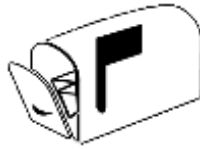


Incorrigible

Every month one or more of the “Good News Guides” come back to PO box 14, typically because an inmate has been moved to another facility.



Sometimes the inmate has been released, which is good news. **But please, if you get released, send me your new address so I can keep sending you the “Good News Guide.”**

Whenever I get a returned GNG, I look on the Internet for the DOC website of the state where the inmate was incarcerated. I can usually find the inmate’s new facility, so I can update the mailing list and re-send the returned GNG.

While I was starting to write this lesson, I thought about the irony in the name of each state’s prison system. They are always named “Department of Corrections” or something close to that. I wonder what they think they are correcting. California wishfully adds “and Rehabilitation” to their DOC name.

I learned something early in my married life. I cannot change my wife, and she can’t change me. She can change herself, and I can change myself. But any external attempt to change someone is easily defeated by a stubborn refusal to change.

Let’s face it—putting someone in prison does not “correct” the person. It serves mainly two purposes: (1) punishment for past crimes; and (2) limiting the ability to commit further crimes. Some prison systems do try to help inmates change their lives for the better, but many do not, and “rehabilitation” programs are mostly unsuccessful, judging by the rates of recidivism.

Why is there not more successful rehabilitation? I am not an expert by any means, but I believe there are three primary sets of limiting factors: namely, the individual’s past, the present, and the future.

The past has to do with life experiences—often indifferent parenting, inadequate schooling, and wrongful influences from every direction. It’s hard to fly straight and level in a hurricane.

The future depends on having the right expectations, but also on the environment.. Opportunities for ex-convicts are limited. Also, old associations will often lead to temptations and more wrong choices.

You can’t change the past at all, and you can’t do much to change the world of the future—although you may be able to change the way you relate to it. What you can control is your present.

The word “incorrigible” means “not capable of being corrected.” When applied to a person, it usually means that he or she stubbornly refuses to make some life changes that will lead to better attitudes and behaviors.

I’ve written before about my pen pal, David, who was constantly at odds with the guards and other inmates. Finally, during one visit to him in Supermax, he told me, “I’ve figured out what my problem is. It’s me!” His chip-on-the-shoulder attitude, his quick temper and refusal to cooperate, were what put him and kept him in the maximum security prison. He changed his ways, and soon he was moved back to the regular prison, and eventually released. I wish I could say he stayed out of prison—he didn’t. He went back to old haunts, old friends, and old ways, and he wound up in prison again.



I want to mention a few examples from the Bible. One is King David, who sinned big-time. He played peeping Tom while Bathsheba was taking a bath; he committed adultery with her; then he had her husband killed. In those times, actions like that were common behavior for a king—but they were wrong, and David knew it. When God said, through the prophet Nathan, that He was angry about David’s

crimes, David owned up to it. Instead of turning away from God, he turned to Him. Psalm 51 is David's cry for God's forgiveness, and for help in correcting his sinful behavior.

Another prime example of someone in the Bible who was incorrigible is King Saul, the first king of Israel, who thought doing his own thing was better than obeying God. God took the kingdom away from him, but I can't see that he ever repented.

Yet another example is the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Israel during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. Though He told them often about the things they were doing wrong, they wouldn't listen; they would not repent and ask God to help them change. Instead, they managed to have Jesus crucified.

King Saul and the Pharisees were incorrigible. King David was not.

The Bible contains the word "repent" quite a few times. In the Old Testament it is usually when the Lord, through His prophets, told the people of Israel that they needed to repent—to turn back to worshipping their God and obeying His commandments; and to stop messing around with the false gods of their various pagan neighbors. In the New Testament the word is often used by Jesus, telling His hearers to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is here among you."

"Repent" basically means to stop going the way you're going; to change direction; to get off the wrong path that you're on, and take a better path.

Because we're all sinners, we often sin. We all do things we shouldn't do, or we fail to do things we really should do. Sometimes we sin without really being aware of it, but usually we know if when what we're doing is wrong, and we know we should repent.

