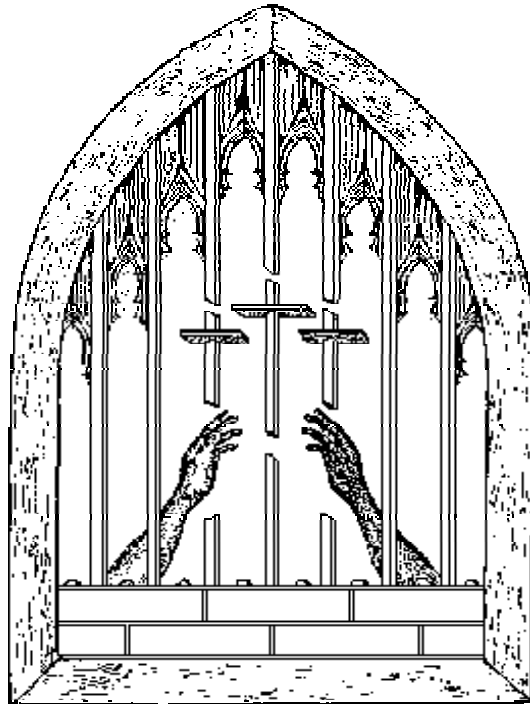


Food for the Soul

A Series of Lenten Meditations



By Prison Congregations of America
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Dear Friends.

We are pleased to share with you a series of Lenten meditations written by members of prison congregations across the country. We trust they will bless you as you travel this important journey toward Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.

We have edited the texts supplied by the authors to improve readability, but have left as many of the original words as possible.

Please feel free to copy or reproduce any part of this booklet. We do ask that you give Prison Congregations of America credit for the portions you use in your publications and elsewhere.

Thank you for your continued support and we pray you will have a blessed Lenten journey.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Ed Nesselhuf
Executive Director
Prison Congregations of America

The 23rd Psalm

Lord

You are my Teacher - I always will be instructed wisely.

You let me rest in the shadows of Your wings when I am weary.

You lead me to the waters of wisdom as I thirst for knowledge of Your ways, and You give me peace of mind.

Although I walk in dark territories, places I never have known, I will never fear. You go with me, keep me safe and show me what to do.
You feed me with Your wisdom while my enemies wonder what has happened to me.

You fill me with Your perfect love until I can also love my enemies.
Your kindness and love I can no longer live without.
Your love I have never known before, and You give Your love to me so freely.

I forever want to follow You - wherever that may be,
I want to go with You- AMEN.

Day 1 (Ash Wednesday)

Read Philippians 3:13

I used to let my past failures and disappointments get me down. I used to return to old friends who used drugs, only to reactivate my own addiction. It's only since I've truly studied the Scriptures that I have been able to understand myself and the power of the Word that God promises.

I pray that my past suffering and pain may be used to help others who are going through the same kinds of things.

Prayer: May God touch and heal all those people who are addicted to drugs and alcohol and turn their suffering into a gift of hope for others to have new life.

Day 2

Read John 11:35

How many times have you or I heard someone say that real men don't cry? I often wonder what non-feeling fool came up with this idea. Women are not the only ones allowed to have feelings and emotions, or the only ones allowed to express them. Feelings and emotions are such a small portion of our lives, yet if we are to stay healthy, they cannot be suppressed or ignored. Besides that, I feel that 'if it weren't for the bad times, how would we know how good the good times are?'

No one can say that Jesus was not a real man because he cried. That would be one of the most ridiculous statements that anyone could make. Jesus was so human that he showed many different kinds of emotions. He even showed anger when he chased away the people out of the temple who were selling animals to be sacrificed. He also expressed love in many ways. Most importantly, he gave up his life so that we may have life eternal. I'm glad to know that He cared enough for his friends that when he heard that Lazarus had died, "Jesus Wept."

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for loving us so much that you were able to come to earth in human form, to show us that it is not unmanly to express our feelings and emotions, caring enough to shed tears for a friend.

Day 3

Read John 11:35

When I was arrested, I knew God had brought me to this place to save my life. I had been what I would call a 'convenient Christian.' When it was convenient or I needed something from God, I would be a Christian. God was always there for me, but Satan always lured me away by making me feel that I would not be able to survive as a Christian in the world.

Then I came to prison. (Me, an upper class white woman with a college degree, having worked for a prosecutor who sent other people to jail!) Now, I had brought myself here! And while on my knees in county prison, I thanked God for saving me by showing me the truth about myself.

