't know what to say, odds are neither do they. But you have the advantage of time to develop stuff. The person you are in that cell is the same person that goes to the visitation room or takes their call. So practicing conversation skills in the chow hall or yard will carry over to when you're with your children. Guilt, trauma, and laziness can turn us into grunting bears without even realizing it. But there are endless ways and depths that we can express an apology or sincere care. You can say, "I tried, it didn't work" or you can realize you haven't even begun to try. Everything matters: your tone of voice, your choice of words, the depth of heart... Because they all reflect how sincere you are. Teenagers are experts at detecting if you're real. Token questions lead to generic answers and kill a conversation but detailed questions and an attentive ear will take you somewhere special. Ask specific questions, remember the answers and ask about them later. There are two goals if you want to have a place in your child's life: Make them know you listen and that you care. Be a friend, if you can accomplish that, they will know you love them and you'll have the ability to help parent again.

**"THE BIGGEST, BADDEST  
DOG ON THE YARD IS THE  
MAN WHO LOOKS OUT FOR  
THE LITTLE GUY. LIKE IN  
WEIGHT LIFTING, YOU GAIN  
STRENGTH BY LIFTING UP,  
NOT PUTTING DOWN"**



**LET'S RIDE**





# THE BATTLE WITH EMOTION

DISARMING DARK MOODS



Anger Anguish Annoyance Anxiety Apathy Betrayal Boredom Confusion Contempt  
Depression Despair Disappointment Disgust Distrust Doubt Embarrassment  
Emotional Detachment Envy Fear Frustration Greed Grief Guilt Hatred Horror  
Hostility Humiliation Jealousy Loneliness Lust Nostalgia Outrage Panic Passion  
Pity Pride Rage Regret Rejection Remorse Resentment Sadness Self-pity Shame  
Shock Shyness Sorrow Suffering Suspicion Worry

BY RACHEL REBEKAH

## WRITE THE STORY YOU WANT TO LIVE.

**A** mood is like creating your own movie. It consists of two main elements: the picture and the soundtrack. Think of the 'picture' like the thoughts in your mind, while the 'soundtrack' is the emotion that is attached to those thoughts, much like background music or sound effects in a film. Together, these elements are the story you live each day. Your mood is the movie you want to "play".

Using this example helps us understand how to heal and empower ourselves. We can split thoughts from feelings. We can isolate and replace a feeling to create a different sense to a thought. It is essential to realize the power of your will. You are the sole producer and director. You can play a picture but turn down, eliminate, or change the feelings that provide the background to your thoughts. *Emotion is a choice.*

Many people choose to be "cold." They remove all emotion and operate only by thoughts. Truth be told, it is a reaction to pain. To do this by choice proves we are the master in charge of our emotions. If you can unplug the emotions from the thoughts, it is the beginning of healing your mind. As you learn this and thoughts come to you, you will find the power to change their "music". *You can do this. I do it every day.*<sup>30</sup>

**WHEN YOU LEARN TO DISCONNECT EMOTIONS FROM THOUGHTS, THE BLEEDING SCARS BEGIN TO HEAL. YOU BECOME THE MASTER.**

We choose what feelings, if any, to add to our thoughts, depending on what pictures we want in our life. We can't eliminate thoughts, but we can control their power to determine our emotional attachment to them.

Memories can be very powerful because they replay the "movies" of our lives.

We often replace our present life by clicking on "movies" of our past. They 'entertain' our mind with an exact duplication of an earlier experience. If we have no control, we can slump into the soundtrack of self-pity and melodrama.

**MEMORIES, HOWEVER, ARE NOT ESSENTIALLY REAL, IN THAT THEY ARE NOT TAKING PLACE IN REAL TIME. THEY ARE DONE, GONE AND OVER. SO THEY DO NOT REPRESENT OUR LIVING DYNAMIC. WHEN WE RESPOND TO THEM AS IF THEY ARE IN REAL TIME, A SENSE OF DELUSION OCCURS. WE CAN DETERMINE HOW LONG WE WANT TO REPLAY OUR MOVIE OF THE PAST. THE KEY TO HEALING OUR MEMORIES IS TO PRIORITIZE OUR PRESENT OVER OUR PAST.**

You may recall a thought or a picture from the past, but if you refuse to join your feelings or sensations (the soundtrack) to it, the memory loses its destructive influence to control your present life. It has gone from a strong memory to a passing reflection. Victory.

Have you ever seen an Airport Control Tower? It regulates incoming and outgoing airplanes. Sometimes a negative memory will fly in like a plane and we feel like there's no one in the control tower. Before you know it, you're stuck in an emotional air traffic jam with planes circling in every direction. *That's ok. It's normal. We don't have to panic in a frenzy.* My friend, *YOU* are in the control tower. You can take over and get your mind on something else. We need to change the flight patterns to avoid a collision course of negative memories because they are linked to a myriad of destructive thoughts and feelings of sorrow, regret, anger, etc.

You can also take in emotions from unexpected sources. As you walk prison grounds, oncoming facial expressions of blank stares or angry scowls can hit you with despair and grief and you don't even realize it. Imagine if those looks were rocks. *Would you catch them or deflect them?* Every day you are hit by negative emotions. Like stones, they knock you down. Isolate and identify them. Where did they come from? Why do you allow them into your inner place? You don't realize that you've been hit by a 100 rocks of: *"It's hopeless. I am screwed. I have no one. I can't go on."* The key is learning to separate and identify these lies as the negative B.S. that they are.

## OBJECTIVE OR SUBJECTIVE?

Each emotion has a name to describe "where" it will take you. It always follows the exact same path to predictable behavior. *God explains we are in a constant battle against things we do not fully understand* (2 Cor. 10:2-5). Billions allow laziness and fear to cause them to yield to impulsive reactions

and imaginations. You become controlled because you wrongly assume your emotions ARE YOU. They are not. *They are only part of you.* It's you who determines what influence they play. The battle with emotion can be **mastered** by subjecting our thinking to the living revelation of the Scriptures in the context of a loving Father (Rom. 12:2/Eph. 6:10-18). Flash thoughts can be completely bizarre but so brief they don't even register on a time scale. Yet we can stupidly stop them and stretch them out like putty and ponder them as if they reflect our essential persona. It's like trying to dissect a mosquito. *It's quite stupid.* When rogue bizarre thoughts flash across your mind, realize *everyone* has them. Just let them go and move on.

The word 'objective' is huge. It changed my life. It means being neutral. It's how I deal with emotion, like an -object-. Subjective is the opposite. It is taking things deeply personal. Emotions are subjective: meaning they are -subject- to you. A rap we're working on has the line *"Don't get attached to the fear of falling apart"*. When you detach from negative emotions, you make room for life-giving thoughts.

**IT TAKES A HUGE EFFORT TO FREE YOURSELF FROM MEMORY, BUT WHEN YOU SUCCEED, YOU START TO REALIZE THAT YOU'RE CAPABLE OF FAR MORE THAN YOU IMAGINED.**

PAULO COELHO

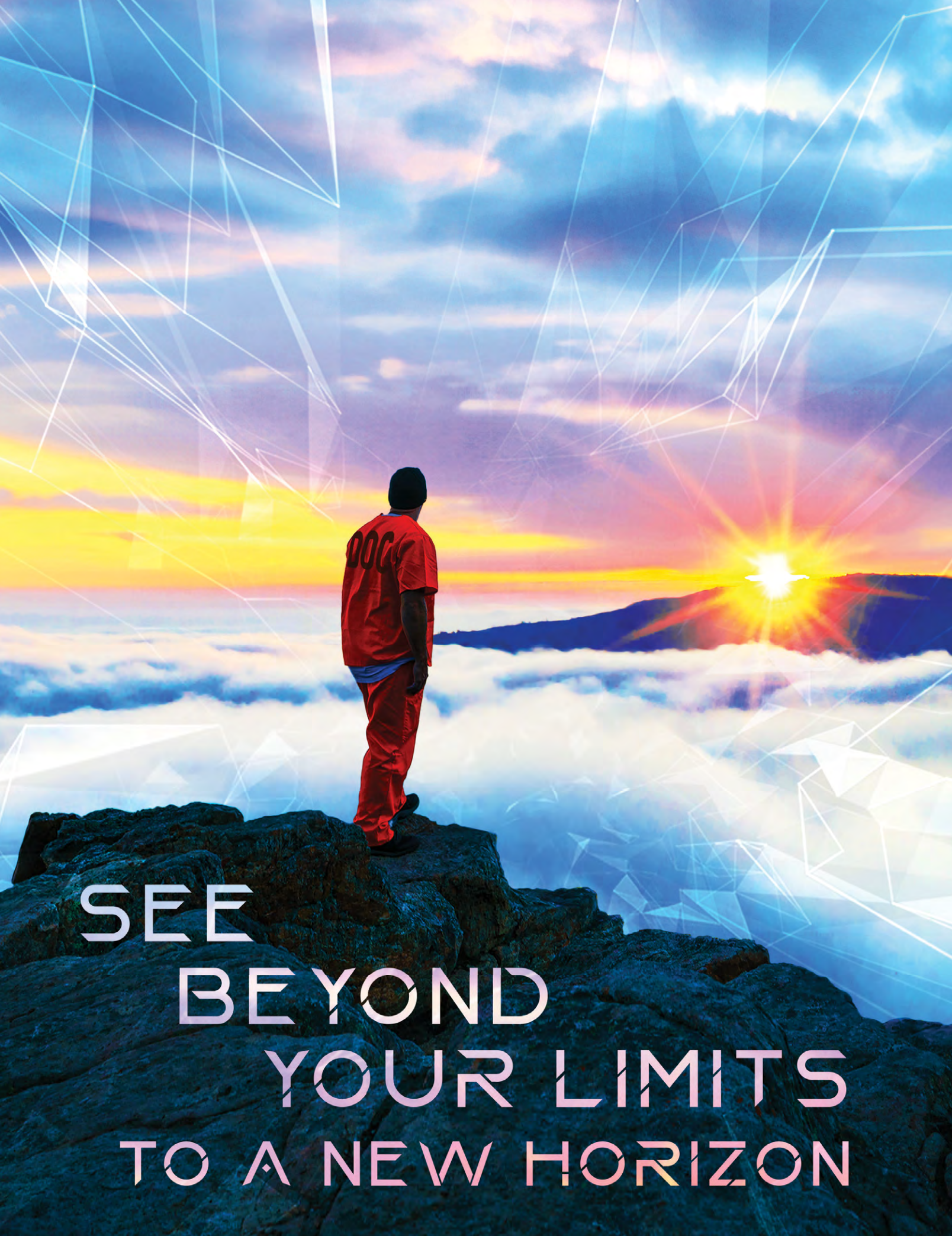
Faith teaches us to treat feelings in an objective manner. We must not allow them to control us. Emotional entrapment leads to a bad "movie." Like eating a very greasy meal that you know gives you heartburn then being surprised at the heartburn. You can shut yourself down, not because of a weak personality, but because ignorance of the laws of our feeble humanity makes us a victim of self-pity.

Faith is not an emotion. It is a 'business' decision. To objectively detach and identify our emotions, and logically determine why we feel them, is an intelligent power from the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup> He can calm the anxiety, stabilize all panic, and bring the broad perspective of eternal love in Jesus. Ask and He will come.<sup>36</sup> You CAN conquer emotions and as you see yourself do so, you feed the power of your own will and weaken the power of emotion. The outcome will be your power to replace bad vibes with *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"*.<sup>41</sup>

**YOU ALONE ARE THE DIRECTOR OF THE MOVIE THAT PLAYS IN YOUR MIND.**







SEE  
BEYOND  
YOUR LIMITS  
TO A NEW HORIZON





# IT'S THE PIE OF THE TIGER

By Abraham Paul

calories, I would have been shredded.

