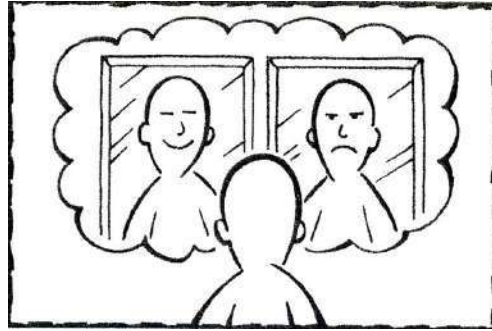


“The past can be useful as a tool, lesson, or reference.”

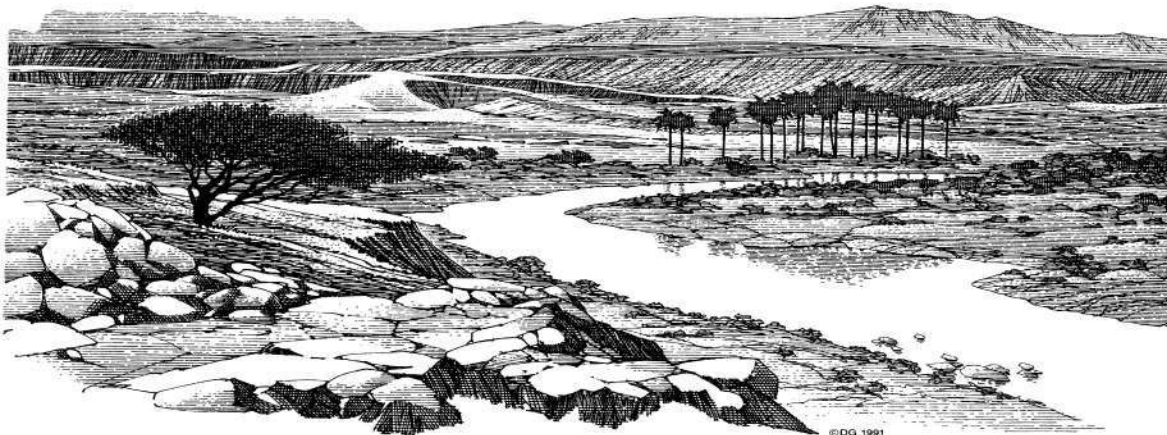
“It is useful to remember the past, but don’t try to relive it again.”

Use the experience of the past in your present, in order to build a future.

Live your life one day at a time.



QUESTIONS AND/OR THOUGHTS WE MAY WANT TO DISCUSS WITH A CHAPLAIN, LIKE “DO I NEED HELP, DO I WANT HELP, WHERE WILL I FIND HELP, WILL I ACCEPT HELP?”



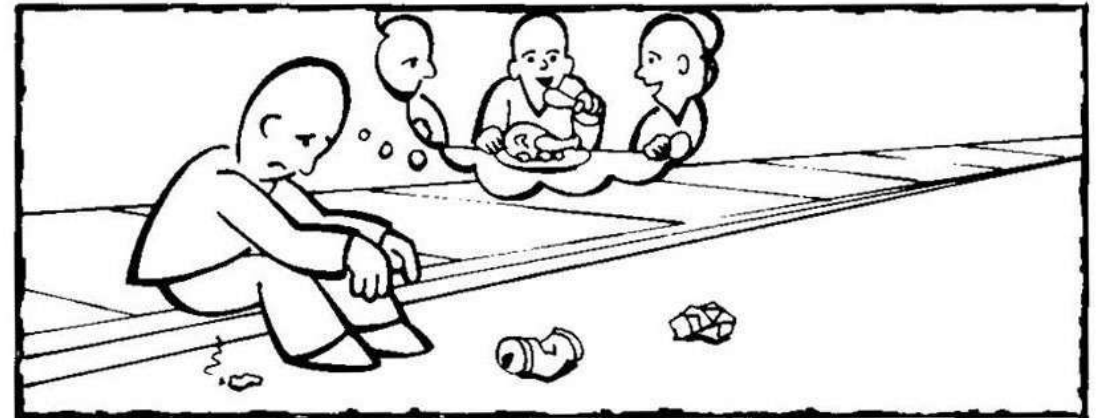
FINDING THE “WAY” IN JAIL

VOLUME ONE

TOUGH CHOICE

13

A man had a nice little business. He and his two sons worked hard. They were successful. The man planned that the boys would take over the business when he died. But the younger son was bored with the hard work. He felt that life was passing him by. He wanted to have some fun before he died. So, one day he asked his father to give him cash for his share of the estate. The father said, “O.K.” and gave his son a fair price. The young man packed his clothes and took off for the big time. There he had a great time drinking, gambling, using dope etc. Then his money ran out. One day he woke up broke. He had no money for liquor or for dope. No money for a girlfriend, a place to stay, or even for food! He couldn’t find a job and while sitting on a curb



he remembered the good meals he had had at home, as well as his room and his friends. Looking around, he saw the choices he had. He could go on drinking or taking drugs. He could get involved with a gang and perhaps be dead by the time he was 25, or end up in prison, OR he could give up this crazy life, go home and start over. The future was up to him.

*What do you think the young man was looking for out of life?
What do you think about the way he tried to find it?
If you were telling this story to your son, how would you end it?
I think I would tell him.....*

You can find out how Jesus ended this story by reading the Gospel of Luke 15:11-32.

What do you think of the choice the Father made?

What do you think of the choice the older brother made?

In what way do you see yourself in this story?

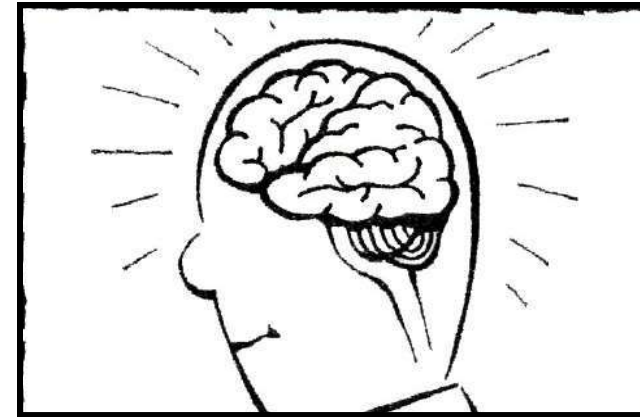
If you do not have a Bible ask the chaplain for one. Look through it to see if you can find other times when people made a choice.

MAKING A CHOICE

Let's not bother talking about the loving father or the stubborn older brother. Let's just try to get a line on the thinking of the young man.

What might have been some of the thoughts that ran through his head...

1. when he realized that he was broke and could not find a job?
2. When he discovered that he could not get help from the people he thought would help him?
3. When was he walking along the road close to home?
4. When his father gave him new clothes and threw a party



THE HEAD CHANGES THINGS

What's in the story for us? One thought is that change will come not from things changing around us, or from other people changing, nor from getting the right breaks.

It will come **ONLY** when we change our way of thinking and the way we look at people and especially ourselves. We have to see that we can change and be willing to do what is necessary to change. Change starts in the head, changing our attitudes and the way we think and act. Any other change does not help very much.

The young man in the story used his head, the most important tool anyone has in life. He could recall the past, and picture possibilities in the future. He could remember choices he made and their consequences. He could feel and see what happened to the money. He could recall what he wanted out of life and how he failed to get all those things.

Thinking about the past is both good and bad. It is bad because the past cannot be changed. It is good because it helps us see where the road we are on is going. We can't change what happened a short time ago, but we can change what might happen in the future. His head helped the young man see clearly where he was going. It showed him the different road he could take, and what was necessary to do, in order to walk that new road. It helped him be clear about what he really wanted out of life. It decided what he was going to do.

It is only when our spirit decides we need to change that our heart can soften and transform us. When we are truly changing is when our heart is being filled with the love of God and it pours out on us and on others through us. Have you ever felt this change and the peace and joy it brings to you?

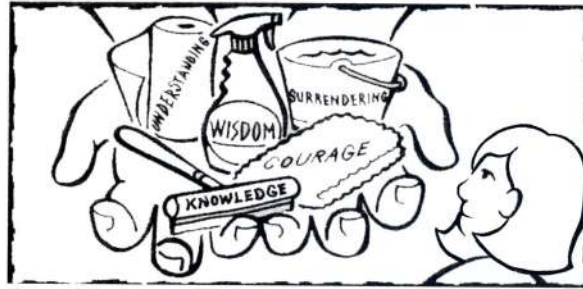
Each of us has a set of tools that are gifts from God. These tools are knowledge, understanding, wisdom, courage, counsel, and respect for God.

BIG WORDS!

Let's put this in another way.

WE NEED TO:

- see the situation as it is (knowledge)
- realize that change is really needed (understanding)
- figure out the best way to make the change (wisdom), and trust
- have the guts to keep at it (courage)
- ask for help and advice (counsel)
- respect God. Follow his commandments.

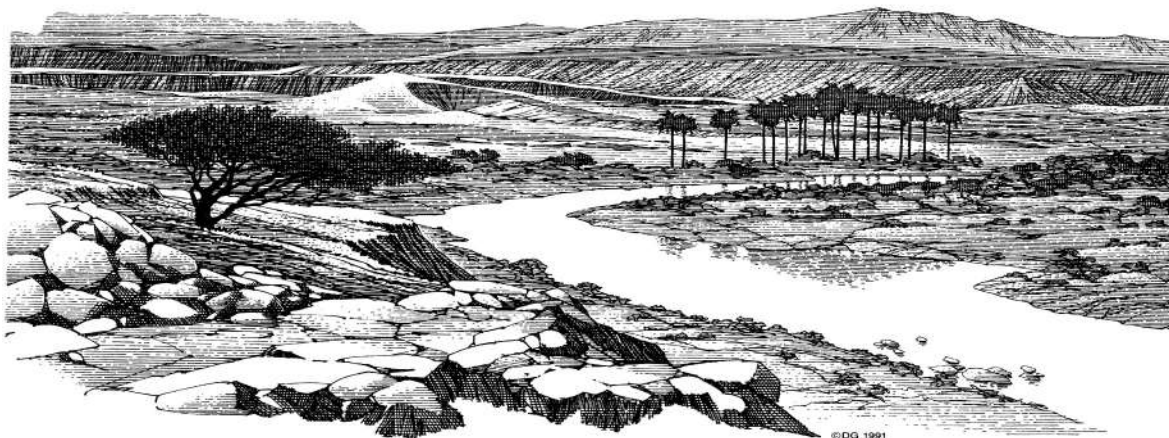


We may think that God does not give a damn about me. He does not help us. Our prayers are not answered and this God stuff does not make any sense. Here are some of the statements men make about God being in their lives.