I have to spend one year and thirteen days in prison. When I got here, I could not imagine spending even one day, and now I have lived through 188 days. My last 6 months will be spent on work release. God showed me his love is unconditional and that the direction he has for my life comes in his time, not mine. For that I am thankful, Praise God!

Prayer: Thank you LORD for loving me unconditionally and for hearing my daily prayers that guide me to do your will, in Jesus' name. AMEN.

Day 4

When I was in county jail, I was waiting for my sentencing date. My lawyer and I had hoped for probation, but I was sentenced to 4 years. While I'm waiting for my parole date, I've been attending religious services of several denominations. I've taken several courses at the school and learned many things that I can use when I'm released. Then I plan to take more courses.

I've been in continuous touch with my brothers in Idaho, where I plan to live when I'm released. I'm also in touch with members of a church there.

Prayer: Lord, help us to rest in your promises and not to worry about our future. AMEN.

Day 5

I have many examples of having to wait for the consequences of my negative behaviors. Through most of my life, I have looked at this as punishment for my flaws. But as I get closer to God, and turn to him in times of waiting and need, I have been shown how to learn, grow and mature through my mistakes. Prayer has taught me to have positive expectations while I'm waiting, and also about the true nature of my wrongs.

At times, God can be our only friend while waiting. But being honest, in times of trouble, the thing I need most is a friend or someone to talk to. I can say the Lord is the best friend I have found.

God can show each of us the many things to give thanks for and also help us to know about rewards that waiting has brought to others in the past.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for helping me to learn while waiting and for being my friend in times of need while I wait. AMEN.

Day 6

"Hasten, O God, to save me; O LORD come quickly to help me." Psalm 70:1

They say that "patience is a virtue." But I say patience is a process in this journey we call life. First, you hear that it's going to happen, and you're excited and anxious and nervous. You ask yourself, "What will I say?" How will I look?" Will it make sense?" All these questions, and more, run through your head while waiting.

The day comes for the event to happen, and you forget all you thought about. You keep that one moment in your mind; and play it over and over. And when it's over, you ask yourself, "What was I so nervous about?"

My father is coming to visit, and I haven't seen him for a year. I've learned that patience is my life now. I cannot live by the motto "God grant me Patience, but hurry!" Now I must believe that it will all come naturally, like it hasn't been that much time at all.

Prayer: God, thank you for giving me patience for my easiest times and for my hardest times throughout all my life. AMEN.

Day 7

Before last year, I had never taken part in Lent, but I gave something up. My decision to give something up was really for me to read several Bible passages each day and write them down.

As I did this, I found I had more kind words to give away to the female prisoners around me. It has been a struggle to remain strong in my faith with these prison walls and all the negative attitudes around me. But my list of strengths grew every time I picked up my pen. For I found that the Lord guided me to find his wisdom that he knew I needed to have.

Now, the end of my time here approaches. My faith is still intact and growing stronger with each gift of insight from God. I am blessed to be a part of his great plan. Patiently I wait while I walk the path he leads me down.

Prayer: Dear Father, as your child, let the light of Jesus shine through me to all those I meet. AMEN.

Day 8

Since being in prison, I've finally learned the true meaning of waiting. I've learned to put my total trust in the Lord to get me through each day while I wait to be released.

Lying quietly in my cell each and every night, I poured my heart out to God for help, to give me patience, and most of all, the peace that passes all understanding. And I learned how to give everything to God and to ask him to answer my prayers in his time, and not my time. And to give me the faith to wait until my prayers are answered.

I also learned not to take my request back from God or to try to solve things myself. Now, I know to leave my prayers with God each and every day, and sit back waiting faithfully for an answer.

Prayer: Lord, help me to step out in faith and to know wholeheartedly that my prayers will be answered. I thank you Lord, for as long as I have asked in Jesus' name, I know it shall be granted unto me. AMEN.

Day 9

Waiting, waiting on God for answered prayer, I have been in prison for 2 1/2 years on a 30-year sentence. So many times I have prayed that God would work a miracle and send me home now to be with my children. But, as I have been faithfully waiting for him to answer this prayer of my heart, God continues doing so much more in my life than I would have ever thought possible.

God is taking this time to build up my character into the exact mold that he has always had in mind for me. So waiting on the Lord is an honor and a blessing. Time doesn't even matter so much anymore, as long as I stay close to God. He is making me see things and people as God sees them.

