

RETURNING HOME



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

ANSWER KEY

Cover artwork by Mark, Crossroads student in Australia



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PRISON MINISTRIES

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INTRODUCTION

This course is assigned to Crossroads' students who are getting near their release date from incarceration. The course is focused more on the practical aspects of leaving jail or prison. The student will share about their challenges and concerns about going home. Following Christ will be the most important thing that someone leaving prison should commit to doing. Look for opportunities in this course to encourage the student's spiritual growth and commitment.

STUDY TOOLS

Throughout this course, students will be provided the tools listed below to assist them in their studies. These tools provide ways that you can interact with students.



CONVERSATION BOXES: We have included some spaces throughout the print versions of lessons that we call **conversation boxes**. Students can share questions or thoughts about the lesson or life. Students completing digital lessons can use the comment box at the end of the lesson for the same purpose. You may respond in any open space.



ACTION STEPS: At the end of each lesson, we have included a challenge called an **action step**. It asks the student to apply what they have learned. If they feel that they need help or encouragement to complete it, they may simply write down what they plan to do. You can follow up with the student by asking if they have completed it.



Crossroads provides NIV Bibles, upon request, to students who need them to complete the lessons (if allowed by their facility).

Glossary of Terms

Each lesson contains Bible names, terms and ideas that may be new to students. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. The list below includes all of the terms found in this course. In each lesson, we have included an asterisk (*) the first time each term appears.

Antisocial — Being against or harmful to society; displaying behavior that is very different from accepted behavior.

Antisocial Associates — Friends or acquaintances who are involved in criminal or destructive behavior or who influence a person to hold antisocial (see “**antisocial**”) beliefs.

Antisocial Behavior — Actions that harm or violate the rights of other people, such as stealing, lying, manipulation, and violence.

Antisocial Personality Patterns — Not caring about or respecting the feelings, rights, and well-being of others.

Antisocial Thinking and Attitudes — A view of the world that causes unwillingness to follow societal norms or laws and supports criminal behavior.

Babylon — An ancient city whose people destroyed Jerusalem and captured its people. The ruins of the city are located in modern-day southern Iraq.

Case Manager — A correctional facility staff member who assigns and tracks programs and, in most cases, approves an incarcerated person’s release plan. They may have a list of resources that can be helpful in planning a person’s return to the community.

Celebrate Recovery — A Christian twelve-step program designed to help people recover from a wide variety of unhealthy behavior patterns.

Coping Mechanism — Behavior used to avoid stress or unpleasant emotions. This behavior can be positive (prayer, exercise, journaling, etc.) or negative (excessive drinking, abusing drugs, avoidance, self-harm, etc.).

Cyrus — Also called Cyrus the Great, he was the king of Persia from 559 to 530 BC. He conquered Babylon (see “**Babylon**”) and freed God’s people from captivity.

Deceptive — Having the power to trick someone into thinking something false is true.

Discern — To come to know, recognize, or understand.

Haggai — One of the twelve minor prophets (see “**minor prophets**”) of the Old Testament. He prophesied to God’s people after their return from captivity.

Harmony — Living in agreement with others without lasting conflict.

Idol — An image or object representing a deity, or god, to which worship is directed. An idol can be anything we consider more important than God.

Idolatry — The worship of idols (see “**idol**”)—anything that is not the true God of the Bible.

Institutionalization — Harmful effects that arise from spending a long time in an institution such as prison or jail and becoming used to its environment and culture.

Marduk — A Babylonian god worshiped as the territorial god over Babylon (see “**Babylon**”).

Minor Prophets — The Old Testament prophets who brought messages from God to His people and the people of the surrounding nations and wrote the twelve shorter prophetic books of the Bible.

Motivation — A force that drives or encourages someone to do something.

Nebuchadnezzar — Babylon’s (see “**Babylon**”) most powerful king. He ruled from 605 to 562 BC.

Shalom — The Hebrew word for “peace.” In the Bible, shalom is used to describe the peace that comes from God and the peace that exists between people. God desires us to live in a state of shalom with Him and with others. The word is also used as a greeting.

Sobriety — The quality or state of being sober—not impaired or controlled by the use of alcohol or drugs.

Statistics — A branch of mathematics dealing with the collection and study of numerical data, often for the purpose of determining trends or practices of a large number of people by looking at a small sample of representative people.

Strong’s Concordance — Another name for *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. A valuable resource for Bible study, it was published in 1890 by theologian and professor James Strong. It contains an alphabetical list of every word present in the King James Version of the Bible, along with definitions and citations of the passages in which each word is found.

Trigger — To cause an intense and usually negative emotional reaction in someone (verb); something that causes an intense and usually negative emotional reaction in someone (noun).

LESSON 1: Preparing to Go Home

Lesson Focus:

Setting your priorities as you anticipate your release.

Congratulations! You can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Whether your sentence was two years or twenty, it has probably felt like an eternity. As you look forward to your release date, you may also be experiencing fear and stress as the day gets closer. You might feel overwhelmed as you think about the details you will need to have in place. Housing, employment, reconnecting with family, maintaining sobriety, and staying out of prison are just a few of the things that might be weighing on your mind. It can be hard to stay focused on the things you need to do.

This course is designed to help you develop a plan that will eliminate much of the uncertainty and stress of reentry. Some things won't work out the way you hope or expect, but if you create a solid plan, you will have a strategy to help keep you on track.

First, let's look at a time when God's people strayed from God and ended up in a similar situation.

Read **Jeremiah 25:1–14**.

The Prophecy of Jeremiah

Around 597 BC (Before Christ), Nebuchadnezzar,* the king of Babylon,* attacked Jerusalem. These attacks lasted for several years. By 587 BC, Jerusalem and the temple of Solomon were destroyed, and many of the people who lived there had run away or had been taken prisoner by the Babylonians.

Several years earlier, in 605 BC, the prophet Jeremiah had given the Jewish people a message from God. He warned them that they were facing destruction by King Nebuchadnezzar, who would capture them and make them slaves if they did not repent.

Read **Jeremiah 25:1–14**.

1. What accusation did Jeremiah bring against the people of Judah (verse 3)?

Jeremiah tells the people of Judah that for 23 years he has brought them prophetic warnings from the Lord, but they have not listened to those warnings.

“For twenty-three years—from the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah until this very day—the word of the LORD has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened” (Jeremiah 25:3).

2. What did Jeremiah say the people needed to do so God would not harm them (verse 6)?

Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not arouse my anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you” (Jeremiah 25:6)

3. Because the people did not listen to repeated warnings from Jeremiah, what did God tell them He was going to do? List all the consequences in verses 8–11.

Jeremiah 25:8-11 says:

“Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: ‘Because you have not listened to my words, I will . . .

****summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations.***

****I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.***

****I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp.***

****This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”***

God’s chosen people had a long history of worshiping other gods rather than the one true God. These other gods are called idols.* Idolatry* is the worship of someone or something that is not God. While there were and are many gods that people worship, anything that we put before God in our lives is an idol. Money, power, sex, drugs, alcohol, relationships, and even anger can be idols.

One way to recognize the idols in our lives is to look at what we go to for comfort when life gets difficult. What do we rely on to make us feel better? Just like the false gods of the Babylonians could not save the people, the idols we allow in our lives will not be able to save us from ourselves. God is merciful and doesn’t want to punish us, but if we trust in something else, like money, it will let us down. Self-medicating with drugs or alcohol may provide temporary relief but will cause harm and destruction in the end.

4. In your past, what are some of the idols that you put before God?

Idols are anything that we put before God. The student may answer: Money, drugs, sex, relationships, power, pride, or anything else that they served rather than God.

5. Think about the idol that was most destructive to you. What was it about that idol that gave you relief from the difficulties of life?

The student’s answer should reflect an awareness of how they have allowed idols,

instead of God, to control and direct their life choices. Their answer should include something about how those particular idols brought them temporary relief from their problems but ultimately were destructive.

When we place our trust in gods or idols that are not the God of the Bible, we have willingly placed ourselves in danger, just like the Jews did. God was patient and gave His people many opportunities to repent and return to worshipping Him.

Release from Imprisonment

When the Jewish people's seventy years as prisoners of the Babylonians were over, God promised He would punish the Babylonians. The Babylonians were punished when they were conquered by Cyrus,* king of Persia. Cyrus freed the Jews and allowed them to return to the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem.

However, after seventy years of imprisonment, some of the people chose to stay where they were. Most of them were born in Babylon and had never lived in Judah. The prosperous Persian Empire, under the rule of King Cyrus, offered better opportunities and an easier life. The thought of returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the destroyed city did not appeal to them.

Although King Cyrus was a kinder ruler than Nebuchadnezzar, he worshiped the god Marduk.* Those who remained under the rule of Cyrus traded God's plan for them for life in an idolatrous country.

6. Some men and women in prison decline parole and choose to "max out" or "jam" their sentence. How is that similar to the actions of the Jewish people who chose to stay where they had been held captive?

When their seventy years of captivity by the Babylonians had ended, some people chose to stay in Babylon because they were comfortable there and it would have been difficult to return to Jerusalem to rebuild a city in ruins. Some men and women in prison choose not to be paroled, serving their full sentence instead so they won't have to be responsible to obey the requirements of their parole. They are more comfortable in prison than in the community where rebuilding their life will be difficult.

