

# FINDING JOY ON DEATH ROW

## LETTER TRANSCRIPTIONS

### Chapter 4: Joy Is God's Work

#### **Writing prompt for those who are incarcerated:**

The term *joy* in its dictionary definition means the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying. That means that something happens and the thing that happens makes you feel good. Christian joy has another definition. Christian joy is the assurance that God uses circumstances to bring believers good feelings that rest not on events but on God's work in their life. The difference is that Christian joy understands that God is intentionally working to bring us joy as opposed to joy being dependent upon happenstance.

#### **Response from John "Mac" McNeill:**

I find joy knowing what God is doing for me in my circumstance. Though, I not were I want to be, but it is a delight to know God's will never leave me and it bring me joy ever day of my life. Because we have a Savior who will never forsake me (us) — When I want to give up He tell me He love me uncondition and die on the cross for us all. The joy He give can not be measure nor explain by the world joy.

#### *Story:*

I commit a sin that would never be forgiving for (murder), but I read the Holy Bible and the world of God said He would forgive all sin but one. Did, I commit the unforgive sin. Reading the book and I read God's Holy word I could not put it down cause once you taste God's word it is sweeter than Honey comb. That is when I found out that I was forgave of all my sin. I been reading God's word every since and aply it to my life and tell other of His Goodness. Thank you Jesus for the joy you brought to me, the devil mention Evil for me, but you are truly the Joy of my life.

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#### **Response from Melvin White Jr.:**

My joy in Christ Jesus is due to what He has done and is still doing in my life. I'm not saying that I walk around each day laughing as if I'm a lunatic, and yes I have moments of difficulties. I want to be free, to be with my family, to go as I once was able to. But I never want to move about without Christ Jesus, everywhere I go I want HIM to already prepared my way. My joy is in Christ and the peace I have in my life is due to HIM and the guidance that HE gives me daily. Noone Nothing can save my soul, give me peace, answer my prayers even though it can be (yes, no, or wait.).

*Story:*

One of my most difficult moments was last Friday Sept/22/2017. I had to go to the outside hospital, and while riding I observed the trees, fresh air, nature. I saw how much I was missing or how much I thought I was/am missing in life, and I got upset. But when I stop to think all that God is and has worked in my life, how I once was lost, headed to hell, I haven't repented yet, but I will, as soon as I get back to the pod, to my assigned cell.

God is so good to me, because he could have left me where I was, in my life's mess, but HE has compassion, mercy on me, He called me to His side as a father, his son. Now I know I'm saved and peace has filled my life, this is what I understand about my trip to the hospital, God is/did show me that HE's still in control and I'm not missing anything.

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**Response from Alden Harden:**

"I agree with this statement. As I've learned that allowing Jesus to live in my heart gives me daily joy beyond my present situation. I've learned the truth in joy, is in knowing Jesus.

*Story:*

I can recall someone once saying, I wish I had what you got. I wake up and get mad because I realize I'm in prison. I said, what I have is free for the "askings" but know that Jesus won't be fooled. So don't try to play Him. The Bible warns us that it's better to never know Jesus than to turn from Him. Once you've come to know Him... I showed him the passage, so that he'd know it wasn't just my words."

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**Response from Fernando Garcia:**

Christian Joy for me is: When I give a thing unto God, and in my faith with patience I know in my heart God will see this "thing" through. The joy comes from intimately knowing God. Joy comes from me knowing that ALL things pass through God's hands. There is nothing that God does not know about, or cannot handle, and though in my limited nature and feebleness I have trouble doing things on my own. Joy comes from knowing God is with me!! God the creator "see all" and "knows all." And since God created All, since He sits on the throne, He knows how to get me out of, or deliver me from all trouble. My Joy comes from knowing that: "God's faithfulness is my protecting shield."

*Story:*

God uses everything, or creates circumstances and, situations for His glory. It's like me coming to prison here, in NC. Instead of N.J. I have no doubt God brought me to NC prison to save my life. Also in here it is not as bad as a N.J. prison where I might have to constantly be looking out for someone who might want to take my life. But in here it is not so. So then, here I can be more focused on seeking God. Have my character built. Just like the "Jonah", when he entered the Big fish's belly. God is working on me. I have seen it in my attitude, my softness of heart for others.

Believe me when I tell you that if I hear a sad story, I tear-up big time!! And in the process of building me up God has touched my heart to feel good, and joyous because I can feel God's hand on me. I would have never thought about tithing and now I can't wait til I receive money to send in my tithes. Because I can receive a "CD" series that I send to people. I worry about others not hearing God's word. My joy comes from giving out God's word.

## Chapter 6: Joy in Lockup?

### Writing prompt for those who are incarcerated:

Can there be joy in lockup? When you are confined, by someone or something else, is it possible to enter into joy-filled existence?