Waiting, waiting on the Lord has made me realize that I am still not in charge, and never was, but now I am grateful for it. Of course, waiting is hard. It is very much like Christmas when you're a child. You wait for your parents to give the okay for you to dig into your pile of gifts. That's what it's like for me now waiting on God. I'm waiting, waiting for my heavenly Father to answer my prayer, another question, give me an instruction, or show me another new direction in my life.

But one thing I know I never have to wait on is his love. And God loves me exactly the way I am.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for in waiting, I am still in your presence and I can watch you work. AMEN.

Day 10

After I got to prison, I was baptized and have been living for God every day. I asked him to show me the right way in life. But the devil has been trying to change me back to my old ways. So I just keep asking God to help me out, and he has been a very real help. I know myself, I couldn't do it by myself.

Thank you Jesus. I trust you; I thank you.

Prayer: Dear God, you so loved the world that you gave your only begotten Son for me, to die for me so that I can give my life back to you and witness to your Word. AMEN.

Day 11

I have received my parole over four months ago and have not gotten out yet. Yet through all this, I continue to pray to the Lord, my God. My older sister has reminded me to take it, "one day at a time" and said that "all good things come to those who wait." Praise the Lord!

Prayer: I pray that I may be released from the confines of this prison soon.

Day 12

Waiting! We are waiting for a letter from a loved one, waiting for the day to end, waiting for freedom, waiting for relief from pain, waiting for the perfect relationship, waiting for peace. We are waiting, for life inside the walls, as well as life outside, is filled with waiting. Waiting calls for a certain degree of hope and expectance from us. We wait because we believe we will receive, maybe not in the immediate future, but someday. Sometimes calamity enters our lives and we can't possibly see any good that might come from it. Sometimes the pain is so deep that we can't possibly imagine that it will ever be better. At those times, all we can do is brace ourselves and wait for deliverance.

The Lord says He will not give us more than we can handle. I can recall a few moments in my life when I truly doubted that. But looking back, I remember that when the pain became too great, when I believed my heart was breaking so much, that soon it would just stop completely, was the time that an incredible, unmistakable sense of peace and relief came over me. That was God. It had to be. So now, as I look ahead to the trials I know I will face, I have faith that I will make it through. Sometimes we can see better from a distance than we can up close.

The pain is the greatest when it is staring us in the face; but when the pain becomes overwhelming, God reaches down and holds us. Nothing else could ever get us through. We so often become impatient, but God's timing is perfect timing. It all works out for the perfect will of God. Waiting: We wait so that we will receive; our faithful God will always answer.

Prayer: Father, I pray that in my waiting, I do not lose hope or become weary, and always trust in you. AMEN.

Day 13

While waiting to be sentenced, I had a lot of time to think about how and why I got where I was. I called on the Lord for the strength to endure the long road. I knew what was ahead of me. I was looking at 22 years of my life behind bars. This was one of the most difficult waits in my life.

I praise and thank God for all he has done and is still doing in my life. The eight months that I waited seems like a flash of time that's well behind me now. God held my hand and walked through it all with me. I had plenty of time to read the good Word. This comfort was irreplaceable.

I received ten years instead of 22 years, and 3 years of that was suspended. I'll wait 29 months until my first parole date. I thank God everyday for his patience with me and his loving hand now guiding my life. I am so very happy he loves me, a sinner. I honestly feel that I was rescued and not arrested. I see and feel his presence more and more everyday. God has mercy on those he loves. All my praise, thanks, love, and life are now His.

Prayer: Lord, help me to wait for your will. AMEN.

Day 14

I waited for a lot of things, things that were never worth waiting for, until one day I called on the Lord and prayed. He gave me better things to wait on. I'm still waiting on some of those things, and I struggle every day. But I call on the Lord for help and guidance, and he always hears my cry for help. Even though I sometimes turn from the Lord and continue to sin, I will always wait for the things the Lord knows I need. I know I will continue to struggle daily; but after the waiting and struggling, I will have those things. I will continue to wait on the Lord with joy.

Prayer: Lord, help me to wait. Guide me, and continue to give me the strength to wait in Jesus' name. I will call on your name every day of my life. Bless me with your goodness Lord. AMEN.

Day 15

I waited to get baptized, and on March 31st of this year, I got baptized. Now the Lord shows me the way to go each day. So I don't deserve any write-up, thanks to the Lord. Also, I asked the Lord to take me through the waiting for court. I am going back to court because of some of the stuff that was not done. Hopefully, I will get a time cut.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to live in hope, no matter what happens from day to day. AMEN.