Probably it's even more common to have a bad attitude. This comes out in many ways: being prideful, being inconsiderate or rude, being critical, bearing grudges, gossiping, and so on. When we're too stubborn, too prideful, too lazy, or simply too selfish to make the attitude

and behavior corrections we know we really ought to make, we are being incorrigible.

Can God change us, or help us change ourselves? Yes, of course He can—if we will let Him. He will use all sorts of things to get our attention, but He won't force us. Free will is free will. We can be so stubbornly incorrigible that we'll finally wind up in Hell, if we really want to. But that is not what God wants.

God loves us. He has created us for an eternal life of peace and joy with Himself. He has given us His word, the Holy Bible, to tell us who He is and what He expects from us. He has given us a Savior, His only begotten Son, Jesus, to suffer and die to pay for our sins. And He has sent His Holy Spirit to guide us and help us live the life He calls us to live.

God loves you and me. He wants us to love Him wholeheartedly in return, simply because that two-way love relationship is what we were created for, and enjoying it is the greatest blessing we can possibly have.

He also wants us to love each other with the love of Jesus, so that we can have the joy of bringing His blessings to others.

James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." How can you get closer to God? By reading the Bible, especially the New Testament, and paying attention to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. And by spending time in prayer, not saying or thinking a lot of words, but mainly inviting God's Spirit to be present with you. The more time you spend with Him, the more you will realize how good and beautiful He is, and the more you will come to love Him.

And then let Jesus love others through you. Be kind, gentle, and generous; don't let yourself do things that are selfish or arrogant. If you mess up, run to God for forgiveness and correction.

Don't be incorrigible!

God bless you, my brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, and give you His peace —

Brother Roland

Repentance

by Tim Zulker

(Adapted from www.gotherefor.com, a ministry of Matthias Media)

We cannot become a Christian without repentance, and we cannot grow without regular repentance. (Acts 17:30-31.) In fact, growth is the habit of repentance and turning to Christ in faith. Repentance must be the lifestyle of a Christian if we are going to grow. Here's a little ditty to help us remember this idea:

“Repentance is the key to the gospel for me.”

How do we know if repentance is genuine? 2 Corinthians 7:8-11 helps. It includes this list of signs of a truly repentant heart

- Earnestness (taking seriously the commitment to stop doing the sin)
- Eagerness to clear yourself (by confessing it)
- Indignation (anger at yourself for doing the sin)
- Fear (not of the consequences, but of a holy God)
- Longing (for holiness)
- Zeal (for what will bring holiness)
- “Paying back” anything I can because of my sin (like Zaccheus did)

Yes, repentance is hard. It's hard because we are busy, we are prideful and we are often less than zealous about holiness. But if we are the sort of person who can never admit we are wrong, we will be in chronic conflict with others. And this is a testimony of the enemy at work, not Christ.

Though it takes work to bring our hearts to the point of genuine repentance, it is a deep and joyful blessing. There is a wonderful relief in our hearts when we repent. God has made it that way. He has designed all things to revolve around and glorify his Son Jesus Christ. It's Jesus who led the way of humility and then joy—the humility of the cross and the joy that followed the resurrection. It's Jesus who empowers us to live this way. This is the gospel being lived out in our lives each day.

If we are living a lifestyle of repentance, then we have a story to share when we call others to repent of their sin and turn to Christ in faith. My co-worker, Rich, came to faith as an adult—ten years after his wife came to faith. It was a tough road. One of the turning points was a golf game with a friend. As Rich was on the green, his Christian friend told Rich about an argument he had had with his wife the previous evening. And he told about how they resolved it in light of Ephesians 4:26. It was a story of repentance and reconciliation. And Rich was shocked—that a Christian couple had a fight, and that God helped them resolve it what way. It was a powerful testimony to Rich about the work of the gospel in the life of a Christian. And it was a significant turning point in his coming to faith.

We grow through the habit of regular repentance from sin. As we do, we continue to write our testimony. It's a testimony of turning from sin, turning to Christ, turning to the cross. As you invite others to repent of sin and turn to Christ, show them how it's going for you too.