7. What fears or concerns do you have about getting out of prison and following God?

The student's answer should reflect an awareness of some of the difficulties and challenges of reentering the community after incarceration.

8. As you prepare for release, how are you trying to place God first in all your plans?

Answers can include, but are not limited to:

Prayer, Christian fellowship, Bible study, searching for a church, making a commitment to have accountability in the community, making amends to those they have harmed.

Read **Haggai 1:2–8**.

The Prophecy of Haggai*

Haggai was one of the twelve minor prophets* in the Old Testament. The minor prophets were not less important than the major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel). They are called minor prophets because the books they wrote are much shorter than the books of the major prophets.

Haggai lived during the time when God's people were released from their captivity by the Babylonians. Scholars date his prophecy around 520 BC. His prophecy to the Jews is recorded in the book of Haggai, which is only two chapters long.

Read **Haggai chapters 1 and 2**.

As you learned in your reading, those who returned to Judah and Jerusalem after seventy years as prisoners returned to a homeland and temple that had been destroyed. They soon found themselves facing many challenges. Haggai gave the people a message from God that explained what mistakes they had made and why they were experiencing so much hardship.

Reread **Haggai 1:2–8**.

9. In your own words, what did the people do after they returned to their homeland (verses 2–4)?

The student's answer should reflect an understanding that the people were more concerned with their own selfish desires and comfort than they were in placing God first in their lives by rebuilding the Temple and honoring God.

10. As a result of their actions, what were they experiencing (verses 5–6)?

God was not blessing their efforts.

"Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it'" (Haggai 1:5-6).

11. What did God tell the people to do to correct their course (verse 8)?

Rebuild His house, the Temple that had been destroyed.

The mistakes the Jewish people made after being released from their imprisonment by the Babylonians are the same mistakes that many people today make when they are released from prison. Rather than putting God first, they try to make up for lost time by attending to their own desires.

Instead of building the temple so they could reestablish their worship of God, the Jewish people built paneled houses for themselves. Paneled houses were a luxury. Their priority was thinking of themselves and what they wanted rather than making sure their spiritual lives were in order.

Similarly, these are some common mistakes people today make when they are released from prison:

Trying to make up for lost time. Because they have missed out on life outside prison, they feel like they need to catch up. They may focus on making as much money as they can. They may start a romantic relationship too soon because they were lonely inside prison. They may covet the lives and possessions of their friends outside, feeling inferior because of their friends' success. They may buy expensive things and end up going into debt because they want to appear equal to their peers.

Thinking they deserve good things. The Jews who returned to Jerusalem and Judah felt they deserved a prosperous and comfortable life. After all, they were slaves for seventy years. Someone who has spent multiple years in prison might think about all the things they were denied, all the freedoms they lost, and all the difficulties they endured in prison and believe that they deserve everything life has to offer.

Assuming their spiritual life will be perfect. You have probably heard someone in your facility say something like, "I'm not going to be like these fake Christians here. These people go to chapel and talk about Jesus, but when they get out, they come right back to prison. When I get out, I'll follow God for real."

People who think this way leave prison spiritually unprepared for the difficulties of reentry. Their pride makes them think they are somehow stronger than the "fake" Christians around them. In their minds, they are smarter and morally better than others.

The truth is that if you are not doing something now, you are not likely to do it when you get out. As you anticipate your release, your number one priority must be to put God first in your life now. This will help you plan and make good decisions for your future. God knows what you will need when you get released. As you seek to follow God in everything you do, trust that the other pieces of your life will fall into place.

Read **Matthew 6:25–34**.

12. What did Jesus say we should not worry about (verse 25)?

The student's answer should reflect an understanding that God will provide for their needs in the future.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25)

13. Write Jesus' words in verse 33:

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

Here are some important elements to include in your plan to help you put God first. Each one lists an accompanying verse that we recommend memorizing. Look up each verse and write it in the space provided.

Making Your Plan

When the Jewish people returned to their country after seventy years of incarceration, they came home to a mess. The temple was destroyed. Most of their roads, buildings, homes, and farms were gone. They had to start over and completely rebuild their lives.

When you leave prison, there will be a lot for you to rebuild, too. You may no longer have a home, job, money, or friends. Some people lose their marriages, children, or support from their community. In many ways, like the Jews in Haggai’s time, you will be starting over.

As you continue this course, you will make a reentry plan. Your facility may also require you to do this. If so, use the biblical principles from this course in your facility release plan. Keep in mind what happened to the Jewish people when they were released, and don’t make the one big mistake that they made. Put God first in everything you do. The Jewish people should have first rebuilt the temple and restored their nation’s loyalty to God. Make sure to seek God and His Kingdom first, and He will provide the things you need.

Here are some important elements to include in your plan to help you put God first. Each one lists an accompanying verse that we recommend memorizing. Look up each verse and write it in the space provided.

14. **Talk to God daily:** Spend time every day in prayer, letting God know your fears, challenges, and needs. Ask Him to strengthen you spiritually and help you overcome your weaknesses.

Philippians 4:6–7: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

15. **Obey God:** Even though we know the things God wants us to do, we often fail to do them. Is there someone you need to forgive? Have you been resisting God in an area of your life? Are you holding on to unhealthy or destructive idols?

James 1:22: *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”*

16. **Study God’s Word:** As we read and study the Bible, we learn what God loves and hates. We learn what His will is for us. We learn what God requires of us as we follow Him. Most importantly, we learn that God loves us.

Psalm 119:105: “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”

17. **Listen for God’s voice:** Prayer is talking to God, but more importantly, it is listening for God to speak to us. In your prayer and study time, practice being quiet in God’s presence. What is He saying to your heart?

John 10:27: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

18. **Have a grateful heart:** We have a good God who loves us and gives us good things. Being grateful is a choice. We may have trouble in our lives because of bad decisions we have made, but God forgives us and invites us to be in a relationship with Him. If that isn’t a good reason to be grateful, then what is? Make it a habit to thank God for His love and forgiveness.

Colossians 4:2: “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”

19. Understand that God is always with you: God says He will never leave us. We will go through difficult times, but knowing and believing that God is with us on even our hardest days will strengthen us and give us the confidence to continue.

Deuteronomy 31:8: “The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

Action Step

If you haven’t already, start preparing your release plan, emphasizing ways to maintain and strengthen your relationship with God once you are released. Seek out reentry resources that are available at your facility. If you have specific prayer requests related to your preparation for release, share them here so the mentor who reviews this lesson can pray for you.

LESSON 2: Restoring Shalom

Lesson Focus:

Preparing to rebuild relationships with your family, friends, community, and the Church

Have you ever heard the expression “Shalom”?* Around the world, it is a common greeting that Jewish people and some Christians use to say “Hello” and “Goodbye.” In many Arab countries, people say “Salaam” or “As-salamu alaykum.” Both expressions have the same origin that predates both the Christian and the Islamic religions. Shalom is commonly understood to mean “peace.” While that is accurate, it also means much more. Some of the words that Strong’s Concordance* uses to define shalom are *completeness, wholeness, safety, harmony,* and absence of agitation or discord.*

God desires that each of us would have shalom in our hearts, relationships, and communities. In the previous lesson, we looked at putting God first and developing our relationship with Him. This is the first step to shalom. But biblically, shalom also requires having peace and harmony with others, within our communities, within our nation, and with other nations.

1. What are some things that make it difficult to have shalom with others?

Shalom is peace, cooperation , and partnership with others, our community, our place of employment. The student’s answer should reflect things that hinder having good relationships with individuals and the community.

When we have shalom, we function in harmony with God and, as far as it depends on us, with our community. Our community includes our town or city. But it also includes our family, our church, our workplace, and the authorities God has placed over us. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the church in Rome, wrote:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Romans 12:17–18)

Paul did not say that we would never have conflict. He said that we should do everything possible to live at peace with others. We should not be the cause of conflict.

As you prepare to go home, think about what it means to restore shalom with your community. Will you need to repent for past actions and attitudes toward others? Will you need to ask for forgiveness from someone to restore a relationship? How will you rebuild the trust you may have broken? How will you become a valued member of the community that you may have harmed by your actions? As you draw near to God, He will help you answer these questions.

Restoring Shalom with Your Family

Relationships with family members can be challenging. Members of your family may have harmed you or betrayed your trust. You may have harmed them or betrayed their trust. You may have experienced a chaotic or abusive home—the opposite of shalom.

Conflict within families is common. Maybe you have a long history of conflict and disagreements with your family members. Maybe your spouse or children are angry or have stopped speaking to you because you went to prison.

Restoring shalom in your family relationships does not mean that every relationship will be completely healed. We can't control the thoughts or actions of others, but God still requires us to do our part to bring healing to our families. Restoring shalom takes prayer, hard work, and time.

Read **Matthew 5:43–45**.

You may consider someone in your family to be your enemy, but you probably love your family members even if your relationships are currently broken. If God tells us to pray for our enemies, how much more should we be praying for our family members? We begin to restore shalom when we pray for our families. When we ask God to heal their hearts, we will find that our own hearts will also begin to heal.

2. Make a list of people in your family you need to pray for. Include the family members with whom you have the most conflict. Commit to praying every day for each family member on your prayer list.

The student should list at least two family members that they have or have had conflict with.

Commit to praying every day for each family member on your prayer list.