Day 16

I lived in a life of sin, drinking, drugs, and sex. Divorced and a mother of two, I left my children with their father. The only thing I was waiting for was the next drink, hit, or man. Then I got arrested. After my arrest, I was waiting to go to prison. I thought that once I was sentenced, my life would end. Little did I know that being in prison would made me feel a greater freedom than I'd ever felt. Now I am thankful for being arrested and placed in prison. The only thing I continue to wait for is the day the Lord takes me home.

Prayer: Lord please help me to live a life that is pleasing to you, as I continue to wait for you to take me home. AMEN.

Day 17

I was waiting for my time to get out of the hole. While I was in there, I learned how to deal with the anxiety of leaving the hole. I learned how to pray and how to ask God to help me with the troubles I was having.

As the days came and went, I learned that waiting is a kind of game. As the days go on, you get better as you play the game. My patience grew, dealing with everything and everyone. Then the day came when I got out of the hole. What I got out of all this is, if you wait and pray, the days go quick.

Prayer: Lord, I ask you to give me the strength to wait for the time when you will give me what you want. AMEN.

Day 18

I hate to wait; I want to be first. But incredibly, I find that if I can't be first, I want to be last. I am referring to "waiting" in line for any reason. Of course, the really big thing about "waiting" is what you are "waiting" for.

If you're waiting to get an ice cream cone, it is not the same as waiting to get executed. Even then, some don't mind waiting for ice cream because you know how good it's going to be. But, some don't have the patience to wait, regardless of what they are facing, good or bad.

Patience and long-suffering are fruits of than spirit. And if you think about patience and long-suffering, they are like fruits for others to eat. No one is the sole beneficiary of his own patience and long-suffering.

What good does it do a man to be long-suffering? It toughens him to do what he needs to do. So, while you are waiting, ask yourself: "Who is benefiting from my patient waiting?" God is probably using your patience to further his will, not yours.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the spirit of long-suffering and patience to do your will. AMEN.

Day 19

My personal lesson for you deals with needing the feeling of forgiveness. It's been a big problem in my life and given me a lot of setbacks and downfalls.

But now, no matter how angry I am, I will call on the Lord's name and pray for forgiveness. I pray for the patience to get through my struggles, to keep moving through this journey toward freedom. I will continue to struggle daily, but with the Lord, I will be strong and hang on. I hope and pray for the Lord to help my brothers and sisters the same way, by forgiving them.

Prayer: God of Salvation, help me to know my wrongs and struggles and confess them, so I can let them go. You can lead me and help me. AMEN.

Day 20

Waiting has always been a test for me. My patience sometimes feels like a long agony or a short happiness. I do artwork, and that takes patience and time. I think about where my life has been and where it is in the present. I basically inventory the events of my life. It has been full of a lot of anger and sadness. When I look at my son, it brings joy to my heart and life.

Prayer: I pray for my family and son, that they don't have a hard time while I'm away. I pray that they just love each other and do the best they can. AMEN.

Day 21

While waiting for the Lord, what do you spend your time doing? The time you spend working, watching TV with your family, or in leisure activities, is "quality" time.

Here are some examples of how I spend my "quality time." I start my morning thanking the Lord for another beautiful day, and I ask him what I can do for him today. Next, I read my devotionals: *Our Daily Bread* and *Today*. Then I do my Bible study.

When I work, I meditate on God's Word. When I watch TV, I meditate on God's Word and read my pocket Bible during the commercials. When I'm with my family, I thank God for His many blessings; and when I'm participating in leisure activities, I look to find the Lord in whatever I'm doing.

Remember to meditate on God's Word always. When you're doing something, ask yourself if it's something Jesus would do with you. If you do these things, your "quality" time will be well spent.

Prayer: Lord, show me your perfect will, so my "quality" time will be well spent. I ask this in Jesus Christ's name. AMEN.

Day 22

Waiting is all I have left for the next few years. How shall I do my waiting? I could get into trouble, but what good could that do me in here? None!

Waiting for my turn to see the real world is the longest time that I have ever considered. Years will pass, and troubles will cross my path on the road to a new beginning. The people I will meet during my time will be either friend or foe. So I look to him, and he gives me patience and understanding to forgive those who would cause me harm.

The best waiting I have done so far is through Jesus, the Son of God. Even though a new obstacle is thrown into my path daily, I give it to the Lord. God has shown me that only through him will I have a glorious day.