I was eating way more than I wanted to admit. I had a knack for remembering the *one* healthy thing I ate, while conveniently forgetting the litany of deep-fried delicacies that followed it. From an objective perspective: My workouts were consistently pathetic. My pump-up playlist include Enya, whale sounds, that one song that says, "...it's the pie of the tiger, it's a grill in the night..." and a 45-minute

getting away with something, but from who? I was basically the Supreme Court of snacks—every case brought before me ended with a ruling in favor of fries. I could sneak at least two Twinkies under my chin and my beard completely hid them. Turns out, my version of a diet was *"I ate a salad... and then three apple fritters."* (But hey, I wanted to eat the full dozen so that's serious discipline).

Nonetheless, somehow I still successfully deceived myself into thinking I was doing all I could. No one else was involved. I did it completely to myself. It scared the hell out of me to realize my own mind had the power to make me think things are the way I want them to be, even when there was absolutely no reality to it. My ability to lie to myself was clearly far greater than my ability to execute any self-control. More like- it's the LIE of the tiger.

So I made a disciplined plan, calculated how much I was going to hate, resent, detest, abhor, loathe, and despise myself for making this plan, and then I followed it. Believe it or not, in a few months I lost all 40lbs. *Who knew self-loathing could be so motivational?*

It's a scary thing to delude yourself, but at a moment's notice we can snap out of it if we actually *want* the end goal more than the comfort of our habits. I saw how deep it is in me to always say, *"I'm doing everything I can."* Not only in regards to losing weight, but all things in life. So every time I hear myself saying

those words, I try to replace them with *"There's so much more I can do, I've only just begun..."* (No, you cannot check under my beard to see the Twinkies... that's just weird).



TED Talk on accepting fatness. No wonder the gym offered to refund my membership out of pity. My muscles filed a missing person report.

**I** drive a big ol' Freightliner hauling all our gear. Long hours of sitting while crisscrossing the US caused me to gain more than 40 lbs. True joy is junk food at the truck stops. At this point, I realized my truck wasn't the only thing with a heavy load that needed to pull onto a scale. My fat-ass could've been slapped with a DOT violation for exceeding the Gross Vehicle Weight Rating. I was so oversized I almost needed my own escort vehicle; \*Caution Wide Load\*.

So I've been trying to lose it for some time now. I got real frustrated after a few months of not making any progress. No real difference. I couldn't figure it out. I went to the gym often and thought I was really dieting. I assured myself I was doing *"Everything I possibly could."* I was about ready to quit.

Before giving up, I sat down and added up the food I was eating compared to how much I was moving. I realized I had completely tricked myself in my own head. If lying to yourself burned

I was sneaking junk food and always justifying it in my mind as a one-time-thing that I deserved... But let's be honest...It wasn't a *"one-time-thing"* and I didn't deserve it. I felt I was

The following page is a part of a children's book you can read at visitation or could take out and send to your child. >



MY DADDY IS IN PRISON  
SO WE NEED

# EXTRA LOVE

FROM THE ACCLAIMED CHILDREN'S BOOK  
BY RUTH MERCY



Hi. My name is  
Jonathon. I like  
to be happy and  
play in my backyard,



But sometimes  
out of nowhere, life  
can get really hard.

One day the cops came and  
put my daddy in their car,  
then took him away to a prison that  
was really far.  
I didn't understand why they took  
my dad,  
but my mom told me he made a  
mistake and did something bad.



When we went to visit my dad  
the prison was a long drive away,  
so we had to get up early and  
it took all day.



I did not like going into the  
prison and walking through the  
gate. It was a scary place and we  
always had to wait.

State Prison  
Security



We didn't talk very  
much when I sat across  
from my dad,  
Because he was  
hurting and I  
was mad.



But then I realized that my  
attitude was wrong,  
because I wasn't even helping  
my family stay strong.  
I remembered one time my  
mom told me not to play  
football inside,  
but I did not listen and when I  
broke her vase, she cried.  
I shouldn't have done it and felt  
really bad,  
and I got punished just  
like my dad.

Well I was upset and didn't know  
what to do,  
but my dad fixed the vase  
because he used extra glue!



I thought, 'My family  
is broken but we could be  
fixed with love...'



...because love is like  
glue if it comes from the  
Father above.'



I knew I couldn't change our situation  
or make my daddy free,  
but maybe things would get better if I  
could change me.

So one day,  
I went by myself to  
my special spot.  
I had to clear my mind  
and think about a lot.

I looked at the beautiful  
things God made and  
thought,  
'God must be good too',  
and I asked Him to show  
me what I could do.

I took out  
the Bible that  
Grandma gave  
me and there I  
read,  
How Jesus died  
on the cross but  
rose from the  
dead!

God gave us extra love  
when He gave us Jesus, His Son.  
And He can forgive us for the  
bad stuff we have done.  
So I thought, 'if God gave us so  
much, even though we are bad,  
then I can certainly forgive  
and give extra love to my dad!'  
So I talked to Jesus and the  
Father above,  
and asked Him to give me His  
special love.  
I wrote down ideas that  
I could do,  
to bring my family together  
and be the glue!

#### Extra Love For Dad:

- 1.) Tell him I forgive him.
- 2.) Make him laugh.
- 3.) Play the silly game I made up.
- 4.) Read him the Bible verse I chose.
- 5.) Tell him it's gonna be ok.
- 6.) Write a story with him.  
(He draws the pictures and I write)
- 7.) Tell him I love him.
- 8.) Have a talent show each time  
I see him and compete to  
see who wins.

#### Extra Love for Mom:

- 1.) Do the dishes.
- 2.) Hug her a lot.
- 3.) Help her clean the house.
- 4.) Take care of my sister.
- 5.) Buy her flowers for no reason.

Now the prison isn't so scary  
because I have extra love to give,  
And when you love someone else,  
life is much better to live!

We pretend that my dad is a  
prince in a castle,  
and I don't even mind  
waiting or all the hassle.

Now my dad and I have a really  
good time. We laugh and dance and  
make up a rhyme! I have my list, of  
special of things we can do, and love  
brings us closer like extra glue!

So remember, even  
though bad stuff happens  
and sometimes you feel  
rotten,  
God loves you very much and  
you are not forgotten!  
If you choose a good attitude  
and build a big heart,  
you can help bring your  
family together even if they  
are apart.  
You can make a list here  
of special ideas to do,  
with your parent in prison  
that will be just from you!  
Talk to Jesus and your  
Father above,  
ask Him to give you His  
**EXTRA LOVE!**

#### Extra Love Ideas:

- 1.)
- 2.)
- 3.)
- 4.)
- 5.)
- 6.)
- 7.)
- 8.)
- 9.)
- 10.)

For the full book and a lot of other  
cool stuff visit our site:  
[deepheartworldtour.com](http://deepheartworldtour.com)



# The Tale of a Son

- WRITTEN BY ABRAHAM PAUL -

**R**ichard grew up poor in the ghetto, but he was diligent and studied hard. He loved music and dreamed of mastering the violin. Its sound moved him in ways he couldn't explain. He was good for his age and hoped it might be his ticket out. Tragically, he had to kill that dream, along with the rest of his childhood hopes, after his father left when he was eleven. He became the one to care for his mother, who battled addiction. He dropped out of school and by seventeen was on his own. He struggled to find work and make a living. He bounced in and out of juvenile centers and, later, served short stints in prison. When he got out, he couldn't hold a job. He battled drugs, alcohol, and other vices.

While hitting bottom, he had a moment of clarity and set his will to turn things around. He cleaned up his act, got a stable income, and rented a cheap apartment. *It wasn't much, but in his mind, he had made it.* He was quite proud of himself for all he conquered on his own.

Now, Timothy grew up not too far away, but had a very different story. From the moment he was born, his purpose was clear, shaped by the identity of his father; who was a multi-generational billionaire. He was not an arrogant man, but a humble philanthropist. He made himself available to all who suffered. He taught Timothy these ways of sincere love for the forgotten. Timothy knew that just by being born he had a huge inheritance waiting for him. He had no real worries about the future or doubts about who he was. He loved and was deeply loved by his father. He took joy in sharing their love with others. His father disciplined him so he was not spoiled or presumptuous.

One day while Timothy and his father were working in the projects, they heard about the hardships of Richard so the father approached him and made him an offer. The father said, *"I have the ability to make things different. Instead of being born where you were, I can change that. You could be born into my household and I would raise you as my son. As my heir, you would have an inheritance and the same purpose as my son."*

Richard wasn't as thrilled as you might expect. He asked, *"And what of all my accomplishments and all that I've done on my own, what would become of that?"* The father gently replied, *"It would be forgotten, as if it*

*never happened. In one sense you would have to 'die' to all you have done so that you could live again. That's the cost."*

Indignant, Richard snapped, *"Do you really think I would just throw away everything I built myself? Do you know all I've been through? No one helped me. Where were you when I was going through hell, huh?"* The father turned to continue his work and looked over his shoulder to say, *"I know your story quite well. I was where I've always been and always will be. You know the way."*

Richard found it hard to move past what he took to be an insult. *How could that man just make so little of cleaning up his act and actually making something of himself?* The bitterness from this short encounter festered like an open wound. It wasn't just a bruised ego, but a jealousy he couldn't admit. Deep down, he longed for the kind of identity and purpose that Timothy had been born into. *The father's words echoed in his mind.*

Not long after, a severe earthquake hit the city. Richard's apartment did not withstand the quake and his place of employment closed permanently. He was once again left with nothing. After a few nights at the shelter, he relapsed and landed in county jail. It took a tremendous effort to fight off the regret that he did not take the father's offer. He insisted that he was right not to be demeaned. He spoke to himself, *"I did it once, I'll do it again. I'll pull myself up by my bootstraps. I'll prove to everyone..."* But he stopped mid-sentence and wept. He couldn't keep it going. As he got up to use his one phone call to try and reach that father, a deputy shouted out, *"Richard! Let's go! Your bail's been paid."* Confused, because he didn't know a soul in the world, he was grabbed by the arm and taken to collect his things.

*There, the father awaited him.*

Stunned, Richard said, *"I was a fool and was wrong, I'm sorry. I realize I can't do anything and even what I thought I did, was really nothing at its greatest height. Is there any way that your offer still stands?"* The father was delighted from the moment he saw him from afar and replied, *"My offer has always stood since the day you were born, but the cost also remains."* Richard had already calculated this out, so without hesitation, he chose to yield.

All the burdens and worries of his adulthood were surrendered. He relinquished all the fighting to prove he was something. **He was now content in being nothing... but a son.** He had a home. For the first time in his life, he knew he was loved. The father motioned toward the chairs in the empty visiting room. On one of them sat a Stradivarius violin... only the very best. *"That's yours," he said.*

Richard stood frozen. After all these years... after all that was lost... *How could he know?* Holding back tears, he sheepishly stepped forward for a hug and was pulled into a strong, warm embrace. <sup>14/27/17</sup>



Next time you're hit by a wave of hurt, imagine God as a real Father pulling you into an embrace like this. (Luke 15)





## ||| MUSIC: |||

MUSIC IS COMPOSED OF THREE PRIMARY ELEMENTS:

RHYTHM, MELODY, AND HARMONY.

**Rhythm:** the systematic arrangement of musical sounds, principally according to duration and periodic placement.

**Melody:** a combination of pitch and rhythm to create a sequence of notes that is musically satisfying.

**Harmony:** created by distinct pitches or tones coinciding with one another in order to create new, distinct musical ideas.

### ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS:

**Tempo:** The speed or pace at which the music is played.

**Dynamics:** The volume of how loud or soft each part is played.

**Flow:** The pace, structure and delivery of lyrics in rap.

**Mood:** The emotional tone + atmosphere conveyed.

**W**hat's up, guys? David here. Along with Raven, I produce and DJ the music for the shows we put on in prisons around the world. When I see guys walking into the gym or area, it's my job to make them move. Sometimes, guys will get down to it, but mostly, I look for indicators like a subtle groove or head bob and that's when I know I'm hitting it. It's my heart to lift your heart.