I do not know God and he doesn't care about me! God isn't on my side! Why did God do it to me?

But, there is another view. God is on my side. God loves us and forgives us. God does help me!

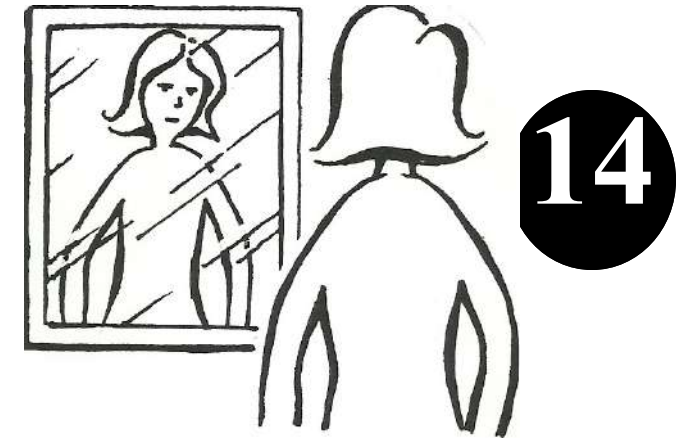
Think of a time when you feel that God has helped you. How did the tools mentioned help you in that situation?



FINDING THE "WAY" IN JAIL

VOLUME ONE

TAKE A LOOK



When we look into a mirror we see what other people see - two eyes, two ears, a mouth, a nose etc. What we can't see in that mirror is what kind of person we are looking at. We can't see how she feels about herself. We can't see what kind of person she wants to be, and what she is willing to do, to become that kind of person. We can't see what is really important to that person. It would be great if we had a magic mirror to see below the surface and discover what kind of person is behind the face in the mirror. We can create a mirror in our mind's eye. In it we will see all sorts of things that the glass does not reflect. We will be able to see what the guy is really like. We can talk with the face in the mirror and not worry about what other people will hear or say. We also will be able to get some straight answers and some questions and ideas we have. What kind of questions? How about these?

- *Is that person in the mirror locked up inside himself as well as being in jail?*
- *What image of her does she want other people to have?*
- *What is really going on inside her?*
- *Do I really like the person I see in the mirror?*
- *Is she serious about wanting to change her life?*
- *What is she looking for inside herself now, and when she gets out?*
- *Is it all too overwhelming?*
- *Does she feels good about himself, or worthless, or angry, or lost?*

There are no simple answers to these and similar questions. We have to ask them time and time again about the guy in the mirror. Our answers will change over the years. BUT the real me will never have a chance to come out unless we begin to ask the right questions TODAY.

Inside of us, there is good and bad. Sometimes we convince ourselves that we have more bad than good, But we ARE good and we need to let that goodness out!

THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Sounds like silly questions. They are, if you don't dig deeper and ask other questions about the person behind the face. You need to ask the right questions to get to know the woman who is behind the face. What you do about the answers you get to your questions is entirely up to you.

A real woman has the courage to go deeper into herself and ask questions about who she is and what she wants to be.

What are three or four GOOD things you can say about the woman whose face is in the mirror?

You may say she's good-looking, or friendly, perhaps she is loving, caring, or generous. Maybe you see someone who is loved by a mother, a husband or boyfriend, children. Look carefully and thoughtfully.

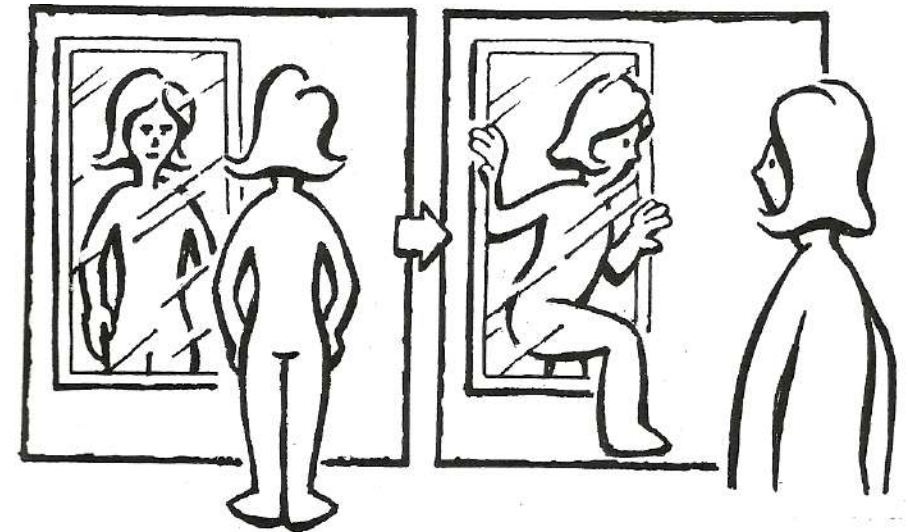
WHO DO YOU SEE?

What are one or two things you would like to change in him?

Maybe she needs to change some habits, clean up her mouth, stop using drugs or alcohol. Perhaps she needs to spend more time with her family.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Take another look at the face of the woman in the mirror and ask, "Where are you?" This also sounds like a foolish question because the obvious answer seems to be, "In jail." Maybe a better way to ask it would be, "What's going on in your life right now? What are you worried about? How do you feel about things? Where would you like your life to go? Where do you think you are going?" These are key questions but it is not easy to find the answers. We have to get past the obvious problems of where we physically are, and look at what is going on deep down inside ourselves. It takes time to do this and the real answers come slowly. That's O.K. What is important is the willingness to look, and to be willing to change what we find.



To begin to look for an answer to this question, as well as to the other questions, it helps to create a quiet space around yourself. That's hard. There is constant noise from the TV, the guys talking, the deputies calling out. But you can move inside yourself and cut off the outside world for a short time while you think about the tools you already have which will help you become what you want to be.

YOU ARE INVITED...

Most of us could use a little help to answer some of the questions the guy in the mirror might have. While none of us need someone to tell us what to do, we sometimes can use help to know where to look for answers. So if you like what you have just read and you want to know more, we invite you to continue the journey you have already begun. There are more volumes to explore and as we go along, we'll suggest some helps or tools to assist you. If you wish, someone from the Chaplain's office is looking forward to accompanying you.

Ask the Chaplain for a list of places that may be a help to you or your family.

Have you ever heard of the story about the footprints in the sand?

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the LORD. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand. One belonging to him and the other to the LORD.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the LORD about it. "LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why, when I needed you most, you would leave me."

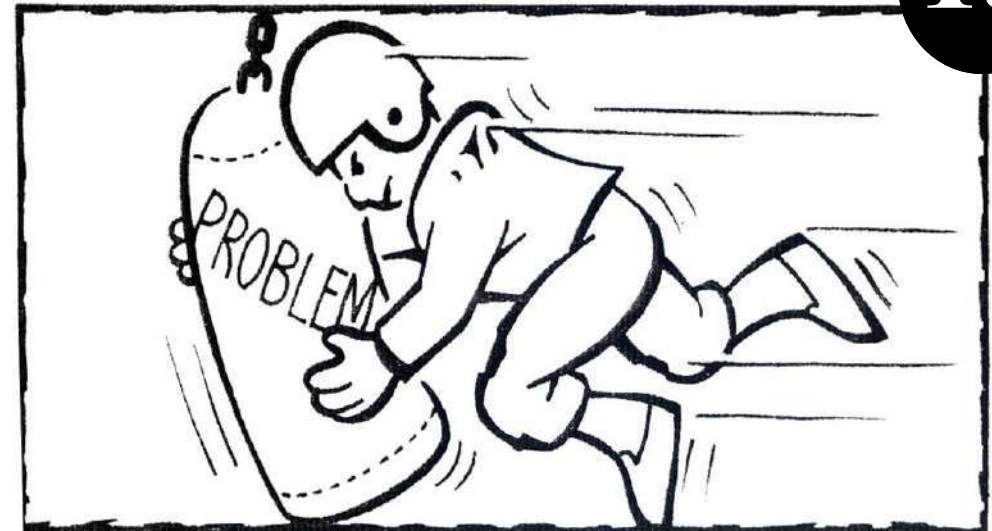
The LORD replied, my precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you! During your times of trial and suffering, when you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.

FINDING THE "WAY" IN JAIL

VOLUME ONE

***GOT A PROBLEM?
LET'S TACKLE IT!***

15

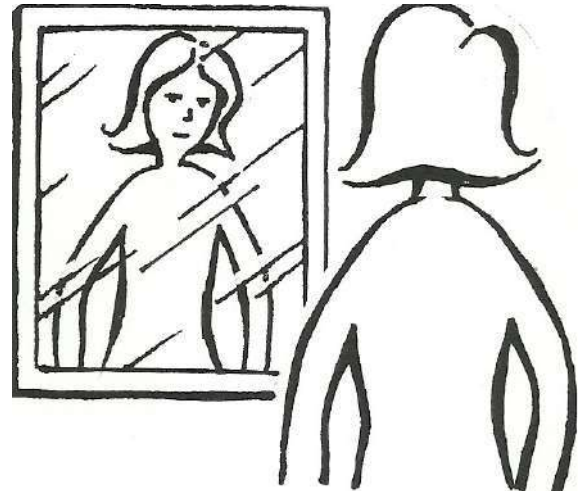


Got a problem? Who hasn't one? What to do about it? One important tool we have is our brain that can think about the problem. Merely thinking about a problem is like sitting in a rocking chair, going back and forth and getting nowhere at all. We need to use our head to get the facts. Then we use our head to decide on a course of action. We just can't hope or pray that the problem will go away or that someone else will solve it for us. SEE—JUDGE –ACT, three simple steps used by people from the beginning of time.

Sometimes it helps to talk with the woman in the mirror as if she were a good friend telling you how she sees the situations. Set the problem down between the two of you and see what it is, how to judge it and what you might do about it. If you are uncomfortable trying this with a person such as the chaplain, try it on your own.

STEP ONE...TAKE A LOOK!

Take a look at the situation you want to think about and get all the facts lined up, the facts and nothing but the facts. Here's a sample of getting started.

A simple line drawing of a woman from the back, looking into a mirror. The mirror shows a woman's face. The woman in the foreground has short, dark hair and is wearing a light-colored top. The mirror is rectangular and mounted on a wall. The woman in the mirror has long, dark hair and is wearing a light-colored top. The background is plain.

You:
Here I am in jail because of a DUI.
I hate this place. I didn't do any
thing wrong. All I had was a beer
or two....maybe three.

