



# A Message of Hope for Those Who Are Incarcerated

*God's light can be a part of your future.*

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**Y**ears ago, I was visiting a prison when I met a man named Eric. He had been incarcerated for 17 years. During this time, Eric rarely missed church. He prayed often with others and helped many people learn about the scriptures. When I met Eric, he was suffering from serious health challenges. I was able to visit with him in his prison hospital room.

As we talked, Eric told me how grateful he was for the many Church members who had supported him over the years. He shared his testimony and faith in Jesus Christ. Then, in a whispered voice, he said there were still many days when he felt forgotten and alone. We talked for a while longer, prayed together, and parted as friends. A few hours later, I learned that Eric had passed away.

Eric's journey through life had been rough. But he had eventually come to know and love Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and himself. And *that* is what matters. In the eternities, I don't think it will matter where or how we came to know Jesus. What will matter is what each of us did with our life after we found Him.

The circumstances and choices that led to your incarceration do not need to define your life. You may have made mistakes, large and small. You may have committed a crime once or many times. This is part of your past, but your past does not decide your future. You have the

power to make choices that will invite happiness, even during difficult times.

## **Your True Identity**

Sister Joy D. Jones, Primary General President, has visited prisons several times. She once told me this story:

"I remember the first time I visited the prison near where I live. As I spoke with a group of inmates, it felt like I was in a holy space because I knew they earnestly wanted to change and come to Christ. We talked about our divine identity as children of God.

"At one point, I told them about my two-year-old granddaughter who came to me one day, smiling. She enthusiastically announced, 'Grandma, I'm a child of God!' Then one person quietly said, 'I wonder what my life would be like today if someone had told me when I was young that I was a child of God.'

"The good news is that we are all God's children," Sister Jones continued, "whether we learn it as a child or later in life. It is *never* too late. You are *not* forgotten. God knows you. He loves you. His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior. He atoned for each and every one of us. Because of that, Jesus understands our lives perfectly, and we can be completely forgiven of our sins. He said, 'Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. . . .

Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me' (1 Nephi 21:15–16)."

Believing that you, and everyone you know, is a child of God can be a source of inner strength. As you accept this truth and let it guide your life, you will find greater peace and become an example of good for others.



## Rebuilding Trust

Throughout life it can be difficult to know whom to trust, but you can always trust your Heavenly Father. The scriptures teach that God knows you perfectly. He loves you and cannot lie.<sup>1</sup> If trusting others—including God—is difficult for you, pray about it. Ask your Heavenly Father, “Do You love me? Can I trust You?” Then listen for an answer. It may come as a peaceful feeling or calm thought. It may take time. But God *will* answer your prayers.

In addition to knowing whom you can trust, it is important to become someone who can be trusted. It may not be appropriate for you to have contact with those you have harmed. But you can still consider past events from their point of view, develop compassion for them, and pray for them. You can choose to be a trustworthy person in the new relationships you form.

It can be a long road. I’m grateful for this encouragement from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Keep loving. Keep trying. Keep trusting. Keep believing. Keep growing. Heaven is cheering you on today, tomorrow, and forever.”<sup>2</sup>

## Parenting While Incarcerated

You may be tempted to think that you can’t be a parent during your season of

incarceration. Resist this thinking. Whenever possible, find ways to support your family and children.

In recent years, Church leaders have emphasized how important it is to teach the gospel to one another in our families. Ask yourself, “How can I help my family receive the blessings of the gospel?” Here are four ideas:

- You can *always* pray for your family. Prayer is a powerful type of spiritual work that is not limited by walls or distance.
- If you are allowed to communicate with your children, find appropriate ways to express your love. Teach them about the spiritual lessons you are learning.
- Make an effort to reconnect with trustworthy friends. Build relationships with those who would be a good influence on your family.
- Change for the better. Every effort you make to improve yourself and take responsibility for your choices will help you be a better father or mother.

### Moving Forward

Our prophet today, President Russell M. Nelson, said that the quest of this life is to prepare to meet God by following the example of Jesus Christ. “And we do *that* as we repent daily and receive His cleansing, healing, and strengthening power,” he taught. “Then we can feel enduring peace and joy, even during turbulent times.”<sup>3</sup>

Repentance is an important part of healing. It starts as you sincerely pray to God, telling Him what you have done wrong and asking for His forgiveness. You will begin to feel at peace as you learn more about the gospel and follow the example of Jesus Christ. These feelings, and your changing behavior, are evidence that you are beginning to heal.

Church leaders are there to help you walk this path back to God. Through Jesus Christ, it will always be possible to return to your Heavenly Father. Although you may feel forgiven by God long before you are forgiven

by family, society, or even some members of the Church, don’t despair. Just continue to move forward. Trust God’s promises and His timing.

### God Will Help You Heal

Remember that any sort of healing—including from addiction, abuse, or other trauma—takes time. The Bible tells the story of Jesus healing a blind man whose vision returned in stages. He first saw “men as trees, walking.” Then Jesus “put his hands again upon his eyes,” and that was when the man finally saw everything clearly (Mark 8:24–25). Similarly, when Jesus healed a woman who had an issue of blood, it was after she had suffered with a health problem for 12 years (see Mark 5:25–34). These stories remind us that physical, spiritual, and mental healing often happen over time. If you feel like your healing isn’t happening as quickly as you’d like, try to identify small successes. Pray and talk to God about your feelings, including thanking Him for whatever progress you do notice.

Whether you are already a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, learning more about the gospel, or returning to Church membership, please know that we care about you. No matter what your past has been like or how long the road is ahead, your future can be filled with God’s light. The gospel path gives us strength. It brings us comfort. It leads to more happiness in this life and joy in eternity.

Your Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ know and love you perfectly. They will never abandon you. They will never harm you. They will never forget you. ■

#### NOTES

1. See, for example, Hebrews 6:18; Enos 1:6; Ether 3:12; Doctrine and Covenants 62:6.
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Tomorrow the Lord Will Do Wonders among You,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2016, 127.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “Opening Message,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2020, 6.