### Response from George Thomas Wilkerson:

I think there is no simple answer to this question, although based on scripture and personal experience, I'd say it's definitely possible to be joy-filled despite one's physical incarceration. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, so I of course mean this in regards to Christians. Before I was a Christian, I had joy too, but I wasn't physically incarcerated. Although, I also believe that even before I "came to Christ" God was already working in me—hence my joyful disposition. It (joy) is part of who I am, a prominent personality trait. I have also been imprisoned by nonphysical things: drug addiction, anger, pride. When in chains to these, I still had a measure of joy, but joy wasn't the dominant characteristic. Specifically, with addiction, I was chasing a type of pleasure I thought was the ideal, a euphoria or bliss derived from chemicals. I was enslaved by it. Even as I attained a momentary euphoria, I was living in hell, deprived of the pure Joy that only comes from God.

#### *Story:*

Before coming to prison, I was imprisoned by pride. I was so concerned about my reputation, about what others thought of me, that I felt forced to do things I didn't want to do. I was anxious all the time, worried, afraid—constantly visualizing all these scenarios where I'd have to fight someone because of some perceived slight. I was miserable and high-strung. Pride stole my joy, it muffled it, it diminished my personality. Pride dehumanized me, and moved me to dehumanize others. Pride objectified me, and others, as it distorted my perception of reality. Over the years, as I go to war against my pride, I find my joy quotient increasing inversely proportionate to my decreasing pride. Maybe one day I can embrace being nothing, embrace true humility. Prison presents plenty of obstacles to joy, by nature I think. I have a working theory that a person cannot be fully human while alienated from others. God created us as individuals with unique personalities, but He also designed us to be part of collective marriage, family, communities, etc. It is through the various relationship dynamics my humanity finds full expression. For example, I can be tender with my mom or sister in a way I cannot with others while I can be rough and blunt with my brothers in a way I can't with others. Both, tenderness and roughness, are parts of me I cannot express outside a relationship.

Thus, when I can't fully express my humanity, I feel incomplete, oppressed, deprived of joy. God promises to give us life abundant, and I believe He's referring to enabling us to fully express our humanity. Within moral boundaries, of course. Joy is directly influenced by my ability to be fully human. Prison is highly effective at creating barriers to relationships. I have so many joy filled moments! Joy, like I said, is part of my disposition, so when I say I had a joy-filled moment, I'm referring to a particular intensity of joy. The ones that come to mind are when I have these moments of AWARENESS, of understanding the reality of my faith:

- That God is real and loves me.
- That He chose me, a sinner, saved me, and walks with me daily.
- That I am truly blessed.
- That Life itself, the mere fact I exist and know it is miraculous.
- That I get to participate in creation, and work with God at shaping Eternity.

All these truths and more sometimes puncture my day-to-day train of thought, and I am in an ecstasy of Awe, wonder, and joy.

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#### **Response from Fernando Garcia:**

Yes. Joy is not a feeling, but a spiritual fruit of the Holy Spirit. Joy can be expressed in many forms in any circumstances & situations. Just look at the life of Daniel. Even though he was locked into slavery had had “joy” because he was a man led by the Holy Spirit. Joy come because of the intimate fellowship in God, and how He is with His people, in His constant faithfulness and His truth. Everything we experience has to go through God's hands. We can cross reference that with the 1st chpt of Job, & the life of Joseph God's blueprint for their life was already written out. We having faith, & truth in God helps us to have joy in life no matter the circumstances.

#### *Story:*

I guess, I can start this story with the fact that as I was being pursued by God to come back to Him, I was running away more and more, further and further from Him. I was trying to find myself. I was being reared by drug dealers who grew-up with my father. So to them I was part of their family. I was able to be part of many a things that I wish I did not see or be part of! Street life was hard! Street life had it's own rules & leaders. And I being in to the life via family friends I was not able to be in contact with God on a personal level because I was in a realm that God did not like to visit. A realm in which God tried to pull people out of. But I was too busy to listen to God or see what God's plan was for me. I did not have joy when doing me, only when I have myself to God did I truly find joy and myself. I believe that it is difficult to have joy when faced with the many distractions in life. When I take my focus off of God, my life become chaos. When I don't pray in the quiet times in the morning before we have our cells opened my mornings seem to have plenty of opportunities to go sour! But once I put on the “Armor of God,” I feel assured after a good prayer that I'm good. I feel the “Holy Spirit” upon me. I feel the presence of “the Lord” with me. Then and only then do I experience true joy Because the same way I put on my clothes, I put on Jesus, and everywhere I go Jesus goes also. As I have said before—”Joy comes in knowing God.” Well mayhaps the best moment for me is when I truly came back to the fold ‘Gods way.’ It felt like Rushing waters all in my stomach. More powerful then

butterflies. A scene of peace in knowing—OK God has me. As my “Adonai.” He owns me, He values me He’s going to take care of me. It’s hard to submit but it is also exhilarating to know that with God it is always an adventure. It’s always joyous thinking about God doing a small thing for me. Or helping me do a simple thing for someone like interceding for someone and watching the prayers get answered.