Rebuilding Trust

Rebuilding trust will not be easy. You may have made promises to your children or other family members that you didn't keep. Simply telling them you are sorry for the ways you have hurt or disappointed them will not be enough. Apologizing is a good start, and it is necessary, but your actions will be more effective than your words. Over time, as they see you do what you said you would do, their trust in you will increase. As they see you make a faithful effort to be responsible and caring, you will find opportunities for restoration.

Fruit of True Repentance

If we have sincerely repented and turned from our life outside of the will of God, there will be fruit (visible actions) that will demonstrate our repentance. The story of Zacchaeus is a perfect example of true repentance.

Read **Luke 19:1–10**.

3. Who was Zacchaeus (verse 2)?

A wealthy chief tax collector.

4. What was the crowd's reaction when Jesus told Zacchaeus that He was going to stay at his house (verse 7)?

They were surprised that Jesus would eat at the house of a sinner. Some may have been upset. Others may have seen it as a sign of hope for themselves as sinners.

5. What fruit or action demonstrated that Zacchaeus had genuinely repented of his sin (verse 8)?

Zacchaeus not only believed in Jesus but committed to taking action as part of his repentance.

"Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and . . .

"if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Like Zacchaeus, we need to demonstrate our repentance by our actions when possible. Consider whom you may have hurt or to whom you may owe something. If you owe a family member money, make every effort to repay that debt, even if you can't pay it all at once. For example, if you owe a family member \$1,000 and begin faithfully paying them back \$50 a month, you will demonstrate a consistent commitment to change and repentance. Your actions will build trust and demonstrate your commitment to your new life in Christ.

Other examples of things you may need to do to restore shalom in your family include:

- Paying child support
- Writing a letter of apology that focuses on the steps you will take to rebuild trust
- Being consistent in taking care of your responsibilities to your parents, spouse, siblings, or children
- Being a good listener to understand what your family needs and expects from you
- Letting your actions speak louder than your words
- Doing your best to both speak and act in love
- Giving others time and space to forgive you on their own terms

Think about the family members with whom you need to restore shalom. Praying consistently for them is the place to begin, but what other steps will you need to take to restore the relationships that have been broken?

Start by making a list of things you can do to restore your relationship with one specific family member.

6. Family member: _____

What will I do to bring shalom to my relationship with him or her?

The student should reflect in their list some practical steps that can help restore their broken relationship.

Restoring Shalom with Your Community

Before Adam and Eve's sin caused the Fall, God's creation was an example of perfect shalom. Humanity's relationship with God was marked by peace, harmony, and wholeness. When sin entered the world, that shalom was broken.

Read **Acts 3:19–20**.

When we turn to God, our sins are forgiven, and we experience “times of refreshing” in our lives. But God's long-term plan is to fully restore all of creation. It was not a new idea in Jesus' time. Peter said this was God's promise from long ago, told to the people through His prophets.

As believers, we should do everything possible to live in harmony with others, including those in our community. Think of the life you hope to have when you are released. Have you considered how you will live in peace and harmony with your community? What will it mean to be restored to society and your community?

7. It is easy to be so focused on ourselves and our immediate families that we forget to pray for the communities in which we live. How can you intentionally include this in your prayer life?

The student's answer should reflect an understanding and awareness of the needs of the community and how to live in harmony with the community inside or outside of prison.

Living in society means following both written and unwritten rules. The written rules are called laws. When we break the laws of the community, we have broken the community's trust. A consequence of breaking that trust may be making things right with those we have harmed. Another consequence may be paying a debt to society by spending time in jail or prison.

The unwritten rules are things expected of each member of a community. They include respecting the rights of others, demonstrating care and concern for others, and doing our part to make the community a good and safe place to live. Jesus summed up this idea in what is known as the Golden Rule.

Read **Matthew 7:12**.

8. In your own words, explain the Golden Rule.

The student's answer should reflect an understanding of the “golden rule” in Matthew 7:12: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

9. Do you think it is fair or unfair to be expected to make your community safer and better for others? Please explain.

The student's answer will reflect whether they believe the expectation to make their community safer is fair or unfair. This question provides an opportunity for the mentor to provide some spiritual counsel. If the student believes it is unfair to expect them to make their community safer, their explanation for their reasoning should be well thought out.

Think back to the story of Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector—a Jew who collected taxes from the people for the Roman government. Tax collectors would collect more than what was owed to Rome and keep the extra money for themselves. They were considered traitors and were disliked by their own people.

Zacchaeus went beyond paying back the money he had stolen from his community. He promised to pay back four times the amount he had stolen. Zacchaeus understood what was needed to restore shalom with his community.

10. If you were part of Zacchaeus's community, and he paid you four times what he had stolen from you, what would your reaction be? How would this affect your feelings about him?

The student's answer should reflect an understanding that they would be surprised and/or inspired by Zacchaeus's repentance and admission that he had harmed the community. The student will likely indicate that they would have a willingness to forgive Zacchaeus.

Shalom at Your Place of Worship

As you approach your release date, people have probably been encouraging you to find a good church to join in your community. This is excellent advice. A healthy church community will provide fellowship, encouragement, and an environment where you can continue to grow spiritually.

God's plan from the beginning of creation has been to have His people living in His Kingdom, under His protection, in relationship with Him. Through Jesus' work on the cross to redeem humanity, the Kingdom of God is being established. Jesus came to establish His Church. Jesus' Church is not a single church building or a small group of people in one part of the world. His Church is all those who place their faith in Him.

Unfortunately, many men and women, even the most committed Christians, will not successfully find a supportive church family after release. There are several common reasons for this.

Hiding Out

Some people start attending a large church where they won't be noticed. They are afraid of people knowing they just got out of prison. They think a large church will allow them to stay anonymous or hide out. Many large churches are healthy places of worship, but within those

large churches are opportunities like small group Bible studies or ministries that help people get to know one another and build relationships that are necessary for spiritual growth. If you find a large church you like, it will be important to find a smaller group within that church where you can get to know other believers and they can get to know you.

11. Although everyone doesn't need to know all the details of your past, you need some people in your life who are familiar with your journey so they can properly support you. Are you comfortable with allowing people at your future church to get to know the real you? Please explain.

The student's answer will reveal something about their level of trust in God, the world, or others. Look for an opportunity to provide encouragement for the student to have people in their lives that they can trust to share their struggles with.

Not Feeling Welcomed

We all want to be part of a church where we feel loved and welcomed. Just as Jesus accepts us and forgives our sins, we might expect every church to do the same. However, the Church is made up of people like us—sinners who do not always perfectly reflect the love of Christ. If you are rejected by a church, you might be tempted to think that God is rejecting you. Don't give in to that temptation!

When someone visits a new church, people notice. Some of them will immediately greet and welcome the new visitor. But upon learning that a person was in prison or jail, some may be unfriendly or distrustful.

As Christians, we should be wise and have the mind of Christ. If we are prideful, we may become angry or hurt that everyone at a church is not welcoming. The apostle Paul, when he was still known as Saul, experienced this, too.

Read **Acts 9:26–27**.

The Christians in Jerusalem knew about Paul's history of violence against Christians. He did not have a good reputation among the believers. You may find that you have a negative reputation in your community as well. When others learn that you were incarcerated, they may have concerns. If you have record of a violent or sexual crime, their concern might be justified. The pastor may be put in a difficult situation if someone from the church says they are concerned about your attendance. It is important for you to understand that this may happen. Remember, restoring shalom will require that you do your part to build their trust. It may take time, but when they see your faith, humility, and commitment to live for Jesus, they will see how God can transform a life.

Raul's Story

Raul spent many years in prisons in Minnesota and California. He was known in prison for his kind heart and passionate love for Jesus. Raul says the best advice he was given before his release was about finding a good church home:

"Someone told me I needed to be humble, be open with the pastor about my past, and look for places I could serve. I helped out whenever there was an opportunity. I volunteered to clean and do maintenance at the church. I eventually had an opportunity to volunteer on the video team. I worked hard, and God blessed me with a church where I was loved and accepted. Eventually, I was asked to come to work for the church doing video production and anything else they needed. I went in knowing that people didn't know me and I would have to earn their trust. God was faithful. I just needed to have a right heart and good attitude."

12. What are some ways you can work to build trust with people at your future church?

The student's answer should reflect some practical things that will help them become a trusted, contributing member of a church when they are released from jail or prison.

One Body, Many Members

Each of us has a place in the Church, the Body of Christ. The Church needs us, just as we need the Church. God has given each of us gifts to use to build each other up. We must let God show us how we can grow and serve others.

Read **Romans 12:3–7**.

13. List some of your gifts, talents, or qualities that will help you find ways to serve the Church when you return home.

The student's response should demonstrate self-awareness about the gifts, talents, and qualities that they possess and are valuable to share with others.

Action Step

Write a letter to someone with whom you want to restore a relationship. Don't choose your most challenging relationship. Start small—perhaps a friend or coworker you think will respond positively. Keep the goal of restoring shalom in mind as you write your letter. If your facility allows, mail your letter. Pray that God will open the recipient's heart to your words.

LESSON 3: Getting Out and Staying Out

Lesson Focus:

Staying out of prison by overcoming risk factors

Think back to when you received your sentence and arrived at your prison facility. You probably asked yourself, "How did I get here?" or told yourself, "When I get out, I am never coming back to prison!"

If you have been in prison for a while, you have probably seen many people come back after being released. A 2021 article in the Harvard Political Review claims that 76.6 percent of people released from incarceration in the United States are rearrested within five years. If that number is correct, that means almost eight out of ten people will be rearrested after leaving prison or jail. The odds of someone staying out of jail are not good.