BPM (Beats Per Minute) is one of the most important elements of DJing. In the ole days, before technology, I would have to time 20 seconds on my watch

and count the beats. Then multiply that times 3 to get 60 seconds to get the BPM. Titanium by David Guetta is 126 BPMs. If you try to mix that with Return Of The Mack by Mark Morrison at 95 bpm, it just doesn't work. You could speed up Return Of The Mack to 126 but

then it would sound like a chipmunk singing opera in a windstorm. *Some songs aren't meant to be beat-matched.*

What's fascinating is that you and I have a BPM as well. You can hold two fingers to the left side of your neck, time 20 seconds and count each pulse, multiply times 3, and that's your heart rate. Get this; your heartbeat is so individual to you that it's more identifying and unique than your fingerprint. No one on earth has your same heartbeat. And in life, we each have a BPM, too. We got a 'sound' that's all our own. The composition of your heart, mind, attitude, vibe, personality, vocabulary, and experiences all constitute your individual rhythm.

But tragically, I see many guys lose this as they go through life. The routine is monotonous, the peer pressure is strong, and slowly, many match their heart to the beat of life's mundane drum.

I talked to these two young guys in a Kansas prison who told me they could see themselves slowly losing their 'vibe', (*a term which comes from vibration-frequency- music*) and just matching the dull drum of

prison rhythm. It just crushed me to hear this. They still had 9 years left to go. One of them told me that he tried a religious group, and the 'morality police' completely constrained him. He couldn't listen to this, could only listen to that... couldn't do this, had to do that... constantly having to obey their rules and their music. He felt completely suffocated. Like being in a prison within the prison. It made him start to give up on God and lose hope. And I get it. Who wants to be prohibited from just being themselves? Not me, not you, and definitely not God. On the contrary, He says, *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free"* (Gal. 5:1).



When you come to Jesus, He doesn't make you lose your rhythm and become a predictable, phony, religious robot, but transforms you into the ultimate "DJ", blaring your heartbeat until the walls shake. He takes your unique personality, all your experiences, your killer humor, and your individual will, and lifts it, infusing it with His love and purpose. *And I can tell you, it's downright awesome.* Because what He has for you is what's best for you. It's not generic and lame, but personal and exhilarating. Don't let others sneak in, bro, and make you become someone you're not. Don't be restricted by Contemporary Christian music. It can stifle your spirit and cage your creativity. Don't be afraid to be "worldly". Create your own music and be real. Because your rhythm is unique and beautiful, don't sell it for cheap. Sync your beat to His and find your true BPM.







While producing music for over 15 years, I have always been drawn to the style of rap. It is an art form that is far more in-depth and complex than most realize. I have written a number of original tracks and perform them for my brothers and sisters in prison. As we travel, I have met so many incarcerated individuals with such extraordinary talent. They were always extremely encouraging, welcoming, and gracious to me, helping me with profound insight and creative feedback on how to rap. I am deeply grateful to each of them. So I thought I might pass along what I have learned over the years to help you as you perfect your art.



## BE INSPIRED

When guys write the nitty-gritty-down-and-dirty lyrics, they dig deep to break the boundaries of creativity, they think of stuff nobody's ever thought of, but when they write something 'clean,' sometimes they just settle for the most basic levels of positive affirmation, with no personal creativity, causing it to lose its grit and flavor. What do you say we write something no one has ever thought of, or done before, that's wildly creative while still being uplifting?

Here are some concepts I am playing with. Feel free to grab one as an idea and write your own rap. Maybe you can share it with me someday if we visit your facility:  
**VICTIM TO VICTOR**  
**DIGGIN' FOR DIAMONDS**  
**I IS FOR LESSONS**  
**WAKE THE LION**  
**MUSIC IS ETERNAL**  
**PATIENCE IS IMPECCABLE**  
**FORCE NAME** (strength of soul in French)  
**PROTOCOL IS MY PROTOCOL**



I met this beautiful bro at Pablo Escobar's prison. He was a very talented local rapper so I invited him to perform a rap with me and he killed it with an amazing freestyle.

## DROPPING BARS BEHIND BARS

Each line of rap is called a "bar". Each bar is a full 4 count of music. It's broken down into 1/4 beats. 1 2 3 4. Typically, the snare lands on the 2 and the 4. '2-4' rappers will land their rhymes on the snare for greater emphasis. Within every 1/4 beat are actually 4 more rhythms called 1/16th notes. When you wanna spit really fast, you'll fill these 1/16 notes with syllables. Here's a chart I made to show you what that looks like. Copy it on a separate piece of paper so you can add your own lyrics.

Lyrics														C		Natural Minor (Aeolian)				16 Steps	
1/16 Note	1/16 Note	1/8 Note	1/4 Note				1/2 Note														
Not	abo	ut	to	allow	a	lot	of	doubt	to	bring	me	down									
Don't	ever	count	me	out	cause	im	ma	mount	up	from	the	ground			I've						
not	for	got	I'm	not	gonna	stop	'till	I'm	on	top	the	clouds									
An	astro	naut	that's	got	a	shot	to	turn	his	world	a	round									

A good way to practice is to repeat the phrase "One Ya Beh Duh". That will fill every 1/16 note with a syllable.

One	ya	beh	duh	Two	ya	beh	duh	Three	ya	beh	duh	Four	ya	beh	duh
-----	----	-----	-----	-----	----	-----	-----	-------	----	-----	-----	------	----	-----	-----

Cadence, or flow, is when you look at 1 or 2 bars and see which 1/16 or 1/8 you will leave blank in order to create a catchy rhythm. You will typically repeat the same pattern for 4 to 8 bars. As you write your lyrics, it's also crucial to breathe! So add a '(B)' in your chart to give you space to take a breath. Because once you lose your breath, you won't have the resonance to give a solid delivery.

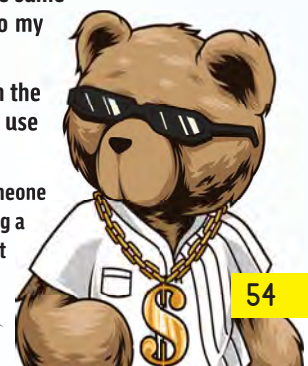
One	ya	beh	duh	Two	ya			Three	ya	beh	duh	Four	(b)		
One	ya			Two	ya			Three	ya			Four			(b)

**ShoVing** - you cut off or soften the end of the word because the syllable that rhymes is in the first half. "I ain't paying these fees, cause this is my season"

**Alliteration** - is the other side of a rhyme. It's when the beginning of a word shares the same sound with the beginning of another word rather than the end. "Bringing beautiful beats to my brother behind bars, firing up a furious feast, I'll never be far"

**Internal Rhyme** - is when your bar contains another rhyme scheme that varies from the end rhyme. "The fact is this rap is more than just words on a page, it's an emphatic tactic to use verbs in a completely new way."

**RAP VOICE** - every rapper has to find their rap voice/tone. Talk (don't shout) as if you're talking to someone sitting at the back of the room. Now make it edgy, add some attitude. Play around with your pitch by going a little lower or higher. Compress your vocal chords to add a little distortion/vocal-fry to it. Keep working at it until you feel comfortable with it.





# Finding Guillermo

By Joshua John



On November 7th, 1985 tanks entered Plaza Bolívar in downtown Bogotá to blast open the Palace of Justice that had been taken over by rebel Guerrillas who were holding 200 victims inside. The Palace would end up in flames and 98 lives were lost, including 12 Supreme Court justices. This tragedy marked one day in a 50-year war that forever shaped the nation of Colombia.

In May 2010, on the corner of that very plaza, we set our speakers on the pavement, plugged the cables into the mixer, yank-started

the generator, and began playing our music as night fell on the famed "Septima" Street. Friday night was special as the street was closed to traffic. Families would pack the colonial corridor to browse the goods laid out on blankets by street vendors and soak in the tastes and smells of popcorn, churros, and cotton candy. We wanted to offer our music, magic, and love to those who had suffered so much from the endless ripples of such unspeakable tragedies. A massive crowd formed around us as it was not common to see eight Americans performing on the streets of Bogotá at night. I had no idea that it wasn't the crowd or the place, but someone else that night that would forever touch our lives.

## Chapter 1:

### The Gentleman Of Bogotá

Once upon a time... out of the corner of his eye, Michael saw a very small man slouched against a brick wall, sitting on the cobbled street. *Noticing such 'invisible people' has always been one of his specialties.* We had met the man a few days earlier outside the grocery store. His name was Don Guillermo Valderama, and he was 68 years old, completely blind, missing some teeth, and very poor. But had more charisma in his fingernail than all the world's celebrities combined. His laugh reverberated through your soul, and he had the most beautiful smile he would never see. He had a rich, resonant voice and carefully formed each sentence with elegance and class.

He played his guitar on the street to make the \$7 he needed each night for his room. We gave him some money, talked a little, and then he insisted on serenading "Dona Rachel" for her birthday.

His voice boomed down the city streets with a song that included an interlude on the harmonica strapped to the top of his guitar.

Now, he sat just down from us on the Septima 'Friday Night Lights'. *"We can't perform here. No chance. Not with him sitting over there and no one paying any attention. Ask him if he wants to come and play for our crowd,"* were Michael's words to Elizabeth, Ruth, and I that would begin the relationship with this person who we would eventually consider our best friend.



Every song started with a few minutes of speaking; providing a rich background to the "cántico" he was about to sing. It began with, *"Esteemed ladies and gentlemen of the public, I hope, believe, and trust that you will enjoy this song that your humble servant is honored to sing..."*

There is something very special about the Colombian people, and the crowd somehow grasped that this was not an ordinary moment. There were no fancy lights, gala gowns, or orchestra symphonies, but it every bit felt like an Andrea Bocelli concert, and to all those present that night, it was.

A unique trait about Guillermo was his ability to express gratitude, which he now had in plenty as the crowd roared in cheers and filled his guitar case with pesos. As he thanked those present, his voice rose as if standing in a stadium of thousands.

## Chapter 2:

### Standing In The Dark

Guillermo became our dear friend. He was to have no lettuce on his hamburgers and absolutely no pineapple on his pizza. He didn't drink water. Like, ever. I don't understand how that's even possible. But cherry soda it was.

I began joking with him that the hamburgers were made out of Pigeon. Being nearly deaf, I never expected the roar of laughter that burst from his mouth at



DON GUILLERMO VALDERAMA

such a simple joke. Each subsequent time we'd bring him food, he would be sure to confirm in jest that it was also made from pigeon. The whole street would turn to look as we'd shout lines back and forth about the type of pigeon it was and if feathers were included.

Every time we performed on Septima, Don Guillermo joined us, adding to the magical memories in the libraries of our minds. When his birthday came around, 'Dona Rachel' didn't forget about his serenade that rainy day in front of the grocery store. So she spent the afternoon cooking several sheets of birthday cake, drove it downtown, put it on a table in front of Guillermo, and led the crowd in the happiest happy birthday we'd all had in a while. Guillermo's face lit up with shock as he carefully placed his hands to feel the sheer magnitude of the cake in front of him. Tears streamed from his glassy eyes as he covered his face in delight.

