

# Your Spiritual Journey

## Growing in Christ

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*This book helped me realize that I'm incarcerated because God loves me and wants to correct me, not because He hates me, but because He delights in me.*

Chatauna

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## Your Spiritual Journey Growing in Christ

Coming to faith in Christ is the beginning of your spiritual journey. You spend the rest of the journey deepening your relationship with Christ and growing in Christlikeness. As with any relationship, you must invest in it to develop it.

For some, coming to faith in Christ while in jail or prison is viewed as a temporary relationship. This is called “jailhouse or prison religion.” Individuals try to “use” God to help them through their time of need, but when released from incarceration, they leave Jesus at the gate and return to living life on their own, without God. For some, “jailhouse religion” is not intentional. They have a sincere desire to live for Christ when returning home, but they experience a gradual drifting away from Him. They are overcome by the pressures of life and the pull of the streets. This experience is no different than free people who seek God’s help when in a crisis, but once that need is over, they go back to living without thinking about God.

To develop your relationship with Christ, you must “own” your faith and take *responsibility for cooperating with the Holy Spirit in your spiritual transformation*. While you are incarcerated, you have time to spend with the Lord and opportunities to participate in Bible studies, worship services and fellowship with other believers. One day you will either be transferred to another institution or be released. You have to decide if your faith in Christ is your new identity or if when you shed your prison uniform, you shed being a follower of Christ. For example, I grew up in a Christian home. When I left home, I had to decide if my faith was my own or if it was my parents’ faith. I had to take responsibility to live in obedience to God and seek opportunities to grow spiritually. There was no one there to do it for me. Ask yourself if this faith is my own or is it that of the jail or prison? Am I going to make my relationship with Christ a priority in my life or only when I am in trouble? Am I going to take the initiative to participate in spiritual practices that help me grow in my faith?

Many people, incarcerated and free, come to Christ out of need, but they stay with Christ when they understand the truth of the Gospel. They stay when they understand what Christ has done for them and what they now have in Christ. This pamphlet is a guide for staying with Christ and growing in His likeness.

### Coming to Christ Your Personal Relationship with Christ

Christians have more than knowledge about Christ. They sense a personal relationship. They know that this relationship is not given just for them to experience hope and comfort. Christians know they have a responsibility to mature in Christ and make Christ known to others through who they are and what they do and say.

*We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20)*

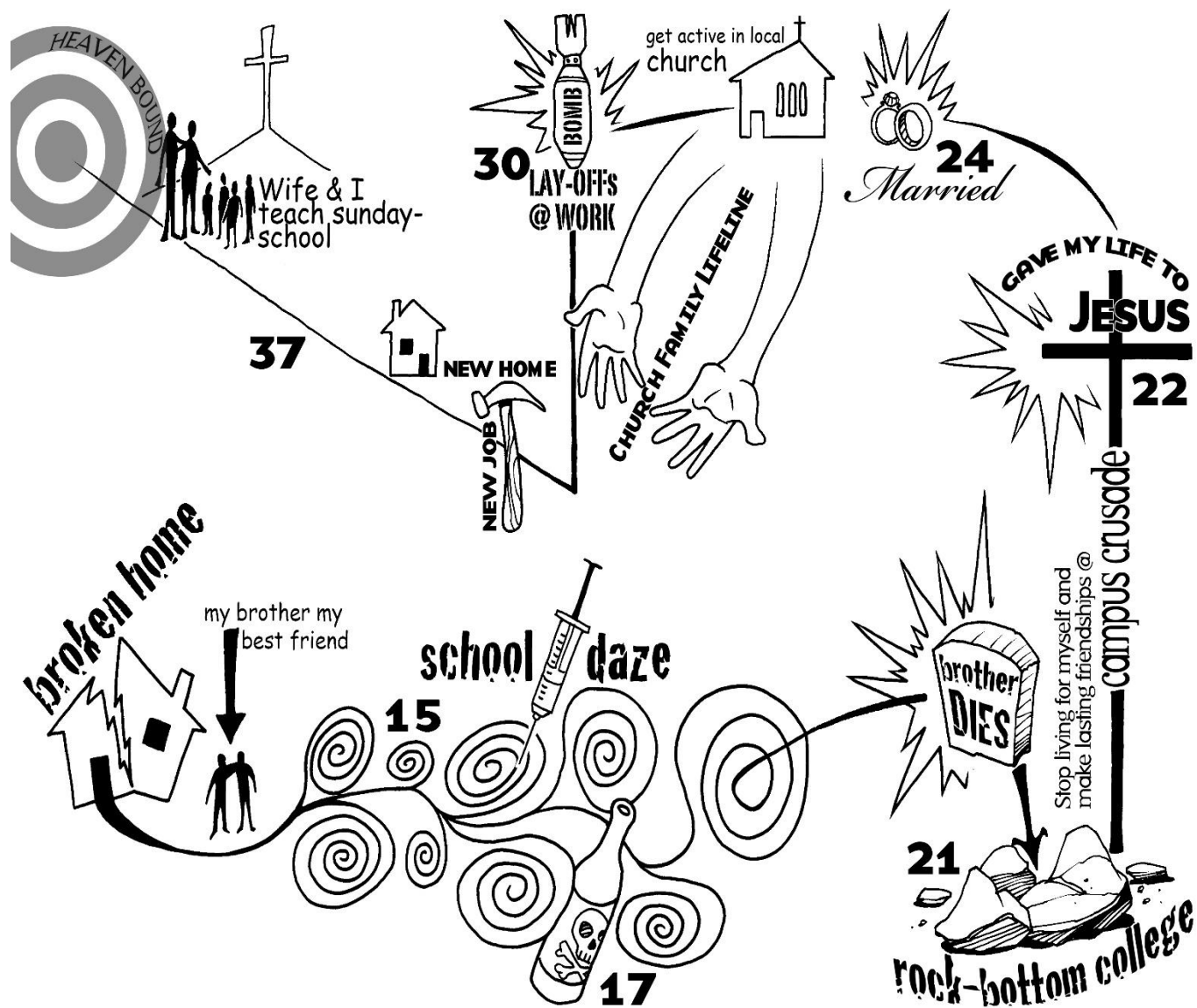
*We know we have come to know him if we obey His commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys His word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:3-6)*

