

*How To Break Out
of
This World's Worst Prison*

by

May McClure

Copyright © 2004 by May McClure. All rights reserved.

No portion of this document may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the author. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Hi! I'm May McClure and I'm writing this hoping it will help make your load just a little lighter and your future a lot brighter. I'm 75 years old. Yes, that's pretty old but from this vantage point I see life from an interesting perspective. I see a lot of things I regret. I see a lot of bloopers I've made and stupid things I wish I'd done differently.

I guess we all know that life ain't easy, don't we? But *if* we can learn a little from each other, we're going to be a lot further ahead than if we try to slug it out on our own. I've learned a few things along the way, whether I wanted to or not. No, I haven't arrived anywhere, but I have discovered a little bit about myself. And I'm wondering if there might not be a few things you haven't yet discovered about yourself.

Now, I'm sure you know I can't pack an awful lot in a few pages. So, I'm just going to share a little from my cache. Let me caution you, though, please don't try to read this whole thing in one sitting. Read a little and then put it down. Give yourself a chance to think about it. Then when you're ready, pick it up again and read a little more. It's like taking vitamin pills. You don't take the whole bottle at one time, do you? You take just one tablet and then give your body time to digest it before taking another one. If you tried taking the whole bottle all at once your body would be overwhelmed. In the same way you might find it a little too much to digest if you try reading this whole package at one sitting. So, be sure to just take your time and enjoy.

And as you're reading know that the author is just a fellow traveller stumbling along with you on the highway of life. She shares weaknesses that you have. She has regrets like you do. She has been hurt, perhaps not in the same way as you, but still hurt. And she understands that you have not had it easy.

You can also know that she and others will be praying for you.

May McClure

How To Break Out Of This World's Worst Prison

P-R-I-S-O-N! That's a familiar word to you, isn't it? You're well aware of the walls and bars and locks that make a prison a prison (or a jail a jail). But no matter how gruesome you think yours might be, there's one that's much worse. There are no walls or bars or locks in that prison, in fact you can't even see it with your eyes. But it's very real. It's very cruel. And it holds its captives more securely than anything man can build. The strange thing is, many people in that prison don't even know they're locked in. They think they're walking around "free".

Now, our government has a set of laws we're expected to live by, hasn't it? If we break one we can expect to go to jail or prison if that's the given penalty. When we break man's law its called a "crime".

The God of the universe also has laws He gave us to live by. When we break one of them we are locked up in a different kind of prison. Breaking God's law is called "sin". And what is sin? Well, yes, it's murder and stealing and having sex outside of marriage. It's also lying and swearing and anger and hating and greed. And when we sin we become sin's prisoner.

Sin is a prison that has trapped us all. Maybe we haven't all robbed a bank or murdered anyone but do you know anyone who has never told a lie? No one can plead, "Not guilty!" before God. God's book for us is called the *Bible* and in it He says we've *all* sinned.* In fact, He says *the whole world is the prisoner of sin***. This means you and it means me and it means everyone else in this whole world. We all are or have been inmates in sin's prison.

You may have noticed that the first time you thought about doing something you knew was wrong, there was a voice deep inside you that said, "*Don't do that! It's wrong!*" You may not have known the word "sin" but you knew it was wrong just the same. If we deliberately choose to do something, knowing all the time that we shouldn't, something happens inside us. This is because God says in the Bible . . . *the wages of sin is death****. And that's what happens when we choose the path of sin, a little bit of something inside us dies. Then if we go back and do it again, the little voice isn't quite so loud as it was the first time and if we keep on doing it, we eventually start thinking, "Well, it really isn't that bad, after all." It has become part of us. That's the way sin is. It lures us ever deeper into an evil prison that not only wastes our life, it wounds and destroys others in our path.