1. On a scale of 1–10 (1 being not confident at all; 10 being very confident), how confident are you about your ability to stay out of jail or prison after you are released?

Circle one: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 **(Student should have circled a number.)**

2. Please explain why you chose that number:

There is not a better or best response. As they explain why they have the level of confidence they have about their ability to stay out of jail or prison, look for how to best encourage or guide them to doing things that will increase their confidence and ability to not be rearrested.

A lot of research has been done to determine what puts someone at risk of getting rearrested or coming back to prison. This is a Bible study, so before we look at what the research says, we need to remember what God says about us. We encourage you to write these verses down, memorize them, and think often about what they mean to you:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)
Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

As Christians, we need to remember that we are in a spiritual battle. Our enemy, the devil, wants to discourage us, make us fearful, and, ultimately, get us to walk away from God. The good

news is that when we surrender our lives to Jesus, we belong to Him. When we place our trust in God, we don't have to fear what the devil, the world, or the statistics* say about us.

Risk Factors

Some of the things that put people at risk for incarceration or rearrest are things they can't change. For instance, past criminal history, having a parent who was incarcerated, and growing up in an unhealthy home environment all increase the chances of a person's incarceration. The risk factors that a person can't change are called **static risk factors**.

3. What are some possible static risk factors in your life that make you statistically at risk for rearrest? Think about your past, your family, etc.

Possible responses could be:

A parent that had been incarcerated

A history of arrest in their life

First arrest at a young age

Low or lack of education

Past or current gang affiliation

A past history of drug and alcohol abuse

A past history of mental health problems

Many people grew up without the love and guidance they needed for their emotional and spiritual growth. This has consequences for their lives. Moses warned the Israelites that the sins of parents could affect their children for generations. In Lesson 1 of this course, we looked at the sin of idol worship. Remember that idols are anything we place before God in our lives. God is jealous for our love.

Read **Deuteronomy 5:8–10**.

This warning tells parents that there are consequences for their actions that impact the generations that follow them. When people quote these verses, they sometimes forget to mention the last part. Read it again:

*"I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, **but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments**" (emphasis added).*

When we turn our lives over to God, we are given the power to break the cycle of sin. Not only are we free from the sins of our parents, but God promises to show us love. The world may say we can't escape our past, but God says something different.

In contrast to static risk factors, **dynamic risk factors** are things that can be changed. Overcoming these risk factors can help a person stay out of prison or jail for good. One example is a history of

drug or alcohol abuse. If a person with a history of substance abuse does everything they can to maintain their sobriety,* they are more likely to stay out once they are released.

Another dynamic risk factor is conflict within families and marriages. As we discussed in the last lesson, pursuing shalom helps restore relationships. This affects not only a person's spiritual health but also the choices they make, which can help them stay out of prison.

Lack of education and work skills is another dynamic risk factor. If you have furthered your education during your incarceration, that can positively impact your future. Finding and keeping a job after your release will help you stay out of prison.

4. Read Colossians 3:23 and Proverbs 14:23. What do these verses say about work?

Colossians 3:23-24: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

Proverbs 14:23: "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty."

5. What are some things that put you at risk for returning to prison that you can change? Make a list of your risk factors and steps you can take to change them.

The student should identify things they can / will do to reduce their chances of rearrest after release from incarceration. Examples are:

Education
Drug or alcohol programming
Change antisocial thinking and attitudes
Receive counseling / mentoring
Vocational training
Prosocial friends and support system
Spiritual growth

It Starts in the Heart and Mind

Although static and dynamic risk factors play a big role in a person's ability to stay out of prison, the most important risk factors start in the heart and mind.

The way we think and view the world starts in our hearts. When our hearts are full of guilt, anger, jealousy, hopelessness, or sin, we will think in ways that are consistent with what's in our hearts.

6. Read Proverbs 4:23 and Matthew 15:18–19. What do these verses say about our hearts? **(The student can paraphrase or copy the verse from their Bible translation.)**

Proverbs 4:23: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

Matthew 15:18–19: “But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

In the first two lessons of this course, we looked at having a right relationship with God. When you are spiritually healthy, the condition of your heart will be healthy. A healthy heart will lead to healthy thinking. Healthy thinking will lead to healthy actions and behaviors.

When we talk about the heart from a spiritual perspective, we are not referring to the organ in the body that pumps blood. We are talking about who a person is at their core. It might be easier to think of the heart as the *soul*. In the eighteenth century, the English evangelist John Wesley started his meetings by asking attendees, “How goes it with your soul?” Essentially, he was asking, “What is the condition of your heart?” He understood that, as Proverbs 4:23 says, everything we think and do flows out of our hearts (or souls).

7. How would you answer a friend who asked you today, “How goes it with your soul?”

There is not a right or wrong answer. The student may feel that the condition of their heart is not good. The mentor should use the student’s answer as an opportunity to provide encouragement or direction.

Some people refer to the most important risk factors that lead to incarceration as “the big four.” These “big four” risk factors are related to the condition of a person’s heart and mind. They are:

- Antisocial thinking and attitudes*
- Antisocial personality patterns*
- Antisocial behavior*
- Antisocial associates*

Something that is antisocial* is against society or hostile to the structure, norms, and expectations of society. Here are some examples of antisocial thinking and behavior:

- Feeling no guilt about or responsibility for harming others
- Having a sense of superiority over others
- Hostility, aggression, or violence toward others
- Hostility toward the law
- Inability to consider the feelings and opinions of others
- Continually lying to others
- Blaming others for one’s problems

You may have had an opportunity to participate in a program that addresses thinking errors and how to correct those errors. These programs are designed to help people lessen their risk of returning to prison.

The Bible has much to say about our thinking, attitudes, personality patterns, behaviors, and associates. Let’s look at the Bible’s view on the people with whom we associate.

Antisocial Associates

We are influenced by our associates—the people we spend our time with. If you spend your time with others who commit crimes, you are more likely to do things that could lead to getting rearrested. You should make every effort to surround yourself with people who are trying to do the right things.

8. Read 1 Corinthians 15:33, Psalm 1:1–2, and Proverbs 12:26. What do these verses say about the people we spend our time with? **(Some students will copy the verse from their Bible, others may paraphrase. Either response is fine.)**

1 Corinthians 15:33: “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’”

Psalm 1:1–2: “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.”

Proverbs 12:26: “The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.”

Consider memorizing one or more of those three passages. Memorizing Scripture means that God’s Word is always with you wherever you go. When you think and meditate on what the Bible says, your heart, thoughts, and attitudes will start to change. The Bible will become your guide and help you follow God’s will.

It isn’t hard to understand that spending time with people who are involved in harmful or illegal activity increases your chances of getting rearrested. For instance, if drugs and alcohol have caused problems for you in the past and you spend time with people who are using drugs or abusing alcohol, you put yourself at risk of being tempted to do the same.

Let’s look at an example:

David was released from prison three months ago. He is on parole and meets with his parole officer twice a month. He is working a job he enjoys and has found a church he likes attending. The church has a Thursday night drug and alcohol recovery group that David has been attending faithfully.

9. List at least three positive things David has done since his release:

***Meets with his parole officer twice a month.**

***He is working a job he enjoys.**

***He has found a church he likes attending.**

***The church has a Thursday night drug and alcohol recovery group that David has been attending faithfully.**

One Thursday evening, after arriving home from work, David received a call from Steve, one of his best friends from childhood. Steve said he was going to a concert with Mike and John and

asked if David wanted to join them. David really likes the band they are going to see. He has been working hard on his parole requirements and feels that he deserves to enjoy an evening with an old buddy.

Steve has been David's lifelong friend. They have been through good times and bad times, and Steve has always had David's back. Mike is more of an acquaintance to David. In the past, David bought drugs from Mike, and they were in a few bar fights together. David doesn't know John. Steve says John is a friend of Mike's that Mike met in county jail.

10. As David considers whether to go to the concert with the guys, what are some potential red flags? List at least three.

- *Steve and David have a long history together with some illegal activity**
- *Mike has sold Steve drugs in the past**
- *Steve and Mike have some past history of getting in trouble (bar fights)**
- *Steve doesn't know John at all**
- *Mike and John met in jail**

Despite the potential risks, David decides to go to the concert. He will miss his recovery group meeting, but he figures it's okay because he hasn't missed a week since getting out.

When Steve comes to pick him up, John passes a joint to David in the car. David politely declines, saying, "No, thanks. I just got out of prison and am trying to stay out. My life is going well for a change." John says sarcastically, "Good for you, man. Work your program." Mike thinks John's comment is funny, but Steve says, "Leave my man alone. He's doing really well. I'm proud of him." Steve takes a sip from a flask of whiskey before taking the on-ramp for the freeway.

So far, David hasn't broken any laws. He thinks one of his parole requirements is that he isn't supposed to associate with any known felons, but he's not sure. Steve and Mike have had more than their share of misdemeanors and close calls over the years but no felony convictions. He knows next to nothing about John except that he got a bad feeling being in the car with him.

11. Knowing that criminal associations increase the risk of rearrest, do you think David put himself at risk of rearrest by going to the concert rather than his recovery group meeting? Circle **Yes** or **No**.