## **Your Spiritual Journey**

The Christian life is a journey—not an event. It is helpful to see how God has walked with you through this point of your life. There are several ways to help us with this. One way to visualize this is to create your spiritual life map. The spiritual life map is a picture of your spiritual journey. Much like a road map, spiritual life maps tell us where we have come from, where we are now, and where we are going. Typically, the path proceeds from birth to present and then to death and the afterlife. List the people by name whom God used to reveal himself and what Christ has done for you. Who first told you about God? Jesus? Salvation? Heaven, etc.

You will notice most of the people you named were not professionally spiritually trained. They were people like you and me who loved you and cared enough to share Christ with you. God calls each of us to make Christ known by being a spiritual guide for others on their spiritual journey.

Think of places, events, and things (books, television shows, etc.) God has used to develop your relationship with Him. Include various trials you faced, along with spiritual resources (prayer, scripture, other believers, etc.) that helped you cope with those trials. Include what you want your life to look like in the future. An example of a spiritual life map is on the following page. (The numbers shown indicate ages). On page 5, draw or use pieces of magazines to create your spiritual journey. Your spiritual life map will not be evaluated by your artistic ability; it is a way to express and communicate your spiritual journey. Have fun!



## **My Spiritual Life Map**

## Your Transforming Story

Every follower of Christ has a transforming story—a time when his or her life intersects with Christ. Transforming stories are powerful examples of the saving and continuing grace of Christ in believers' lives. They are also powerful tools for witnessing. People may be more open to hearing your story than verses in the Bible.

*... one thing I do know, I was blind, but now I see. (John 9:25)*

The attention span of most people is short; therefore, you want to keep your story to two-to-three minutes. Your story may describe life before Christ or when you lived away from Christ. It may also describe your encounter with Christ and your life in Christ today. Or you can describe placing your faith in Christ, a crisis or trial you faced and how God met you in it.

Examples:

*"I grew up as an only child, who never received the affections or love that a growing child needs. I sought that love from others leading to drugs, abuse and incarceration. I was having sex at age 11, pregnant at 13, married with two kids at 15, in prison for the first time at 17. My life continued to spiral downhill and was back in prison for a fourth time with a 15-year sentence. Realizing my way of life wasn't working, I called out to God. He met me where I was and transformed my life into something beautiful."*

*"I grew up in a home and a church that taught me to love Jesus. At a young age, I decided to give my life to Jesus and become a follower of him. But being a Christian did not guarantee that life would be problem-free. My husband, Mark, and I both had cancer. God chose to permanently heal Mark by taking him home to heaven and to temporarily heal me. During these trials, I knew that God loved me, was in control of my life, would never leave me, and gave me a peace that I cannot explain. My relationship with Christ is the most important relationship in my life."*

## Principles for Writing Your Transforming Story

1. **Keep your audience in mind.** They may not be familiar with Christian lingo. Avoid phrases such as "accepted Christ," "trusted Jesus," "born again," and "saved." Possible alternatives are "received the gift of eternal life," or "found out I could be certain I was going to heaven," and "received assurance that God was me always."
2. **Avoid exaggeration.** The best testimonies are believable. At times, we want to make our testimony more exciting or try to connect with others so we may make it sound more dramatic. When we do that, we are trying to be the center of attention rather than allowing God that position.