Yes, *the wages of sin is death**** and the ultimate end of those trapped in sin's prison is a death penalty much worse than the lethal execution of this world. The Bible calls it the *second death*. God tells us in the Bible:

*. . . cowards who turn away from (God) and unbelievers, and the corrupt, and murderers, and the immoral, and those who practice witchcraft, and idol worshipers, and all liars— their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This is the second death.*****

Sounds pretty scary doesn't it? Well, it is! But you'll be glad to know there's a way out. There's a road that leads out of this prison and away from this death trap, a road to *freedom and life*. No one has to stay in sin's prison. No one has to suffer the terrible sentence of the *second* death. There's a gate that is wide open to anyone who wants to break out. It's a small gate and it's narrow but we are all free to walk through it. I have to warn you though, it's not like the broad, easy road you've been on until now.

God says:

*The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose the easy way. But the gateway to life is small, and the road is narrow and only a few ever find it.**

How do you feel about the sins that have become *your prison*? Do you wish you could just leave them all behind and start over? We've all been there. We all have things in our life we wish we hadn't done, things we're ashamed of. But if you want out there's a way to escape your messed up past and begin again with a fresh, new beginning. This little booklet will show you how it can happen for you.

Even if your body is still locked up in a prison of walls and bars you can be "freer" than you've ever been before and more free than a lot of people who aren't even aware that they're in a jail. But first there are some very important things you should know.

- 1. You are a very special person, different from everyone else in the world.*
- 2. The God of the Universe loves you more than you can even imagine and He longs for you to be free and happy.*
- 3. This great God has a plan for you and for your life.*

The little stars you see, here and there, are to mark something taken directly from the Bible. If you want to read it for yourself right from God's Word you'll see the "address" of exactly where to find it on page 16.

You Are Special!

God made you unlike anyone else in the whole world. You are *you*, and there's no one else in the entire universe who has the personality He has given you. God gave you traits, abilities, and talents in a combination unlike anyone else. And He gave you the ability to worship Him and to serve Him in a way that no one else can. Just because you are *you*.

God has followed your life ever since you were first conceived in your mother's womb. He tells us about this in the Bible. David was a king who lived about three thousand years ago. Many of his writings are included in the Bible because God gave him unusual wisdom and insight about many things and He gave him the words to write about it. In the verses below he is talking to God about some of the wonderful things he has learned about Him. But this isn't just true about David, it's true about you, too. And it's true about every person born into this world. Why don't you read it out loud to the Lord just as if you wrote it.

Lord,

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. . . You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born.*

Yes, God was watching over you before you were even born. God knows everything about you. He has been following you all of your life. He knows every thought that has ever entered your head, every word you've spoken and every move you've ever made. David said this in that same psalm. And you can say it too.

O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought . . . Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord.**

Yes, God knows everything about you. (He even knows how many hairs you have on your head.*) He knows all about what you've been up to and what you've been down to. He knows all about the hurts and heartaches you've gone through. He has suffered with you when other people have wounded you and used you in hurtful ways. Yes, and He saw the way you injured others, too.**

God Loves You!

Did you know that God loves you? Yes, God - loves - you! God loves you! He loves you! If you're like most of us you're probably thinking, "If God knows everything about me, how come He loves me?" That's one of the wonderful things about God. He knows everything there is to know about us, more than we even know about ourselves, but He still loves us with a love that can't even be measured. He tells us in the Bible: "*Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you.*"*

Your next thought might be, "If He loves me how come I've had such a rotten life?" Well, that's because of the prison we were talking about. The "sin" prison not only keeps *you* locked in, it keeps *God* locked out of your life. The Bible says, . . . *your iniquities* (that's all the rotten things you've done) *have separated you from your God and your sins have hidden His face from you . . .*** Sin is an impassible barrier that keeps us separated from God and prevents Him from doing all the loving things He wants for us.

Now, we may not all actually be locked up with bars and locks and some of us may think we're completely "free", but as we said we've all broken God's laws in one way or another. We all are or have been inmates in sin's prison. In God's court of law we're all guilty. No one is excluded.

Now, let's say you (or I) were a confessed murderer and were brought into court before a fair and just judge to be tried. And it happened that the judge was a good friend of our family. Let's say the judge had known us all of our life and loved us like his own son or daughter. Because he loved us, could he just decide, "It's okay, you're a friend of mine, you can go free. You don't have to do any time or face any punishment." Why couldn't he do that? Today, laws are twisted in all kinds of ways but in a fair and just court there's no way a judge could do that, is there? He would have to sentence us to whatever penalty the law dictated. Why? Because when someone breaks the law of the land he has to be punished. That's the law. A fair judge would have no choice. No matter how much he loved us, he would have to do the right thing. He would have to find us guilty and sentence us to the punishment prescribed by law.