YES

12. Explain your response to the previous question. List all the things you think David did right or wrong.

Wrong:

- *David missed his recovery group meeting to go to the concert.**
- *He was spending time with a group that is smoking marijuana.**
- *Steve is drinking and driving.**

***David doesn't seem sure of his parole requirements for whom he can associate with.**

Antisocial Thinking and Attitudes

All behaviors start with thinking. We make a decision before every action we take. Before a person assaults someone, for instance, he has thought about why that is the best course of action. Maybe he feels threatened, or maybe he thinks the other person deserves to be harmed. Maybe he thinks he will be considered weak if he doesn't fight. Before a person gets high, she has thought about why she wants to do it. Maybe she is depressed, tired, or bored. Maybe she thinks she can't control her drug use. Maybe her body is in withdrawal, and she thinks her only option is to get high to counteract the symptoms.

In both examples above, prosocial thinking (the opposite of *antisocial thinking*) could have led to better actions. Before someone assaults another person, a prosocial way of thinking would be, *"If I attack this person, I could pick up a new charge or jeopardize my parole. I want to go home next year so I can be in my children's lives."* Before someone decides to get high, a prosocial way of thinking would be, *"Drugs have destroyed my life and my family. I want to get high, but I know I need to call my NA sponsor or check into rehab."*

You can see why thinking errors or antisocial thinking patterns greatly increase the risk of getting arrested. Here is a list of some thinking errors that can lead to making harmful choices.

13. Put a check mark next to each error you have ever told yourself.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ I am smarter than most people. I won't get caught. | ☐ They should be able to forgive me. It's on them. |
| ☐ I'm not interested in what others think. | ☐ I need to be in control. I make the decisions. |
| ☐ Getting my way is important. | ☐ When I want something, I should get it. |
| ☐ My illegal behavior isn't hurting anyone else. | ☐ I'm different. People don't understand me. |
| ☐ The laws are unfair, so I don't have to follow them | ☐ Going to work every day is boring. |
| ☐ Others are to blame for my situation in life. | ☐ I need to look out for number one, myself. |
| ☐ Karma happens! They deserved it. | ☐ They'll get over it. I don't feel guilty at all. |
| ☐ Nothing good ever happens to me. | ☐ When they yell, I'll just yell louder. |
| ☐ If I didn't sell them drugs, someone else would. | ☐ It's not my fault. They should have been smarter. |
| ☐ I can't help it. I grew up in a dysfunctional home. | ☐ They have insurance. They'll get their money back. |

There are not right or wrong answers to this checklist. The mentor should use the student responses to offer encouragement and/or insight and advice to the student.

14. Choose two thinking errors from the list in the previous question. For each error, give an example of a prosocial thought that will lead to a better outcome.

Thinking error:

A prosocial thought would be:

Thinking error:

A prosocial thought would be:

Depending on the student's response, the mentor should look at the thinking error the student has listed and their prosocial alternative to the thinking error.

Reading and studying God's Word is the best way to shift our thinking to be in accordance with God's heart and will.

15. Read Romans 12:2. Write the verse in the space below, and then memorize it.

"Do not conform 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 is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2)

Action Step

Ask God to show you what attitudes and beliefs you have that are antisocial or put you at risk of making the same mistakes that brought you to prison. Make a list and pray that God will help you change each item on the list.

LESSON 4: Planning to Succeed

Note: In Lesson 4 of *Returning Home*, pages 5-6 of the print lessons include a checklist for students to use as they prepare for release (see pages 35-36). The instructions on that page direct students to keep pages 5–6 and not return them. As a result, these pages may be missing from the student’s lesson.

Lesson Focus:

Developing and following a solid reentry plan

You may have heard the saying, “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” This is especially true about leaving jail or prison. Making a solid reentry plan and following it will be key to your success. Your case manager* or parole officer will probably require you to submit a reentry plan. If you haven’t started yet, this lesson will help you begin working on your plan for release. This is not intended to take the place of any other release plans you are putting together. It will, however, help you make a plan that reflects your commitment to your faith.

On pages 5 and 6 of this lesson, you will find a helpful checklist that can serve as a guide as you prepare for reentry. After you finish this lesson, **pull out the checklist sheet and keep it.** Then, return the rest of the lesson to Crossroads. You can continue to work on the checklist as you finish this course.

1. What assistance is available at your facility to help you develop your release plan? Take your time asking about and looking into all possible resources. In the space below, list all the programs, staff members, and resources available to you.

Every jail or prison facility will have different resources available. The student should have done some work to identify possible resources. If the student doesn’t list any, encourage them to do more inquiry.

God’s Word has a lot to say about the plans we make. The book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings that reflect the wisdom of God for our lives. We recommend memorizing the following three verses from Proverbs that speak to our plans:

Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans. (Proverbs 16:3)

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22)

Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails. (Proverbs 19:21)

Proverbs 16:3 highlights the importance of placing God first in our lives and in the plans we make. When we commit to following Jesus, every big decision we make should start with a prayer to ask God for wisdom and guidance.

2. As you start planning for your release, how are you committing your plans to the Lord?

The student may answer with a simple yes or no. Encourage them to continue praying or to develop a consistent prayer life and to continue strengthening their commitment to following God.

3. What do you need prayer for as you prepare to go home?

The mentor should pray for the student based on their stated prayer needs. Let the student know that you are praying for them.

Proverbs 15:22 tells us we need the wisdom of others as we seek God's will for our lives. Mentors, pastors, wise Christian friends, and others with more life experience are examples of where we should seek counsel.

4. Make a list of people inside and outside your facility who could be part of your support team before and after your release. Think about people you trust and who have wisdom and spiritual knowledge.

Provide feedback to the student based on their list of support people they have identified. Make some additional suggestions about how to build a support network of people that will help them in their release.

Before you are released, you should begin reaching out to people you can depend on to support you in your reentry, sobriety, and spiritual growth. Many advisers will help you succeed.

Proverbs 19:21 assures us that God has a purpose for our lives. There may be many things in your heart that you want, but as you make your plan, seek to discern* God's will through praying, reading the Bible, accepting wise advice, and listening to God.

5. What are some things God has placed on your heart to do for a successful reentry? Make a list below, share it with your support network, and pray about it frequently.

The student's answer will provide the mentor with an opportunity to provide feedback and encouragement.

Housing

In the first three lessons of this course, we discussed:

- Putting God first in everything we do
- Living at peace with God, ourselves, and our community
- Being wise when it comes to risks of rearrest and temptations to sin

As you start developing a specific release plan, you need to consider the environment in which you will be living. Depending on the county or state you live in, it may be difficult to find housing

that is affordable and safe and will allow you to focus on your success. You might have little to no choice about where you will live due to the nature of your crime, the rules of your parole, or your financial limitations. You may be required to live in a halfway house or work release facility. While not every halfway house is the same, some of them are not safe places for reentry. Victor said the following:

When I got to the halfway house, it was really stressful. Three people tried to sell me drugs in the first twenty-four hours I was there. There were guys meeting up with their girlfriends in cars in the parking lot. There were a lot of rules that no one seemed to care about. We weren't supposed to have cell phones, but just about everyone did. I didn't see how I was going to live there for ninety days without getting in trouble.

Start doing your research early. If you can meet with your case manager or a reentry services staff member at your facility to find out what options are available, you can start doing your homework to find the best living situation. This will help the case manager or staff member see you are serious about staying out. Share your concerns with them. Let them know you are working on a release plan that will address the things that may put you at risk of returning to prison.

6. As you think about your past and your weaknesses, what housing situations or conditions might be risky for you?

The student's answer should reflect an awareness of their weaknesses and need for safe and healthy housing.

If you do not have options for housing and know that you will be going somewhere risky, it will be your responsibility to make the environment there as safe as possible. Attend every available support group or class. Find other Christians who will pray with you and support your success. If allowed, start attending a nearby church as soon as you can. Follow the rules of your housing environment. That is worth repeating: FOLLOW THE RULES! Just because everyone else has a forbidden cell phone or laptop hidden in their property doesn't mean you should do the same. Look what happened to Matt, who thought he couldn't get caught:

When I went to work release, everybody had a cell phone. We were not supposed to, but it was a rule that didn't seem to be enforced. One of my mentors warned me to get rid of my cell phone. I laughed and told them they were worried for no reason. I had done a long sentence and was on an intense supervision plan. I was caught with a cell phone, and my parole was violated. They sent me back inside for two years. I had to apply for parole all over again.

Doing the right thing requires building new muscles. Each time you decide to do the right thing, you strengthen your commitment to staying out. While small rules may not seem that important, following them will help you get into the habit of making good choices.

7. What are some "little rules" in your facility that you don't always follow?

Breaking small rules is an indication that we are susceptible to ignoring larger or more important rules. Provide the student feedback and guidance based on their answer.

8. What excuses do you make when choosing not to follow the rules in your facility?

The student's answer should reflect self-awareness about how they rationalize breaking rules or not following good guidelines and advice. Provide feedback.

You may have the option to be released to a family member or friend's home or to get your own apartment. Before deciding to live with family or friends, consider whether you would be living with people who drink alcohol, do drugs, or may not be supportive of your new lifestyle. If you have the finances and can get an apartment, look for a nearby church or support group and determine whether your support network will be close enough to check in with you from time to time. Reach out to churches, Christian organizations, and other resources that can help you find housing. Finding a living environment that will support you, not tempt or harm you, is essential to your success. Don't skip the hard work it might take to find the right place.