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**Response from James Edward Jaynes:**

There is no doubt that JOY can be had in lock-up/prison. I’m able to Find Joy in the changing of the seasons, a phone call home or a good book. Even though I’m not where I want to be, I am not miserable, I am not bitter. I’m able to turn on the radio and hear of people that are worse off than myself. I’m not always bubbling with joy, but it’s only a few breaths away. It’s not only possible to lead a joy-filled existence, it happens every day. Even when I don’t feel joy-ful, I see guys that are. I am not alone, as I have my trust & faith in God, that Heaven awaits.

*Story:*

When I was a kid my homelife was bad. My Dad was an abusive alcoholic. To get away from the situation I would go for long walks by myself. I enjoyed walking in the woods, through fallow fields and by the creek. I had a few places I’d go. I might sit for an hour in a quiet, moss-filled place, or the bedrock of the creek. I felt joy in being surrounded by Nature and being away from home. I learned to enjoy solitude. It can be difficult to always have joy when the guy next to you is blaming the police, the D.A. or God for their circumstances. Or someone will say, “What good is living, if I never get out of prison.” Negativity can make things difficult, but I try to keep my mind on positive things, and pray that the particular person finds peace & joy without ruining mine. My most memorable Joy-Filled moment was back in the early 90’s. My Mom and my Cousin came to see me here. I knew they were coming to bring Holiday goodies but got the dates mixed up. The day they came was unexpectedly early and the visit was great. My Mom has since passed away but I still recall how happy & joyful we all three were for those few hours.

## Chapter 7: Anger and Joy

**Writing prompt for those who are incarcerated:**

We must be careful to not allow anger to rule as the governing emotion as we make our life choices. Anger will mess you up and mess somebody else up. When anger governs, it usually just makes you feel bad and makes things worse.

**Response from Alden Harden:**

This is a true statement, but also one not easily learned. It will come when you start replacing “your will” with the “will of God” in your daily walk.

*Story:*

I once (years ago) fought over what to watch on the T.V. I won the fight, watched the show. But the next day couldn't remember any details of the show. It was that day that I promised to never let anger rule nor govern my decisions ever again. "I believe" I took another step into the will of the lord for my life that day. (This happened here in prison)

## Chapter 9: Late Night Joy

### Writing prompt for those who are incarcerated:

Midnight symbolically suggests the hour when an individual could easily move from anxiety to dread to despair and, eventually, to emotional and spiritual defeat. Midnight is a dangerous hour and one could easily say, "I give up" in the midnight hour. Paul and Silas are remembered not for their despair, but for their expressions of joy. They prayed and sang when it was tempting to give up and give out. They prayed and sang as attempts were made to steal their joy-filled existence. To you, my brothers, locked up here on Death Row, you like all of us can feel that it is the midnight hour. Understand this truth. God made joy for your midnight hour.

### Response from George Thomas Wilkerson:

I agree that the "midnight" hour can be an especially trying time of despair, which can lead to defeat both psychologically and spiritually. And I agree that joy can help one get through that dark time. However, I don't think God specifically made joy for the midnight hour. Rather, I'm convinced joy is part of the ideal state of being that God is transforming us toward—along with the other fruits of the Spirit, such as peace, patience, etc.; and other qualities, like gratitude, hope, gladness, etc. What I mean to say is: God is conforming all believers to the Image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-30), who is His own Image. Joy is the natural, steady state of God and Christ, i.e., their disposition! A lack of joy speaks to our fallen state. No, if there was something that truly seems to help one through a dark hour, it's HOPE—that reasonable confidence that God will accomplish His will. Amen.

### *Story:*

I understand "hope" to mean "the reasonable confidence that something I desire will come to pass." In scripture God tells me He will never leave me nor forsake me; that for "him whose ways are pleasing to God, He will make even his enemies be at peace with him." There was a time years ago, after I first got locked up, when someone on my pod did something so disrespectful that according to prison culture I had to fight him—or even kill him. I prayed desperately because I did not want to do it. The only way I could get out of it without being victimized by the other bullies was if the guy came and apologized. He was not known to have ever apologized to anyone, so I needed a miracle. I said, "Lord, I need You. I want to do Your will. I need You to move in that man's heart and make him apologize—and I will forgive him. Please, Lord, otherwise I will be forced to hurt him or be hurt trying." Sure enough, a few minutes later, the guy came and apologized. I had hoped in God, and He delivered me. No other test since then, has even come close... Amen. By the way, in the 8 years since, I've not heard of or seen that guy apologizing to anyone else, which further confirms the miracle.