Woman in the mirror:
*Oh yeah? It was closer to eight beers
and you were falling asleep at the
wheel and messing up.*

You:
O.K. I do have one too many at times
but that's no reason for getting 60
days. Besides I'll lose my license,
my relationships...

Woman in the mirror:
*Right! But what are you going to do
about it this time?*

**We can't lie to the
woman in the mirror!**

Go on. Practice what you would say to the face in the mirror to get all the facts in the case clear. No excuses. No blaming someone or something else. Just the cold facts.

STEP TWO...LET'S THINK ABOUT THIS!

When we have the facts, as clearly and as honestly as we can, it is time for step number 2. Let's think about the situation! Is it good or bad? Is it right or wrong? Is it the way I want my life to go? Is it helpful or harmful?

But there are some other general questions, which we can address to the face in the mirror. Questions like, "what do I have going for me? What is going against me? Where and from whom can I look for help? Do I really want to change so that this will not happen again"?

The face in the mirror usually will give you a straight answer.

STEP THREE...LET'S DO SOMETHING!

After working with steps one and two, and answering the questions the face in the mirror puts to us, we're ready for step three. We decide what we think we should and can do about the situation. What do you think the face in the mirror would suggest you do about your DUI?

Another way of naming these three steps is :

- 1) OBSERVE: Have the courage to see the facts in your life. Name them for what they are without being afraid.
- 2) JUDGE: Honestly see if those things that you have observed have been hurting you or others in your life.
- 3) ACT: Begin now by making serious decisions to change and ask God for help in bringing these changes to reality.

On paper these steps seem reasonable and easy. In real life they are not that easy, but they are necessary. We can do them if we really want to change.



The prophet asks God what gifts he should offer to him? God replies, “This is what I ask: That you act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God.”

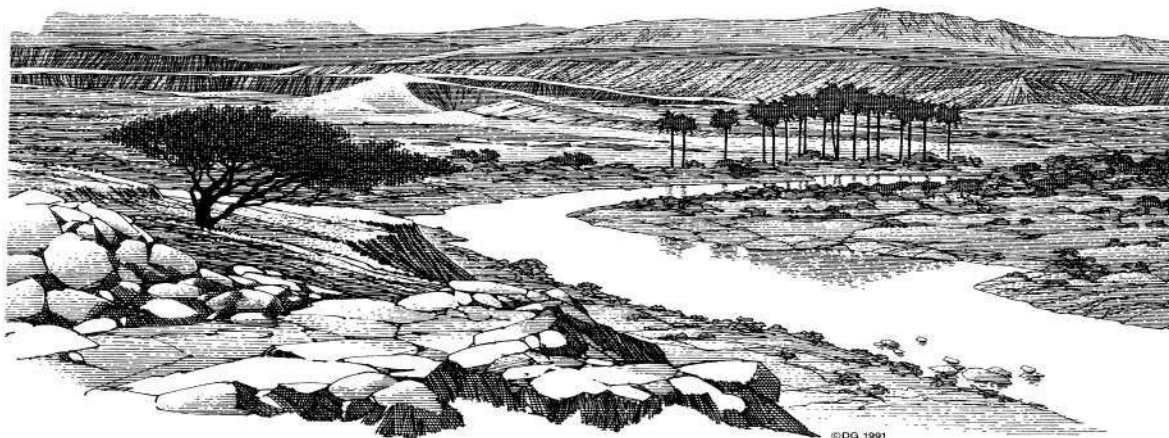
Micah 6:8

Jesus taught us to pray this way to God, our Father.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Have you ever thought how God might respond to you, you being his child, when you say the Our Father sincerely and lovingly?

My son, who is on earth, worried, confused, lonely, and sad. I know exactly what your name is. I always say it and bless it because I love you. Together we will build my kingdom, the one you will inherit. There you will not be alone because I will be with you. I will live in you. I wish you always to do my will. My wish is for you to be happy. You will have the bread for today and I only ask that you share it with your brothers. I will forgive your trespasses before you even do them. I only ask that you also forgive those that trespass against you. I will lead you away from temptation, protecting you from evil. Amen.



FINDING THE “WAY” IN JAIL

VOLUME ONE

16



One of the most important tools we have is help from others. Which others? People who are like us and want to help... people who have learned how to change. We get help especially from God. It is not a miracle, but with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the Bible. Yeah, the bible is a big help.

There is a story in the book of Judges about a man who needed help. Dishonest desert tribes called Medianites each year would steal or burn his wheat and take off with his grapes. He felt that there was nothing he could do to make them stop. He was just a poor farmer. His name was Gideon. God heard his cry for help and sent a messenger to tell him what to do. Gideon did not believe the messenger but God helped him to see that the messenger had really been sent from God. Gideon called the fighting men of the tribes. There were 22,000 of them. God looked at the mob and said, “Too many. Send the weak-hearted guys home.” 10,000 stayed. God said, “still too many. March the men in the desert heat. Take them to a stream, keep the ones who do not stop to drink but who scoop up water with their hands”. Only 300 remained. Gideon did not know what to do. Three hundred against several thousands. He did not have a chance. God told him to give each man a horn and an empty bowl in which there was a burning torch, and then to put the three companies at different points around the camp. When Gideon gave the signal they all pulled out their torches, blew their horns, and made as much noise as possible. The Medianites sprung up thinking they were under attack and they began fighting with each other. Then they retreated and ran into an ambush that Gideon set up. They were destroyed. (The full story of Gideon is found in the book of Judges 6:1-7:23)

SOME QUESTIONS:

What do you really think about stories like this one?

Who has been a messenger sent by God in your life telling you that God will help you?

When has God helped you?

The adventures of Paul the Apostle, in the Acts of the Apostles, tell of the many narrow escapes he had with God's help. You might like to read them. The Acts of the Apostles comes right after the four Gospels in the New Testament. You may get a New Testament Bible from the chaplain if you request one.

JUST THOUGHTS...

One person asks another..."Why are you talking so much about God?" The person responded, "If you would have changed my life as He has, I would be talking about you too!"

You have probably read or heard many bible stories that fascinate you by showing God's presence through the years. Who hasn't heard about Adam, Eve and the Garden of Eden, Moses and the parting of the Red Sea, Jonah and the big fish, Jesus and all the miracles? You probably have figured out that there is a truth in every story that can help us.

What do these truths tell us about our life?

The story at the beginning of this folder tells about a messenger that helped Gideon.

Messengers from God come in all forms, and often in unexpected forms! They do not have wings and work wonders. Sometimes these angels look just like you. Sometimes they just say a word or two. It is important to listen for that word.

Who has given you help or offered help in your life? Who is a messenger?



A lady had been drinking too much for many years. She always said she would stop but never did. One day, a person who had worked with her, met her on the street and said, "You look terrible. Why are you trying to kill yourself?" That's all. One sentence, one question. She took her words to heart and asked for help from AA. She turned her life around and made it with the help of AA.

*God,
grant me
the serenity
to accept the
things I
cannot
change.
The courage
to change the
things I can.
And the
wisdom to
know the
difference.*

Another way to ask questions would be to see yourself as the defense attorney for Adam & Eve, or as the prosecuting attorney, or as the judge. What evidence would you present for, or against, them? Another way to break open this incident in your imagination would be to draw a picture of Adam and Eve in the garden. Of course, we cannot use this tool for every verse in the Bible but we can use it on many of the stories. Try it out for a couple of days. Talk with the chaplain or the volunteer and discuss how your imagination has helped you understand some things about yourself and about the way you act.

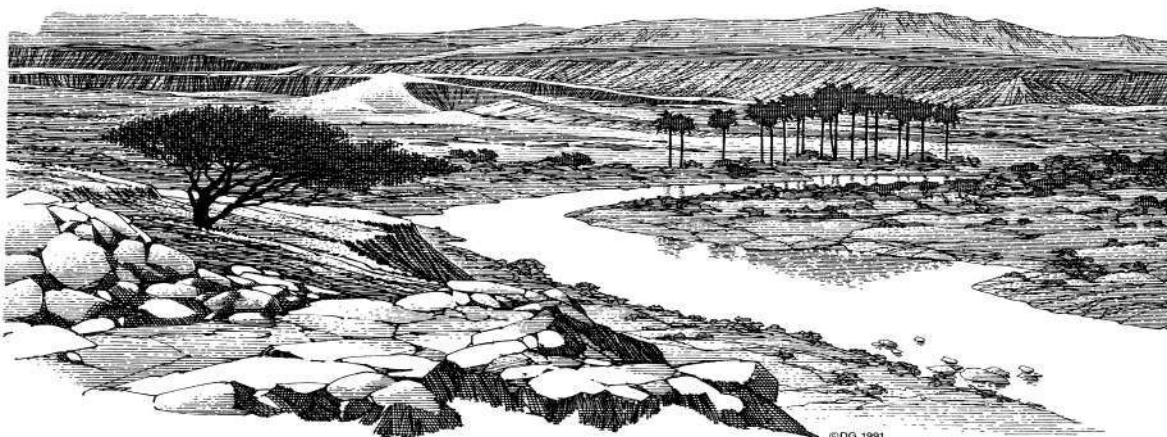


Try reading the stories about Jonah and the big fish, or the Prodigal Son. Both of these stories talk about turning back....are you ready to turn back to God?

The prophet said,

"If you put an end to oppression, to every gesture of contempt, and to every evil word; if you give food to the hungry and satisfy those who are in need, then the darkness around you will turn to the brightness of noon."