3. **Be clear and concise.** Follow a natural progression of your need and God's supply. Keep it to two hundred words so that it can be communicated in two-to-three minutes. Keeping it brief shows you respect people's time. It also allows opportunity for questions if they want to know more. If you lose their attention before you get to the main points, you will often lose the opportunity to expand the conversation.
4. **Focus on Christ.** Make what Christ has done for you the essence of your story. Focus on a personal need or pain and how God met you. For example, you lacked purpose and found it through a relationship with Christ. The goal of your story is not helping them to know you better, but to have them see where Christ has met you. Do not over-emphasize how bad your life was or how great it is now. Keep it balanced. Your spiritual life map may be used to guide writing your story.
5. **Write it out, refine it and rewrite it.** Keep working to focus on the main points of your story and being able to communicate it in two-to-three minutes. Share it with two Christian friends and get their feedback. Edit it again.
6. **Pray for a chance to share it one-on-one or in a small group.** Well-meaning Christians will encourage you to share your life story and encounter with Christ—your testimony. It is best to wait for one year before sharing your story in front of a large group like the church or a men or women's group. Instead, start by sharing your story in small groups or with individuals. This will prevent you being put on a pedestal and feeling pressure to pretend to have life all together. The purpose for sharing is to help others understand how Christ has changed your life. We know Christ can change their lives too. It is not to point to us.

## **My Transforming Story**



## Staying with Christ

One of the challenges in the Christian life is persevering in your faith. As mentioned earlier, people often come to Christ but fall away. Remembering the truths of the Gospel and our position, power and identity in Christ keeps us from getting off track.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)*

## The Truth of the Gospel

The gospel is the biblical good news and saving work of God through Christ Jesus. The gospel declares that on the cross of Christ, God took upon Himself, in the person of His Son and in our place, the judgment our sins deserves. In the same great saving act, completed, vindicated and declared through the resurrection, God won the decisive victory over Satan, death and all evil powers. He liberated us from their power and fear and ensured their eventual destruction. God accomplished the reconciliation of believers with himself and with one another.<sup>1</sup>

The Apostle Paul states, *By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (I Corinthians 15:2-4)*

The truth of the Gospel is that:

1. **We are sinners and deserve to die.** We are too sinful to contribute to our salvation and so we need a complete rescue. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*
2. **We are saved by God's grace.** Out of God's love for us, He gives us undeserved favor (grace), rather than death, through Jesus Christ. *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ . . . (Galatians 1:6)* Salvation only comes through belief in Jesus' work—His life, death and resurrection. We realize we cannot save ourselves. We cannot do anything to earn or keep our salvation. It is all because of God's grace. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action.* The Lausanne Movement, (2011, p.23).

**3. We are assured of eternal life.** By trusting in Christ alone, we are united with Christ through the Holy Spirit and are counted righteous in Christ before God. Being justified by faith we have peace with God and no longer face condemnation. We receive the forgiveness of our sins. We are born again into a living hope sharing Christ's risen life. We are adopted as fellow heirs with Christ. We become citizens of God's covenant people, members of God's family and the place of God's dwelling. So by trusting in Christ, we have full assurance of salvation and eternal life because our salvation ultimately depends not on ourselves, but on the work of Christ and the promise of God. *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **(Romans 8:39)**

**4. We are transformed through the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit.** Spiritual formation is "the process by which Christ is formed in us . . . for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives, and for the sake of others."<sup>2</sup> Spiritual formation helps us fall more in love with God and with others. It increases our capacity to reflect the character and priorities of Christ. *For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son . . .* **(Romans 8:29)**

This transformation, or change, is not something we do to ourselves, but something we allow God to do in us and for us as we yield to the work of God's transforming grace. In other words, God is the initiator and source of our transformation through the Holy Spirit; we cannot transform ourselves. We can engage in spiritual practices that open ourselves up to the work of the spirit.

**5. We are motivated to live for Christ out of our gratitude and love for what Christ has done for us.** We are assured of God's love and approval through Christ. Our motivation for obeying Him, is not for ourselves or so that God will save us, but out of gratitude to God who has already saved us. We obey not in the fear or insecurity of hoping to earn our salvation or to keep our salvation, but in the freedom and security that we are already saved in Christ. We obey out of gratitude, out of our love for Christ. *If you love me, keep my commands.* **(John 14:15)**

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<sup>2</sup>Ruth Haley Barton. (2011) *What we believe about spiritual transformation*. The Transforming Center. [www.tttttt.org](http://www.tttttt.org)

## Lies and Truth

Satan does not want Christians to stay with Christ. Some of the most common lies Satan uses to encourage individuals to walk away from their relationship with Christ are:

**Lie #1:** *I must obey God so I do not lose my salvation.*

**Truth #1: The gospel is the good news that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.** Our standing before God is not based on our performance but upon the finished work of Christ when He died on the cross for my sins. To be justified *means* we are “clean” and acceptable to God. Even though we are sinners, in Christ, we are not condemned by God but become righteous.

*We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:15-16)*

**Lie #2:** *I am responsible for my own spiritual transformation, becoming more like Christ.*

**Truth #2: God is the only one who can transform us into His likeness.** But this doesn’t mean we do not contribute to the process. Our responsibility is to participate in spiritual practices that allow the Holy Spirit to transform us.