Prayer: Lord, lead me through the day with a clear focus on you, forgiving those who do me wrong.
AMEN.

Day 23

I've been waiting for 13 years to be returned to my family. My five children have grown up. Life can seem cruel sometimes, but I put myself here. I've learned to be responsible for myself and that I don't need to, and can't, change others. During this time, I need to grow up. I've got to take the time to read, pray, and study, to be acceptable to God. I need to be a man who will not be ashamed when rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

I have not heard from my family in over two Years, but I won't give up. I will continue to write to them and to exhort them in the faith. I will continue to trust in the Lord with all my whole heart and lean not unto my own understanding. In all my ways, I'll acknowledge Him, and He shall direct my paths. For His Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my paths. Never give up when times get hard. Keep the faith and continue to press into God.

Prayer: Lord, keep us close to your heart so that we will obey your voice by loving Jesus. AMEN.

Day 24

It was in the year of 1978. The weather was snowing, blowing, and cold, like seeing a black cat on a black street. My feet were blue, and my hands were black and blue because of being wet and cold.

As I was sitting by a window, I saw nothing but the cold emptiness of covering snow. But the fire was nice and hot, with the comforting sounds of a lot of popping and crackling. I had waited so long for this comfort; and it felt so good as I was sitting there, because I had walked about five miles in the cold and wet snow. But the wait was well rewarded. Now I was safe and warm.

It's kind of like that in prison now for me as I'm getting my life back together. Before, life was cold and empty because I couldn't see. Now, life with the Lord is warm, safe and comforting, no matter how bad other people try to make it. The wait has been well rewarded.

Prayer: My Father, help me to keep seeing your way in all I do. AMEN.

Day 25

When I was arrested and placed back in jail, I couldn't even pray. I couldn't stop thinking about my daughter. The closest I came to prayer was asking God, "Why?"

I had to wait to see if I would be violated, which I was. I had to wait 35 more days to see the board. In that time, I felt like I was going to lose it. I was looking at up to four years if my street time was taken too. I was listening to the devil's lies through other people.

I knew I had to come to my senses and call on God for peace and for his will to be done. I began praying and putting my weight on his shoulders. He has worked in many ways since, bringing people into my life and favor within the parole board. I've been continued six months and will stay busy in the meantime with a good job and lots of support.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for never giving up on me and for showing me your goodness once again. AMEN.

Day 26

March 11, 2002: I had my good-bye visit with my 3-year-old son, Sunny. On that day, I had gone to court and voluntarily terminated my parental rights, while serving a nine-year prison sentence. That was the hardest thing I've ever had to do.

But I know in my heart that I did what was best for my son and his future. After I terminated my parental rights, I had no idea who the state was going to allow to adopt my son. My cousin had done a home study and was willing to adopt my son. I prayed that God would allow my cousin to adopt my son. If she did, I knew he would be raised in a stable Christian home.

I waited after court and kept praying and trusting in God, that He would take care of Sunny, because he was God's child as well. During a weekend phone call home two weeks later, my mom told me that my cousin would be adopting my son. Praise God, my prayer had been answered. My heart was at complete ease.

Writing this devotional months later made me think of asking myself, "If I trust my child being in God's hands, why shouldn't I trust him with everything?"

Prayer: Lord, I pray that you will guide me to continue to place my whole trust in you today, and every day, and that you will have your way with me. AMEN.

Day 27

I had a lot of trouble believing that I could be forgiven. I did not have the belief that Jesus loved me, but now I see. Through friends and the pastor, I found belief.

I try now and hope to see more clearly how much he loves me. His love helps me also get through the days. This love will always shine in me even as an inmate. He loves me and has faith in me. He loves all God's children.

Prayer: Gracious God, let your love shine on us forever and ever. AMEN.

Day 28

God causes all things to work together for good for those who love him. When things look bad, remember for each one of us, God is good. God has a special formula for each and every one of our lives. There is only one recipe, Romans 6-.28. Certain ingredients get added one at a time; God gives them as we need them to go into our lives. And as each one is mixed in, there are new challenges, trials, and tests. We just have to believe that each one works together for good.

God is good. There is purpose to be found in each heartache. There is meaning to be found in each tear. As our Savior, Jesus experienced them all for us and always knows what is best. We can learn so many precious lessons from God, who brings us wisdom because of his Word.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you that because of Jesus Christ, I can smile, even though all looks hopeless. AMEN.