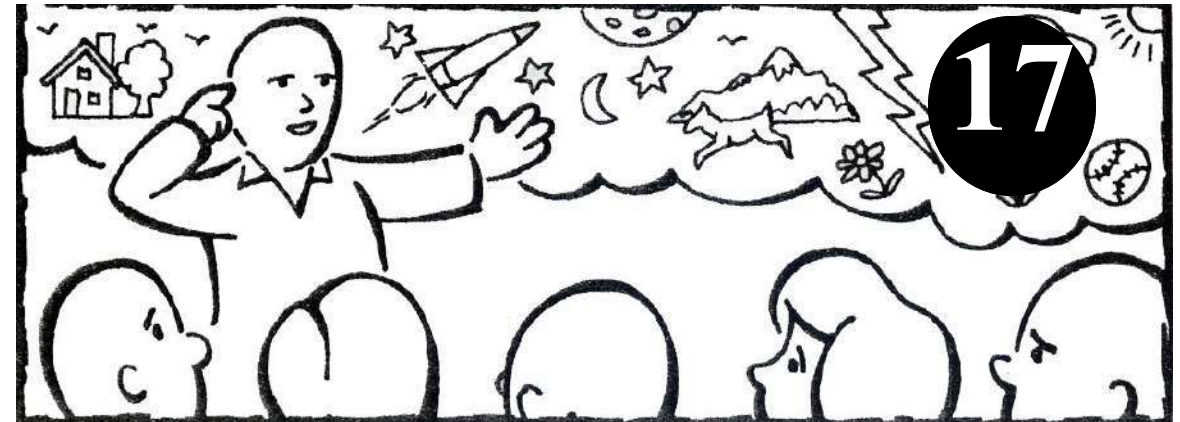
Isaiah 58: 9-12



FINDING THE "WAY" IN JAIL

VOLUME ONE

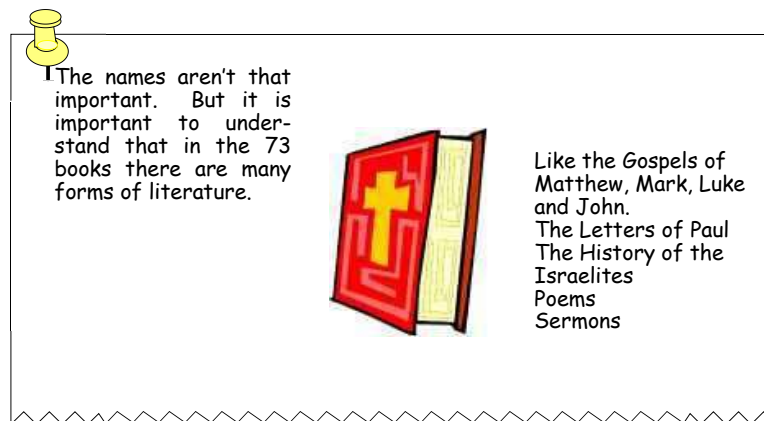
IMAGINATION



Story telling is as old as the human race. People in the past and people today tell stories for different purposes. They tell stories to let others know what they have done. They tell stories to help themselves and others understand what is happening or has happened to them. They create stories to help them understand why things are as they are. Some of these are funny, some tragic, some actually happened; some have very little truth in them. But all have a point to make!

Each of us has a story. It is a very interesting story. Countries and religions and all kinds of groups have stories about their origin. The Jews and the Christians have a collection of books with stories about their relationship with God. This collection of books is called the Bible. Some of the stories in it actually happened. Others may not have happened in just the way the Bible tells them, but the writers all had a purpose in the stories they told. They had a message from God for the people of long ago as well as for us.

The Bible stories have several layers of meaning. The obvious one is not always the most important. For example, in the first book in the Bible, called the Book of Genesis, there is the story of the creation of the world and of all the things in the world, human beings included. No one was around with a video camera to record the events and so the people told how they thought creation happened. It makes no difference if the world is the result of one word spoken by God or by a long evolution set in motion by God. Today we know that the earth, the stars, the sun and moon took millions of years to form, but the story in the Bible is just as true as if they were formed in one instant. It has a message of God's power and concern for human beings that we need to hear today just as our ancestors heard it a thousand or two thousand years ago.



Let's look at one little section of that story. God creates man and woman, Adam and Eve. He places them in a garden, meaning they did not have to work for a living, and that everything that made life pleasant was nearby. God told them that they could eat of the fruit of any tree in the garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Not a bad deal, but we can say, "So what? It has nothing to do with me today." Not so. Not so. There are several layers of meaning in that story. One of which is a good example of how people try to avoid the consequences of their actions by blaming someone else. Adam blames Eve. Eve blames the serpent. No one says, "It was my fault." No one says, "I'm sorry". The consequence of their refusal to take responsibility is that the wonderful life is lost for all people.

To find a message in this story we use a very special tool that we all have. It is our imagination. We can picture in our minds what we could have done in such a situation. We can picture what we might do in the future if we do this or if we do that. With imagination we cannot change the past but we can change the way we think of it and remember it. We can picture a better way of living.



This tool often comes into use when we begin to ask ourselves all kinds of questions. For example, we can read that incident about the tree of good and evil in the Book of Genesis (chapter 2 verse 8 to chapter 3 verse 20) and ask ourselves questions such as, "what would I have done if I had been in their shoes? What different approach could they have taken? What do I see them doing and talking about as they grew older or as they told their children about being locked out of the garden"?

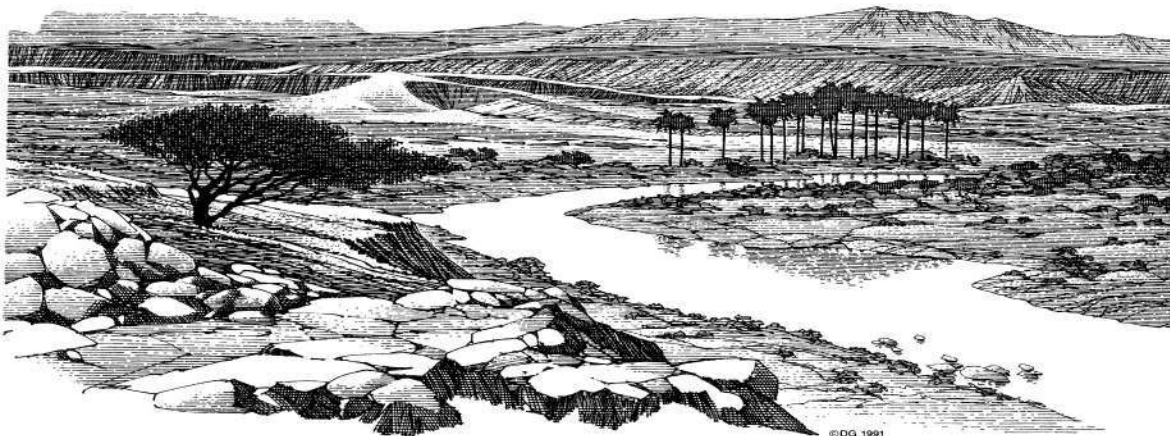
Words are not enough. Actions show what we believe much better than words do.

If it could, the door would nod its head at your responses, but it can't. So it whispers a word of encouragement.

"Glad to see you have a plan. Good luck and I hope I'll never see you again."



What would you silently say



FINDING THE “WAY” IN JAIL

VOLUME ONE

THE DOOR



The door to the jail makes no distinctions. It opens for the men coming IN and it closes behind the men going OUT. It makes no difference to the door whether those passing through are innocent or guilty, whether their stay will be long or short.

But which way the men are walking through that door makes a big difference to them. For example, the first time a man walks through the door he might be angry because he feels that he has been given a raw deal. He might be afraid of what might happen next. He might be worried about how the family will get by. It might be the man's third or fourth time through the door. He might feel good that he only got a few weeks instead of the maximum. He might feel resolved that this is the last time he will drink and drive.

What feelings did you have the last time you walked in through, or out of, that door? Anger, joy, fear, relief, worry? What was your resolution about how you intended to spend your time in jail? What did you plan on doing when you got out?



PERHAPS, THESE ARE SOME OF THE THINGS YOU INTEND TO CHANGE OR PROMISED THAT YOU WOULD DO:

I will read the bible every day.

I will go to prayer call.

I will go to church.

I will treat others the way I want to be treated.

I will look for help from others to deal with my REAL problems.

I will help myself by honestly looking at my life and what I need to change.

I will.....

Believe it or not, as you enter or leave the jail, the door is silently asking you a question or two. It might be helpful to use your imagination and have a talk with the door about what you intend to do with the time between now and the day you walk out through the door. In your imagination hear the door saying to you,

“Well girl, I see you have some time on your hands. What are two or three things in your life that you intend to change so that I never see you again?”

Such an imaginary conversation seems silly. Doors don’t talk. Well then, each time you hear that door open or close it can be a reminder of the resolutions you make while you are here.

But more than that. The sound of that door opening or closing is a reminder from God that He cares for you and that He is close to you all the time. Whether or not you take God seriously, He is present and is concerned about you. More than that. He is willing to help you, no matter what you have done in the past. Each day is a fresh start in God’s eyes.

If we listen carefully we might hear the door asking a question or two:.

Do you take this God stuff and religion seriously?

If not, what has turned you off? Often, we judge others and don’t look at away from God by swelling on our guilt?

If you do take it seriously ,what do you think you should do to show that God is present in your life? Do we believe that God forgives us? Do we forgive ourselves?

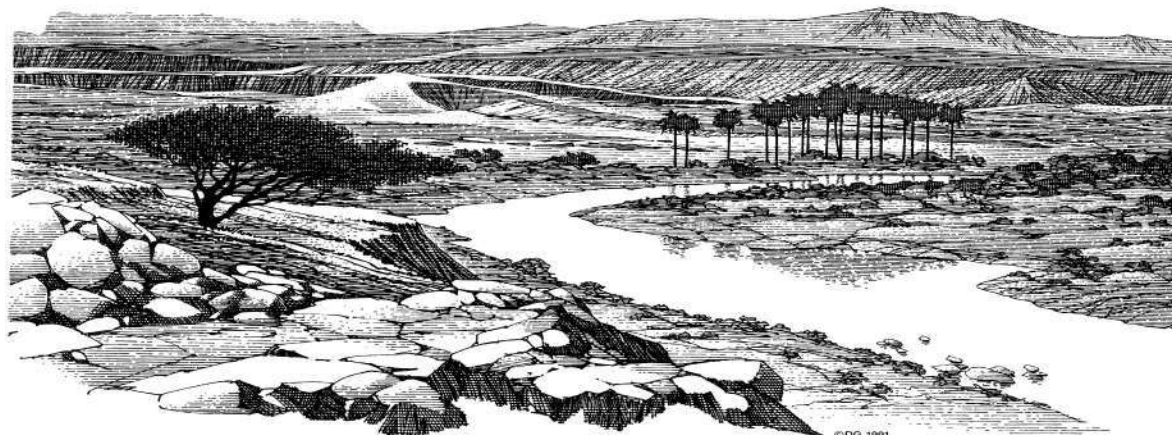


If God forgives us, why can’t we forgive ourselves?

To be stuck could be, for example, every time we make the decision to take drugs--knowing it is bad for us AND it drives us away from family and others.