So, here is an interesting dilemma. We've all broken God's laws and we're all guilty. God is a fair and just Judge. No matter how much He loves us, He has no choice, He still has to punish our sin. You know first hand about man's penalty for breaking the law, don't you? But what is the punishment we mentioned for breaking God's laws, the punishment that every man faces for his sins? Remember the verse?

*. . . cowards who turn away from (God) and unbelievers, and the corrupt, and murderers, and the immoral, and those who practice witchcraft, and idol worshipers, and all liars—their doom is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This is the second death.****

But we're all guilty! What is God going to do, sentence everyone to an eternity in hell? No! God wants to free us all from the prison of sin that holds us and reverse the death penalty we face. He wants to erase our sins from His books and free us from the guilt of all the rotten

stuff we've ever done. He wants to help heal the painful wounds that have scarred our life. He wants you to be able to start over again with a clean sheet as beautiful as the new fallen snow. Yes, that's what He wants for you. But maybe you're thinking, "I know He's God but how can He undo what's already been done?"

Okay! When a law is broken be it God's law or man's law, justice demands that a guilty person be sentenced according to the stated penalty and punished, right? But God doesn't want anyone to have to go through the terrible punishment that His law demands. It meant a great sacrifice on His part but our loving Lord devised a plan whereby He could punish our sin and still give us a full pardon. How did He do it? It wasn't easy!

Do you have a son or daughter? If you do, would you be willing to give his or her life to save a friend? Not many of us would, but that's what God did! He sent His own Son to pay *our* debt. Jesus, Son of God (and God the Son) was born as a man. Even though He was tempted in every way, just like we are, He didn't sin. He lived a perfect, sinless life but ended up condemned as a common criminal. He was pure and innocent but all of our sins, even the filthiest and most repulsive ever committed, were placed on Him as He hung there humiliated and suffering on that blood stained cross. Yes, He suffered for our sins. He bled and died so you and I and anyone else in this whole world could have a full pardon.

Death by crucifixion is considered to be the most painful torture of all times yet God the Father could not comfort His Son even during that critical time. Because it is impossible for a holy God to tolerate sin, He was forced to turn His face away, even from His own Son, when *our* sins were put on Him. And Jesus, in pain, ridiculed, and alone, suffered the added anguish of being rejected by His Father as He cried out in desperation, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*"*

If He wanted to, Jesus could have called ten thousand angels to come to His rescue but He did not. He died in agony — in our place. Why? Because we are precious to Him and He knew there was no other way for you and me or anyone else to be freed from the sins that lock us away from His love. The Bible says:

*God made (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us . . .***

*He was wounded and crushed for our sins.****

When Jesus took on Himself our guilt, our sins, and the punishment we deserved, God's law was satisfied. God, the judge of all the earth now offers *a full pardon* as a free gift to anyone and everyone who will accept it. But a gift is not yours unless you receive it, is it? If someone wants to give you something you don't want, you don't have to take it. And if anyone tries to *make* you take something you don't want, it's no longer a "gift". Our Lord is a perfect gentleman, He would never try to force His way into your life. He *offers* the gift of forgiveness to everyone who will take it but the decision is yours.

God has given you a free will and you can do anything you want. This is why He hasn't interfered in your life before. Because He gave you the right to make your own decisions He had to stand back and let you do whatever you wanted to. Now, you alone must decide whether or not you want Jesus to be a part of your life. This is the gate you must walk through. The only way to escape sin's brutal prison is to accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness.

God wants you, yes you, this very minute to have a slate that is wiped clean in His sight. No matter what you've done, He wants your record, as far as He is concerned, to be cleared of every sin you've ever committed and every stain that mars your past. Are you ready to accept this precious gift that was bought at such a great price? Are you saying, "Yes! I want to receive God's gift of forgiveness. I want to accept Jesus as my Savior. I want to walk through that gate and out of sin's prison. What do I have to do?" All you have to do is to invite Jesus to come into your life. Open your heart to His love and He will do the rest.