*For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, (Romans 8:29)*

*Apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

**Lie #3:** *God owes me a blessing when I obey him or when I participate in spiritual disciplines such as reading my Bible, praying, going to church, fasting, etc.*

**Truth #3: As a sinner, the only thing God owes me is death.** Romans 6:23 says, *For the wages of sin is death.* When we obey God, we do avoid the consequences of sin, but just as our salvation is given to us out of God’s grace and love, so are His blessings given to us out of His grace and love. We cannot manipulate God or do anything to earn God’s blessings. We owe God everything because He created us and gives us breath each day.

*... all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6)*

**Lie #4:** *I can expect a comfortable life now that I am a Christian.*

**Truth #4:** **I can expect to experience suffering in life.** Suffering comes in many forms including abuse, relational conflict, sickness, loss of a loved one, loss of child custody, and addiction. It is experienced by both good and evil people. Some suffering is a consequence of our choices and behavior and some suffering is a result of living in a sin-tainted world. Suffering often does not make sense; but, we know that God is in control of life so we can trust Him. And, we know that God experienced suffering so we know He understands our pain.

### **Growing through Suffering**

When experiencing suffering, we have a choice to trust in the God who loves us more than we can understand, who is in control of life, and who knows what is best for us. Or, we can become bitter, angry, turn our back on God and try to make life work on our own.

Do not waste your suffering. Here are a few suggestions to use trials to strengthen your faith:

1. **Do not be surprised when you suffer.** Suffering is a part of the consequences of living in a sinful world; but evil will not win—Jesus is on our side!  
*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (Jn. 16:33)*
2. **You are not alone.** God is walking with you through your suffering.  
*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)*
3. **Suffering may be used to test our faith to see if it is real.** Do we love God when we are in pain or only when life is good?  
*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:6-7)*
4. **God uses suffering for good in our lives.**  
*And we know that all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)*
5. **Suffering produces perseverance, character and hope.**  
*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us. (Romans 5:3-5)*

**6. Suffering can help us grow spiritually.**

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)*

**7. Suffering may be a result of God's discipline.**

*My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; . . . Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:5-11)*

**8. We are comforted by God and our suffering may be used to help comfort others.**

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)*

**9. Our hope is in Christ and knowing that one day all suffering will be gone.**

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Revelation 21:3-4)*

### **Our Position in Christ**

As Christians we now have a new position in life. We are now no longer "in Adam" but are now "in Christ." Let me explain. God is the loving ruler of the world. He made the world and everything in it, including Adam and Eve—and it was perfect. Adam and Eve were to rule and care for the Garden of Eden but not eat from the tree of Good and Evil. "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being." **(Revelation 4:11)** But Adam and Eve rejected God by rebelling against Him when they ate from the tree of Good and Evil. All humans are born "in Adam." This means everyone is born a sinner, spiritually dead and with an eternal destiny of hell. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. Our position is in Adam.

As Christians, we are born again. We are now "in Christ." We have a new life and a new nature because the Holy Spirit is now living in us. The Holy Spirit recreates our fallen sinful nature into spiritual righteousness. This process continues throughout the Christian life as we are transformed or changed. We are purified of sin and remolded in the image of Jesus Christ.

*If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: The first man Adam became a living being, and the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as it is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:44-49)*

In the first Adam, we are given physical life; but in the second Adam, Jesus, we are given spiritual life. Being “in Christ” is our new position as believers. We are united and identified with Christ. God no longer sees our sins, but the righteousness of Christ. Our new position in Christ gives us the power to overcome our sin nature.

### **Our Power in Christ**

You are born again and you have the Holy Spirit living in you (I Corinthians 6:19). The same God that created the universe and holds it together, lives in you. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, can be grieved, quenched, fill you (control you), give you spiritual gifts, and produce the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to live in and through you. This is the Christian life. You are saved from the power and effects of sin because of the work of Christ. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit, using the inexhaustible resources of the risen Christ for effective victory over the world, the flesh and the devil. *But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.* **(Galatians 5:16)**

If you fail to understand what God has already accomplished for you through Christ, you are doomed to attempt to live by yourself. You will try to have an obedient life and make life work on our own. You will rely on your own will power and strength. You will be filled with anxiety and fear wondering if you are “saved.” The truth is you have the power to live an obedient life and persevere in your faith, through Christ.

### **A Transformed Mind**

The truth of the gospel affects every area of our lives—our thinking and behavior. Our thinking and beliefs begin to change from being worldly to being Biblical. We develop a Christian worldview where we see all of life through the lens of Scripture.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will—His good, pleasing and perfect will.* **(Romans 12:1-2)**

What does the Bible say about money? About sex? About work? About \_\_\_\_\_? (Fill in the blank.) Biblical truth should guide our thinking and beliefs—not what the world believes.

### **A Transformed Heart**

As our heart begins to become more like Christ, so does our behavior. Think of ways your behavior has changed since becoming a Christian. For example, we go

- from rebelliousness to submission of those in authority. **(Hebrews 13:17)**
- from envy, competition, and self-protection to love. **(I Corinthians 13:4-13)**
- from bitterness to extending forgiveness and seeking reconciliation. **(Ephesians 4:32-5:2)**
- from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

In the beginning of our spiritual journey we are seeking to know Christ. After we have put our faith in Him, our spiritual journey shifts to living Christ-centered lives.