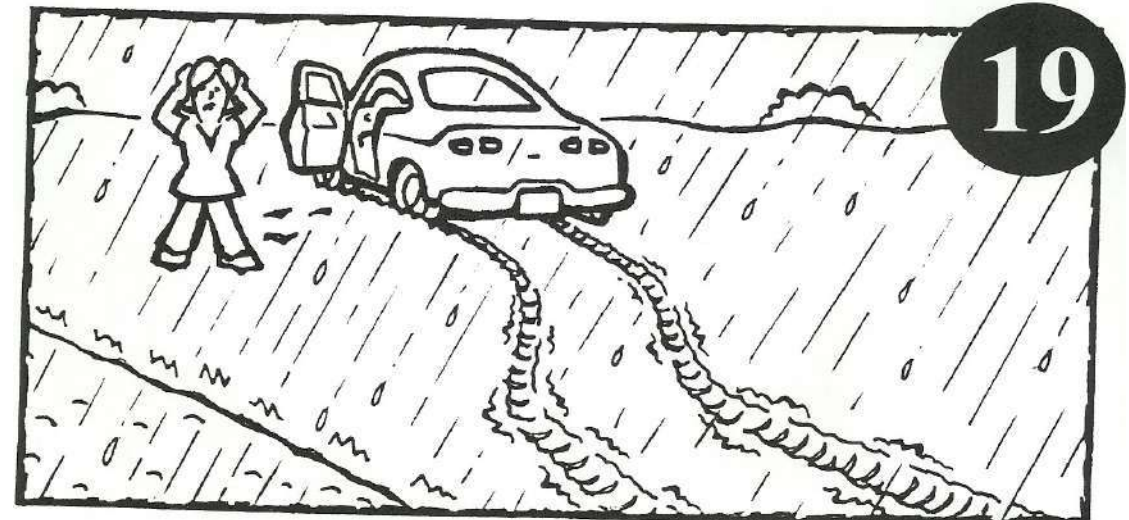
Perhaps being stuck could be when we choose to stay in miserable situations because we do not trust that we can change. Sometimes we choose this so we can continue to be the same, an easy way out! Sometimes we convince ourselves that we are not good enough, "What if I'm no good at all? What if I'm not worth it? Why do I even bother trying?"

Sometimes I know that I am stuck when I have too many thoughts and ideas bouncing around in my head, too many goals to achieve, too many things to fix, so much to change.....isn't this being a bit unrealistic? Aren't we being a little too tough on ourselves? Perhaps I need to develop a plan, get a little organization in my life, maybe I should I ask for help.



FINDING THE “WAY” IN JAIL

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The Way I Am Feeling Now

I remember a long time ago when I went to pick up my boyfriend for a date. It was a rainy day, and I was running a little bit late, living off a country road outside the city. As I was driving to pick him up I decided to take a short cut through a field, knowing that it was probably a little risky...and GUESS WHAT? I took a curve too fast and slid off the road onto the wet and muddy shoulder. I kept pressing the accelerator and the only thing that happened was to go deeper and deeper into the mud...I didn't know what to do. I turned off the engine, put my hands up and said, "NOW WHAT?"

Today, as I reflect on this story, I realized that, at many times in my life, I have been stuck because of my own actions, or maybe because I simply didn't know any better.

The author Wilkie Au, in his book, “The Enduring Heart,” wrote the following:

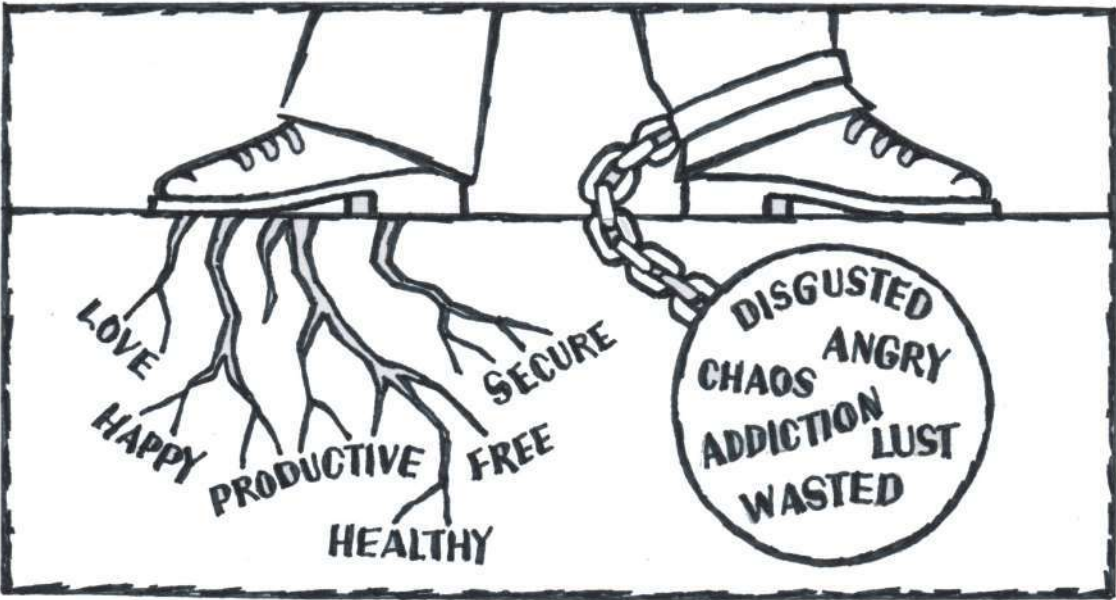
“In trying to walk the distance with soul, it’s important periodically to ask ourselves, ‘Am I rooted or stuck?’ To be rooted is to find ourselves at home with who we are, ever open to growth, to actualizing more of the potential contained in the rich mystery of our being. To be rooted is to feel a confident adequacy in being an autonomous self, yet feeling a deep desire to share ourselves with others in friendship and community. To be rooted is to be peaceful and productive, content and creative, intimate and generative. In short to be rooted is to find that our lives bear rich fruit for ourselves and for others. A blossoming, fruit-bearing tree is rooted; a root-bound plant is stuck.”

Perhaps now is a good time to ask myself a serious question: *AM I STUCK or AM I ROOTED?*

Can you identify with any of these phrases in your life:

<i>STUCK</i>	<i>ROOTED</i>
1. I’m disgusted with myself	1. I’m happy with myself
2. No one loves me	2. I’m capable of loving
3. My life is in chaos	3. I’m peaceful and productive
4. I’m angry and afraid	4. I’m happy and secure
5. I may have an addiction	5. I’m free of addictions
6. I’m always thinking about sex	6. I respect women
7. I’m physically wasted	7. I’m healthy

Let’s take a minute and reflect on these in silence.



OK, now that we’ve had the time to reflect on this, we might ask ourselves a simple, but serious question:

What is the meaning of “being stuck?”

Do I feel “stuck” in this jail and there’s nothing to do to improve my life?

When will the day come that I will have another opportunity?

Why has my life been so hard?

Does this sound like “being stuck?” Do you like to feel that way?

If you don’t like that feeling, what are you willing to do about it?

Maybe, you’ll have an answer the next time we meet.

It is not necessary to be in jail to be stuck, but it is very easy to feel stuck when we have to ask for permission to do anything and have no freedom to do as we please.

Just because I have changed, just because I've accepted God in my life, just because I'm sober, just because I now have people with good values in my life, it doesn't guarantee that the rest of the world is going to change their perception of me right away. What is important is that I know who I am NOW, and I know what I want to do with my life, and I also know that I'm not alone—that others are walking with me in this new way.

Do you ever feel that you aren't getting the respect you need?

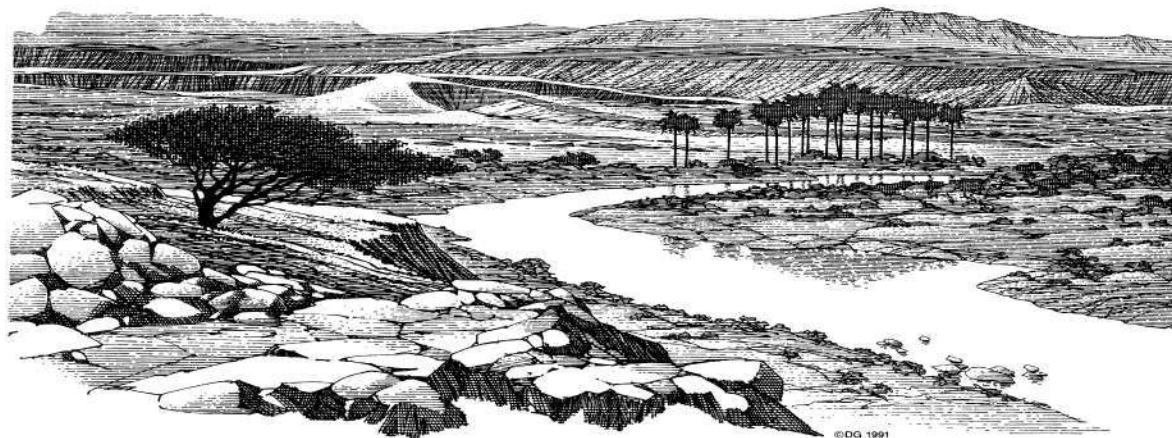
Do you ever feel that people didn't appreciate how hard you were try-

ing?

Do you ever feel that no one cares about your story?

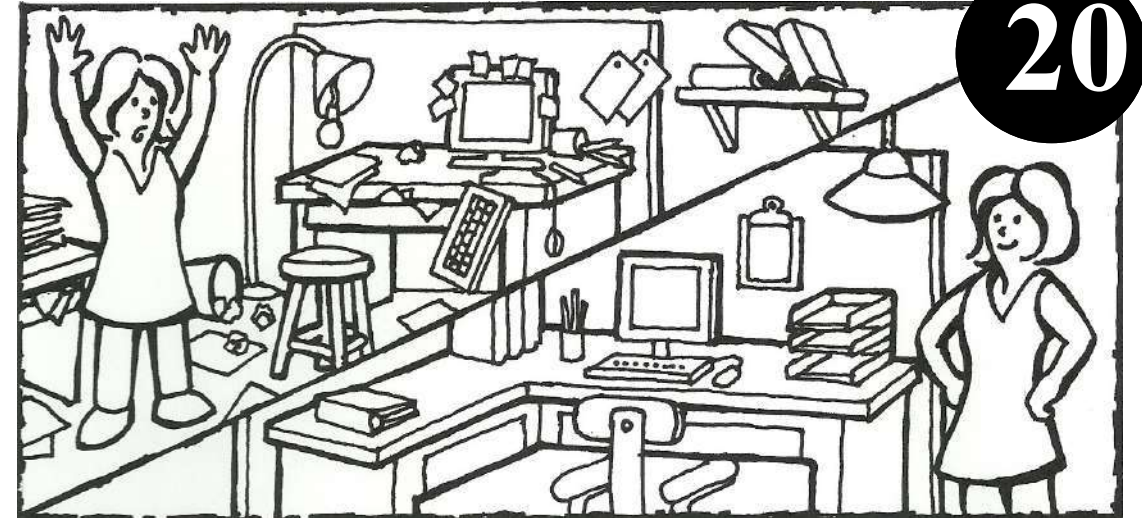
Perhaps we need to remember that change does not come easy. But the question remains, am I tired of my life now? Am I willing to do whatever it takes? If the answer is YES, it's because you ARE worth it---- and you know what??