Yes, Jesus died a painful death and was buried as any other man would be, but *He was God*. Death could not hold Him prisoner. On the third day He rose from the dead victorious over death and He lives today as our Savior and Lord.

Right now, you can just bow your head wherever you are and tell Him, "Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner. I'm guilty! I've broken your laws. Thank you for taking my punishment so I can be freed from my guilt and sin. Please come into my heart and life and cleanse me with your precious blood."

The Bible says:

*... the blood of Jesus, (God's) Son, cleanses us from every sin.**

God Has a Plan for Your Life

1. You Now Have A Brand New Start!

So, if you prayed that prayer and really meant it, some exciting things are happening in your life. Whether your body is still behind bars or not, you're a free person. God says in the Bible . . . *the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death. . . * Christ has really set us free.*** As far as God is concerned, you are completely free from your past sins. It's as if they never happened.

What's more, not only did Jesus take all your sins on Himself, when you received God's gift of forgiveness, He gave you a robe of righteousness. God says in the Bible:

*. . . God made (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for (you), so that in Him (you) might become the righteousness of God.****

Yes, you are now a *righteous* person. How about that? Now, when God looks at you, He doesn't even see your sin. He sees you as perfect, just as if you've never done anything wrong. Of course, that's not because you are perfect, it's because Jesus is perfect and sinless and when God looks at you now He sees only Jesus. He sees that Jesus paid the penalty for your sins and He sees the robe of righteousness that Jesus has given you.

Another thing that has happened if you prayed that prayer and really meant it, is that God has given you a brand new life. He said in the Bible:

*What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!*****

So you are now a *new* person. The old things are gone and new things will start to take root in your life. You no longer face everlasting death as punishment for your sins, instead God has given you the gift of *everlasting life*. And when you leave this world your new life will continue on in heaven with your Lord, forever. Remember that verse we mentioned at the beginning about the wages of sin being death? Well that was just the first part of the verse. Here is the rest of it:

*The wages of sin is death BUT the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.******

Yes, this means you will have everlasting life when you leave this earth, but this new life starts as soon as you receive God's gift of forgiveness. When you have Jesus as your Savior and Lord you have a new life, a new start and a new beginning. But it doesn't mean that everything is going to be fun and games from now on. Life on this planet will never be easy although Jesus will always be with you to help you and show you the way.

2. God Has Given You A Free Will. You Can Do Whatever You Want. Choose Wisely!

We mentioned before that life is made up of choices. We are where we are because of the choices we've made. Because the Lord gave us a free will we can do whatever we want to and that hasn't changed. As it was in the past, your whole life will be just one continual series of choices - every action, every reaction, every thought, every word. Now that you have Jesus in your life, you will become much more aware of a battle that is going on inside you. As long as you are in this life you will be a battleground in the struggle between good and evil.

Be aware that you have an enemy who will try to get you back on his turf. Now that you've taken a stand for Jesus, the devil will work hard to again control your mind and your body. He'll promise you anything. He'll entice you through any means. He'll use your buddies to try to manipulate you. He knows just the temptations to dangle in your face. Always know that he is bent on your destruction and if you yield to him, he'll surely bring you more heartache and sadness.

So every day you'll have many choices. You'll have to decide whether to follow your worst enemy who is bent on dragging you down into your past life, or follow Jesus who loves you and wants you to know a better way. Actually you can think of God and the devil as two bosses, or masters and you'll constantly have to choose which one you want to follow. God tells us about this in His Word:

Don't you realize that you can choose your own master? You can choose sin (with death) or else obedience (with acquittal). The one to whom you offer yourself—he will take you and be your master and you will be his slave. Thank God that though you once chose to be slaves of sin, now you have obeyed with all your heart the teaching to which God has committed you. And now you are free from your old master, sin; and you have become slaves to your new master, righteousness.

I speak this way, using the illustration of slaves and masters, because it is easy to understand: just as you used to be slaves to all kinds of sin, so now you must let yourselves be slaves to all that is right and holy.