## My Identity in Christ

Since putting our faith in Christ, we are a new person. We have been born again. The old person is gone. The new you is here.

1. **You are accepted by God.** You have now been adopted into God's family as His daughter. *Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)*
2. **You are chosen by God.** *For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will. (Ephesians 1:4-5)*
3. **Your future and relationship with God are secure.** *Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership upon us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)*
4. **You can trust God with your life and eternity.** *And we know that all things work together for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)*
5. **You are important to God and to His purposes . . .** to be a personal witness of Christ and to do good works. *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)* *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)*
6. **You are to bear fruit.** *(. . . the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control . . . . (Galatians 5:22-23)* *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

To find out more about your new identity, the benefits of being a Christian, and your new purposes, look up these Scriptures. After you are finished, check your answers in Appendix A.

SCRIPTURE	IDENTITY, BENEFIT, PURPOSE
Matthew 5:13-14	I am the salt and light of the earth.
John 15:15	I am Christ's friend.
Romans 5:1	I have peace with God.
Romans 8:1-2	
Romans 8:31	
Romans 8:35	
I Corinthians 3:16	
I Corinthians 6:17	
I Corinthians 6:19-20	
I Corinthians 12:27	
I Corinthians 6:1	
I Corinthians 5:17	
Ephesians 1:1	
Ephesians 2:6	
Ephesians 2:18	
Ephesians 3:12	
Philippians 1:6	
Philippians 4:13	
Colossians 1:14	
Colossians 2:10	
Colossians 3:3	
2 Timothy 1:7	
Hebrews 4:16	
I John 5:18	

The more you know and agree with how God sees you as a person, the more your thinking, feeling, and behavior will reflect your true identity as a child of God. Enjoy your new makeover and all you have in Christ.

### Living a Christ-Centered Life

The goal for Christians is to live a Christ-centered life, which means:

- Allowing Christ to guide all you do and being fully devoted to Him.
- Having your relationship with Christ be the most important relationship in your life.
- Putting off habits that displease God and beginning to be more like Him.

To live the Christian life, Christians need the support and encouragement of other believers. God did not create us to live alone. We need one another.



## Spiritual Friendships

Spiritual friendships are those who are growing in their love of Jesus and living for Him. They not only encourage us and are supportive of following Christ, they do not tempt us to engage in harmful or immoral behavior. We grow spiritually as we spend time together doing everyday life, such as talking, watching TV, playing sports, playing games, shopping, hanging out with the kids, etc.

If you are serious about your spiritual journey, your choice of friends is *critical* to your success. Distancing from unsafe friends and others who will not support your desire to change and live for Christ begins *now*, while you are incarcerated. This means distancing by not communicating with old friends and maybe even some family members for a time. Expect to experience some loneliness, especially when you reenter society, as you seek to develop healthy spiritual relationships. Making friends takes time and effort—you will need to resist the temptation to go back to old friends because it is easier and comfortable.

Finding a mentor, someone who can disciple you by meeting regularly to study God's Word and pray, is strongly recommended. Your mentor may be another inmate or a volunteer who is further along in their spiritual journey. If possible, find a mentor from the outside who can continue to walk with you when you return home.

Another type of spiritual friendship is an accountability partner. This is an intentional relationship of meeting together to check in and see how each other is doing living the Christian life and praying for one another. Honesty is the key to accountability. You must be willing to ask for help in areas of struggle and give an honest account.

*He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. (Proverbs 13:20)*

*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)*

## Developing Your Spiritual Plan

Developing your faith requires you to own your own faith and take responsibility for cooperating with the Holy Spirit in your spiritual transformation. Being made into the likeness of Christ is a life-long process. Change can be slow and made with small steps. Creating a Spiritual Plan is a tool to help you intentionally align your life with God's will and to:

- have direction for your spiritual growth.
- get in the habit of spending time with the Lord.
- live a Christ-centered life.
- deepen your relationship with Christ.
- allow the Holy Spirit to transform you.

A plan that is not acted on does not do any good. Living out your plan helps you create a pattern or rhythm of life for your spiritual transformation. Participating in spiritual practices invites the

Holy Spirit to transform you into Christlikeness. Spiritual practices in and of themselves do not make someone more “spiritual.” Think of engaging in your spiritual plan as clay on the potter’s wheel. The clay must be pliable and stay on the wheel for the potter to mold and shape it. Spiritual practices help you to have a soft heart so God can mold and shape you into a person who loves and serves as Jesus did. Remember, it is God who transforms us, not us.