**Response from Archie Billings:**

I will agree with this statement being that my midnight hour came when I came to death row. I was in dispair ready too give up. But I redidicated my life to the Lord. I now have the joy of knowing that I am forgiven from my wrong doing. I find peace in knowing since I gave my life to ‘God’ he will help me through my circumstances. I find joy that I’m locked up and not living the lifestyle I was on the streets of drugs and alcohol. Even though I’m locked up and don’t want to be, I’d rather be here than on the streets dying in sin not having salvation. People say you can’t find joy but put your trust in ‘God,” and you will find it.

*Story:*

I was lead to Christ when I was a young child. But didn’t know what it meant to worship God. When I caught my [ILLEGIBLE: chargea] preacher in the jail kept coming by each week, talking to me. I wasn’t trying to hear it. When I got sentenced to death my attorney gave me a Bible, so I feel that “God,” never gave up on me and was leading me the whole time. That is what brings me joy.

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**Response from Clifford Miller:**

I believe this to be true. With so many ‘outside’ influence’s expecting for me to give up, I can chose to go that route. But I believe that God, who is in me, is stronger that those ‘outside’ voices.. People who expect me to fail/just give up. By staying focused on the God of the Bible, and not depend on my own strenght, I believe He will allow me to see better day’s. I refuse to believe he has brought me this far to fail me now.

*Story:*

I, not having family support over these 17 yr’s., have had pen-pal’s & attorney’s supporting me both financialy and at time emotionally. I, looking back, can see the God of the Bibles hand in all of this. He is the one I depend on for everything because he owns everything and is my everything. Gods provision.

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**Response from Stephen Buckner:**

Yes, God has made joy for my midnight hour! I could give up, but I never will for God has placed in me, His Holy Spirit. I remember being locked up five weeks in a cell, isolated from everyone else—but I got a Bible (which brings me joy anytime) and read it out loud for others to hear, in this darkness on another cell block, I and I know the others heard too, someone singing: “He’s got the whole word in HIs hands”! When the officers came by to check on us I told them about it, and I started singing too, “He got the whole world in His Hands” too! We brought one soul to Jesus too—thats joy—salvation!

*Story:*



Knowing God is ever present with me, I've this joy, hope of His promise that Heaven awaits me. But God has given me—some—thing hard that I see, but I realize my ways are not His ways, and I know He'll give me the strength and words to use in doing His will. Just as the story above brought me joy, I know God receives the glory and joy, He has put for me too do—for His will. God placed on my heart to ask for forgiveness for the sins I did against them, my victims family members.

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**Response from William Eugene Robinson:**

That would be so true, for the simple fact my reality is that I am sentenced to Death, and threw the day I have my thoughts from everyone, and thing around me to keep me going but when that cell door close during that midnight hour, Its just me and God. Basiclly Im more lost without God in the light of the day than I am in the midnight hour.

*Story:*

(When the door close) Every night when that Door close for lock down, And Im in that cell alone, it feel like a big weight just fell off my shoulders, because everytime I leave outside my cell I have to put on that Armor to guard myself from the Anxiety that creeps up in my bones, facing the hate, and animosity that lives around me daily. In order to make it back to that cell in one peace without being transformed into what I see every day, I have to scratch and claw my way back to that cell in the same tack I left, sheild with the Body Armor of Christ. Falling back into my cell, is to face the reality of not being able to go home, not being able to get away from the nose, the negativity, the pressure of the world. So I learned to be okay even when things seems to be very bad for my well being.

## Chapter 10: Joy With Shortages

**Writing prompt for those who are incarcerated:**

When you don't have what you want, you are vulnerable to ideas and words that draw you toward despair. You will start to speak to yourself, saying you are inadequate or inferior, that you are by birth or upbringing less of a person than what is needed. Worse yet is to hear that from someone else.

**Response from Clifford Miller:**

No, I don't feel nor think this to be true. Why do I view it this way? Because I am who I am. I don't have 'cus the father did not give it to me. If he wanted me to have, I'd have. To be vulnerable and inadequate means to me: vulnerable is weak, prey, victim. Inadequate is unable, not ready, ill prepared. Before truly leaning on Christ, I was those. I have learned to go to him for everything, and he has provided.



*Story:*

Before coming to Christ, I felt that I had to live up to the “Worlds standard.” To be a “mans man.” I had to learn to fight or become a victim in the C.Y.A. (or California Youth Authority). I, over these 17 yr’s., have learned that I don’t have to live like that. Trusting in Christ has relieved me of those burden’s.

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**Response from Keith East:**

Yes and no: it depends on who and what a person beleives in and their background. If they have a strong foundation in the Home or church they will react differently from some one who does not have Beleive in Christ. Your belief system will help you react to despair, (in Christ) I was taught He will listen and guide you It took me a long time to learn the answer to all lifes problems can be found in the Bible these are the things my family had been telling me for 35 years But I have only come to understand in the last 15 years Here on the Row

*Story:*

There was a time in my life when I was the Golden child much was expected. But as I grew older I found out there were others just like me, I remember the time I was all set to attend voice camp at UNC 16 years old 2 weeks nothing but singing H.S. kids from all over the state. I was convinced that none could compare or compete with me. Much to my surprise there were at lese 50 or more thinking just like me and that caused me to rethink and wonder about myself.