GOD already knows that!



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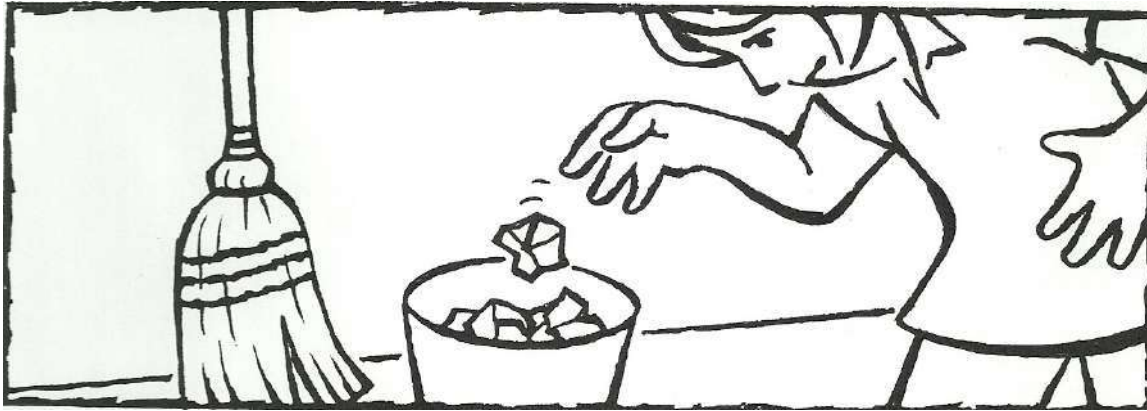


Putting My Feet On The Ground

One day this girl walked into a recovery program, ready to change her life, she was tired, suffering, and the problems in her life were overpowering. But, more than that, in her own head, she was very much overwhelmed with all the things that she needed to change, all the things that she needed to repair, and all the people she had to make amends to. Let's remember that this girl was sick and tired of being in and out of prisons and jails. She had already done more than 16 years inside, never lasting more than 7 months on the outside. WHAT A BUMMER!! But the real truth of this story was that she did not have the tools that she needed to deal with the reality on the outside, and that was probably one of the reasons for her failing.

An old-timer told her on that day the story of a lady that had two work tables in her office...one table had all sorts of items on it...crumpled papers, coffee cups, McDonald burger wrappings, a spilled jar of nuts, candy wrappings

grounded out cigarette butts, you get the idea, total disarray. Now the other table was neat as could be...papers neatly on a board, pens and pencils sitting in a little tray, books neatly arranged, the table top swept clean, all in order and ready for work.



We all want a clean and manageable work table in our lives...but if the only table we have now is the messy one, we must clean it and organize it and get rid of the things that don't belong on it. Yet many times we want to KEEP things, just in case, we might need them later. Like the time:

I quit smoking pot but I kept a couple joints just in case I might need it. Does this ring a bell?

How about keeping a phone number of a drug dealer just in case...?
How about continuing a relationship with someone that doesn't really add anything positive in your life, like the girl friend or a boy friend that calls the police on you...?

How about all those times I prayed to God for unrealistic results in my case, or in my life, or relationships, just because I had not been drinking for 6 months while I was in jail...?

LET'S GET REAL...Let's not bite off more than we can chew...we have to crawl before we walk...let's start thinking of the little things we can do NOW to start changing the way we are...the way we've been living.

We all know how difficult change is...we all know that we need help and we may have to accept that we cannot do this by ourselves and we must remember that there is a GOD, a GOD who can help us in the little things we need to change. We must remember that GOD helps us many times through the actions, advice and examples of others.

I learned a very hard lesson when I was able to clean up my bench.

I remember in one of my sober times, I was six or eight months clean and sober from alcohol and drugs and I thought my life was just perfect. I had God in my life, I had a program to go to, but I had a big problem...A lot of people did not believe I had changed...they didn't give me the respect I felt I deserved...my man did not trust me, my friends thought it wouldn't be too long before I returned to my old habits...even I had doubts...but I

wanted that respect NOW...then I realized that THIS was one of my main problems—INSTANT GRATIFICATION---that I always wanted to be recognized and respected NOW...but the truth of the matter is that people don't forget that easily, they will keep remembering the old ME---they need time to see the new ME and we need to be very patient with them—we need to remember how much hurt we have caused them—the least we can do is to give them all the time they need.



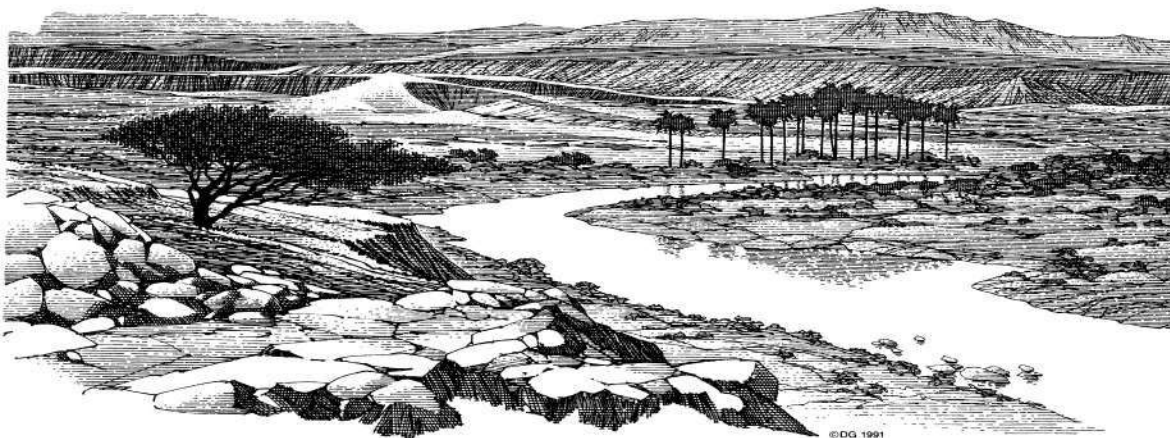
Where's the darkness in your life? Drinking, violence, drugs, stealing, pride, lust...?

Where's the light in your life? Are you letting the light shine onto your life? How does God light your life? Does He give you wisdom? Understanding? Family? Friends? Programs? Love?

If we make a mistake, if we sin, and we ask forgiveness, do we know what we are asking for? Do we want to listen to God? Do we want to listen to the changes that we need to make in our lives to accept His forgiveness?

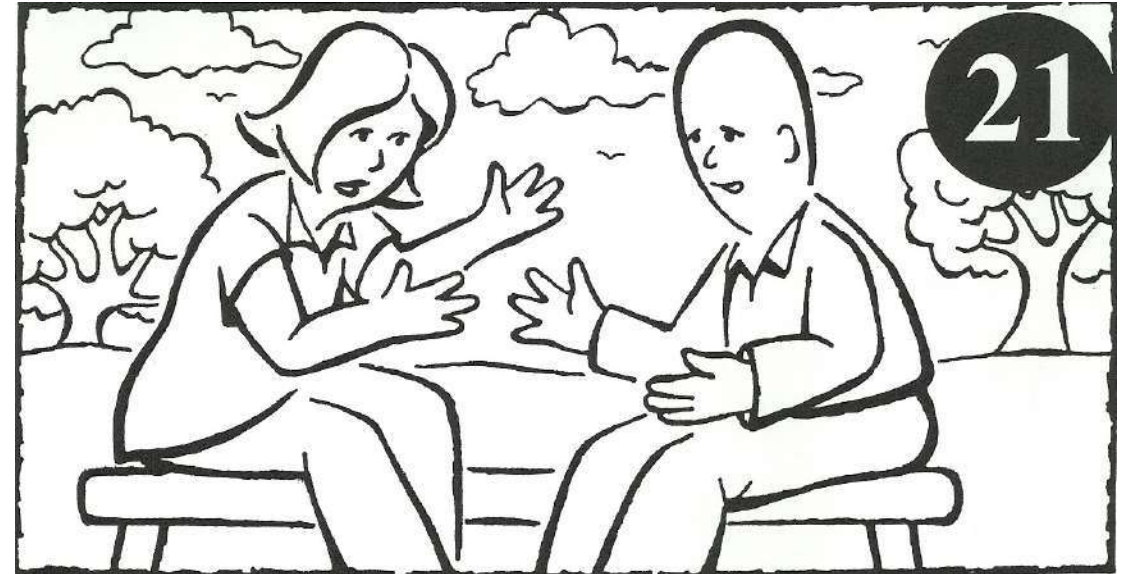
One thing is certain, God is always on our side. God is always ready to help us, to guide us, to forgive us, to save us from ourselves and to unite us in love with others.

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is Good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him.
Psalm 34:8



FINDING THE “WAY” IN JAIL

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GOD *Let's Talk About Him!*

I know I'm in trouble, I know I'm lost. I want to change, I want help, but I always have doubt. Is GOD here in jail? Who is He? Where is He? Does He know I'm here? Does He really care about me? Is He listening to me? Will He forgive me?

It certainly doesn't feel that way. I read my bible, I go to church, I pray at court, I pray on my bunk...and every time I think about this I come back to the same feeling...the same lousy place in my own mind—not knowing what to believe.

A few serious questions to ask myself ...

Do I think of God as the master repairman...one who can fix any problem that comes up? I have an illness, I pray, He heals me. I lose my job, I pray, He finds another for me. I fight with my man, I pray, and he loves me again and without complaining. I get arrested and go to court, I pray and then He releases me from jail. FREE at last!!!

Be careful what you pray for....

I heard an old timer talk about how much she prayed to be found innocent of the DUI against her, and there was a “MIRACLE” or a coincidence---the charges were dropped and so she went home, so happy that she celebrated with friends, got real drunk, got in a serious accident that put her away for ten years. Now, she’s asking herself this question, perhaps I prayed for the wrong thing—instead of praying to be released, she should have been praying to be free of his addiction.

Does this sound like God? A God that grants me what I ask for? In this example, who is the master here? God or me?