*In those days when you were slaves of sin you didn't bother much with goodness. And what was the result? Evidently not good, since you are ashamed now even to think about those things you used to do, for all of them end in eternal doom. But now you are free from the power of sin and are slaves of God, and his benefits to you include holiness and everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Yes, God has a plan for your life. Until now you've followed your own way and done your own thing *and* you're paying the price for it. *Now your new Friend wants to guide you into something better. He wants you to be happy!* Happiness is walking on God's path of righteousness. (You already know a little about the unhappiness that sin brings when it takes hold of your life, don't you?) Now, you may be thinking, "But how do I know what God wants me to do?"

*The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you."***

3. Off With The Old! On With The New!

Have you ever noticed how often "New Year's Resolutions" are laughed at as the joke of the season? Have you ever wondered why people never seem to be able to "turn over a new leaf"? There are a lot of reasons, I know, but one has to do with an important principle.

If we decide to make a change in our life and stop doing something that has become part of us, it's very important for us to fill the empty space that is left. You've probably seen this principle applied most often by people who want to stop smoking. They will often chew gum or do something similar to help take the place of cigarettes. Once as I was waiting in an airport I saw a man with a great many packages of little mint-like candies. As long as I watched him, he popped one after another into his mouth, non-stop. I wondered if he was a chain smoker or what it was he was trying to shake. At least he was applying the right principle of trying to fill his time with something different.

This principle is taught in the Bible in many different ways, and it will be important for you to use it in your new life. There are going to be a lot of things you won't want to be involved with any more and things you are going to want to do differently. It's not going to be enough to just decide that you don't want them to be a part of your life any more, you need to fill the space they were occupying with something better.

The Bible tells us to *overcome evil with good**. Or, in other words, *Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.*** You'll find that when the Bible encourages us to abandon a sin in our life, it almost always suggests something to fill the emptiness that is left. If you try removing a sin in your life without replacing it with something better it's awfully easy to slip back into those "old life" habits again.

Now, if you're tempted to steal, what should you do? What is the opposite of *taking* something that isn't yours? It's *giving* isn't it? The Bible says:

*If you are a thief, stop stealing. Begin using your hands for honest work, and then give generously to others in need.****

Are you tempted to swear or say something nasty? Think of something nice to say. The Bible says:

*Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*****

If you're tempted to lie, what should you do? That one's easy, isn't it? The Bible says:

*. . . put away falsehood (lies) and tell . . . the truth.******

4. The Bible Is God's Book. Find Out What He Is Saying To You!

God's Word, the Bible, is going to be a very important book for you from now on for the rest of your life. It will be important for you to know what it says and to follow the guidelines our Lord gives us in this book. Some people think that God's rules are harsh and demanding. Not so! The road to happiness is to do what it says. You've lived your past life according to your own ways, wants and desires, haven't you? You've done whatever you felt like doing and you know where that got you. Now God wants to guide you on to a road of happiness. That's not a path any of us can find on our own.

If you don't have a Bible, perhaps your Chaplain can help you get one. Start reading your Bible. You've spent a good part of your life learning about things that have led you into sin's jungle, now you need to learn about traveling in the other direction. Happiness is straight ahead. In Psalm 1 God tells you where to start.

*Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with scoffers. But they delight in doing everything the Lord wants; day and night, they think about His law.**

The first thing is a "*don't*". *Don't* hang out with people who are going to drag you down. Don't go back to the old crowd. Ask the Lord to give you friends who love Jesus and will help you live for Him. (Again your chaplain may be able to help you with this.)

If you're released from prison, find a good church. But there are all kinds of churches, so be careful to choose one that honors Jesus as Lord. To check them out, call up and ask what they teach about Jesus. A good Bible believing church will tell you:

- 1. that Jesus is God born as a man*
- 2. that Jesus is our Lord and Savior and the only way to heaven.*

If they try to twist these basic truths in any way, don't go there. There are a lot of good churches that stand on God's Word but you may have to browse around a little to find the right one. Always ask the Lord to guide you. He has just the right one in mind for you.