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**Response from Mario Phillips:**

its not necessary true to how I will, would feel about hearing that from somebody, however yes it would, have an impact on me only if I believe it to be true in its entirety, and from experiences in my life, there are and has been times, where I tend to allow others words, or false statements about me. Or words directed at me to take affect and I would process it as if it was true, when it wasn’t only because I was vulnerable. and unsure of myself, and the direc-tion my life is going in. Being vulnerable, to me is being unsure of myself and therefore. Exposing myself to all my weaknesses, and allowing myself, to be accessible to making more mistakes. Then I usually would, and due to my being inadequate, inadequacy, I tend to get sucked into others propergande, and there mess. and now they want to me. Define me perceive

*Story:*

When I was a child, my mother raised 4 sons, also with the help of her mother, my grandmother. And alot of times, I felt very vulnerable, at how she raised us boys, in that she would call me bad names, verbal abuse, beatings some-times sometimes, for no apparent reason and it made me & my brothers, me especially feel inadequate. and if I was not good enough to be her son, or if she regretted having me, conceiving me. So, I felt very vulnerable, unwanted,

unloved and inadequate and useless alot of the times until, I found something meaningful to hold onto or something in myself I liked about me, to feel good about myself.

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**Response from Nathan Bowie:**

I believe this is true, because no one wants to hear that they are not good enough.

*Story:*

I have learned over the years to make the best use out of what I have. This way I always have enough. When looking at things this way I am always thankful for what I have.

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**Response from Terry Alvin Hyatt:**

Vulnerability is a fact in my life, because of my own ignorance. I adopted the idea that it was alright to not learn to read and write and little did I know at the time that I was not opening a door to a brand new world. For years I kept it shut, just like I did with the Lord. Now that I have opened those doors they have both opened up a brand new life. The world sees vulnerability as a cratch, but after coming to know the Lord vulnerability is a great prize to strive for with the Lord. It means you are dependent on Him.

*Story:*

My grandfather, whom I looked up to, could not read and write and I thought it was OK. All you needed was a trade. You did not need to know how to read or write. As I grew older I learned I was crippling myself, which made me real vulnerable to grab hold of any thing, but now that I have come to know the Lord and have learned to read I realize it is one of the great blessings and tools that He allows me to us to get to know Him better. It sure don't mean that I'm perfect now or ever can be in this body, but that will come one day. When I come face to face with Him I will be what he has made me to be; His adopted Son. If you want proof of this just look in that Lambs Book of Life and you will see my name and I hope yours too.

## Chapter 12: Joy in Community

**Writing prompt for those who are incarcerated:**

When shortages occur in your life, you need the Savior, but you also should not forget that you need the Savior's disciples. Some people act as if they can go it all alone, but God has created us with a need for one another, and we are designed with interdependence on one another. As brothers and sisters in Christ we should be there to lend helping hands to one another.

**Response from Alden Harden:**

I agree, gen... It's not good that man should be alone. No matter what the situation may be. ...forsake not the assembly... The savior places angels in our paths to help guide us. It's through them, that we will find His strength.

Story: I've no doubt. That my family has rallied around me on their journey, from day one and continues to do so. I have a few pen-friends that have stood strong with me, by me for ten years and more. I know that the Savior sent them. (My savior Jesus). He knows what we have need of.

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**Response from George Thomas Wilkerson:**

I agree. The greatest commandments are to Love God with our all, and to love one another as ourselves. In 1 Cor. 13 (the love chapter), it lists the features of love. When I look at them closely, I see these define our relational dynamics. God is concerned with our relationships!: i.e., between Him/us, us/each other. We are all part of something greater than ourselves, and can only fully realize that reality—come into our destined and created purpose—by laying down our “I” mentality, by discarding the “Us vs Them” attitude, and instead embracing the US reality. We are meant to be ONE. Period.

*Story:*

I am a brother, a son, a friend, etc. Each of these relational dynamics requires that I express a specific aspect of my life, like light shining through different lenses—and for them to do the same. God says it is more blessed to give than receive. I tend to be a giver, but one day I was in need. A brother noticed and asked if he could get me anything. I told him “no.” He said, “Why would you deny me my blessing? You give to others, and it's from the heart, yet you're too proud to receive?” I was convicted because although I thought I was doing good by helping others, I realized part of being in a relationship is receiving. I had to learn to receive, so that we can be one, and balanced; not two, in an asymmetrical relationship.

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**Response from Keith East:**

Not only when shortages occur, in every day life we need those who will lead and comfort us. When trying to go it alone we often turn away from Christ and seek what we need from some form of escape I.E. drugs, booze, you are right God created us to need each other when you depend and trust another in Christ you have the power to overcome anything

*Story:*

As a young man I knew all about what it was to grow up in a family of Christians; but when I lost my job, got divorced, instead of turning to Christ and the family of believers I turned to Drugs and Booze and lost my way and at age 35 the first time in prison found myself on Death Row Had I turned to my family and those I knew were in Christ I would not have caused so much pain for so many.