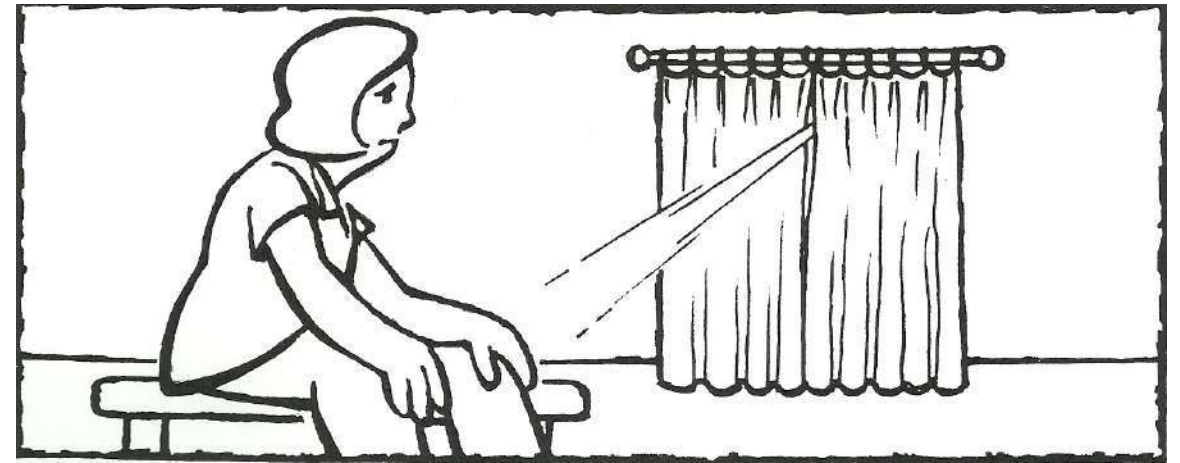
Perhaps I need to think about my image of God. A God who created everything, yet a God who trusts me to make my own decisions—What a wonderful gift, this freedom of choice. What a deal!!! God must love me so much that he trusts me with this responsibility.

Come to think of it...I must remember, that I’m not alone, there is a name that comes to mind...**Jesus**...do I believe this? Because if I do, I know that God came down to earth as man in the form of Jesus Christ and Jesus taught us by loving, by healing, and by example. Perhaps I need to learn more about his life.

Let’s take a moment to reflect on all these ideas about God that I’m considering. I have to realize that my life has been very messed up...at times it feels like I’m sitting in a pile of crap...and on the other hand, I know I have to make a decision whether or not I want to change.

I need to take a moment and I ask myself this question—Have I started to take any steps to change my life?

Let’s reflect on this story for a couple of minutes.....



Imagine that I’m living in a very dark room. All alone, disconnected, unloved, tired and afraid. I see a light, a tiny beam of light, coming through a slit between the curtains on a window. I don’t know from where, but one day I got the courage and I asked God for more light. I knew that the room where I was living was dirty and filthy. I felt it, I smelled it, but I couldn’t see it, because of the darkness. So I asked Him to help me see. And there it was, the curtains opened up a little, and more light came into the room. As I admired this ray of light, I couldn’t help but be full of wonder at the radiance of it, the edges of it, the brilliance. But I also noticed that the light, ... when I followed the light all the way down until it hit a spot on the floor, showed me the mess on the floor...the floor of my life. Again, I didn’t know how, but I felt that God was saying to me, “Don’t worry, I will help you clean it up. I will give you the strength. Others will help you, too.” So, little by little, as the curtains keep opening ever wider, and more light comes into my life, I continue the process of cleaning up the messy floor of my life to the point where I can feel and see the beauty in my own life. So now I’m a little afraid to ask God to open those curtains all the way!!!! Why???...Because I might not be able to handle all that light at once!!!

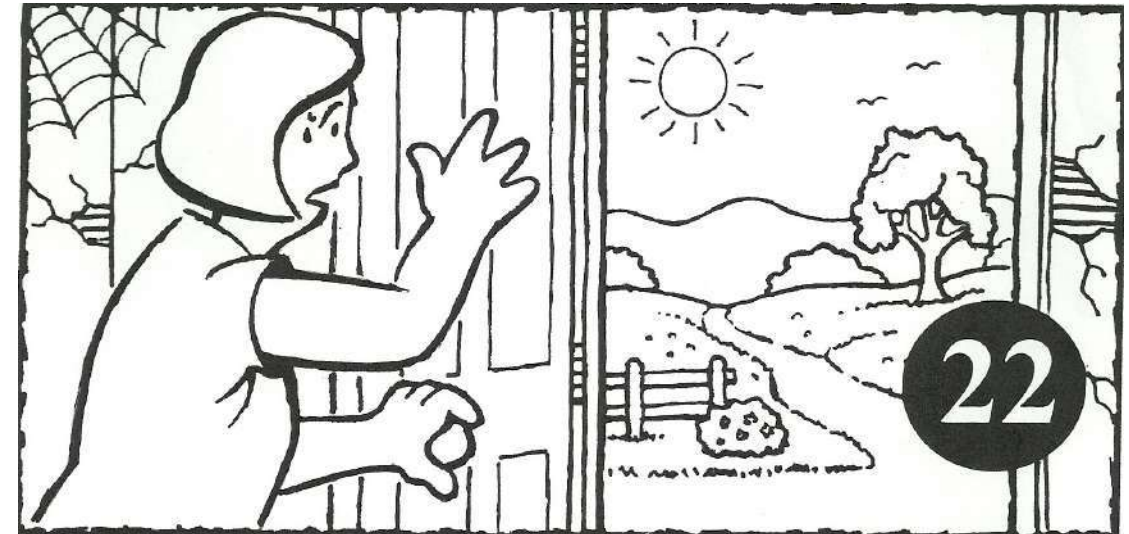


We need to confront our small fears first. We need to do this one fear at a time. By doing so, it will give us the confidence to move on to deal with other fears. We need to be patient and ask God to give us the courage to have the perseverance and a good dose of faith.



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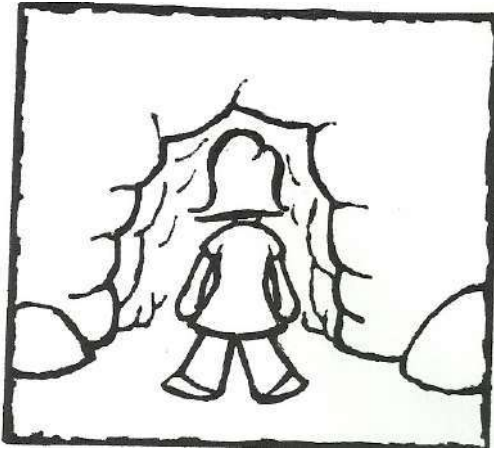


Facing Our Fears

Let’s talk about a couple of things. What do you see in the picture? Is this woman sure about herself? Does this woman want to come out? Is she afraid? Perhaps she has lots of reasons to be afraid. Perhaps she has never experienced a pure or clean life, a sober life, a free life...free of fears, free of insecurities, free of anxieties, and free from a few other things that we may all have experienced at one time or another. Can you think of something in your life that you would like to be free from?

Sometimes we forget that fear is in all of us, even in those we believe were very strong in their faith. A good example of this is what we learned from the bible when we read about how the apostles were locked up in a room, hiding and afraid, after the crucifixion of Jesus. They, too, had their share of fears.

We find another example in Jesus' time when two of the apostles were running to the tomb. The one that Jesus loved the most got there first. But the other apostle, the stubborn one, the one that was rough around the edges, got there later, but he was the first to enter the tomb. Perhaps he was afraid, insecure—but he entered anyway. Can we put ourselves in that position, which of the two apostles are we like today?



We must remember that fears can only be confronted with the truth. We see this struggle in recovery meetings, where people deal with fears and guilt by talking about them, and, little by little these fears lose their power over them.

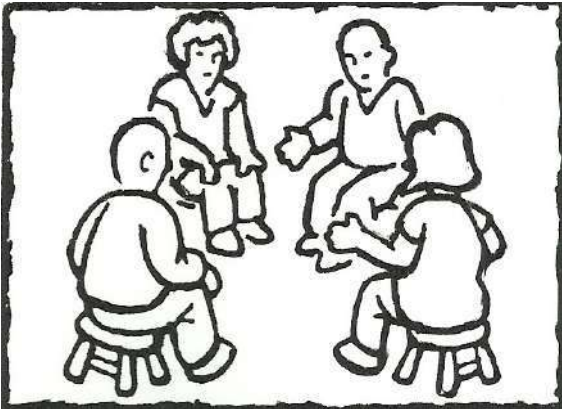
We are invited to ask ourselves a few tough questions, like:

- Do I have the courage to confront my most serious problems?
- Will I ask for help if I lack the courage?
- Am I afraid of going back to the old ways?
- Am I afraid of losing respect because of the way I have changed?
- Am I afraid of losing the faith that I now have?

We are invited to answer these questions in a very honest way today; it could be our first step. The truth of the matter is, as soon as we recognize where we stand today, the sooner we can confront our fears head-on—taking away their power.



No one among us really wants to recognize our own fears. It's not easy to do this. But when we really think about it, if we don't share these fears with others, how can we begin to overcome them? We must learn to use the power that exists in us when we share and support each other.



Nelson Mandela once said, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.”

In other words, we have much goodness in ourselves and we have to allow it to surface.



As we begin to understand ourselves and our tendencies we can begin a new way of life. We can transform our thoughts from the negative to the positive and start looking at people in this new way—a way that builds people up instead of tearing them down.

Do I bring myself down all the time, or can I start looking at myself in a more positive way?

Do I want to find peace in my life? Will I do whatever it takes to get it?

HOW do I start in this search for the truth within me? For this peace that I'm looking for?

We always want the whole enchilada, and we want all the answers right now and feel good about ourselves. But we know deep inside that nothing good comes easy in life...and that we must work at it.



It is suggested that in order for us to understand more clearly the message and the example from God, through His son, Jesus, we have to be humble.

- If we are to understand “humility” we begin to see the common thread in all these situations. It boils down to the basic fact that we too often put OUR desires first, without thinking of others or contemplating the consequences of our actions.
- When someone asks us to do something, have we ever thought or said, “What’s in it for me?” or “Why should I do that?”
- Is this a humble attitude? How about doing it because I CAN do it and its good!
- How many times a day do we put ourselves first? Think about this a bit. How many times would things have turned out better had we put someone else first? How would some of the situations we shared before have a different ending?

WHAT DOES BEING HUMBLE MEAN TO YOU?