*Spiritual disciplines in and of themselves have no merit whatsoever. Just as we do not earn our salvation, we do not earn blessings from God. Training in the spiritual disciplines places us before God and is the God-ordained means for forming and transforming the human personality so that when we are in a crisis we can be “response-able”—able to respond appropriately.<sup>3</sup>*

### Create Your Spiritual Plan<sup>4</sup>

1. **Pray.** Ask God to guide you as you put your plan together. Your plan needs to be realistic with your current circumstances. A plan that works while incarcerated will not work when you are in the free world. Life while incarcerated may have fewer temptations and more time to spend with God. Life on the outside may have more temptations to old habits, and more responsibilities, such as taking care of basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and all the added issues of work, childcare, transportation, positive support, and fellowship with other believers.
2. **Select spiritual practices.** (See Appendix A.) Include spiritual practices that can be experienced alone and with others. Include practices you are drawn to and ones that will stretch you. Include practices that help transform areas where you are least like Christ. For example, to learn to be concerned more for others than yourself, engage in the spiritual practice of service. You may want to engage in a spiritual practice for a month and then try another one.
3. **Identify when and where.** Will it be daily, weekly, monthly? Some people are more alert in the morning and others at night. What time of the day will you live out each part of your plan? Where will you engage in spiritual practices? For example, in the morning right after breakfast, in my cell.
4. **Life changes needed.** List the changes you will need to make in your life to consistently fulfill your plan. For example, get up earlier, give up a TV show, etc.
5. **Communication with others.** Identify what needs to be communicated with others you live with. For example, let them know that you don’t want to be interrupted between 6:30am and 7:00am.
6. **Evaluate your plan.** Every six months (or when you experience a life-change, such as reentry or being transferred to a different institution) is a good time to review your plan and make changes.

<sup>3</sup>Foster, Richard. (2007). *Living the Mission*. New York, NY: Harper One, xiv

<sup>4</sup>Barton, Ruth Haley. 2006. *Sacred Rhythms*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 152.

**7. Spiritual plan in the free world.** When planning for reentry to the free world, below is a list of questions to consider as you create your spiritual rhythm on the outside. Remember, you will not be able to spend as much time focused on your spiritual life on the outside as you have on the inside.

- Will I live alone or with someone?
- Will I live in a structured program or on my own?
- Will I have care of my children?
- Will I be working?
- Will I have probation or parole responsibilities to fulfill?
- What church will I attend?
- Will I have transportation to church?
- Who are my spiritual friends on the outside?

After creating your Spiritual Plan, share it with others who can pray for you and check in to see how you are progressing. Fulfilling the plan is always the goal, but it is not to become legalistic or performance-driven. In other words, if you don't fulfill your plan, it does not mean you are a bad person or that God is unhappy with you.

*Developing a friendship it is not about logging minutes but developing a relationship.  
It is the same with God.*

## **Reentry Challenges and Responses to Living for Christ**

Reentry from incarceration provides several challenges to staying with Christ. When we look to something else for hope or to some other way to make us feel good and complete, we have replaced God with idols. We experience a loss of spiritual momentum, get stuck or drift away from the Lord. Some of the causes for this drift include the following:

- 1. Spiritual life is not a priority.** Less and less time is engaged in your Spiritual Plan. You miss more days of reading your Bible, praying and going to church. You prefer spending your time doing other things, such as sleeping, watching TV, Internet, etc. You have to decide your spiritual life is a high priority in your life and you are willing to schedule around your Spiritual Plan.
- 2. Responsibilities and life demands.** Women are overwhelmed by your responsibilities of work, life and taking care of your children. This is especially a challenge for single moms with little help. Keep your spiritual plan realistic. The time you spend with the Lord will not be as much as when you were incarcerated. Adjust your plan until you find a way to make it work.
- 3. Facing temptation.** Everyone faces temptation. Even Jesus was tempted but without sin. Satan wants to attack us in the areas where we are weak. We need to be ready by having a plan to avoid temptation and escape temptation.

4. **Emotional issues.** This may include dealing with depression, anger, PTSD from being victimized, or other mental health challenges. Make sure you get and take your medications. Find counseling for hope and healing.
5. **Friendship issues.** Having healthy relationships is needed to help with your spiritual growth. Those who lack spiritual friendships and/or have inappropriate relationships hinder their spiritual growth. Spiritual friends can help encourage you when you face trials in life and help you have a Biblical perspective. Inappropriate relationships (co-dependent, abusive, sexual immorality) can be deadly to you spiritually.  
*Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character. (2 Corinthians 5:33)*
6. **Addictions.** Any type of addiction hinders spiritual growth. Addictions may be drug, alcohol, sex, shopping, stealing, gambling, eating, etc. Seek help through treatment, support groups and accountability.

What kind of barriers and challenges to your spiritual life do you anticipate when you return to society or transfer to a different facility?

What will you do to prevent or address these barriers and challenges?

## **My Commitment as a Christian**

"I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.