The next thing after the "*don't*" is a couple of big "*do's*". Notice, happy people *delight in doing everything the Lord wants; day and night they think about His (Word)***. This says that "happy people" do God's will. And how do they know what God's will is? This verse tells us that they think about God's Word, *day and night*. So, what do you think? Does this mean you should spend all day reading your Bible, and sit up all night doing just that? Well, reading your Bible is going to be an important part of your life and you should spend time reading it. But God doesn't expect you to spend all day and all night reading your Bible. We'll talk about the "*day and night*" part just a little later, but first let's think for a minute about why God's Word is going to be such an important part of your new life.

As we said, up until now your mind and life have been full of things your enemy has been feeding into it. Now it will be important for you to start feeding God's truth into your thinking to help attack those things that have dragged you down in the past.

All of your actions, both good and bad start in your thinking process. This is the first place the devil attacks. One thing he'll probably start with is trying to get you to think about the old life. If you give in to this you may just start looking down that old path. From there it may be easy to

just go back and check it out a little, but only a little to start with. Then before you know it the trap is sprung. You're back entangled in its snare.

Be sure to ask the Lord to help you keep your thoughts going in the right direction. Remember we said that our lives are made up of choices? This applies especially to your thoughts. That's why Solomon said "*Above all else, guard your heart (and mind) for it affects everything you do.*"* The choice is always yours. Remember everything starts with that first thought and if you play with it the act will often follow close on its heels (good or bad).

I'm sure you can see why your Bible is so important. You need to replace those old thoughts with thoughts from God's Word. And you need to have His Word with you all the time so it's there to think about. You need it handy to ponder anytime during the day and when you're awake at night. So, how do we think about it "*day and night*"? The only way this can happen is for you to start *memorizing* it.

5. Memorize What God Is Telling You In His Word!

Now, before you throw your hands in the air and say, "What?? Memorize? I couldn't even memorize when I was a kid. I sure can't do it now!" Hey, don't forget you're now a new person in Jesus. You have a new Helper. God says:

*What is impossible from a human perspective is possible with God.***

*... nothing is impossible with God.****

Remember, we said earlier that you have an enemy who is going to work against you. He'll work hard on this one. He'll tell you, "Memorize the Bible? Forget it! Don't even try. That's for brainy people, not for you." Here are some Scripture verses you can read back to him to block this attack. (Scripture is another word for what's written in the Bible.) Tell him:

*... I can do everything through Christ who gives me the strength I need.*****

*It is not that (I) think (I) can do anything of lasting value by (myself). (My) only power and success come from God.******

This is how to use God's Word against the enemy when he tries to lure you into his traps. Just tell Him what God says. He can't stand against God's Word and the Bible tells you to *... resist the devil and he will flee from you.****** Your enemy won't hang around when you start telling him what God has written in His Word.

This is why it's important to *memorize* from the Bible. *God's Word is your defense against sin.* It is a *Sword* for you to use against evil.***** You know what happens to soldiers who are caught without their weapons, don't you? It's only when we *memorize* God's Word that we have it in our heart and mind to use as a weapon against the great deceiver when we need it. You won't always have your Bible (book) with you or be able to find the right verse if you do. But when you memorize it, you have it with you all the time, *day and night*. You'll be prepared. Your enemy is always lurking close by ready to spring when you are unprepared and least expect it.

Are you now thinking, "Well, where should I start and what do I do?"

When you start looking through your Bible, you'll see sections with names that are called "books". And you'll see that the books are broken up into "chapters" and the chapters into "verses". Some people will tell you to memorize individual verses, a verse here and a verse there. This is great, but you'll find it even more helpful to memorize an entire chapter, and maybe even a whole book. When you memorize longer portions you can understand what God is really saying rather than just taking a verse all by itself.

Then as you start reading the Bible, you'll begin to find passages that kind of jump out at you and you'll find yourself thinking, "Yeah, that's something I really need in my life." That would be a good passage or chapter to memorize so you can think about it when you don't have a Bible in hand. But until you get to that place ask the Lord where He wants you to start. I'm sure your Chaplain or a Christian friend will be happy to help you. Your first chapter should be short. You might even consider memorizing Psalm 1. (Remember we talked about a couple of verses from that chapter earlier in this section.)