After the shows, I'd have the privilege of walking with him down the cobbled streets, past Plaza Bolívar, which was always full of pigeons and would become the subject of many conversations and hearty laughs. Then we would walk past the President's Palace, into the no-man's-land of 'Las Cruces.' *Ask anyone in Bogotá, it's the place you just don't go. But for Don Guillermo, it was home and so we went.* Guillermo's hand in mine as we walked down wet roads that seemed to reflect the feelings of the night. Vague figures moved through shadows, and dogs wandered through the trash in every direction. I thought to myself, *'What is this place? How can anyone live here?'*



GUILLERMO'S BIRTHDAY CAKE







GUILLERMO'S PLACE

Guillermo cordially invited me into his tiny lot (left). I will never forget the time I stood there in total darkness for several minutes as he went about putting his things away; his hat on a nail in the wall, his guitar in its corner, his bag under the bed, and tuning the radio to his favorite music. After a bit, he stops and says, *"Oh my, what a terrible host I am, I didn't even think of it."* And flips on the light bulb hanging from the ceiling. It dawned on me that that light was never used, and darkness was his forever-world. When I asked about the three large garbage bags full of clothes, taking up much of his limited space. He explained through tears, that they belonged to his wife, who passed away, and he couldn't ever let them go.

The day eventually came when we would need to continue traveling to the rest of South America. Many in our crowds formed a bond with both us and Guillermo, and assured us they would look after him. Many did, for many years. We'd send letters, care packages, and calls through intermediaries for many years until slowly they faded off. When covid came, we were locked down in Brazil and everyone in their houses. *We lost track of Don Guillermo.*

### Chapter 3:

#### Searching For Guillermo

In May 2024, our plane touched down on the rainy runway of Bogotá's, El Dorado Airport. A million miles away never felt more like home. I got on a bus, cram-packed with commuters, vendors, and even a rocker playing an electric guitar, tumbling towards the center.

As I walked the streets flashbacks flew across my mind like the pigeons in the plaza. I remembered Sarah and I taking Guillermo to a medical appointment and sitting down for some piping hot coffee afterward. We could barely sip ours, but Guillermo knocked his down like a shot and casually asked for another. Sarah and I looked at each other in shock.

I remembered procuring a coveted spot in an elderly home, only to have him pull out at the last minute because he just couldn't give up his total freedom. *He had to be able to walk downtown and play for his public.* I walked past a fancy pastry shop where we took Guillermo for a birthday, I remember coming down the stairs of the two-story shop and Guillermo goes, *"Watch this"* - hands me his blind stick- and begins to jump down the stairs like a toddler, laughing his head off, knowing I would freak out.

So I began to ask around, and show his picture to anyone I could. *Many knew of him.* I'd pick up a trail,



only for it to go cold a little later. I soon met a man walking the streets who insisted he had seen him a few days prior. The price for taking me there? A cigarette and a caramel totaling .36 cents. We stood in a now-steady rain as he lit his cigarette, the ember glowing orange. As we walked down the tattered streets, he jabbered on of all the threads of his life that had now come unraveled in his mind. None of it made sense to me, but for him, it was all the sense he had left. We found the spot where he had 'seen Guillermo', and nearby street sellers said they had seen him too... but not for a while. *How long? "No sé... mucho tiempo, amigo."* Soon after, two ladies knew him quite well and were certain he was sick in a hospital about 10 blocks away. As I headed there, the busy center quickly turned into a third-world hellscape. Coming around the corner, the scene was nothing less than apocalyptic. There were hundreds of individuals standing in a near zombie-like state. *I realized these were souls surrendered to the netherworld of drugs.* Wrapped in blankets and tattered clothing; some yelled into the wind, others stared into the abyss, as dozens of dogs wandered through the crowd.

I suddenly see a small man in a grey coat with a walking stick, moving down a side alley. *I couldn't believe it.* My heart started racing. I remembered how much I loved this guy. I called out *"Guillermo!"*, he turned around, but he was a different blind man, the same age and size as Guillermo, named Pablo. *He was the man many thought was Guillermo.* We shared a while, I gave him what I could, and carried on.

I made my way toward the hospital and once inside, found doctors and nurses working like saints in a dark underworld. Sick patients laid on gurneys in crowded halls, many near their end. A nurse was certain he was there and took me to an old man in a gurney, but it wasn't him. *Someone else again.* She checked the hand-written registrar and no Guillermo was admitted. I shared about Jesus with those in the halls and made my way back out to the streets.

### Chapter 4:

#### Not One Bird

I walked back up to Las Cruces to stop by his 'home' one last time. Men appeared as ghosts wandering in the Bogotá mist of rain and smog. One man uses the wall as a toilet, another shouts ahead to stray dogs as if they were his pets. An earnest man hustles the traffic light to sell what he can. A woman begged me to leave the barrio for my own safety, *"this is gang territory; they won't hesitate to shoot you"*. But experience has taught me how to operate in such places. I identified and told the gang members who I was, and they became eager to help me find Guillermo, too.

I pounded on the large metal door at Carrera 8 #2-91. This time, a man comes to the door and as I explain who I'm looking for he nods in full assurance. He knew Guillermo personally and was also touched by his larger-than-life persona. He explained that Guillermo was dead. He passed

away from a health issue about a year ago. Tears came to my eyes as we talked in the rain. *I was too late.* Thoughts of; *'Why didn't I come sooner? I let him down. I wasn't there for him. I left my friend all alone,' filled my mind with grief.* Then the most bizarre thing happens as I am standing there. Out of the corner of my eye, I see something fall and hear a flutter sound. I look over to my right and see a pigeon had just fallen from its perch on the roof. *It scuffled about on the floor and then died, right in front of me.* Now, I am sure pigeons die all the time. They're just insignificant little birds; no one even cares. *But I had never seen one fall to the ground. I had never seen one die, until that moment.*

Suddenly, a thought came to me as if it had been spoken into my mind. *"Not one bird falls to the ground apart from your Father..." The words of Jesus in Matthew 10:29. "Not... one... bird".* It was a surreal moment. Standing in this Bogotá back alley, I 'heard' something I had never stopped and considered before. If God sees each bird on Earth, surely He sees each person, in each place, and is there, attentive to their call. I wasn't there for Guillermo, as I should have been, but the Father was. This brought me tremendous comfort. I am always hesitant to say that someone went to heaven. *Jesus said, "the road to life is narrow and few find it" (Matt. 7:14). I don't know what was in Guillermo's heart. We talked many times about Jesus and he confessed his love for Him. So I hope and believe, maybe, but I don't know.* What I do know is that God Almighty took notice of this little 5' ft, homeless, blind, man and was there for him at a moment's call. If you let all this sink in, there is a wealth of thoughts for you to draw from.

Jesus knew that we feel as insignificant as a pigeon falling off a broken brick roof; *'Oh, you do? Well, my Father knows every pigeon and when it falls, and where it lands, and you are worth more than many pigeons.'* My precious brother or sister, wherever you are, reading this, the Father knows and sees... you. *You are not forgotten or unnoticed.* And neither is your family, or loved ones. If you lost someone while locked up, or have someone, and cannot be there for them, as I wasn't for Guillermo, guess what? *God's got your back.* He sees them, knows them, and is there for them, when you are not.

So, for all the 'insignificant little birds' whose stories go untold, whose lives go unnoticed, and who feel like they fall unseen on the back alleys of life. Whether you walk down a ghetto street at night, a dusty rural road, or a dark prison hall: no one, and I mean no one, goes unnoticed by our Father.<sup>82</sup>

Not... even... one... bird.

*The End.*







# RIDERS ON THE STORM

I got 15 tattoos to cover the needle holes in my arms. My life has been a shipwreck shattered by drugs and men. It started when a captain let me work on board his ship as a cook and the pay was great. What I went through would cover ten books but they wouldn't be anything a family would read.

So one night we had just dropped anchor about a 100 miles out. It was a hot spot for a huge catch. The winds rose so fast we were caught off guard. Suddenly off the port bow we spotted a funnel cloud from hell under a sudden massive storm. We knew it was over. No chance we'd survive what was about to hit us. But here is what happened. My life flashed before my eyes and it wasn't good. No care for anyone else. *Why would God spare me?* Every memory was attached to my 'Don't give a damn' attitude. I couldn't find even one speck of good in anything I did. It was all for me. Darkness fell on us and it covered my soul. I was going to hell and there was no doubt. The waves began rolling over the entire boat. I looked at my watch. It was broken. I clenched a rosary in my pocket. What a hypocrite! Our ship was tipped so far over I could actually touch the sea.

**I LET OUT A SCREAM THAT I NEVER THOUGHT COULD COME OUT OF ME. FROM EVERY BLONDE HAIR ON MY HEAD TO THE BOTTOM OF MY FILTHY BOOTS I WAS TERRIFIED. DEATH WAS WITHIN SECONDS.**

Suddenly a memory flashed of what a lady told me long ago at a Walmart. She said "Just cry out to Jesus to save you. No matter what you've lived, He'll forgive you and give you eternal life".

So that's what I screamed: "Jesus!!!" 5 letters. One hope. One Person. I had only said His Name before as a swear word. But now, in that moment, I said it with something she explained was the key; BELIEVE Him!<sup>132/11</sup>

When I stood up it was like hours had gone by. That gigantic, black-as-coal cyclone turned on a dime right in front of our eyes. A miracle?! Yes. It was. And God saved our entire crew. Every single guy and the other two ladies aboard were as white as the clouds now over us. I ain't never seen people so changed. There was both crying and laughter. The captain just dropped to his knees and started singing some crazy song. And me? I just stood there, soaked in salt water and wonder, knowing His name, those five letters, would be my anchor through every storm.

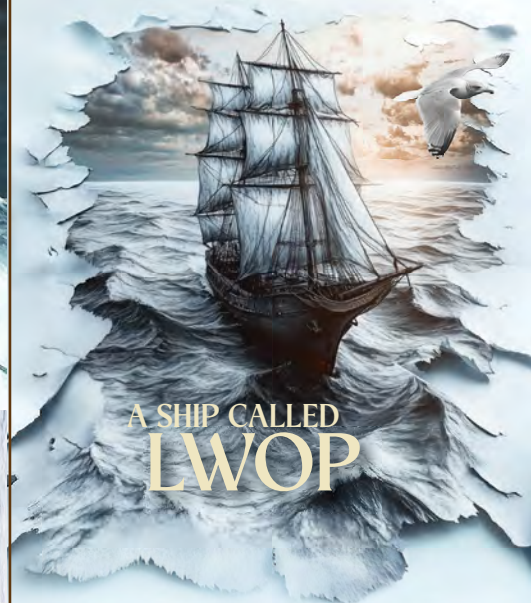
*"Jesus is not a second chance at life but a life of second chances."*



## REVERSE LOGIC *By Michael*

Ocean beauty revealed its hidden terror when I once captained a 41 ft. sailboat on a failed journey to South America. More work and danger than I ever had all my previous life. Long story short: lots of NO BUENO! Charts, tides, shortwave radio codes, apparent wind vs real wind, currents, bilge pumps, and engine failures brought me into unimaginable desperation. One time in a massive Miami storm, I lost all steering. The seas hit me with huge waves and cross currents. We actually were out on a 'sea-trial' to sell the boat with the potential buyer on board (also a sea captain). The steering suddenly just went out. It seemed like a "mayday" was inevitable when my desperation led me to put the boat in reverse to gain some steering and I was able to navigate out of the bay, into the harbor, and ultimately to the dock. Everyone was shocked, including me, that it worked (they still bought the boat). Sometimes in life, my friend, it takes some reverse logic and major out-of-box thinking to get out of a bad situation.

Fun Fact: The average storm cloud weighs about 1 million pounds.



## A SHIP CALLED LWOP

*By Ruth Mercy*

They said this ship was bound to sink,  
Pushed so far, to the very brink.  
"Take all dreams and throw them  
overboard. Hope is something you can't  
afford. A dead-end course set in motion,  
A ghost ship lost upon a dark, black  
ocean. 'Just a number,' they say, 'a  
forgotten soul.