9. Even if you only have one or two choices, list your possible housing options and note the pros and cons of each option. Consider your spiritual health in addition to your physical needs.

Housing option 1: _____

Housing option 2: _____

Pros (Why is this a good choice?):

Pros (Why is this a good choice?):

Cons (What risks might I encounter here?):

Cons (What risks might I encounter here?):

Housing option 3: _____

Housing option 4: _____

Pros (Why is this a good choice?):

Pros (Why is this a good choice?):

Cons (What risks might I encounter here?):

Cons (What risks might I encounter here?):

The student may or may not be able to identify four housing options. Even if they provide only one option, give the student feedback on their assessment of the pros and cons of that option.

Family

If you will be returning to the home of your partner, children, or other family members, you will likely face some challenges. You have been away from home for a long time. The children's other parent or caregiver has been doing double duty during your absence. They have developed routines that worked for them while you were away. You may want to take back the head disciplinary role, which could cause conflict. Your family members may not fully understand the priorities you need to set to get adjusted to life outside. If things at home were chaotic before you went to prison, your children or other family members may worry about what it will mean for you to be home.

You may have developed a spiritual life while incarcerated. Your partner, children, or other family members may not have had a similar faith experience. Remember, God drew you to Himself by His grace and love. Be sensitive to where your family members are on their faith journeys. Share your faith in love. They will see how God has changed you as they watch the way you live. If you expect your family to immediately embrace your new faith or insist that they follow new rules that are confusing or overly strict, you may turn them away. Remember, Christianity is not primarily about following rules; it is about following Jesus.

As often as possible, have honest and open discussions with your close family members long before going home. Be sure not to make promises you can't keep.

10. What concerns do your family members have about your return home?

It is important that the student know that his or her family will have some concerns about their release from incarceration. Provide feedback to the student based on their response. If the student writes that their family has no concerns, encourage the student to think about the question more thoroughly and reach out to their family if possible.

Money and Work

It is getting more expensive every year to afford to live outside prison. Many people experience stress and anxiety because of money—how they will earn enough, how they will pay their bills, etc. It is realistic to expect a similar experience when you return home.

Read **Matthew 6:25–34**.

11. What did Jesus say worrying will not help us do (verse 27)?

Add a single hour to your life.

12. What did Jesus say we should do instead of worrying about our needs being met (verse 33)?

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

You can't expect God to simply drop money in your lap, but you don't need to panic about it, either. As you work hard and make wise decisions, God will provide a way for you to get what you need.

You may be concerned that having a criminal record will make finding a good job impossible. It can make it more challenging, but the good news is that many employers are willing to hire someone with a criminal record if they believe that person will work hard and be dependable. It will be up to you to convince them you are that person. Here are some things you can do:

- Ask your supervisor(s) at your facility if they will provide letters of recommendation for you. If you have been a dependable worker at your facility, your supervisor should have no problem writing a positive letter for you to give to potential employers.

- Write a resume. List your work history, any educational courses or training programs you participated in at your facility, and work-related accomplishments.
- **Be honest.** While some states have made it unlawful to ask about criminal history on a job application (a policy called “Ban the Box”), most states still allow it. It is important to be honest in your applications. Here is an example of how to answer the question about criminal history:

Have you ever been convicted of a felony?

X Yes ___ No

Explain: “I am willing to discuss the details of my involvement with the justice system at my interview. I look forward to doing that and sharing everything I have done to improve myself.”

God willing, you will find a good employer who will appreciate your honesty and willingness to be open with them. Remember, they need employees so they can run their business or organization. You have something they need: a willingness to work hard and be dependable.

Keeping a healthy work-life balance is important for your spiritual health. It may seem like a small or unimportant thing, but how you spend your time away from work is a common risk factor for relapsing or returning to prison. Be sure to manage your money wisely, develop healthy hobbies, and connect regularly with your church community and your mentors.

Rebuilding a life outside prison will feel more like a marathon than a short sprint. It will require dedication, determination, and faith. But remember, as Jesus said in Matthew 19:26, “With God, all things are possible.”

Action Step

Start putting together your work resume and looking for any job applications you can fill out. If none are available, see if a family member or friend can send you some generic job applications that you can start filling out and sending to potential employers.

Reentry Checklist

Knowledge is power. The more work you put in to identify resources and assistance for your release, the greater your chance of success. This checklist does not include everything you may need, but it will be a good start as you plan for reentry. **Remove this checklist page before mailing the rest of your completed lesson back to Crossroads.**

Information/Resources:

- ____ Visit your facility's library to see if they have lists of resources or forms to fill out to apply for documents like a state ID, health care card, or copy of your birth certificate. Some facilities can help with getting a driver's license.
- ____ Schedule a meeting with your facility's case manager and request a release planning worksheet or workbook. Be sure to ask about timelines for submitting your release plan. Your case manager may have information about available resources.
- ____ If your facility has a designated reentry coordinator, meet with that person at least six months before your release to ask for guidance on preparing for a successful reentry.
- ____ See if any friends in your facility have been working on their release plans. Sharing information back and forth could be mutually beneficial.
- ____ Contact family members, friends, or mentors on the outside who might help you gather information about possible employment, housing, and resources.

Housing:

- ____ Learn and understand the rules and restrictions about where you will be able to live.
- ____ Make a list of potential apartments, halfway houses, reentry houses, or sober houses.
- ____ If you plan to live with a friend or family member, make sure the environment will be healthy and supportive.
- ____ Calculate how much money you will need to get appropriate housing.
- ____ Research bus routes and rideshare options that will allow you to get from home to work, appointments, etc.

Employment:

- ____ Create an up-to-date employment resume to send to potential employers.
- ____ Ask for a recommendation letter from a work supervisor at your facility.
- ____ Prepare for how you will explain your time in prison to an employer.
- ____ Write to former employers outside who may consider rehiring you.
- ____ Read employment ads in the newspaper to see who might be hiring.

Finances:

- ____ Find out how much gate money you will receive when you are released.
- ____ Make a basic budget to use as a guide to manage your money outside prison.
- ____ Find out if you are eligible and how to apply for SSI (Supplemental Security Income) benefits and/or an EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) or SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) card.
- ____ Research what school, housing, or employment grants you may qualify for.
- ____ If you earn state pay, save as much money as you can prior to your release.

Health Care:

- _____ Ask facility health care staff for information about getting prescriptions outside.
- _____ Find out if you are eligible for Medicare/Medicaid or state/county health care services.
- _____ Prepare physically for reentry with exercise, sleep, and a healthy diet if possible.
- _____ Research the locations of available medical services you qualify for in the community where you will live.

Community Support:

- _____ Locate and contact a local church that will be supportive of your reentry journey.
- _____ Identify mentors and sober friends on the outside who will provide accountability.
- _____ If applicable, research locations of community AA, NA, or support groups.
- _____ If applicable, work your alcohol or substance abuse program faithfully.
- _____ If applicable, research locations of appropriate mental health services.

Supervision:

- _____ Carefully review and understand your terms of release.
- _____ Determine how you will stay in touch with and get to appointments with your parole or probation officer (PO).
- _____ Meet with your designated PO as soon as you are released.
- _____ Prepare for a respectful, professional relationship with your PO.

Time Management:

- _____ Make a list of healthy recreational activities on the outside.
- _____ Do your best to keep a calendar of appointments, meetings, and obligations and follow it faithfully.
- _____ Set realistic goals for your career, relationships, and finances.

Completing everything on this checklist does not guarantee success, but it will help you be better prepared than most people are when they are released. An important verse to memorize is Proverbs 16:9—**“In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.”** This proverb is a reminder to seek God for guidance in every situation. If your relationship with God is strong, you can trust He will go before you in all things.

LESSON 5: Winning the Race

Lesson Focus:

Overcoming addictive behaviors

The National Institute on Drug Abuse reported in 2020 that an estimated 65 percent of people in prison have a diagnosed substance abuse disorder (SUD). Another 20 percent, while not diagnosed with an SUD, were using drugs or alcohol when they committed the crime that led to their incarceration. For anyone who falls under these categories, a plan to get out and stay out of prison must include attention to achieving and maintaining sobriety.

If you have struggled with drug or alcohol abuse, you have likely participated in a substance abuse education or treatment program while incarcerated. Substance abuse programs provide excellent strategies for getting clean and staying clean. As your release date gets closer, find notes from any classes or programs you completed and revisit what you have learned. Rebuilding relationships, keeping a good job, and enjoying success in life after prison won't happen if you relapse into abusing substances as a coping mechanism.*

Maybe you haven't battled alcohol or drug issues in your past. But most of us, at some point, have experienced behavior that turned into an addiction. Addictions to sex, power, anger, violence, and risky behaviors can be just as destructive as addictions to drugs and alcohol. If drug and alcohol addictions have not been part of your past, think about your past addictions to other negative coping mechanisms. If you don't want to call it an addiction, consider thinking of it as a *life-controlling issue* or a *persistent sin*. You may think that, because you are a Christian, these issues won't be a problem after you are released, but the devil will see these as possible points of weakness to attack you.

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

1. List any addictive behaviors that have had a damaging impact on your life.

Everyone has some type of addictive or life-controlling behavior that has negatively impacted their life. It doesn't have to just be drugs or alcohol. It may be something like pride, power, sex, gambling, or worry. Provide feedback to the student based on their response if possible.