## Chapter 13: Selfishness and Joy

### Writing prompt for those who are incarcerated:

It was selfish pursuits that led this young man away from his father, and it is selfish pursuits that take you away from God. When you become first, you are moving to the far country. When you as an individual say you are first, or we as a people say that we are first, we are moving away from God and going to the far country.

### Response from Archie Billings:

For this it rings true. I coming from a household that didn't attend worship service or discuss religion. While growing up I took part in worldly things doing what pleased me not caring about anyone else. The more you become relaxed in your culture the more comfortable you become. So not practicing any type of religion I fell farther a way from God. Not knowing how much I was damaging my relationship with God. Lucky for me 'God,' is forgiving and full of grace.

#### *Story:*

Why I agreed with this is growing up I started doing drugs and alcohol when I was about eleven years old. After I started this I started to fell in school. I was more concerned for getting high not putting my personal needs in order. I would be seperating my self from family and friend. I even start to steal to support my habits. I was so far away from God. I knew about him but wasn't putting my trust in him, letting him guide my life I ended up hitting Rock bottom leading me to prison.

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### Response from James Edward Jaynes:

I agree that selfish pursuits take us away from God. I know That when I put & keep God first, all else falls into place. My immediate circumstances might not change but how I respond to them will. I'd rather stay in God's country than move to a country so far away I might not find my way home.  
P.S. I enjoy and appreciate Dewey's passion & compassion when he brings The Word.

#### *Story:*

I was in the Church of my G-Pa for a couple of years, but left home at 16. That ended my outside Church life. After I was arrested and came to The Row I got back in Church, but fell away again. Only in the last few years have I put God first and now I'm at peace. I might not have all I want but God gives me all I need and many of the "extras."

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**Response from Melvin White Jr.:**

As a man of God, I do agree with this statement. I am a person that doesn't like depending on people, I want to do it all on my own, people will disappoint you to often. But then that's me, I've disappoint people I love and they still love me. So I've learned that seeking one's own way while not thinking of others, disappoint others. Who is it that don't what to be loved, included, ask for their opinion? Seeking God daily will keep us with an understanding that we need HIM first and people, God (10) commandments, the first 4 are the relationship between HIM and us, the others (are how we should treat each others). Jesus said, the commandments can be summed up in these 2 saying. Love the LORD thy God with everything, and others as you, your self.

*Story:*

I notice that once I was working on a car, the car fell on me, I was alone and I needed somebody. But, by God's perfect grace I notice that I wasn't pin-down by the car, so I was able to worm my way out. Too bad I didn't learn from that situation then, only years late did it take. But I did learn. Along I was, but not alone Because God was there, Yet still I needed to learn to depend on others too & most importantly God in, Christ Jesus.

**Response from Warren Gregory:**

I wholeheartedly believe this statement to be true because it was selfish pursuits that led the young man away from God. All he could see and all he desire was what he believed was his. The same is true of us. When we believe we want what we see and what we desire, we fall short of what God has in store for us.

*Story:*

In my second year of high school I met a girl who I desired. During this time in my life I use to talk to God a lot. So during one of my conversations with God I ask for love and a relationship I could really believe in. The next day I met a different girl and we really hit it off. I stayed platonic friends with the first girl. Eventually I cheated and I told the second girl. I lost her forever. Spiraled out of control and eventually, after long years of being lost ended up in prison. The irony of the situation is it was the only serious relationship I ever cheated in and it led me to a long list of bad judgements... that led me to prison six years later.

**Chapter 15: Joy Within****Writing prompt for those who are incarcerated:**

You are locked up physically behind bars, and your body is forced to comply with the rules of the state, but hear me: your mind and your spirit are free, and you don't have to consume with your mind and your spirit what the pigs are consuming.

**Response from Iziah Barden:**

I know and understand that one must keep learning and listening, to be aware of what's happening today and all around, you keep reading the word of God to be strong, and pray for others. And must know what and what not to do.

Story: To know and not to know and do, as being a barber here in prison, sometime you must make a decision and not break the rule like when not to cut someone's hair when they don't suppose to get one. I get to use my skill and stay in the guideline.

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**Response from Nathan Bowie:**

I believe this is true because, while in prison you have a choice to be positive or not. There are many positive things you can do in here.

*Story:*

Many times over the years people have tried to get me off the positive road. It's a struggle but, I always remember that it is my choice. Everyone has to make that choice for themselves.

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**Response from Stephen Buckner:**

I've all ready found out, I'm freer in here behind these walls locked up, then I was before I came to prison. Not physically but spiritually. I've also learned to be content whether I've little or a lot. I walk everyday with my Saviour, and I know he is ever present with me. I've been blessed here in prison with Sunday services, Tuesday Bible Study and Thursday Discipleship class. I also have Christian brothers who help me too! So yes I'm free in spirit and mind. I do have the joy, peace, and hope in Jesus Christ.