Filed away, Life WithOut Parole.'  
But there is something they don't know:  
You are the captain, and you alone will  
decide where you go. There is no fixed  
course to which you're bound, And you  
can turn your ship completely around.  
Your heart is not chained. Your hands  
hold the helm, to steer this ship to  
another realm. You will find your will  
deep inside. And not be dragged by the  
current tide. You will catch the wind  
for a new direction, And give this ghost  
ship a resurrection. No matter what's  
been done or said, Right here, right now,  
there's a purpose ahead. You can rescue  
another sailor lost in the storm. And be a  
refuge when the dark clouds form. You  
can find the one about to drown. And  
keep their head from going down. You  
will not be anchored to moments past.  
You will explore the unknown, for your  
mind is vast. Rise above, cast off the line,  
Because life that is life is yours to define.  
Clear the deck and trim your sails. Put  
your hope in a God whose love never  
fails. That which was meant to break us  
apart. Use it to build a bigger heart.  
The very thing that was meant to hurt  
us, Turn it into a  
Life With Outstanding Purpose.

Interesting Fact: The energy a hurricane releases is equivalent to several atomic bombs going off every second.





## THE POWER TO LET GO *By Elizabeth*

In this picture (above) I am demonstrating a move I learned while achieving our black belts in Tae Kwon Do. It symbolizes a moment of extreme focus before beginning the sequence of movements, to 'block' out all negative thoughts and choose the thoughts we want to think. It is to take control of the mind and become its master.

A severe storm had just passed. The air was delicious. We were staying at the foot of a volcano outside of Guatemala City in an RV trailer that we had towed all the way down through Mexico. It was quite a drive. It had been pouring rain for several hours. It finally started to lighten up, so I decided to go outside. I opened the metal frame on the screen door and stepped onto the wet ground and suddenly I was electrocuted with 220 volts of power. My entire body was instantly seized by the electrical current. I could feel it being channeled from my head to my feet at an accelerated speed.

The fingers on my left hand had interlocked around the door frame making me incapable of releasing my grip because the electricity was creating an unbreakable electrical connection. It was as if a river of fire was running through my veins. I didn't know how long I had before the current would kill me. My heart was beating so fast I was afraid I would have a heart attack.

I started to scream out for help as loud as I could. My brother came running and grabbed my right arm and started pulling it as hard as he could to free me from the trailer. He was instantly charged with the same current and had to let go. It's like I was "hijacked" by an uncontrollable force. My father came out and immediately braced his leg against the trailer for leverage and pulled with both arms using all his strength, but he was incapable of breaking me free. At this point I thought at any moment I would surely suffer brain damage. I was shocked that I was staying conscious, I begged God for help. Suddenly, it hit me, "disconnect the power!!!" I screamed out, "someone unplug the trailer!!!" They pulled out the power cord from the box and immediately I was free. I collapsed out of exhaustion but couldn't stop hyperventilating. My father took me in his arms as we sat on the ground. He put his hand on my heart and breathed with me slowly. He calmly repeated, "Jesus, Jesus". My breathing started to slow and I stopped trembling. I couldn't believe I was alive. I was so grateful. Later I found out that this could have been fatal. The electrical box was hazardous because it had not been wired with a negative grounding wire.

I have thought back on this frequently over the years as I am in a prison listening to guys share their stories of past memories. They often use the phrase, "I just can't let go of it". I think back to my hand being locked onto that door frame against my will. I just couldn't let go of it... until the power was disconnected. As we experience trauma, we deliberately, or unknowingly, assign a certain level of power to memories and thoughts. Some thoughts are inconsequential, others cause us sadness, and some can completely lock us down. But each one only has the control over us of the emotion we invest in it (see - Emotions - Page 47). Paul says we can actually "forget what lies behind..."<sup>26</sup> From both past memories and future concerns, we have the power to turn off the power, and we must do it for ourselves. Like in chess, pre-think your moves. Decide in advance.

I have learned by detaching my emotion ahead of time, from high pressured situations, we can prevent "emotional hijacking" where intense reactions overwhelm rational thinking and impair our clarity of mindset to respond logically. Whether it be the sentence you are waiting to receive, the report from your parole meeting, a contentious relationship, difficulty with a lawyer or conflict with a C.O. or cellmate. By disconnecting from the anger, anxiety or sadness in advance, you shut off the power that it has over you. You can choose to believe, releasing it to the Father. Then you are free. You can't control what you can't control, so let it go! This is what makes you a master of your own future!<sup>81/133/134</sup>



THE STORM IS GONNA

## FADE AWAY *BY DAVID GABRIEL*

We once lived in, and worked in the prisons, of Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, surrounded by the conflicts taking place in the Favelas and streets all around us. I would often talk to the young men deep in the Favelas. So many complex stories creating a storm of hatred that whirled in their minds. As we would share, I would tell them of the need to forgive those who they considered enemies. It's the only answer to change the dynamic and end the storm that would consume their lives. Jesus says, "If you forgive others, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive... your Father will not forgive you..." Mt.6:14. Clear and simple. Non-negotiable. See your enemy, forgive them, and that storm of bitterness and hatred will begin to fade away. So this is a rap song I wrote and perform in the Favelas, High Schools, and prisons to a Reggaeton style rhythm in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Verse:

Gets so hard to wake up in the morning, every single day is another storm, and it's like a nightmare I can't escape. The darkness won't leave even when I'm awake.

The rain is pouring and I feel so cold, Caught in the current and it's taking me away. This bitterness is killing me and it won't let go. Sometimes I feel like I'm going insane.

Chorus:

The storm is gonna fade away, As soon as I let go of the hate inside of me, the weight on my soul, will finally be set free,

The storm is gonna fade away (x3)

I will not grow old with this bitterness in me, Come in from the cold, forgive your enemies.

Second Verse:

Instead of burning the bridge Imma build it, Instead of re-reading that page Imma turn it, And man if I don't know how to forgive Imma learn it.

Repeat Chorus.

One time we were performing on a beach in Rio, unknowingly on a helicopter landing pad and an emergency chopper needed to land but we had a huge crowd so he diverted to the beach. Whoops. After the event, a man walked up and showed us a gun tucked in his pants, explaining how he was going to kill his wife because she stole his money and left him. He stopped by chance and heard us sharing about forgiveness and Jesus. I will never forget the elation on his face as he realized he could be free from his hatred towards her and get his entire life back by one simple act to forgive her.





# THE ADVENTURES OF LONEMAN VS WHISPERGLOOM

Johnny Rogue is down for 40 flat - vehicular manslaughter- at Shadowstone Penitentiary. Last issue we read how a series of events unleashed something within him—**WILLPOWER**. It led him to deep resolve for the living Jesus. A man with grit who cared for others with reckless abandon. Johnny Rogue transformed his loneliness into solitude and became—Loneman. Back then he slew the prison's darkest threat—The Blackout, a cloud of despair that smothered men in hopelessness. But now... Loneman is overwhelmed. He struggles with deep inadequacy. The weight of the problems of other broken men, impossible questions, and sleepless nights are pressing in. And in the shadows... a new enemy rises. He is under siege by the merciless monster called Whispergloom; Doubt In Disguise, Whisperer Of Lies, Slayer Of Confidence. Loneman realized he had to go deeper.

PREVIOUSLY, IN ISSUE #1

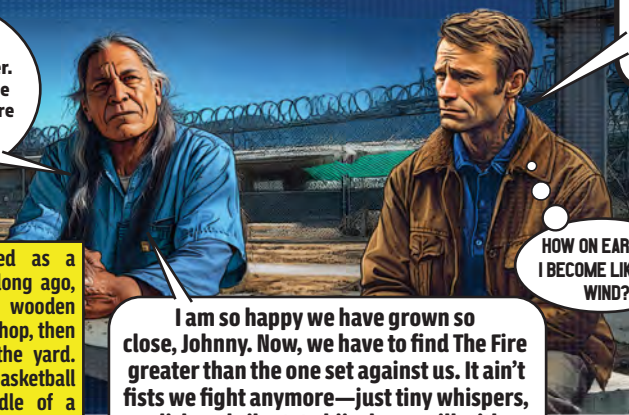
Loneman walked the yard like a man already free—like the bars and bricks couldn't touch what lived inside him. With **WILLPOWER** awakened, he kept The Blackout from reaching Total Apathy by showing others how to care.



JOHNNY WAS TIGHT WITH CARL JOSEPH —A CHEROKEE ALSO KNOWN AS 'BIRD'. HE SAW HIM AS A FRIEND AND THEY SHARED MANY DEEP CONVERSATIONS.

Loneman, I sense you fight a new monster. You think you're the problem, but you are facing an outside force.

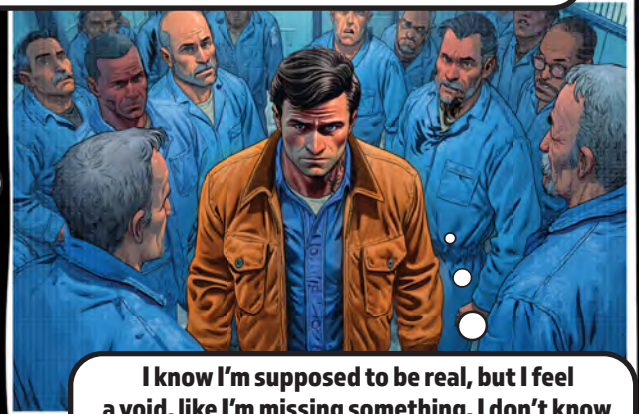
Bird was regarded as a legend. One time long ago, he made an 8 ft. wooden cross in the wood shop, then carried it across the yard. Right across the basketball court in the middle of a game. Everyone stopped to watch but Bird made nothing of it. He said, "I'm just forever grateful for all He did."



HOW ON EARTH DO I BECOME LIKE THE WIND?

I am so happy we have grown so close, Johnny. Now, we have to find The Fire greater than the one set against us. It ain't fists we fight anymore—just tiny whispers, slick and silent, to hijack our will with imaginations. But we must find **LIFT** to rise above it all. Feel that breeze, Johnny? - We must be the wind-

Bird, it's so amazing that we can make a difference in this place. I've seen God do some wow-stuff. Each guy is so unique, I see that I can help them, but I also see my own lack of depth to meet their need with real answers.



I know I'm supposed to be real, but I feel a void, like I'm missing something. I don't know what to tell them or how to really help them. So many complex stories. The basic stuff I got just don't seem like enough.

JOHNNY WAS TROUBLED AT HIS OWN INADEQUACY...

IN HIS MOMENTS OF WEAKNESS, WHISPERGLOOM SPEAKS LIES OF DOUBT AND DESPAIR INTO JOHNNY'S MIND, MAKING HIM THINK THERE ARE NO ANSWERS AND SOMETHING IS WRONG. WHISPERGLOOM WHISPERS LIES BUT MAKES HIS VICTIM FEEL LIKE THE LIES ARE THEIR OWN THOUGHTS. THE VICTIM NEVER KNOWS HE WAS EVEN THERE. THEY JUST THINK THEY HAD A BAD NIGHT... A BAD DAY... A BAD MOOD.

JOHNNY ENACTED HIS **WILLPOWER** AND CHOSE TO SEE THE TRUTH. SLOWLY HIS EYES WERE OPENED TO A **DIMENSION IN THE AIR**. THOSE DARK THOUGHTS WERE NOT HIS OWN, IT WAS WHISPERGLOOM PUTTING THEM IN HIS MIND ALL ALONG. IT WAS BEHIND EVERY NEGATIVE THOUGHT AND FEELING.

Why care? No one sees. It's for nothing.

Why care? No one sees. It's for nothing.

WHISPERGLOOM WEAVES A WEB OF LIES. HE WORKS SUPREME IN THE DARK OF NIGHT.



I'm not the only one being lied to. We're all being brought down by this monster.

Whispergloom feeds the dark—to engulf the mind with lies. Just discovering this was how Johnny began to defeat it.



I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.



I see it now, Bird. Just like you said. Now what?