The Twelve Steps

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) are built on twelve principles, or steps, that have proven to be successful for millions of people. You may already be familiar with the twelve steps of AA or similar programs. Review them and consider why each step is important.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol (or drugs)—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We decided to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongdoings.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all those we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when doing so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, we promptly admitted it.
11. Through prayer and meditation, we sought to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and practice these principles in all our affairs.

As you can see, these twelve steps center around a relationship with God. Each step is based on a solid spiritual principle. Some Christians are critical of the twelve steps of AA because they allow for reliance on a higher power that isn't necessarily the God of the Bible. With Jesus as our higher power, we find that the twelve steps are consistent with our Christian faith.

2. Have you participated in a twelve-step program like AA or NA? If so, what was your experience? If not, what was your reason not to participate?

A twelve-step program may not be for everyone. Many people have benefitted from a twelve step or support-group program. Provide any feedback that is appropriate. The feedback may be as simple as encouraging the student to continue or seek out a support group, preferably faith based.

Many churches have a Celebrate Recovery* or other faith-based support group as an alternate option. Many faithful Christians have found help in programs like AA or Celebrate Recovery. No matter what program a person may choose, it is essential to realize that overcoming harmful addictions requires help and support from others and reliance on God.

Read **1 Corinthians 10:12–14**.

3. What does it mean that God is faithful and won't let you be tempted beyond what you can bear?

The student's response should indicate a belief that God is intimately involved in their life and concerned about the temptations they face.

If applicable, your release plan should include a solid strategy for substance abuse aftercare and support.

The Appeal of Addictions

There is a biological reason why addictions are so powerful, making them difficult to quit. When a person gives in to whatever their life-controlling issue may be—alcohol, drugs, gambling, sex, etc.—their brain releases a chemical called *dopamine*. Dopamine creates feelings of pleasure. It is a powerful chemical that makes us feel good for a short time. This release of dopamine can temporarily get rid of feelings of depression, boredom, or stress. This is why we are so drawn to our addictions.

If we are honest with ourselves, we don't want to quit our addictive behavior. Our addictions often seem to serve us well in managing our negative moods and emotions. Unfortunately, as you have learned, addictions gain control over us and have very damaging consequences. Addictions can rob you of money, friends, family, and the desire to make good decisions. In some cases, addictions can lead to incarceration or rearrest.

Read **Proverbs 23:31–35**.

This passage provides an accurate description of the way addictions can affect a person. It specifically refers to alcohol, but you can replace “wine” with whatever addiction has had a grip on you. You can probably relate to the way the writer of this proverb described the deceptive* nature of alcohol.

Addictive behavior may be triggered* by a sight, a smell, a sound, or being around certain people. The wine in this passage is described as red, sparkling, and smooth to drink. That is certainly a pleasing, tempting description. However, the writer of the proverb knew the wine was deceptive because it turned to poison and caused the inability to control his thoughts and behavior.

4. What are some of the emotions or problems that your past addictive behavior helped you deal with?

Most addictive behavior develops as a coping strategy to alleviate stress or trauma in our life. Addiction then takes on a life of its own and takes control of our life. The student's response to this question should demonstrate an awareness of how they have used past harmful behavior as a way to cope with life.

5. What sights, smells, sounds, or circumstances have triggered you to get high or drunk or engage in another addictive behavior?

Behavior is triggered by a thought that comes to us from an external trigger like a smell, sound, or circumstance we find ourselves in. The student should be able to list some potential triggers to be aware of or avoid.

Sin or Disease?

Some treatment programs discourage looking at addictive behavior as sin. They argue that addiction is a disease that needs to be treated as such. While there is truth to this—addictions do affect brain function and biology—addictive behavior can also be sin.

Viewing our addictive behavior as sin is not only truthful—it is good news. Jesus came to earth to free us from our sin. After Jesus' mother, Mary, became pregnant by the Holy Spirit, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him:

"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

6. Read the following verses about sin. After reading all the verses, choose one to write in the space below, and then memorize it. Copy the verse onto a piece of paper and place it somewhere you will see it often.

Proverbs 28:13

Galatians 5:1

Ephesians 1:7

1 John 1:9

The student may or may not indicate what verse they have chosen to memorize.

7. Do you see addiction as a disease, a sin, or both? Please explain your answer:

From a Christian perspective, harmful and addictive behavior is sin. Many treatment programs view addiction as a disease. It can be both. This question challenges the student to examine their own view. Provide encouragement to the student based on their explanation.

You may have heard this saying about addiction:

"How do you know an addict is lying? Because they are talking."

This may seem like a harsh statement, but think back to a time when your addiction was out of control (if not drugs or alcohol, then another life-controlling issue you have struggled with). When we are caught up in our addiction, we lie to the people around us. Lying is a central part of the addiction cycle. Not only do we lie to others, but we also lie to ourselves. Some of the lies addicts tell themselves are:

- I don't have a problem.
- I can stop anytime I want.
- I'm not hurting anyone.
- I can keep a job, so my addiction isn't causing any issues.
- I'm under a lot of stress; my behavior helps me relax.

- Everybody needs some type of crutch.
 - My addiction isn't my fault.
8. What are some lies you told yourself when you were unable to control your addictions (whether substance abuse or other life-controlling habits)?

Lying is an important part of rationalizing addictive behavior. The student's response should demonstrate self-awareness of their own history of lying to themselves or others to avoid dealing with an addictive behavior. Provide feedback.

Here are some key spiritual principles that will help you claim victory over addiction:

- Pray regularly and work continually on your spiritual growth and relationship with God.
- Find a supportive home church and community where you can be honest about your struggles and receive encouragement to maintain freedom from life-controlling habits.
- Get involved with activities at church and healthy recreational activities with supportive friends.
- Avoid circumstances that might trigger your addictive behavior.
- Set healthy boundaries with family members or friends who may trigger or enable your addiction.

Setting Boundaries

Boundaries are lines or rules we set for ourselves to keep us from harmful situations. If you have ever gone bowling, you have probably seen the bumpers that can be placed into the gutters of the lane to keep the bowling ball from rolling into the gutters. Boundaries are like those bumpers. They are safeguards we use to keep us out of the "gutters" in life.

Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend wrote a book called *Boundaries*. If you can access a copy in your facility's library or from a friend or family member, we recommend you read it.

9. What are some boundaries you can set in your life to help you stay away from addictive behaviors?

The student's response should include practical strategies they have identified to help them deal with addictive behavior. Provide feedback based on the student's answer.

Winning the Race

In his first letter to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul wrote the following to encourage the believers to persevere in their trials:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike

a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Corinthians 9:24–27)

When we follow God, we follow Him with our whole selves—our hearts, minds, and bodies. Winning the race of sobriety or victory over other addictive behaviors will require staying close to God, changing your ways of thinking, and being mindful of your health and fitness.

Think about the greatest athletes in the world. Even if they are not the strongest or most gifted, what sets them apart is their fierce determination to win.

Now known as one of the greatest basketball players of all time, Michael Jordan tried out for his high school's varsity team as a sophomore and didn't make the cut. But instead of giving up, Michael turned the disappointment into motivation.* Here is what he said about that experience:

It was embarrassing not making the team. Whenever I was working out and got tired and figured I ought to stop, I'd close my eyes and see the list in the locker room without my name on it. That usually got me going again.

Where will you find motivation when you are tempted to return to unhealthy, addictive behaviors? Your motivation might be your desire to be the loving, dependable parent your children need. It might be the achievement of an important life goal. It might be your love of God and gratitude to Him for saving your life.

10. List four things you will use as motivation to overcome temptations when you return home.

Provide feedback to the student based on the above list of motivators to avoiding succumbing to temptation.

Action Step

Choose the action step that best applies to you:

1. If you have struggled with addiction to drugs or alcohol, reach out to a case manager or treatment staff member at your facility to ask about sobriety resources to include in your release plan.
2. If your addictive behaviors are unrelated to substance abuse, meet with a friend at your facility who is supportive of your faith journey and your plans to resist temptations. Ask them to spend time with you in prayer. Pray that God will guide your decisions as you prepare for your release.

LESSON 6: Starting Your New Life

Lesson Focus:

Preparing for your first week on the outside

When you first came to prison, you may have heard someone say that reentry starts at intake. That means on Day One of incarceration, a person should start preparing for a successful return to their community. This preparation might include completing a GED, taking college classes, participating in a drug and alcohol treatment program, or taking a marriage and parenting class to gain tools for rebuilding broken family relationships.

Having a job and a place to live when you are released is extremely important, but it is the things you do to improve yourself as a person that will help you stay out for good. Changing harmful thinking patterns and developing a relationship with God will create the inner change necessary for you to succeed. Most people have already set the pattern they will follow for their future when they exit the gate. If you haven't changed the thinking patterns, worldview, and harmful habits that brought you to prison by the time you are released, you will be more likely to find yourself in a position of going back to prison.

In the previous lesson, we looked at running the race to overcome addiction. In terms of preparing to go home, what does it mean to "run in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:24)? Runners prepare physically and mentally for competitions. They work with coaches who encourage them, correct them when they are doing something wrong, and help them develop a plan for success.

The same is necessary for you as you prepare for reentry. Spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical preparation before leaving prison is essential. You need mentors and advisors who will support you and hold you accountable for the choices you make as you prepare to go home and as you adjust to life after prison.