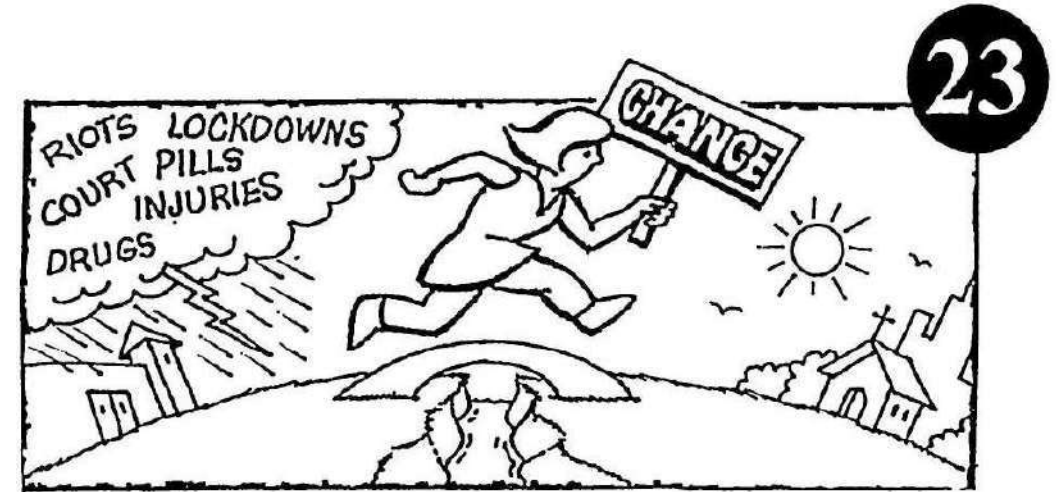
We are all invited to believe in a God that will forgive us if we truly repent. No matter how many times we’ve been in jail or how terrible our crimes might have been. We need to come to believe that God will forgive us.



FINDING THE “WAY” IN JAIL

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IS IT TIME TO CHANGE ???



So, here we are in jail. Some of us can say, here we are in jail, again! Here is count time, chow time, yard time, over and over, again and again. Here are weekend visits, weekday court calls, store days, pill calls, lockdowns, riots, people getting hurt, here is “catching the chain.”

And some of us are sober for the first time in weeks and months. Others are just now finding out what got them here. Others are afraid of what’s ahead and still others are just plain tired of it all.

One all-timer used to say that the jail is sometimes a place where we can hear God more clearly. Of course we know that, God is talking to us all the time, but most of the time we just aren’t listening.

Well, here in jail, we're low, and things are pretty clear....we may come to recognize that we screwed up again!!! We say to ourselves, "God, am I really here again??" We need to ask ourselves, what part, or what role did I play in my getting here? This is a good question to ask ourselves.

WOULD ANYBODY LIKE TO SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS?

So, what do we do now? Some guys say that God gave them this "time-out" because they were caught up with things on the outside. Some say that they always get straightened out when they're back in here, (get back to the WORD and get strengthened). Still others may be looking for God for the first time. Most of us may realize that jail is an annoying bell ringing for us to change.

Do you know that God's will is for all of us to be happy and in union with Him? He showed us how to live our lives by giving us the commandments as a guide to happiness. We know that sometimes we don't follow what we know in our hearts we should, and things get all messed up again.

Then when we are here, we are looking for God's help. So, we must learn to follow His only son. That might sound very easy, but in reality, to follow Jesus is a big challenge, because we have to change. And nobody, likes to change. To follow Him, is to follow the truth and sometimes we are afraid of the truth.

Sometimes we don't like the messenger or the message because of what it shows us so clearly.....it reflects our shortcomings and/or character defects. It's so simple that it hurts to admit it.

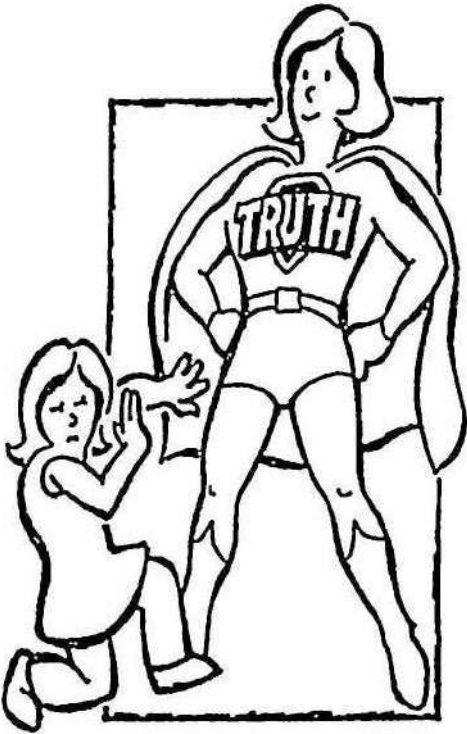
Jesus brought a simple message of love and humility. The message was good enough for Him, the Son of God but is it good enough for us? Perhaps we should start with this—but WAIT A SECOND!!! What does THIS mean?

WOULD ANYONE LIKE TO SHARE?

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

*We are sure God wants us to be
happy, joyous, and free.
We cannot subscribe to the be-
lief that this life is a vale of
tears,
though it once was just that for
many of us.
But it is clear that we made out
own misery.
God didn't do it.
Avoid then, the deliberate man-
ufacture of misery, but if trou-
ble comes, cheerfully capitalize
it as an opportunity to demon-
strate His omnipotence.*

AA Big Book,
page 133



I AM

**My name is I AM.
When you live in the past, with
its mistakes and regrets, it is
hard. I am not there. My name is
not I WAS.**

My name is I AM.

**When you live in the future, with
its problems and fears, it is hard.
I am not there. My name is not I
Will BE.**

**My name is I AM.
When you live in the moment,
it is not hard, I am here.**

My name is I AM

**God in me may be saying
something like this to me
right now:**

**I love you for what you
are....**

**I love you for the great
person you truly are....**

**I love you for what you are
becoming to be when you
choose to follow ME...**

**I promise you to always
accompany you on your
journey.
Remember I only see what I
have made you to be.**

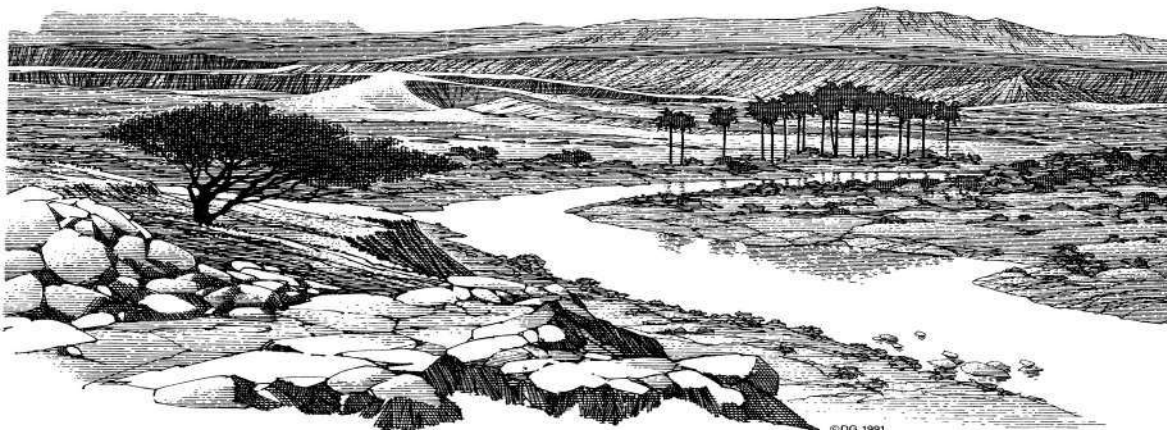
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GOD IN ME!



24



When I place my faith with God I invite Him to dwell in me. God dwells in every heart that's open to his Spirit and He desires a relationship with every human being. That means He can be in everyone in this room, in this jail, in our homes and neighborhoods.

God is always knocking on our door....but we need to open the door and let Him in. Where do we see God? He may be that injured stranger on the road as in the Good Samaritan story. Do we recognize God "in disguise?" We are called to open our door and see Him in the people around us. Perhaps we are called to help someone, or show patience toward someone, to walk with that person where he needs us.

John 14:10 “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.”

He wants to help us to take an inventory of our strengths and weaknesses and offer a prayer of thanksgiving as we discover them. This is a long process and we can only do it one day, one hour, one minute at a time. We must pray for courage, patience and endurance.

One thing is for sure, we cannot do this alone! We need to have someone else involved in all these changes in our lives. Jesus is present in a good brother, in a good friend, in a good sponsor. Let’s not be afraid to ask someone that we respect for help in these matters. Remember, this can’t be done in one day!

The changes that we are talking about here will bring us to a more humble attitude towards life and ourselves.

DON’T PROVE YOUR SELF.....IMPROVE YOUR SELF....

Humility means we have our feet on the ground. It doesn’t mean we are weak, by any means, shape or form. It takes a lot of guts to be humble and know who we are. This isn’t easy! You just can’t flick a switch and be Mrs. Humble. Remember:

Humility is not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less!

As we attempt to change we must accept setbacks and, perhaps, failures. We can learn to adapt to a negative outcome, and be flexible enough to pursue other options. Just because WE think it’s the RIGHT way, the ONLY way, the PERFECT solution, doesn’t necessarily make it so! We need to humbly accept the disappointment and look at it as an *opportunity* to try a different solution. There’s always another way, another option, we just need to accept that reality.

Many of us go through life from one disappointment to another. Our pride gets hurt and we allow some big enemies to come into our lives. In Galatians 5:19 we read about some sins of the flesh such as sexual immorality, impurity, hatred, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, envy, drunkenness. Do we really want these enemies to define who we are to ourselves and others?

We start to change by inviting the fruits of the Spirit to find a home in us: love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, to help us reject the enemy within us and lead us to self-respect, humility, and positive actions towards our neighbors.

AS AN EXERCISE, LETS JUST EXPLORE ONE OF THESE ISSUES:

Let’s talk about some of the resentments that have come into our lives. As an example of what we would like to talk about, let’s take a look at these quotes:

I used to have a lot of resentment against the Probation Department. These SOBs, as I thought, were out to get me! Later, I came to realize that if I had been following my case plan, they would have never nailed me.

How about the resentment against my man? The one I had three kids with? The one that left me and doesn’t want anything to do with me anymore? I used to hate his guts! I came to realize that if I had not cheated on him, if I had not disappeared in the difficult times, perhaps he would have never left me.

We love to embrace resentment. It gives us a great reason to throw the blame onto others and not to look at ourselves....not to look at the part we contributed to the situation. We keep going over and over our resentment and every time we do, we keep shifting the blame to the other person....convincing ourselves that WE are the victims! We might want to consider rejecting this conclusion and releasing resentment’s hold on us.

Honesty without love is brutal and is not what God desires.
Remember that without honesty, nothing good can be accomplished!

AA talks about HONESTY this way:

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually persons who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves.

IS THIS ME?