**WILLPOWER** is like a match to ignite  
Another Power...

...A power that comes for you that is not from inside—but from above. Human power is not enough to war in the supernatural. You need The Holy Spirit, my brother. No emotion or rituals, but divine understanding and **LIFT** to take you beyond yourself. Johnny, we gotta stop our ways and give place to The Spirit.

Loneman had no "Batcave" to hide in. Instead he had his own **FACE PLACE**. Where he put his face smack down on the ground to just talk plain and simple—to engage the living Presence of Jesus.



**"YOU TOLD ME TO ASK YOU,  
SO I'M ASKING YOU NOW!"**

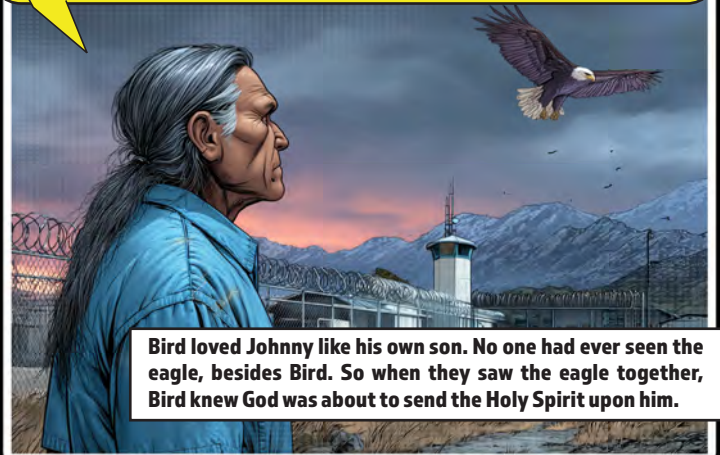
Johnny fired up his heart and mind with clarity. He asked Jesus for the Holy Spirit to empower him beyond himself, to fill his void with depth. Loneman became **DIMENSIONAL** as he began to experience—**LIFT**.



Loneman now had **LIFT**. It did not come in a moment of power but in the power of the moment. He now had **DISCERNMENT** in the Holy Spirit to help him to find words beyond himself. He began to see each brother through their own individual backstory which opened up profound conversations and bonding.

**BIRD TAUGHT JOHNNY TO BE POWERFUL AND GENTLE LIKE THE WIND**

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Divine Trinity, the deeper ways of God. He is the Spirit of Truth to expose the lies of Whispergloom, the Counselor to guide you as you help others, and the Comforter to heal your pain. Look, Johnny! There... like that Eagle! That's Isaiah 40:31.



Bird loved Johnny like his own son. No one had ever seen the eagle, besides Bird. So when they saw the eagle together, Bird knew God was about to send the Holy Spirit upon him.



**AGHHHHHHHHHHH!**

Whispergloom suddenly had no power over Loneman who now defied his lies.

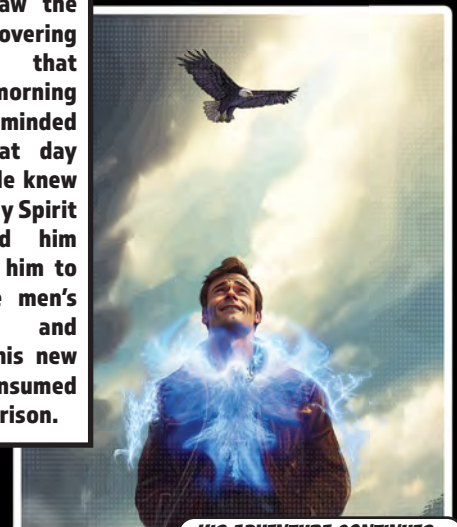
**"NO! IT CAN'T BE?!"**



**THE NEXT DAY, BIRD PASSED AWAY**

Johnny couldn't believe it. He wept so hard when he heard the news. Bird was found laying in a corner of the Yard. Bible in hand. Johnny knew his reward was now being celebrated. He would now carry his torch.

Loneman saw the eagle hovering above on that Monday morning and it reminded him of that day with Bird. He knew that the Holy Spirit would lead him and enable him to answer the men's problems, and his own. This new vision consumed his time in prison.



**HIS ADVENTURE CONTINUES...**

**PHIL 3:10-11,  
RM.6.6, 1COR.2, ROM.8**



"OH DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR  
VICTORY?"

"OH DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR  
STING?" 1COR.15:55

# THE EXONERATOR

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL PETER

## THE EVENT

Imagine the cross encircled by a divine-tornado that pulls bad things into it, while projecting redemption out of it. Imagine the power of its centrifuge could extract the bark off every tree and suck every fish out of every stream and ocean throughout the entire world. Imagine its power could separate you from your past.

Jesus didn't change the prisons, poverty, or education, but yet changed the world by providing the one and only hope for all things pertaining to eternal life: The Event. 3 days, starting with a betrayal, a rigged trial, a bribed jury, corrupt judges, and no defense, in the middle of the night.

*Think He knows injustice?* The cross originated as an ancient Roman punishment inflicting unjust pain upon its felons. Jesus made it into the single greatest Event in world history.

*Why did God pick an ancient torture as the instrument for salvation?* Why not use the invention of the wheel or the discovery of fire? Why commandeer something so despicable to save mankind? God chooses the despised things of the world to shame the wise and exalt the humble.<sup>49</sup> One Event to engulf all the suffering of humanity, bear all the crimes of our depravity, drag death to its own grave, and walk out as the Risen Victor.

Eight billion people in the world each have their individual backstory of hurt. The world says the answer is self-pity, depression, and drugs. God offers the answer of a cross and tomb to bury it all with Him. Jesus didn't toss us a life preserver —He jumped in the water and rescues us out of all sin; past, present, future.

The cross radiates a massive beam of light so mighty it blinds all on earth, except the few who dare stare directly at it (Jn.3:15-16/8). Where is this cross, you ask? Is it the fixture inside or outside a building, a good luck charm, neck trinket, tattoo, or symbol? No. It lives in me, and anyone united with Him, where all my suffering is used to bring me to catharsis. All wounds suddenly find meaning when surrendered to

## Ex-on-er-ate

/ig-zä-nä-rät/  
Latin: ex -onus/exonerare: "unload"

*"To relieve of a burden." It is the declaration of innocence or the removal of any legal or moral culpability associated with an accusation or charge.*

the cross (1s.53). *Like Merl's story, all our baggage finally finds its rightful place.*

Somehow, the agony involved in The Event —the Blood Walk— corresponded to the punishment our sin and crimes deserve. Therefore, because it was executed upon the Innocent, exoneration is now His gift to give.

## "I JUST CAN'T FORGIVE MYSELF"

I hear guys say this all the time, and any efforts to break through are blocked by a wall that says, *"You don't know what I did."* You're right—I don't. But God does. He knew it before you did it (Rm. 5:8). Now, will you let me pull you out of this mind trap? God does not tell you

to forgive yourself because He knows you can't. In fact, to say, *"I must forgive myself,"* is blasphemy. Only God can forgive sin (Luke 5:21). You have been wounded by the moments sin lashed out of you and did what you did (Rom.7:14-21). You can never heal this wound on your own. **We cannot remedy our failures by feelings.** *The shame you feel runs deep in our humanity, in our flesh and blood from Adam.*

If feeling horrible about what you did accomplished anything, there would be no reason for The Event. It is the cross alone that awaits like a surgery to save us from our wound.<sup>138</sup> The question is not whether or not you forgive



THE POWER OF THE CROSS IS GREATER THAN  
THE POWER OF YOUR PAST.

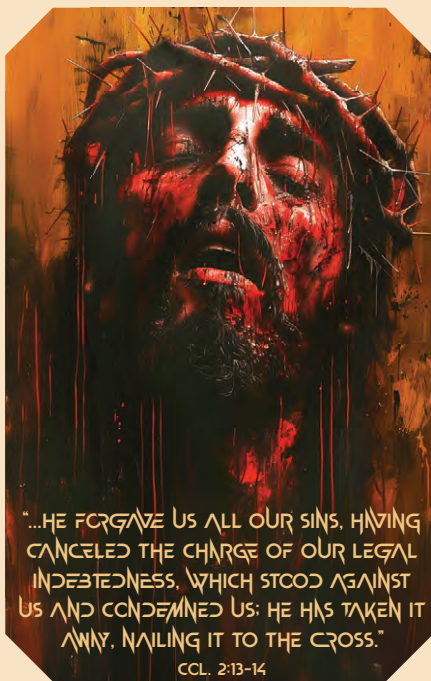


yourself, but whether or not you will believe in the forgiveness He gave His life to give to you. And by this act of -believe- you unite your sin with His death. Then and only then, "It is finished."<sup>121</sup> Instead of 'trying to forgive himself' for his hideous past, Paul says, *"I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me"* (Gal.2:20). He realized the gravity of what he had done was greater than his ability to justify or redeem, and so he yielded it all to the centrifuge of the cross. You see, the cross is the power of the Exonerator, where He saves us from ourselves. The death of Jesus is alive.

### EXONERATION

The crucifixion of Jesus is not a myth but a well-documented historical event recognized by both secular and religious scholars. It is recorded that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled over 300 prophecies (the odds of fulfilling just 8 are one in a hundred thousand trillion). But the core significance is that Jesus shed His blood. *Why? What is this requirement?* Let me explain.

Life itself is sustained by blood; without it, life ceases (Leviticus 17:11,14). *This principle—Life = blood—explains the necessity of atonement.* The sin of Adam and Eve corrupted perfect humanity into sinful humanity, meaning we inherit sin in our flesh and blood from birth. *Therefore, because our humanity is imperfect, no human can be perfect to enter fellowship with a perfect*



"...HE FORGAVE US ALL OUR SINS, HAVING CANCELED THE CHARGE OF OUR LEGAL INDEBTEDNESS, WHICH STOOD AGAINST US AND CONDEMNED US: HE HAS TAKEN IT AWAY, NAILING IT TO THE CROSS."

CCL. 2:13-14

MANY PEOPLE TRAGICALLY VIEW JESUS AS MERELY ONE AMONG MANY RELIGIONS OR TEACHERS, BUT NO BELIEF SYSTEM OR TEACHER MEETS THE ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT FOR US, AS IMPERFECT HUMANS, TO ENTER A PERFECT HEAVEN.

*God in a perfect heaven.* In the Old Testament, animal sacrifices were used as temporary atonement for sin, but the depth of man's depravity required an even greater sacrifice (1 Kings 8:63, Hebrews 10:1-4). This is why God provided Jesus as the ultimate *Sacrifice Lamb*, whose perfect blood was shed 'once for all' to appease Divine wrath and atone for ALL sin (Heb.7:27, 1 Jn 1:7). He was the only suitable Substitute, being both human and Divine. Through His sacrifice, He bridged the gap between God and humanity. Through His resurrection, He destroyed the power of death to offer everlasting life to all who believe in Him (2 Tim 1:9-10).

*This is why Jesus is superior to all 'teachers'.* Without Jesus, there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 10:10-14). His sacrifice offers the exoneration of our guilt (*and the list to the right*), allowing us to escape hell, the just punishment for sin (Luke 12:5, Hebrews 9:12-22). Today, The Exonerator, *the living Jesus*, continues to mediate His sacrifice to anyone who comes to Him, offering Himself as a free gift under the New Testament promise of Abraham's faith.

Atonement is not ongoing. It is complete. No one would even think that such a simple substance called faith is all God now requires (Gal.2:16). When Jesus says, *"I am the bread of life... eat My flesh... drink My blood.. and you will have eternal life..."*,<sup>85</sup> He wasn't referring to eating a piece of bread but to a communion with Him through the work on the cross. Brothers talk about an *earthly* Jesus, but lack of forgiveness proves they don't know the Divine, *living* Jesus.

Death is inevitable, but resurrection life is yours to seize. *It's not religious hype but a power as real as those prison walls to take you beyond their power.* Brother, God promises to give every person who lives on earth the chance to believe the blood atonement of Jesus.<sup>24</sup> This is yours.