*Story:*

I was going down a dark road outside of here. I was doing things that was breaking God's laws, and then men (society) laws. The result of this road led me here. It was there at my lowest in the woods that I found God. He told me I had to go back and face what I did but He would be with me and take care of me. When I went back I got shot six times, but God was there with me and He is with me now here on N.C. Death Row, so with Him I can do anything!

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**Response from Terry Alvin Hyatt:**

My spirit was bound in the world when I thought I was free. But now that I'm locked up I am truly free in Jesus my Lord. My burden is now my blessing. Because I focus on my Lord Jesus and not on myself. I am truly free in him.

*Story:*

Freedom is not all ways being free.

**Response from Warren Gregory:**

This statement is true and it is realer than most people think. It is all mind over matter! I once heard it said that the greatest thing in the hands of the oppressors is the minds of the oppressed. Since hearing that I focus my mind and my thoughts on bettering myself, regardless of my situation.

Story: There was a time when I was much younger that I would always listen to what other thought of me. Then after a great deal of mental and spiritual growth I realized, it matters not what others think of me, or what they think I should do, or how I should act. What matters most is what I think and that my thoughts and action reflect my mental and spiritual growth.

## Chapter 16: Separation and Joy

### Writing prompt for those who are incarcerated:

Prisons have served punishment not just on the men incarcerated but also on the loved ones who do not get to benefit from the presence and resources of the men incarcerated. Just like Naomi and her daughters-in-law felt the pain of being separated from their men, prisons can do the same thing to families today.

**Response from William C. Gregory:**

Yes, I believe this statement is true! I've been incarcerated for over 25 yrs now. Twenty-three years I've been on deathrow. I got locked up at 18 yrs old. My siblings were 3 and 1 at the time. I also had a son who was 16 months at the time. So this is devastating to a family on a emotional, financial, mental and physical level. Not having physical contact with my family is very hard on both sides. I can't work on deathrow so it's a strain on my parents financially. All these years have brought anger, disappointment, sadness on the emotional side for us all! So prisons really try to tear the family structure down on those incarcerated!

*Story:*

On a Saturday after being on deathrow a couple months, I had a visit with my mother. After the visit with her crying alot I went back to my cell and suddenly the pain and heartache of being separated from her really hit me hard to tears. Not only was I in prison but I was housed in a unit were men were executed. So this place was trying to separate me from my mother permently! That hit me the hardest with the reality of my situation.

**MISSING RESPONSE AUTHOR???**

When the judge sentenced me to death at 18 yrs of age, not only was I devastated but my immediate family too. My mother, dad, two sisters, my son and grandfather depended on me as well! So I took a precious loved one from the victims family and didn't realize how much pain and suffering my actions caused my own family! THE RIPPLE EFFECT I caused stretched miles and miles. My son was 16 months old, my sisters 3 yrs old & 15 months old. Now



I'm 43 yrs of age and my family could really need my financial support as well as moral support. The male figures of America are lost in the prison system. That really effects generations and generations down the road.

*Story:*

At the time I was taking care of my grandfather (I was living with him) and I had a son. I just graduated from high school. So I had responsibilities to take care of. When I fell in August of '92, my parents now I had the responsibility of providing for me. On deathrow for over 23 yrs now. I have no job so I'm depended on family to support me financially and morally. Not only has God Blessed my mom & dad's supports but my Auntie, cousins and a spiritual Mother as well. So the roles has been reversed per se. I should be out in the world supporting my fam. I have not had any contact with my son since that tragic day in '92!

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**Response from William Eugene Robinson:**

I would say that this is true in deed! The reason being is, I have a mother that need me now more than ever, because is getting older and her kids are not there for her the way she exspect them to be. So when I talk to her on the phone, I can hear it in her voice that she is lonely and sad. The Holidays and birthdays are not the same anymore without her kids around. Thats why when I call her every chance I get I try to make up for what she been missing with my other brothers and sisters, including me being here on Death Row.

*Story:*

The day I got sentence to death, my world came crashing down. While in the court Room, I became num to everything aorund me. My family was behind me waiting to see how I was hold up but I did not give them the opper-tunity to see my face. I just walked out the court Room without saying anything. The seperation was already made, only they couldn't see it. After weeks later my mother still wanted to know why I didn't turn around.

## Chapter 18: Joy Shared

### **Writing prompt for those who are incarcerated:**

Regina found a truth that is an enduring truth for all of us. God has a plan that involves us giving and receiving help from one another. I am here for you, and you are here for me. We are here for one another. You may think you are alone, but that is not God's plan for you. And it is not what God wants you to feel.