Day 29

After I was sentenced and was being transported to the women's correctional facility, this terrifying fear came over me. This was my first time ever going to prison. I thought about the horror stories that I had heard from all the ladies in the county jail.

My walk was very new with the Lord. I didn't know how to pray. All I kept thinking about was the Scripture that I had memorized the week before: Isaiah 41:10.

"Do not fear, for I am -with you; do not be dismayed. I am your God. I will help you and strengthen you I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
I quoted this verse the whole time we traveled.

When we arrived, I stepped off the bus and felt the presence of the Lord within me. All fear was gone, except for the goodness found in fearing the Lord.

So let me just encourage you all, even though you don't always feel that God is near you. He is right there, and all you have to do is trust him and take him at his word. God loves us and will never leave us, nor will he forsake us.

Prayer: O God, thank you for promising to never leave us alone and for always being near. Remind us that your Perfect love casts out all human fear and that in your presence is peace. AMEN.

Day 30

How great is the faithfulness of God?
From before the beginning of the world to the end of time,
God has been, and is always, faithful to us. That's 100%.
How could we not trust in perfection!

New cars eventually rust, wear out and are scrapped.
New homes can become run down, fall down or even
burn. A new relationship with God only gets better
and better. God never fades or wears away.

Our understanding of the things in this world and our trusting
in those things is only temporary. They can't last very long.
But God is faithful, true and everlasting. So trust in the
Lord with all your heart; in work, at play, in decisions, in all we do,
Trust only in him.

God's will and wisdom provides for all our needs in life.
In Proverbs 3:5-6, we learn that he will make all the rough places smooth
and the crooked paths straight for us if we trust in him.
Jesus Christ is the Light of the World, the Light
no darkness can overcome. He proves his faithfulness to us
by continuing to love us.

Prayer: Father God, when I cannot see because I
am staying in my own way, help me to see with the
eyes of my heart that I may again more fully trust in you,
for you love me and are faithful. AMEN.

Day 31

Before I came to prison, I always prayed to God for what I wanted or needed. When I didn't get it, I got mad at God. But in prison I learned how to pray, asking God for help to do his will.

I had to learn to let God do things in his time, not mine. Now, when things don't work out the way I want them to, I put my faith in God. He will work them out for his glory, not mine, and to make himself known, not me. Waiting is not always easy, but each day it becomes easier to put my faith and trust in God.

When I pray and ask God for my needs, at once I ask to leave it in His hands and not go back later and try and mess with it or put it on my timetable. I work to not feel like God has forsaken me when things don't go my way. In this way, I try to find true joy and peace in life.

Prayer: God, help us to find true joy and peace, no matter what is happening in our life. AMEN.

Day 32

When I came back to prison, I felt like I let God down and didn't deserve to serve him. I had chosen to serve Satan and believe his lies. And I became truly sad and very depressed in my heart.

But with the help of Christian sisters and brothers, I rededicated my life to the Lord. Sadness and depression left, and the Lord filled my heart with happiness that lives on. "Happy are those whose hearts are pure, for they shall see God."

God is in my heart and in my life. And even though I deal with persecution and get made fun of, I go to Bible studies and to church. I still have trials in here, because Satan doesn't want to let go. But now I know I have lots of people pulling for me who are Prayer Warriors for Christ, and I know that I will have the kingdom of God because he said so.

Prayer: Dear God, thanks for never giving up on your children. Thank you for waiting on me and filling me with joy and peace of your Spirit. AMEN.

Day 33

There are leaders and followers all over the world.
As Christians, we are asked to be both. Nobody said it
was going to be easy. However, God knows this, so
He compensates us with the Holy
Spirit once we accept and obey Him.
Before I accepted Christ, I didn't consider myself to be a leader.
Once I turned to Christ, I've been able to do things as a
leader that I never thought I was capable of doing.
With Christ, all things are possible.

I have learned that the best leaders are the best followers.
So keep following and be ready to lead others
to have what you have in Jesus.
You may think it's not easy or that it is impossible.
But listen, and you will hear God's gentle guidance.

When we are called to lead, it is still our job to do, even if
we think no one else is following.
Remember who's leading whom:
God knows where he is taking us!

Prayer: Holy Spirit, help me to listen as I wait and
guide me to lead others to you, that you will lead us all into
tomorrow with hope. AMEN.

Day 34

When I came to prison, at the age of 47, my sons were grown. I had raised four good boys. And when I came to prison, I faithfully attended all the services available at the chapel.