### SUBSTITUTION

JESUS PUT HIMSELF IN OUR PLACE TO BEAR THE WRATH WE DESERVE.

### IMPUTATION

THE FATHER PUT OUR SIN ON HIS SON.

### MEDIATION

WHAT JESUS WAS DOING ON EARTH BETWEEN HIS FATHER AND MAN.

### ATONEMENT

HE FULFILLED THE REQUIREMENT OF O.T. SACRIFICES IN HIS SHED BLOOD.

### PROPIATION

THE SOOTHING IMPACT OF HIS DEATH TO TOTALLY CALM THE WRATH OF GOD.

### INTERCESSION

AS THE REQUIRED PRAYER TO WIN THE FATHER'S UNDERSTANDING OF OUR HOPELESS PLIGHT.

### VICARIOUS

PROXY- HE EXPERIENCED DEATH FOR US.

### EXPIATION

RESTITUTION - REPARATION - TO EXTINGUISH THE EFFECTS OF GUILT.

### RECONCILIATION

REUNIFICATION.

### APPEASEMENT

PEACE OFFERING.

### EXONERATION

SETTING FREE FROM A WRONG DOING.

### REDEMPTION

TURNING A BAD EVENT INTO A GOOD OUTCOME.

### SALVATION

DELIVERANCE

### SANCTIFICATION

TO MAKE HOLY (SET APART).

### JUSTIFICATION

THE COMPOSITE OF ALL THESE WORKS AND THE GROUNDS FOR SALVATION.

### HOLINESS

THE STATE OF BEING FITTING FOR GOD'S FELLOWSHIP.

### RIGHTEOUSNESS

THE GIFT OF PERFECTION RECKONED IN RETURN FOR FAITH.





## CHAIN REACTION

BY RUTH

I was in a prison in Kansas when I met Brad. He shared a tragic story with me he had just gone through. His older brother, devastated by a divorce, left work one day angry, sad, and distracted. He got into a terrible car accident and didn't survive. Brad had no other family besides this brother, and the news of his death hit him so hard he just fell apart. He turned to drugs, accidentally overdosed, and barely survived after being transferred to a medical facility. Brad's cellmate, Jim, who saw him as a friend and mentor, was heartbroken. In his frustration, Jim acted out and ended up in the hole, missing a visit from his daughter on her birthday. She was so disappointed that she took her grief

out on her mother, and the chain reaction of hurt continued. If at any point along the way, someone would have inserted a little bit of genuine care, maybe a word of hope or understanding...

### ...THAT CHAIN COULD HAVE BEEN BROKEN.

Keleigh had a tough life that led her to prison, where I met her. Despite a chain of negative events, Keleigh broke the cycle. She accepted her situation but refused to let where she was define who she was. She learned new skills, including crochet, and remembered a detective who had given her daughter a stuffed frog during a really hard time, and how much that meant to them. She initiated an idea called "Healing from the Inside" where she and the women she teaches create stuffed animals, hats, and scarves, which they then donate. After we met, Keleigh donated some of

these creations to Deep Heart for the poor, elderly, and orphans we try to help in various countries. A month later, in Santiago, Chile, I met an 80-year-old woman in a neglected home for the elderly. Her name was Maria Flor, and the winter cold hurt her bones. I gave her a scarf and stuffed bear made by Healing from the Inside. A smile spread across her face as she teared up, whispering, "Gracias, mi hija, this is the best gift I have ever gotten." She found a spark of joy and began singing in the evenings. Her voice brought peace to Juan Carlos, who was dying of cancer in the next room. When his granddaughter visited the next day, he made her laugh, and so on. A ripple effect of hope because Keleigh introduced a link of creative kindness into a chain of pain. She looked beyond herself and got over the "walls." Keleigh says, "If I can do it, trust me, anybody can."



Did you know... Desmond Tutu was just a child in apartheid-era South Africa, he and his mother were walking down the street when a tall white man — a priest in a cassock — stepped off the sidewalk to let them pass and tipped his hat to his mother. That small gesture of respect deeply moved young Tutu, because Black people were never treated with dignity by white people in that time. He later said: "It changed my life. I saw hope that there could be another way." That priest was Trevor Huddleston, an outspoken opponent of apartheid. Desmond Tutu went on to become a global leader for peace and justice, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. One tip-of a hat, a tiny sign of respect, changed a man's life, and how many others from that one?



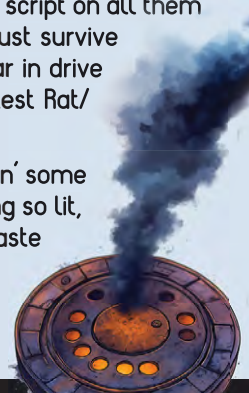
Hey there, ya'll, what's up? Yup, it's me, the one and only Mr. Me. Your boy Shockatony. Actually I never left. I been lowkey sneakin' in and outta your cell, but you been too caught up mumblin' to the ceiling to notice. Did you get a final count on each bolt up there? Anyway, let's talk Ratitude again. Y'all remember what that is, right? The attitude where you choose to be big even if everything and everyone around you is petty and small. Mr. Webster is tryna to get that word in his book. RATITUDE: An attitude so big it is not shaped by the stuff around you, but by the stuff inside you.

So check it out, there's this story in the good book where the dude Moses is sendin' scouts to spy out the land. Most of those mugs come back and bring a boat load of bummer. Talkin' 'bout giant enemies, strong walls, hard work, whack food, danger and a pretty hopeless picture. They said, "this is a land that devours..." And I mean, they wasn't wrong. The challenge was real. But that's where it comes down to Ratitude also known as HEART, feel me?

So this other dude, Caleb, he got that next level Ratitude. He sees the same land as the bummer bringers, but he steps up and drops these 5 words, 5 words I want you to remember, bro, and get into that thick skull of yours, "We can certainly conquer it!" 'Cuz of that heart, God blessed him big time (oh, don't even ask 'bout the other fools. Not good) (Numbers.13-30).

But yo, "prison land" is prison land. Same grind for you, me, and 11 million other heads around the world. We see what's in front of us and what's around us, but we dig deep within us and pull out that Ratitude. We flip the script on all them debbie downers. We pick an attitude so big that we don't just survive our time, we deep dive and strive to come alive, put the car in drive till we arrive at "thrive", you get me? Ok, high five! (My latest Rat/Rap hit single for you.)

Now I'm talkin' about doing real stuff here not just empty chit chat. Like doin' a homie's laundry to lift 'em up. Sharin' some of that gourmet food you get with another mate. Droppin' a fresh idea for a game, a club, a talent show. Something so lit, even I ain't thought of it yet. Feel me? So what them 5 words I told you to remember? Alright, I gotta dip. Toothpaste ain't gonna steal itself, and there's socks waitin' to be chewed through. Y'all got this, stay big.





# AN INNER CITY KID BY RUTH



All my life I've been thrown around. Found myself down on the ground. Tossed here and there and set aside, But you know what? It's ok, because I got this place I hide. Yeah, don't worry about me or offer pity, Because I'm a kid with an inner city. I got a hope skyscraper size. A purpose bigger than a high rise. And all the negative stuff I see, I use like bricks to build the inner me. I set my focus beyond routine, to eternal things like this kingdom unseen. Yeah I'm an inner city kid, I sweep my mind and just get rid, Of all the labels and lies, I won't dwell on the "whys". Sure, I've had it rough, but I push past the outer stuff. Cuz I'm an inner city kid, not defined by things I did. Doesn't really matter how life treats me, Because I got this city, where God meets me. And the affliction I face, He uses to build my inner place. So I'll embrace these battles around me, I know I'll make it because He found me. Yeah, my heart is getting so big it can't be hid. Because me?

Well, I'm an inner city kid.



## Ramon

We met this man named Ramon in a small town in Mexico. He was just sitting there crying out to the public for help. He had elephantiasis since birth which is a condition that makes his legs massive. He is in constant pain and can't hardly carry the weight of his leg to get out of his wheelchair. We had lunch together and as he could not read, I took a bit to read to him the Scriptures and explain the hope of eternal life beyond the suffering of this life. He impacted me as much as I impacted him and I will never forget his warm smile, quick laugh, and upbeat attitude. Sure is a massive dose of perspective when you deal with your issues and pains.



CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

## Close Call

We were having a barbecue at the State park. It was a beautiful cool evening in Indiana. We had just finished a game of flag football, lucky for us we didn't have to try to tackle you. You did some killer out-juke- moves and scored several touchdowns. When you got too far ahead, you even felt bad and let someone else score without them knowing, but I noticed. The autumn leaves were in peak and we had taken so many beautiful pictures of the orange, red and yellow leaves. We lit up the grill to throw on the hamburgers. The smell was amazing.



I decided to run over to the nearby quick stop to grab a few liters of soda, you offered to come to carry the loot. We were distracted as we talked while waiting to cross the street. The pedestrian light turned green and I stepped into the street looking back at you at the exact same time a black pickup truck sped through the light at 60 mph. You frantically screamed, "Look out!!!" You dove toward me. You grabbed my arm just in time to keep me from getting hit. You pulled me back onto the sidewalk. We were both safe.

I was a bit shook up and so were you. It was so close that I felt the wind from the truck blow by. My heart was racing, "Wow, at any minute it can all be over". "Yeah, makes you want to seize your moments," you add. I would have been taken to the hospital that day, maybe to the morgue, had it not been for your quick thinking and heroic action. "Thank you for being so alert," I say, "You got the stuff of a real superhero inside of you".



## The Master *by Michael*

Jesus is not what you see today in public display, He is a living Brother who sees what's inside you, and is waiting to sit beside you. He is the healer of scars and memories, The Einstein of complex difficulties, He is the Doctor for every pain, The Preventer of the insane, The Master of the Soul,

The Psychologist of the hole, The Inventor of ingenuity, The Creator of creativity, He can enter your mind and heart, Make the prison world fall apart, He requires no good behavior, But can tip the scales in your favor, He can equalize your equilibrium, He is the just Judge and the Justifier of the unjust.







## One Night In

# Yellowstone

By Sarah Joy

**M**y hammock swung under pine silhouettes as I watched the stars emerge. The campfire crackled and a loon called across the lake. I was listening intently, hoping to hear the howl of a wolf. I was in Yellowstone, WY, and wolves were now thriving here. They fascinate me with their mystery and beauty. So, figuring it was impossible to ever see one, I was hoping to at least hear them from a reasonable distance.

I added a log to the fire, determined not to close my eyes until I'd heard wolves or the sun rose. But my weary body had a mind of its own and I fell fast asleep under the night sky. Suddenly, something woke me. Eyes and ears scanning the dark forest, I froze as a pair of glowing eyes met mine across the fire's embers.

Not even fifteen feet away stood a white wolf, watching me. I blinked. He was still there. I couldn't believe my eyes. My heart was racing. Neither of us moved. Once or twice, he looked at the fire, but his eyes kept returning to mine. I don't know how long we watched each other. It felt like forever. Then, suddenly, he disappeared back into the trees. As I lay there, shocked, I heard the echo of wolves howling in the night. Their cry was deep and moving. I think, in a way, it expresses something we all feel inside: *an ancient, profound crying out of our soul to be found, to belong.*

When I woke, a thrill ran through me as I remembered. *But was it too special to be real? Could it have just been a dream?* I grabbed a cup of strong black coffee and went to where the wolf had stood. Sure enough, in the dirt near the fire, were fresh wolf tracks. *It was no dream.*

Moments like this are rare, so I treasure it in my heart. I can still clearly see his eyes, his piercing gaze, meeting mine. There was a stillness and confidence to that wild wolf that are hard to put into words. But one phrase keeps

**Flint** (noun)

1. A hard, sedimentary cryptocrystalline form of quartz, used historically to make tools, arrows, or knives because of its strength and durability. 2. Something symbolizing toughness, resilience, or hardness.

coming to mind: *a face like flint.* I can only describe the depth in his eyes as *unflinching resolve.* The long harsh winters and realities of the wild had forged the ultimate survivor.