Now as you begin, don't look at a whole chapter and say, "I'm going to memorize this chapter." Just look at the first verse and say to yourself, "I'm going to memorize this verse." Take it very slowly and say it over and over to yourself and out loud. Look back at your Bible as often as you need to until you know that first verse as well as you know your own name. If it takes you a day, that's fine. If it takes a week or even a month, who cares? Who's counting? Don't go on to the next verse until you can say that first verse right off without any trouble.

When you know the first verse that well, go on to the next one. If you're doing Psalm 1, the second verse is a little longer, you may just want to take the first part of it. Again, go over it again and again until you can say it out loud without any trouble. Then start with verse one and say them together until you can say them right off before going on to the last part of verse two. Memorize it and then say the two verses together. And continue in this way. Always be sure you know the previous verses well before going on.

The Bible isn't like any other book. You'll find it's alive. Yes, alive and very powerful. Don't try to hurry. Go slow. Just take your time and enjoy it. As you memorize, ask the Lord to help you understand what He is saying to you. Someone in the Bible prayed it this way: (Lord) *Open my eyes to see the wonderful things in your law.** That's a good prayer to remember. The Lord will speak important things into your heart and mind as you think and meditate on His Word. Think often about what you've memorized. And it's always fun to share what you've learned. If you have a chance, tell it to your friends.

As you continue adding verses on to what you've memorized, you'll be surprised at how fast it goes and before long, you'll have memorized the entire chapter. That will be a mile-stone for you. You will then have a whole chapter of God's Word hidden away in your mind and heart to meditate on and think about when you don't have your Bible in hand. Say it often to yourself and out loud (and to others if you have the chance) so you won't forget it. Always ask the Lord to teach you what He wants you to learn from it and to show you how to apply it to your every day life.

It's good too, to have someone you can memorize with. Maybe you have a friend who would like to work with you, or you may even want to meet with a group of friends. Then it's good to meet every week so everyone can share what they have learned.

6. Talk With Your Lord! He's Always Listening!

God's plan for your life is a journey that you'll be on for the rest of your life. You start out by inviting Jesus into your life as your Lord and Savior. Then it's important to always keep in close touch with Him. He'll talk to you through His Book, as you read the Bible and memorize it. But a conversation goes two ways, doesn't it? It's also important for you to spend time talking to Him.

Remember Jesus is always with you and for you. He'll never leave you. Talk with Him anytime and all the time. Remember He created you. He loves you. You're special to Him.

Share your thoughts and life with Him wherever you are, whatever you're doing. In other words, hang out with Him. Talk to Him in your heart and out loud. Tell Him about anything and everything, the big things and the little, the good things and the bad. Don't try to hide anything. He knows it anyway. Tell Him what you're thinking about and what is bothering you. Always level with Him.

Ask Him to show you the way He wants you to go and to help you to do the right thing. We all know what happened when we tried to do it our way, don't we? Now, be sure to never try going it alone. We can only avoid heartache and pitfalls by leaning on our Lord. Look to Him for guidance and wisdom in every situation.

When we talk to God it's called "prayer". But don't let the word scare you. You talk with your friends and buddies easily enough, don't you? "Prayer" just means you're talking to your special Buddy, your Helper and your Guide. You'll be learning a lot more about prayer as you go along. But for now it's just important for you to know that prayer is going to be an important part of your new life. You can know that your God and Savior is always listening for *your* voice and treasures those special times you have together.

Remember, too:

*(God) is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope.**

7. If You Blow It Run To Jesus For Forgiveness!

We said earlier that God sees you as perfect, and He does. But no matter how much we'd like to be perfect and even though we always try, we shouldn't be discouraged if we don't quite make it. When we arrive in heaven everything will be perfect, including us, but until that time, life is going to be a challenge.

We all blow it. When this happens to you, you'll notice that God isn't as close to you as He was before. Remember we said that sin separates us from God? It does, but don't ever forget that Jesus died so that our sins could be forgiven. The barrier of sin will disappear when we confess our weaknesses and wrongdoing to the Lord and when we ask for forgiveness. We can know that Jesus has already paid the price so that we can be forgiven.