### **Response from Fernando Garcia:**

Yes I believe this statement is true! There is power and strength in numbers. God does not want anyone to be alone. That is why He said, "It is not good that man should be alone." And God created woman (a helper), for man. And when Jesus left to go to the father after His death, He sent the Comforter to be with us. So that we may not be alone.

When one has a person to talk to, or to lean on, one can establish a bond, a true friendship, a fellowship that helps a person to become accountable for their actions. To strengthen each other, to lift one another.

*Story:*

It's hard to write this one, because I grow-up the only child. So I was always alone while mom went to work. So all of this transcended from my childhood to now! I really don't talk to anyone about my "woes" I just take my problems to God. I am not trying to give a correct answer: I just have a hard time talking and opening-up to others. I do thank God that He is always there ready and willing to listen and give advice and to guide me. Because me alone I am blind and lost. But I have a friend in Jesus wants to share a friendship with me. And I at most of the times have trouble with that. I don't at times know how to handle that. That is probably why I have a pretty good prayer life because I need to know God before I give myself and submit to Him. But thank God He is always seeking me and willing to help me even though I have many faults an imperfection. Though I am on death Row God shares His life with me.

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**Response from Izhiah Barden:**

I think this statement is true, just like in one of my story, God use one to help another, and that open you up to get help when you need it, and to be more of a part of God's will, and a servant of God.

*Story:*

not along when I started job of cutting hair on death row, I did not have a watch. time is important. One guy give me a watch free of charge, some ten years later he ask to give me a new one, one week before the old watch died-out. I believe God move him to do so. God is good.

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**Response from Keith East:**

True, the statement is true for me because God's word tells me tha we are not ment to be alone Adam had Eve and so on even at the worst of times If you have some one to share your thoughts and burdens with the load always gets lighter.

*Story:*

I have a friend who is not a believer but who's mother is, I often get on him about how God is Real and he needs to understand what its like to have Him in your life. He has a problem child a daughter, drugs, booze, running wild he often comes to me saying you have a girl what would or did you do when she was 16, 18, 21, ect. my response often vary but most of all pray I even went so far as to have my mom call his mom and pray over the phone together Friends.

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**Response from John “Mac” McNeill:**

It is very true statement. For, God tell us that He will never leave us or forsake us. We must be there for other as well, as believer, as are father is there for us. I know at time we think we are alone when it seem if no one care about our begin but we are never alone.

*Story:*

I never was alone in my life until I learn what it means to be alone and I never want to go through that again. You see when I was a foolish young man thinking I have the world in my hands. little did I knowed I was lost and all alone. Thank's be to God who recuse me, for I was dead and dying in my sin. Trust and believe for you're not alone. Peace & Blessing God.

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**Response from Melvin White Jr.:**

Yes, God's plan for you/us, humans, God doesn't want us to feel or be alone. In the begaining when Adam was alone God said to him it's not good for man to be alone. Even so that was for Adam to have a wife I believe that extind to friendship. The commandments (10) that God gave Moses, they were to govern the relationship (first 4) between God & man the last 6 between man & man (humans & humans). We need each other and the bible gives many examples. Life is not to be by one's self.

*Story:*

Being here in prison/death row, sometimes I get the feeling that I'm in this alone, by myself. Every two weeks (God Willing), my mom comes and visit me, we talk and share. On one of those visits I was not in a good mood and I said one of the most foolish statements, I'm in this alone. Well', that's when my Mom told me “boy you ain't the only one locked-up, I'm locked-up too, I hurt too.” My life, All of our lives effect someone, good or bad. We are not living alone, people are always think or praying for us. Mom, sister, brother, maybe friends.

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**Response from William Eugene Robinson:**

It is true indeed! We are social being that are created to provide the resource one would need to survive this world. And that is Love, Food, and Shelter. Without God none of this would be possible.

*Story:*

For me to survive this type of situation Im gone need God and a hold lot of Gods people, but the odds was stacked up against me 1/out of a million, and that one was my cusin who I was rased up with sense I was a child by our great Grandmother. She has given me hope, stability and a foundation to withstand this type of situation.

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**Response from William C. Gregory:**

Yes, I think this is true! For the first four years I believed I was alone. That God was absent in my life. That God didn't care about me or my well being. And I was one attending church here on deathrow. But little by little God brought two Christian people into my life and they became my God-parents. They showed me love and sincere affection. They brought God's warm embrace and realness to me in this dark, murky place were it felt like I was drowning! Ten years later God provided a spiritual mother to me! Another wonderful blessing of God's providence upon my life. I wrote a poem called "God does not forget." Even on deathrow I know without a shadow of doubt that I'm not alone!

*Story:*

Someone said to me after I got a new trial and came back to deathrow to "not give up on God." That saying kept me coming back to church even though I was so angry at God. My faith was small and I wanted to have no part of God, Christianity or others who attended church! But this guy was persistent and truly cared about me! His persistence paid off and prayers that I turned back to God, became a liturgist and haven't stopped walking with the Lord ever since.