My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I'm finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patient, lift by prayer, and labor by power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, let up until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till he comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till he stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have no problems recognizing me—my banner will be clear!" (Author unknown)

## Appendix A

### My Identity in Christ

SCRIPTURE	IDENTITY, BENEFIT, PURPOSE
Matthew 5:13-14	I am the salt and light of the earth.
John 15:15	I am Christ's friend.
Romans 5:1	I have peace with God.
Romans 8:1-2	I am free forever from condemnation.
Romans 8:31	I am free from any condemning charges against me.
Romans 8:35	I cannot be separated from the love of God.
I Corinthians 3:16	I am God's temple.
I Corinthians 6:17	I am united with the Lord, and I am one spirit with Him.
I Corinthians 6:19-20	I have been bought with a price. I belong to God.
I Corinthians 12:27	I am a member of Christ's body.
I Corinthians 6:1	I am God's co-worker.
2 Corinthians 5:17	I am a minister of reconciliation for God.
Ephesians 1:1	I am a saint.
Ephesians 2:6	I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm.
Ephesians 2:18	I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit.
Ephesians 3:12	I may approach God with freedom and confidence.
Philippians 1:6	I am confident that the good work that God has begun in me will be perfected.
Philippians 4:13	I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
Colossians 1:14	I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.
Colossians 2:10	I am complete in Christ.
Colossians 3:3	I am hidden with Christ in God.
2 Timothy 1:7	I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love, and a sound mind.
Hebrews 4:16	I can find grace and mercy in time of need.
I John 5:18	I am born of God, and the evil one cannot touch me.

## **Appendix B**

### **Spiritual Practices**

There are more than sixty spiritual practices or disciplines. The ones included in this Appendix have been found to be most helpful for growing in Christ.

### **Reading and Reflection on Scripture**

**Definition:** The Bible (Scripture, God’s Word) is the inspired, only infallible, authoritative Word of God. Read and think about what the Bible says and apply its truths to every part of your life.

#### **1. Why:**

- Reading the Bible and reflecting on Scripture will help you deepen your relationship with God.
- You will learn more about Him and how to be more like Him.
- You will experience a greater awareness and nearness of God.
- Scripture will help transform your thinking and lifestyle to be more Christ-like.

#### **2. Practices:**

##### **Personal Reading:**

- Read a portion of Scripture (a chapter).
- Think about how the passage applies to your life.
- How does what you read affect how you live and treat others?

#### **3. Suggestions:**

- Read the book of Mark to get to know Jesus.
- Read Ephesians or Philippians to learn more about living the Christian life.
- Read a Proverb each day (there are 31) to gain wisdom.
- Read the Psalms to learn how to pray.
- Read Genesis and Exodus to learn the history and God’s plan for the world.
- Participate in a Bible-study-correspondence course.
- Read a commentary (an expansion of the book of the Bible).

#### **4. Sacred Reading:**

- Choose a passage of Scripture (no more than six-to-eight verses).
- Recommended Scriptures: Psalm 13; Psalm 63:1-5; Psalm 73:23-28; Psalm 103:8-12; Psalm 139:13-18 and Matthew 11:28-30

#### **5. Silence:**

- Quiet yourself before the Lord with the desire to hear from God. Pray, “Here I am,” or “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

**6. Read:**

- Read a short passage silently and slowly.
- Listen for a word or phrase that God has for you this day.
- Allow a moment of silence.
- Repeat that word or phrase softly to yourself.
- Ponder on it and delight in it as though enjoying the words of a loved one.

**7. Reflect:**

- Read the passage again and allow it to interact with your thoughts, hopes, memories, and desires.
- How is my life touched by this Word?
- What in my life needed to hear this today?
- Where am I in the text, and what do I experience as I allow myself to be in this story? Silence.

**8. Respond:**

- Read it again. Is there an invitation or a challenge to which you need to respond?
- What is your response to God's invitation? (You may feel love, joy, sadness, pain, frustration or anger. You may learn something about yourself or be convicted of sin.)
- What is your response to God based on what you have read and encountered?
- Share with God the feelings you have in response to the text.
- Is God inviting you to respond to the Word you have heard?
- Pray.

**9. Rest:**

- Read it again.
- Rest with God and enjoy his presence. God is the one who will enable you to respond faithfully to whatever invitation you have heard from Him. It is a posture of submission.

**10. Resolve:**

- Live out the Word of God. Determine to carry this Word with you and to live it out in the context of daily life and activity.

**11. Small Group Bible Study:**

- Participation in a small group Bible study provides a learning community which is often richer than studying on your own.
- Small groups are a place to develop spiritual friendships and it provides opportunities to interact, care, support, and offer accountability.

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

**(2 Timothy 3:16)**

*But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.* **(Psalm 1:2)**



## Prayer

**Definition:** To communicate with God your concerns and worries, to ask for forgiveness and to hear from God.

### 1. Why:

- Prayer helps develop a rhythm of turning to God.
- It reminds us of our dependence on God and to trust God.
- Confession gives you insight into your temptations and your need for God's grace.
- Confession helps you have compassion toward the faults of others as you remember you too are a sinner.

### 2. Practices:

- Pray for help and guidance.
- Let God know what you are concerned about, that you want His will, and what you need guidance for.
- Ask Him to give you wisdom and show you what to do.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on our own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)*

### 3. Pray for others:

- Create a prayer list of people and their needs.
- Pray for them and record how God answers the prayer.

*Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayer, letting God know your concerns. (Philippians 4:6) (The Message Bible)*

### 4. Pray for confession:

- Ask the Holy Spirit to show what sins you need to confess.
- Embrace Christ's gift of forgiveness and healing.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)*

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*

### 5. Listening to God:

- Find a time and place that is quiet and without distractions (if possible).
- Allow yourself to breathe deeply and become aware of God's presence with you.
- Express what is on your heart—a question, an emotion, a longing, etc.
- Sit with what comes into your awareness—just be with God.
- What comes to your mind from God will NEVER contradict Scripture. If it does, it is not from God.

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed. (Mark 1:35)*

## Corporate Worship

**Definition:** A community of believers praising God for who He is and thanking Him for what He has done.

### 1. Why:

- Worship helps us keep our priorities honoring to God. *Love the Lord Your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. (Mark 12:30)*
- Corporate worship benefits believers through the fellowship with one another. *Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. (Romans 12:15)*

### 2. Practices:

- Find a local church and participate in worship weekly.
- Serve in the church and participate in a small group Bible study.
- It is up to you to get connected. Do NOT church-hop.
- Find a church as soon as possible.
- Remember, there are no perfect churches—all are full of sinners.

### 3. Selecting a Church:

- Getting connected with a church is a critical part of your spiritual journey. But connecting with a church is not easy. It takes work.
- There are many barriers, such as:
  - finding a church that is doctrinally sound,
  - where there is Biblical teaching, and
  - where the congregation and leadership live out their faith.
  - Will I have transportation to get there?
  - Do I feel like I belong?
  - Does the worship style help me worship better?
- Addressing as many barriers as possible prior to your release will greatly increase your chances of faithfully attending church when you get out.

## Questions to Ask When Selecting a Church

1. Is the church doctrinally correct? What does the Church believe? Examine their doctrinal statements. For example, the National Association of Evangelicals' *Statement of Faith* includes key tenants of the Christian faith:
  - We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.
  - We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  - We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.
  - We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
  - We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.
  - We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.
  - We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Is the teaching Biblically sound and do the people and leadership reflect the love Christ?
  - Does the church teach from the Bible accurately? Do they teach Scripture in context?
  - Does the church share the gospel with those who don't know Christ?
  - Are the members honest about living the Christian life—loving, caring, and forgiving?
  - Does the church help me grow spiritually and encourage accountability?
  - Do the church leaders model a Christ-like lifestyle?
3. Will I have transportation to get to church?
  - Is the church within walking distance?
  - Does the church offer transportation?
4. Do I feel like I belong?
  - Do I have a friend at church with whom I can sit?
  - Is there someone there who is willing to mentor me or is there a small group I can join?
  - Does the worship style help or hinder my worship?

*The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,  
For such the Father seeks to worship Him. (John 4:23)*

## Service

**Definition:** Providing care, help and the love of God to others.

### 1. Why?

- Service demonstrates the love of Christ and helps us move from concern for self to concern for others.
- We learn to be givers rather than takers.

### 2. Practices:

- **Acts of Kindness**
  - Acts of kindness are only limited by your imagination. It is anything done that is helpful to someone else. For example, starting a grief-support group or tutoring someone.
- **Offer to listen**
  - *Really* listen. Listening not only to the words but to the emotions as well.
  - Reflect back what you hear them say. “You seem angry that you haven’t heard from your spouse or kids.”
  - Resist the desire to “fix” the problem or to give advice.
  - Ask questions to help them talk more.
- **Participate in service projects**
  - Help out at church in an outreach program, go on a mission trip, volunteer at a non-profit in the community.
  - You might want to support a missionary or sponsor a child in another country.

. . . Remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

**(Acts 20:38)**

## Appendix C

### Sample Spiritual Plan (while Incarcerated)

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ MENTOR: \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual Practice/Description	Day/Time	Where	Changes/Communication
Read and Reflect on Scripture  Sacred Reading	M-F 6:30 a.m.  Saturday	My cell	Not go back to bed after breakfast. Get a Bible from the Chaplain.
Pray	M-F 9:00 p.m.	My cell	
Attend Bible study	M-F		
Attend Bible study	M-F		
Spiritual Friends Pray with someone			
Participate in Worship Service	Sunday		Sign up
Serve Others			

## My Spiritual Plan (while Incarcerated)

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ MENTOR: \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual Practice/Description	Day/Time	Where	Changes/Communication

## My Spiritual Plan (In the Free World)

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ MENTOR: \_\_\_\_\_

### Daily

Spiritual Practice	Day/Time	Where	Changes/Communication

# REENTRY PLAN



## **LIFELINES Reentry Plan**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Release Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **1. Spiritual**

- Have you created a Spiritual Plan for continuing to grow in your faith when living in the free world? Attach.
- What church will you attend? (name and address)
- How will you get to church? (transportation)
- Who else do you know that attends the church?

### **2. Safe Housing/Healthy Relationships**

- Where will you have safe housing? (address)
- With whom will you be living?
- Who are people who will support your desire to make positive life changes? How can they help?
- Who are people you should avoid?

### **3. Addiction Recovery**

- Where can you get addiction recovery services?

### **4. Employment**

- Where do you have employment or can receive employment services?

### **5. Concerns/Issues**

- What concerns or issues do you have about making a successful reentry?