If you do something you shouldn't, or if God's Holy Spirit puts His finger on something in your life that isn't quite right and you start feeling guilty, go quickly to Jesus. Ask Him to forgive you and *always ask Him to help you not to do it again*. Don't ever try to hide it. The Lord has told us: . . . *if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.***

Always remember:

- 1. You are a very special person.*
- 2. The God of the Universe loves you more than you can ever imagine. He longs for you to be free and happy.*
- 3. This great God has a plan for your life.*

When you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Life Partner remember these six things:

1. Jesus has paid the penalty for your sins. When you ask Him into your heart and life He gives you a full pardon. As far as God is concerned all the rotten stuff you've ever done is wiped clean off the map. And what's more, He gives you a robe of righteousness. You are a new person. In God's eyes, you no longer have a past, only a future. And the new life He gives will go on with Him forever.
2. Life is just one continual series of choices. Be aware that the paths of good and evil, right and wrong, joy and misery, life and death, will always be there before you as long as you are here on this earth. You have a free will. You can do anything you want. You always have a choice. The decision will always be yours. Be sure to choose life.
3. God speaks to you through the Bible. His Word is your weapon against sin. Don't be caught without it. Up until now your enemy has been busy feeding his lies and ideas into your mind and life. Fill your mind with God's Word to counteract your past way of thinking. Remember everything starts with that first thought.
4. Memorize God's Word. (Don't let your enemy talk you out of it.) Hide it in your heart so you'll always have it handy to guide you on the path of righteousness. That's the only road to happiness.
5. Talk to the Lord about everything, good things and bad things any time and all the time. Don't try to hide anything from Him. Ask Him to help you, to give you wisdom and strength to do the right thing. Never try to go it alone.
6. If you blow it, don't try to hide. Run quickly to Jesus and ask for His forgiveness and ask Him to help you not to do it again. *If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. (1 John 1:9)*

The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs bit and bridle to keep it under control." Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord. So rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey him! Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure! (Psalm 32:8-11)

And now, to Him who is able to keep you from falling and who will present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

Remember, we said the little stars meant that something was taken right from the Bible. If you want to check them out and read them for yourself, the addresses below tell you exactly where to find them. They are in order for each page. (Unless otherwise marked the Scripture quotations are from the New Living Translation. The letters you see after some of them mean that they are taken from other translations. Your chaplain or Christian friend will be able to explain this for you.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>Page 2: Romans 3:23*
 Galatians 3:22**
 Romans 6:23***
 Revelation 21:8****</p> | <p>Page 11: Psalm 1:1-2*
 Psalm 1:2**</p> |
| <p>Page 3: Matthew 7:13-14*</p> | <p>Page 12: Proverbs 4:23*
 Luke 18:27**
 Luke 1:37***
 Philippians 4:13****
 II Corinthians 3:5*****
 James 4:7*****
 Ephesians 6:17*****</p> |
| <p>Page 4: Psalm 139:13, 15-16*
 Psalm 139:1-2, 3-4**
 Matthew 10:30***</p> | <p>Page 13: Psalm 119:18*</p> |
| <p>Page 5: Jeremiah 31:3 - KJV*
 Isaiah 59:2 - NIV**
 Revelation 21:8***</p> | <p>Page 14: Ephesians 3:20*
 I John 1:9**</p> |
| <p>Page 6: Matthew 27:46*
 II Corinthians 5:21 - NIV**
 Isaiah 53:5***</p> | |
| <p>Page 7: I John 1:7*</p> | |
| <p>Page 8: Romans 8:2*
 Galatians 5:1**
 II Corinthians 5:21 -
 NIV***

 II Corinthians 5:17****
 Romans 6:23*****</p> | |
| <p>Page 9: Romans 6:16-23 - TLB*
 Psalm 32:8**</p> | |
| <p>Page 10: Romans 12:21 - NIV*
 Romans 12:21 - NLT**
 Ephesians 4:28***
 Ephesians 4:29****
 Ephesians 4:25*****</p> | |