It wasn't long before a lot of the younger men were coming to me for fatherly advice and looking to me as their role model. I felt shame because I no longer felt like someone that others should look up to. But they treated me with respect, and called me Mister, and used my last name. This was a very humbling experience for me, since I felt that no one would ever come to me again for advice or look up to me because of the crime that I had committed.

I believed that my life was over as a role model or as someone to look up to. However, I've learned that with God, all things are possible if we let him use us. When we are sincere in asking for forgiveness, all will be forgiven; and God can give us new meaning in life by using us wherever we are.

Prayer: God, help me humbly never turn anyone away, who comes to me in need of help or advice. AMEN.

Day 35

In Matthew 6:34 Jesus taught: "Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself." Each day has enough troubles of its own. And I feel that my coming to prison was God's way of teaching me to take one day at a time. As a recovering alcoholic and drug addict, I have a tendency to want whatever I want, right now. This time in prison gives me the opportunity to let God work in my life. It shows me that things don't always go our way.

We need to stop and slow down, so that we can look at all the good things in life that we take for granted. This was God's way of getting my attention, and I used this time to come closer to God. I don't need to worry about what's going to happen in tomorrow, next year or five years down the road. Today, God wants me to rest, focusing on his healing of my mind, my soul, and learning to let him take over my life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please don't let me forget to be thankful for the smallest things in life and to stay with you, Lord, today. Everything will be all right. AMEN.

Day 36

Read: Romans 8:18

I remember the last time I ever used drugs. I had been using drugs heavily, day after day, for many weeks and months straight. And after spending hour upon hour, staying in a room, feeling trapped doing drugs, I had a lot of trouble believing that I could ever be forgiven. I did not have the belief that Jesus loved me then; but now, I try hard to see more clearly how much he loves me. His love helps me get through the days with hope.

I had just finished shooting up a large amount of cocaine. I lay back on the bed, and as the room was spinning around, I closed my eyes and prayed: "God you've got to help me. I can't live like this anymore. Either help me have a new life without drugs, or let me die. "

Afterward, I got up and took a shower and got ready to be arrested for revocation of my probation. I was bonded out that same night, so I went to visit my husband in jail; he had also been arrested on indictment for selling drugs.

While I was visiting him, he said I looked pregnant. Afterward, I got scared and took a pregnancy test. After three positive tests, I had to accept the fact that I was pregnant. The amazing thing was that I was only three weeks along. I haven't used drugs since I prayed that prayer.

God has given me a new life without drugs, and I look forward with hope to the new life growing within me. Through Christian friends and the pastor, I have found that I am forgiven, and I know that God's love is the biggest high I'll ever need.

Prayer: Great God, thank you for saving me from my addictions, and through the gift of your Son, who died for me to bring me new life. Help me always remember that you keep your promises so that I can keep mine. I can't do it without you. AMEN.

Day 37

Read: Luke 24:45

And so the mind shall become open. The Lord will fill you with his Holy Spirit if you will just open your mind to His Word and wait. Repentance and forgiveness cleanses our minds and our souls so that our voices can then be heard.

The heart will be filled to overflowing with the Lord's food. We will all be witnesses of these things. May we who follow Jesus and become loving, caring, giving, and sharing of God's greatness, power, and wisdom.

May you too find God. May you be filled with peace and share in his holiness. Soon, the glory of God will come upon us and his Word will inspire us all to share with one another.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, you have taught us to overcome our sins by prayer, fasting, and works of mercy. When we are discouraged by our weakness, give us confidence in your love. AMEN.

Day 38

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4: 9-12

Left to my own devices and ambitions in life, I seem to have always failed. Even in having a belief in God, I still tried to be in control of everything and chose the wrong path. It was my belief that "walking the straight and narrow" would be hard work with little reward. I was very mistaken.

Since being saved and doing my best to live in Christ, I've found that although it is work, it is not nearly as hard as my life before; and the rewards are vastly greater. I believe it is my duty to gently testify (and sometimes not so gently) to those around me about the miracles of God in my life. I know that other people, like me, can be reached more readily by example. So that is why we should try and live in the walk of Christ every day.

Prayer: Please Lord, help me to always walk in your Word and be an example for others of your miracles. AMEN.

Day 39

To be a disciple of Christ is to have love and always to be sincere. I feel that you always need that desire to love and to help people in need. We even need to love those who persecute us. That's what Jesus did on the night he was betrayed.