1. On a scale of 1–10, how prepared do you feel to stay out of prison after you are released?

Circle one: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

There is no better or best answer. Use the student's response as you seek to encourage and guide them.

2. List three of your strengths you think will help you succeed when you return home.

Provide the student some feedback on their three listed strengths if appropriate.

3. List three of your weaknesses that could potentially put your successful reentry at risk.

Provide the student some feedback on their three listed weaknesses if appropriate.

Pray about these strengths and weaknesses regularly as you prepare for reentry. God wants to give you everything you need to do His will. As you surrender your will to God, you will see that His plan for you is to enjoy the peace and blessings of an abundant life.

Here are three Bible passages we encourage you to memorize as you prepare to leave your facility:

I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13)

*The prudent see danger and take refuge,
but the simple keep going and pay the penalty. (Proverbs 22:3)*

*Go to the ant, you sluggard;
consider its ways and be wise!
It has no commander,
no overseer or ruler,
yet it stores its provisions in summer
and gathers its food at harvest.
(Proverbs 6:6–8)*

The Bible often uses illustrations of things we can see and experience to teach a spiritual principle. From your studies of the New Testament, you know Jesus used this teaching method frequently.

The passage above from Proverbs 6 is addressed to a “sluggard,” meaning a lazy person, who is not preparing for the future. When you observe a group of ants, you notice that they all seem to be busy and that they know exactly what they need to do. They move with a sense of purpose and determination. They prepare for the future even though “no commander, no overseer or ruler” is telling them what to do.

When you leave prison, you will no longer have facility staff members watching you and telling you what to do every day. You will need to hold yourself accountable to do the things required for a successful reentry. Be wise like the ant.

Practice Makes Perfect

Success doesn't come from making one good decision—it comes from a habit of making good decisions. Each good decision builds on the decision that came before it. Making good decisions is like a muscle that needs to be exercised. Great musicians know that learning a challenging piece of music requires repetition. They might play the song hundreds or thousands of times before they feel comfortable playing it for an audience. Professional golfers practice their golf swings thousands of times until they develop what is called *muscle memory*. Muscle memory is developed when we repeat a behavior so many times that we can do the behavior without having to think about it. The process of repeating behaviors can actually reprogram

our brains. If you have taken an addiction course, you might have learned about this process of building new, healthy neural pathways in the brain.

When a person tells a lie for the first time as a child, they may feel guilty and uncomfortable. But with each lie that follows, lying becomes easier and more natural. People who are habitual liars will lie without even thinking about what they are saying. Lying becomes an automatic response. Telling the truth is the same. When we start telling the truth and repeating that behavior, being honest becomes a natural first response.

Read Jesus' words in **John 3:20–21**.

Living by the truth means living in a way that is consistent with what Jesus says about Himself and about you. It means thinking, speaking, and acting in ways that are honest and pleasing to God.

4. In what ways do you strive to live by the truth?

Use the student's response to encourage them as they seek to live by God's truth.

With the time you have left before your release, practice doing the right things, no matter how small those things may be. For example, you might have a habit of taking food, even something as small as a sugar packet, from the dining hall. Maybe everyone does it. But if it is against the facility rules, you are practicing breaking the rules. It isn't about the sugar packets themselves. Choosing not to take sugar packets from the dining hall is a way to exercise the muscle of doing the right thing. You have many opportunities each day to practice choosing to do the right thing.

5. List five small things you can practice doing each day before getting out of prison that can help establish new, positive habits.

Student responses may include: Prayer, seeking like-minded Christians to encourage each other, restoring broken relationships, education, making a solid release plan, exploring employment opportunities in the community you will be living in, being truthful with yourself and others. (This is not an exhaustive list.)

The Starting Blocks

If you have ever watched a track and field event like the 100-yard dash, you probably noticed that the runners had their feet resting on starting blocks as they waited for the signal to start the race. The starting blocks keep the runners' feet from slipping when they take their first strides. They help the runners position their legs for maximum strength and performance when the race starts. Runners spend many hours practicing to position themselves properly on the starting blocks and quickly push off the blocks when the starting gun fires. In a short race like the 100-yard dash, the race is often lost or won in the first few strides from the starting blocks.

Think of your first hours after prison as your starting blocks. This will be your opportunity to start well. Every small decision you make in the first few hours sets the pattern for the decisions you will make in the following months.

The passage below offers encouragement to stay focused amid distractions and challenges. We highly recommend memorizing these verses and thinking about them often as you run the race of reentry:

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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. (Hebrews 12:1–2a)

Who Will Pick Me Up at the Gate?

You may have a friend, family member, or romantic interest who will be happy and anxious to meet you at the gate. What could possibly go wrong? Remember, you have committed to making wise decisions. It may seem like a small thing, but is the friend who is picking you up living a lifestyle that is risky or illegal? Will this person support you in your sobriety and success? Is this person one of your mentors or coaches who will help you make good decisions on your first day out?

If you have the choice, make sure to choose a person who will help you, not put you in harm's way, and assist you with completing the immediate tasks you need to get done.

6. Who is going to pick you up when you are released? How will this person help you in your first hours outside prison?

The student response should reflect an understanding and commitment to have positive, spiritually healthy people in their lives to assist their transition to the community.

Making a Checklist

Here is a sample checklist of things you may need to do during your first hours after release. Review this list and then make your own list to fit your circumstances:

- Meet with your parole officer
- Shop for essential items
- Pay fines
- Meet with a predesignated sobriety sponsor
- Attend an AA or NA meeting
- Meet with your pastor
- Enjoy your first meal outside prison
- Meet with your children
- Check in with the halfway house, program, or release facility where you will be staying
- Get a cell phone (if allowed)
- Go to a job interview
- Get a prescription filled

7. Write your checklist here: (Student responses should include some of the following.)

- **Meet with your parole officer**
- **Shop for essential items**
- **Pay fines**
- **Meet with a predesignated sobriety sponsor**
- **Attend an AA or NA meeting**
- **Meet with your pastor**
- **Enjoy your first meal outside prison**
- **Meet with your children**
- **Check in with the halfway house, program, or release facility where you will be staying**
- **Get a cell phone (if allowed)**
- **Go to a job interview**
- **Get a prescription filled**

Meeting with Your Parole Officer or Supervising Agent

We cannot overstate the importance of developing a good relationship with your parole officer or supervising agent from Day One. You will want to make their job easier by not being the “problem person” on their caseload. They will not be your friend, but they will quickly come to appreciate your cooperation and eagerness to follow the rules. Don’t arrive late to your appointments with them, and don’t argue with them. Make sure you are where you are supposed to be when they call or come to check up on you. Get clear instructions about your requirements at your first meeting. That is the time to ask questions if something is unclear.

Your parole officer or supervising agent will have a large caseload that includes people who cause problems and require lots of attention. Don’t be one of those people.

8. What instructions have you received from your facility case manager or reentry coordinator about meeting with a parole officer or supervising agent on the outside?

If the student indicates they have not received instructions about how to work with a parole officer or supervising agent, provide them with some practical advice about being on time, showing a willingness to follow rules and guidelines.

If this will be your first time on supervision or parole, talk to some wise friends in your facility about how to have a successful experience with outside supervision—and be sure to take notes!

9. What wise suggestions about parole have you received from others? Write the best tips here:

The student should provide advice that others who have been released before have given them to be successful in reentry. If the student does not provide an answer, give them some suggestions for ensuring future success.

Institutionalization*

Even though you are happy and excited to leave prison, walking out the gate is very stressful for most people. The longer someone has been in prison, the more difficult it can be. It is not uncommon for someone to leave prison, go to a store to buy toiletries, and then have a panic attack trying to decide which of one hundred different kinds of toothpaste to buy. In prison, most choices are made for you. Institutionalization happens over time when someone is deprived of freedoms and choices. People often become so used to and dependent on the pace, rules, and environment of prison that they find it difficult to adjust to life outside after they are released. That is why it is so important to make a list of tasks that need to be done during the first few hours and days of reentry. Follow your list in order of importance.

The term *institutionalization* is not an insult. You have probably known people who have been in prison so long that they prefer life in prison because they have become so accustomed to it. Institutionalization doesn't only affect men and women in prison. People who have served in the military, especially those who have been in combat situations, have a hard time adjusting to life outside the military. People who immigrate to another country have trouble getting used to new customs and ways of living.

10. What are your greatest concerns about readjusting to life outside prison?

Student responses may reflect the amount of time they have served in prison. For someone who has been incarcerated for more than three years, there will be some concerns about how the world outside of prison has changed. Use the student's response to provide spiritual guidance.

Final Encouragement and Prayer

The fact that you have completed this reentry course says a lot about your commitment to a successful life outside prison. We at Crossroads want to congratulate you on your progress. God has good things prepared for you as you continue seeking His will for your life.

You are probably getting excited (and maybe stressed) about finally completing your incarceration. In these last days, weeks, or months, commit yourself to praying as often as possible.

One of the most important roles of the Crossroads mentor who reviews this lesson will be to pray for you as you prepare for reentry. We hope that knowing someone on the outside is talking to God on your behalf brings you peace and encouragement.

11. As you prepare to go home, what specific priorities would you like the mentor who reviews this lesson to pray for?

Acknowledge the student's prayer requests and make a commitment to them that you will be praying for their requests and a successful reentry.

Action Step

Arrange a visit or phone call with a pastor or mentor who will keep you accountable when you return home. Spend time praying with them and reviewing your reentry plan.



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