For 20 years, Tim Zulker and his wife Cindy served in campus ministry at Princeton, then at Brown University. In 2003, Tim founded The Philip Center, a non-profit ministry that helps churches with outreach. In 2005, they also joined seven other families to plant a new church—Godspeed Fellowship—near Providence, RI, where Tim is the teaching pastor. Tim has graduate degrees from Boston College and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Do you have a question about the Bible or the Christian life? Send me your question. I'll try to answer it or find an answer for you, and maybe share it with others via the “Good News Guide.” Write to:

Brother Roland, P. O. Box 14, Fayetteville, PA 17222

A Fresh Start on a New Path

Every day brings a new opportunity to do better than we did yesterday. We must not forget the mistakes and wrong choices of the past, and what we learned (or should have learned) from each one of them. But we also must resolve, with God's help, to do better—to make right choices; to love God and love our fellow humans, our neighbors, with Christ-like love. Enjoy the puzzle.

Puzzle:

T F I G A S I Y A D O T E T T F S Q R W N J T K L H Q E I Y G Y Z
Y D S D M M P R D F G U S N T I L G U A E W C F F T F U C R R I J
A N D C O M E S H O R T N E O L R H N Z U P D O Z I Z U X O D Q T
J T G R O Y J R Y D E V U S R G V I Y I E X G S L A W N T L Z Q U
Y M A L L H A V E S I N N E D U S Q P Q H C R W V F V S L G P K M
Z X M N J B A O U L Q F U R L Y S I C S Z T E Y Y E I F S D Z N Y
S Q I L Y D L O F H U R M P Q V N L T E S N L V I H E S Y N O J L
Y A Y M N O I T A E R C W E N A M A I S E I B L S T V W N A P Y I
F B V E M U G Y J Y S C U H A M J X Q V A S H I A P E S W E W R F
K S D E M S E V O L O H W T B N B K A I A P Y Y A E R Q J S H O E
C G U D D S R X C P P M M D J W D H A E C A E L B E Y I Y I O L S
I D B O L B X K U D Z X R E A B I T G B D A E H I K T F M A D G N
A T H G I L Y B G N I V I L D S F Y O R I Q N W T L H R S R I S E
M L S Y C R R G F E S B K L T C W Z E M V D I D P L I E R P E D W
A T A T O M O R R O W I S A M Y S T E R Y L I X O I N Z O L D O C
S T S H D I V T F A N G R C I J S M A X L J A N E W G V E L F G O
I Y R G Q N W C C G C T J S K E M F J F F K E F G I I N B A O F U
N N J I O N Y I I I I E A T Y N E V I G R O F S N I S L L A R O R
N H Q M P A K N L N V T T I I F D N P B W B M W U X N L Z E M E S
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X E R O U P R P T B C I R N H N O M O R E A V I C T I M R R I K K
K C T T N E A L T O N N G E O V B B L B U M N U C Y O V F F I F X
J I H F S X Z X H G N K D H G D P O G P T P J P F T L R N Z D S M
X F T H E G O O D F I G H T T Y F R G A Y K U X N H R S P N D I T

Words:

ALL HAVE SINNED
AND COME SHORT
OF GOD'S GLORY
I AM A SINNER
SAVED BY GRACE
ALL SINS FORGIVEN
I AM A NEW CREATION
STARTING FRESH
THE PAST IS GONE
EVERYTHING IS NEW
I HAVE NEW LIFE
NO MORE A VICTIM

NOW VICTORIOUS
I CAN DO
ALL THINGS
BY HIS SPIRIT
*
ABIDING IN CHRIST
LIVING BY LIGHT
WALKING IN TRUTH
I WILL FIGHT
THE GOOD FIGHT
I WILL FINISH
MY LIFE'S NEW COURSE

I WILL KEEP THE FAITH
*
YESTERDAY IS HISTORY
TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY
TODAY IS A GIFT
IT'S CALLED THE PRESENT
*
ALL PRAISE AND GLORY
TO ALMIGHTY GOD
WHO LOVES ME
AND TO MY JESUS
WHO DIED FOR ME