To love those who persecute us is to love an enemy. By doing this, loving an enemy, we no longer have an enemy, do we? In my eyes, the enemy no longer exists. To me, I think it just means that you are praying for people to love and live in harmony with one another, just as you wish to do. That's peace. May we all live in harmony with one another, in Jesus' name.

Prayer: Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you anointed your only son, Messiah and Lord of creation. You have given us a share in his consecration to priestly service in your Church. Help us to be faithful witnesses in the world to the salvation Christ won for all mankind. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God forever and ever. AMEN.

Day 40, Good Friday

Read: Acts 13:9-12

The Holy Spirit is more powerful than anything evil or anything that represents evil. I have found myself in many situations that were nothing but evil or negative. It was then when I would call on God to get me out of that situation. I never asked him for anything else in life.

Today, I have faith in the Lord, and I have turned my will and my ways over to him. Although I don't fully understand the Lord, I have faith that my life is, and will continue to be, better than it ever was. God has restored my sanity, and I know that in the days to come, it's only going to get better.

Prayer: Jesus, by shedding your blood for us, you established the Paschal mystery. And in darkest days, I have come to you to restore my life, not fully understanding how, but trusting you completely. In your goodness, walk beside me and make me holy. Watch over me always in any future times of need or gladness, that I may give thanks. AMEN.

Holy Saturday, Easter Vigil

Even here in prison, there is a pecking order. How wrong! When I look at others who are rejected and broken, I see myself; and my heart aches. Yet it rejoices! I see my brokenness that still exists; we are all one in God's eyes.

He wants us all to know and live in love and peace. We all get knocked down and have gotten broken at some point in our life. But it doesn't mean you've been knocked out, so you need to get back up!

Don't quit. It's ok! Because of Christ, God knows us better than we know ourselves. He loves us, broken and down, or not. God puts us back together, and that's how we get to glorify him. He shines through our cracks!

Prayer: Almighty and Eternal God, thank you for creating all things in wonderful beauty and order. Help us now to perceive how still more wonderful is the new creation by which in the fullness of time you redeemed your people through the sacrifice of our Passover, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns for ever and ever, reflecting your grace and love abundantly. AMEN.

Vigil of Easter

Read I Corinthians 13.8-13

Basically, I grew up in prison. Coming here at the age of 17, I can honestly say that most of my life has been spent right here in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. Coming here at such an early age, I naturally carried in with me many young and immature traits. Getting into mischief for the mere sake of amusement was one of my worst.

All through the years, I sought opportunities to amuse myself, doing whatever it took to get a laugh or get away with things I knew I should not do. One such opportunity was to go to a call-out church group here at the prison. The Episcopal Church had come here to form a monthly get-together. I jumped at the opportunity to go. I could get out of the dormitory, hang with the guys, cut up, and get a laugh. It was a way to kill the boredom.

As each Episcopal service came around, I found myself looking forward to going. My mischievous ways were met with love and understanding by people who were so much like my family and relatives that I found myself unable to cut up and do the things I originally intended to do. My anticipation of going there was no longer to crack a joke or pull a prank. It became my longing to see people who reminded me of where I wanted to be: home.

The group of people came from the outside with the intention of bringing God's love to us. Maybe they weren't sure exactly how--other than by being there for us and sharing the gospel, a smile, a joke, and a hug. My longing to go see these people – family-like individuals who come here to love me – has attracted me in a unique way, which, in turn, exposes me to the gospel-the Word of the Lord!

God took something that Satan put into me and used it to His advantage. What an amazing and powerful God He is. I went down to the service to do wrong and have instead been blessed.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for bringing your love to someone so unlovable. Let me now look at others I find to be unlovable and seek ways to show them your love. AMEN.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Once again we want to recognize the incarcerated members of prison congregations across the country who have contributed to this devotional booklet. We express our sincere thanks to those who have shared their thoughts with us this year.

NEEDED: YOUR SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS

If you are an "outmate" living in free society and have found these devotionals (written by inmates) meaningful, then it's payback time! Next year for Lent, people will once again receive a booklet of inmate-authored devotionals. And the inmate members of prison congregations will receive a booklet of "outmate" authored devotionals.

Theme: Discipleship.

Guidelines:

1) Select one or two verses of Scripture to base your mediation.

Maximum of 20 words.

2) Write a personal mediation of 140-160 words.

3) Write a one-sentence prayer - maximum of 20 words

Name (optional)

Name/Location of your congregation (optional)

Send to: PCA, Box 415, Vermillion, SD 57069