Brother or sister, I don't know all that you have been through. But I have no doubt that you've experienced, as have I, the 'savage wild' of this chaotic world. Blizzards and cliffs might seem like a welcome challenge compared to what you've faced. So how are we to not only survive but thrive, in such a wilderness as this?

I contemplate the words of the 'pioneer', Isaiah, *"The Lord God helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed."* (Isaiah 50:7). I ask myself, *'What does this mean? How can I do this?'* Isaiah sat somewhere and, just like us, had to calculate, contemplate, and resolve things deep within. He made a choice, *"If there is a God, and if He will help me, then I will stand in that reality. In Him. Nothing will faze me. The challenges of the day are but fleeting shadows that I gaze beyond. I will not flinch, because I see beyond what is around me to the One Who stands beside me."* That choice is what puts in me that same wolf's gaze—the unwavering resolve of knowing I don't have to face the wild alone. And neither do you. Neither do you.



It's a beautiful morning in Northern California. We decided to take a hike into the Redwood National forest. We notice that there is a tiny trail leading into a deep cove of trees. We keep going and actually walk through a massive hollowed out tree trunk! We comment how every true adventure starts off the beaten path. After trekking through some tight bramble, all of the sudden everything clears and, bam! You look up and there is the most unique and unexpected thing you have ever seen. A tree house built into the most phenomenal tree! It is no ordinary tree house. A genius tree house. We imagine it like some kind of "Lord of the Rings" castle! We get closer, and notice a door has been carved out. I start guessing passwords "Krispy Kreme, Cinnamon Churros, Nutter Butter..." You laugh and kick it open!! The enormous tree trunk has actually been carved out and there is a staircase on the inside!

The first impression takes our breath away. The staircase winds with the perfect angle and there is a woven vine as a hand rail. The smell of sap is so rich. The texture and composition of the artistry is astounding. Polished pine-carved steps take us spiraling upward. There are lights positioned perfectly to illuminate our way into beautifully situated rooms. There are chairs and tables, carpets and blankets, and green flourishing leaves with blossoms everywhere we look. Everything is alive. You are amazed, "It's what I have always wanted, a secret place that I could escape into. It must have taken a really long time to build something like this". "No doubt it did," I say. "Ever read John 14:23 where Jesus says that He will come and make an abode within?" We talk about what this practically means and you surprise me with your insight. "Abode. What a cool word. I want to build that, no matter how much time and work it takes. I need a refuge like that, a place all my own." We go up to the highest point and there is a huge balcony with a 360 view! Sure beats a flat screen! Wow! Talk about a breathtaking perspective! You can see for miles and miles in every direction. Breathe in that sweet breeze. Hear the melody of the songbirds. In this place, you realize nothing else matters!

He called it quits...  
but the gold was  
right there.



## Don't You Dare Give Up

Imagine you're digging in a mine where you sensed there might be gold. You're about to hit the 'mother lode' and you give up just before you do. Would anything be more tragic? Imagine you've labored, 'pushed on' a hundred times, but finally had enough, and 'just can't do it anymore'. But only a few inches further and it would have all been worth it. Maybe you've been working at stuff for some years now. Maybe things just haven't 'clicked' yet. Maybe you heard our message and at times feel, "I tried, but I can't." Brother, it's not gold we're talking about here, but eternal life. You must fight on. Jesus says, "He who endures to the end will be saved."<sup>77</sup> So don't you dare give up. The reward is great to those who overcome. It will all be worth it (Rev.3:12 + 21, Mt.13:44).



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## A Land To Explore *By Elizabeth*

Let us take a journey out of time, unlock the clock, and break down the boundary lines. There is a land that's yours, it's completely uncharted. So stake your claim, it awaits the rugged hearted. It's off the grid so leave your baggage behind, doesn't care what you did, let go of the grind. Open as if a door the pages to the Scriptures, relevant words come to life like moving pictures. They do not unfold as you might expect, nor is it in the past where this all takes effect.

But for now in your cell, actual and practical, quite raw; transporting you above the walls, beyond the halls and over all pitfalls. For beyond black letters on white paper is an eternal portal into something far greater.

This is God's Word to reveal Himself to the world, to show you light in the darkness and give you the hidden pearl.

Like wind to a sail, rain to the desert land, it's what our brain was made for and needs to understand. Think of an army of skeletons brittle from death stand to their feet and draw back their breath. A gritty guy defeats a belligerent giant, conquering thousands with a swag defiant.

A soldier, fisherman, farmer, widow, life-long thief, Grabbed by hope and chose to actually believe. People thrown into prison, forgotten with years to wait, getting dumped into tar pits and lions, beaten as slaves. Living in caves, homeless and hungry, treated roughly, whipped, stoned, blistered and bloody. Holding onto something invisible that pulled them through, impossible predicaments, in the furnace of afflictions, they found true. True grit, true backbone, a face set like stone, yeah, true tough, They overcame the mundane...



### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES & STUDY

The Scriptures referenced throughout the magazine are listed here by number.

Example: "44" would be Galatians 2:20. Also, use this as a topical study to help you get into the Word.

- |                                              |                                                                               |                                      |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Why do bad things happen?                 | 35. The Holy Spirit can help:                                                 | 70. Luke 5:8-10                      |
| 2. 1John 2:15/5:19/ James 4:4                | 36. Jn.14:18+26/15:26/16:7                                                    | 71. How to be the greatest:          |
| 3. Eph.6:12/1Peter 5:8                       | 37. Romans 8:15-27                                                            | 72. Matthew 18:2-4                   |
| 4. 2Corinthians 4:4/ Luke 4:6                | 38. 1John 2:27                                                                | 73. James 4:6                        |
| 5. John 12:31/16:33/ 18:36                   | 39. Luke 11:13                                                                | 74. Isaiah 57:15/66:2                |
| 6. John 16:11/17:14-16                       | 40. Acts 1:8/Ephesians 1:3-17                                                 | 75. 1Peter 5:5-9                     |
| 7. Matthew 24:12-13/Mark 13:13               | 41. Galatians 5:5+22                                                          | 76. Luke 22:26-27                    |
| 8. Why we do the things we don't want to do: | 42. 1Corinthians 15:45                                                        | 77. John 13:13,34-35/Acts 20:35      |
| 9. Romans 3:10-18                            | 43. The Practical Work of the Cross:                                          | 78. 1John 4:20/Gal.6:2               |
| 10. Romans 7:7-25                            | 44. Galatians 2:20-21                                                         | 79. Dealing with Depression:         |
| 11. Ephesians 2:12-22                        | 45. 1Peter 3:18                                                               | 80. Matthew 11:25-29                 |
| 12. John 3:19-21                             | 46. Isaiah 53:1-12/ Ephesians 5:2                                             | 81. John 8:32-36                     |
| 13. Job 25:6/Isaiah 59:9-15                  | 47. John 3:16-17                                                              | 82. Matthew 6:26-34                  |
| 14. Discovering the Love of the Father:      | 48. Matthew 10:38/16:24-26                                                    | 83. John 7:17+37                     |
| 15. Mark 14:36/Galatians 4:4-7               | 49. 1 Corinthians 11:18ff                                                     | 84. Philippians 4:6-13               |
| 16. Hebrews 2:10-18                          | 50. Colossians 1:13-22                                                        | 85. John 6:35                        |
| 17. Ps.27:10/2Cor.6:17-18                    | 51. Hebrews 7:23-28                                                           | 86. John 10:9-10                     |
| 18. Romans 5:8                               | 52. Galatians 3:13                                                            | 87. Healing relationships:           |
| 19. John 16:27                               | 53. Philippians 2:5-11                                                        | 88. Matthew 18:21-35                 |
| 20. 1John 4:10-19                            | 54. Mark 16:6                                                                 | 89. Luke 6:27-35                     |
| 21. Prov. 9:10/ Romans 1:19-20               | 55. Finding real forgiveness:                                                 | 90. Colossians 2:3/ 3:12-24          |
| 22. Psalms 19:1                              | 56. Micah 7:19/Acts 3:19                                                      | 91. Matthew 25:35                    |
| 23. Understanding how to change:             | 57. Romans 4:1-18                                                             | 92. Matthew 5:44, 6:14               |
| 24. John 3:3-8, John 1:9-13                  | 58. Colossians 1:14/2:13-15                                                   | 93. The true church vs hypocrisy:    |
| 25. Matthew 7:7                              | 59. Psalms 32:1/ 130:3-4                                                      | 94. John 4:24                        |
| 26. Phil.3:7-14                              | 60. Hebrews 7:16+27/9:12/10:1-22                                              | 95. Acts 17:24                       |
| 27. Luke 15:11-32                            | 61. Why God does not expect us to try to be a "good person" 1 Timothy 1:15-16 | 96. John 9:39                        |
| 28. Luke 18:10-14                            | 62. Romans 3:20-28                                                            | 97. Mark 7:6                         |
| 29. Isaiah 55:6-11                           | 63. Galatians 2:16,21 + 3:10-11                                               | 98. Matthew 7:24-27                  |
| 30. Luke 14:26-33                            | 64. Romans 1:17/Galatians 3:29                                                | 99. John 14:23                       |
| 31. Psalms 51:1-19                           | 65. Mark 10:18                                                                | 100. 2 Timothy 3:1-5                 |
| 32. 2Corinthians 5:17                        | 66. Romans 8:1-8                                                              | 101. John 2:19                       |
| 33. Matthew 17:20/Mark 9:23                  | 67. Romans 10:4-13                                                            | 102. The hidden reward in suffering: |
| 34. Romans 6:21-23                           | 68. John 16:9                                                                 | 103. Romans 5:3-6                    |
|                                              | 69. Mark 2:17/John 3:17                                                       | 104. 1Peter 1:6-9                    |
|                                              |                                                                               | 105. 1Corinthians 1:26-27            |

...proving eternal life is enough. An undying Love, a ladder to the everlasting Father; words that build you a home wherever you wander. Jesus speaks to cut to the quick, no fluff, no tricks, just the real grit to give your heart a new jumpstart.

So when you're in over your head, need something more, and want to stop the clock inside, Explore the Scriptures for the keys to unlock and get out of your time!!

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|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 106. Rom.8:28-39               | 124. John 8:48/Lk.7:34            |
| 107. Luke 6:20-23              | 125. Justice of God               |
| 108. 1Peter 2:19-25            | 126. Romans 12:19-21              |
| 109. 2 Cor.12:9/Romans 8:17-18 | 127. Psalm 109:22-25              |
| 110. Hebrews 4:15/James 1:12   | 128. Matthew 10:25-31             |
| 111. Hebrews 11:1, 6, 24       | 129. 1Cor. 4:3-5/Mt.24:27-44      |
| 112. Growing Salvation within: | 130. Thought Replacement Therapy: |
| 113. Mark 4:3-32               | 131. Romans 8:1                   |
| 114. Luke 12:5                 | 132. Romans 10:9-10               |
| 115. Matthew 11:12, 17:20      | 133. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5         |
| 116. Genesis 15:5-6            | 134. Romans 12:2                  |
| 117. John 12:24-25/Mk.8:36     | 135. Colossians 3:1-4             |
| 118. Suffering of Jesus        | 136. Isaiah 41:8/James 2:23       |
| 119. 2 Corinthians 5:21        | 137. 1 John 3:2/1Cor.13:12        |
| 120. Matthew 27:46             | 138. Jeremiah 30:12-17            |
| 121. John 19:30                | 139. Heb.4:12, Eph.6:17           |
| 122. John 10:20/Isaiah 50:6-9  | 140. Hebrews 2:11                 |
| 123. Matthew 5:10-12           |                                   |



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