

Potential

"Be all that you can be." For years that was the Army's recruiting slogan. "Be all that you can be ... in the Army!" It's appealing, isn't it? It says that in the Army a recruit can, through discipline, training, and experience, become a capable, confident, and successful person. And, for those who go into it with the right attitude, work hard, and follow through to the end, it works. They learn valuable skills, gain confidence, and become capable and successful.

Compare that picture with going to jail. If jail were to have an advertising slogan, it might be, "Whatever you wanted from life, forget it!" Many inmates do as little as they can get by with, learn nothing except how to be (they think) more successful law-breakers, and twiddle their thumbs until their release date. They had an attitude when they went in, and it's worse when they get out. They feel that they have paid their debt to Society, but Society hasn't paid its debt to them.

They want to earn a living, but they find that the only jobs available for poorly educated ex-convicts involve hard or disgusting work, and don't pay very



well. They get frustrated, so they make another try at bucking the system, or they get stoned and assault or kill someone, or ... you name it. Whatever their next offense is, at least half of them go back to jail again, usually for a longer sentence each time.

The saddest part of this scenario is that most of these messed-up people think there is some serious flaw in the system that is keeping them down. They won't, or can't, face the fact that they must change in order to get past this recidivism revolving door.

How far would an Army recruit get toward becoming "all that he can be" if he were not willing to change? He'd be out of the Army in a flash. Nobody becomes anything by staying the same.

Let's talk about you. Say you get out a month or a year from now. Will you stay out? You swear you will, but the truth is, unless you are a different person than you were when you were incarcerated, you probably will be in jail again within a few years. The reason is very simple. You went to jail the first time because you were the sort of person who bucks

the system, gets into trouble, and winds up in jail. Unless you change, you are still that sort of person.

That's the bad news. The good news is that Jesus — the Lord of all creation, the Holy God who created the whole universe, including you — is looking at you today and saying, "Come into my family, and become all that I want you to be!"

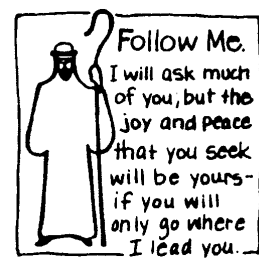
Maybe you've already joined the Lord's family. Or maybe you'll make that decision today, or soon. Don't put it off—there will never be a better time for you than right now.

Being in God's family is a little like being in the Army. It requires discipline, there is training, and there are battles to fight against vicious enemies. The big difference is this: the Army takes you in, then it makes you coöperate, or it kicks you out if you won't. With Jesus, He can only take you in to the extent that you coöperate with Him. You have to say, "Lord, my way doesn't work, so I'm turning my whole life over to you. Please forgive me, change me, and re-make me into the person you want me to become."

I did that when I was 15 years old — gave my whole life to Jesus. The problem was that I didn't really mean it. I took my life back and did my own thing for another 14 years. But Jesus was faithful, He brought me back to Himself, and I finally began to enter into the life He wanted me to live. Did I submit completely to His will at that time? No, but I am committed to the process.

The Bible says, *If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!* (2 Cor. 5:17 NRSV) Which is absolutely true. When you say "Yes" to Jesus, you start fresh in life as God's child. You begin the life-long process of learning and growing and becoming "in Christ."

This process has two parts: God's part, and your part. *I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.*



Do not conform any longer 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 12:1-2 NIV) Your part is to submit to God's will and coöperate with His plan for you. God's part is to do all the hard work of transforming you into a different person—someone a lot like Jesus.

What does your coöperation in this process involve? Think of it in terms of three "D" words: **Devotion, Dedication, and Diligence.**

Devotion is first because it's so important to realize who Jesus is. He is the giver of every good gift—life, love, joy, peace, health, skills, intelligence, wisdom; everything that is bright, beautiful, and true. He is also the Almighty God who created us, and who loved us so much that He became a man and took the punishment that our sins deserved, so that we would not have to. He loves you and me absolutely and unconditionally, and His greatest desire is that we come to love Him in the same way.

What if you don't feel loving toward Jesus? That's okay, because love is not a feeling. Love is a decision. You love Jesus by making up your mind to do so. Then you put that decision into practice, by doing what pleases Him. Jesus said, *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.* (John 14:15,21) He promised to send the Holy Spirit to help us obey Him, and He said He would love us and reveal Himself to us.

If you will say often, "Lord Jesus, I love you with all my heart," and make that the theme of your life, you will soon begin to experience the joy of knowing that your love for Him is as real as His love for you. What a blessing that is!

Dedication has two sides: commitment and perseverance. The decision to Love Jesus includes the commitment to honor Him by keeping His commandments, with the help of the Holy Spirit; and to stick with that program no matter what. Sometimes we'll blow it badly, doing things as bad as any we ever did before. Sometimes there will be trials, even disasters, that we must go through. If we call on Jesus, He will help us persevere to the end, until it's time to go home and be with Him eternally, or until He comes back for His church (1 Cor. 1:7-8).

Diligence means resisting the temptation to get sloppy. It is so easy to get comfortable in our

relationship with Jesus, and to start taking Him for granted. The fact is that when we don't spend time with Jesus, praying, reading and studying the Bible, and worshipping regularly, we start to slip away from that closeness to Him that we had when we first believed and were saved. This is called "back-sliding" by many churches; "falling away" or "apostasy" by others. No matter what you call it, it's unprofitable, and best avoided by being diligent in our Christian walk.

If you come into this walk with Jesus and continue in it with **Devotion, Dedication, and Diligence**, what can you expect?

First, trouble. Satan won't like your turning to Jesus; neither will your unsaved friends and family members. They will give you all kinds of grief about it. Turn it over to Jesus and rest in His provision, then pray for and love those who come against you. Your faithfulness will become a beacon of light in their darkness.

The second thing is temptation. Things that were so appealing to you before may still be. This is especially true if you were ever addicted to drugs, alcohol, or pornography, even slightly. The Bible is very clear on this: **Run from temptation!** (1 Tim. 6:10-11; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Cor. 6:18; also see 1 Cor. 10:13-14). Stay away from bars and other places where you might be tempted to sin. Find a good church, and go there, instead.

On the positive side, you will see yourself becoming a different and better person. As the love of Jesus works in your heart, you will find yourself getting along better with people, helping and complimenting rather than complaining and opposing. You'll find that you care more about others' feelings and less about your own.

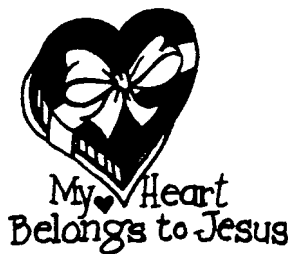
As your devotion, dedication and diligence continue and increase, Jesus will surprise and astonish you by developing in you abilities you did not even know you had. You will look back at your former life and say, "Wow! I really am a different person. Thank you, Jesus!"

You were created in God's image. Let Jesus bring out the potential for Christ-likeness that He has created in you.

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

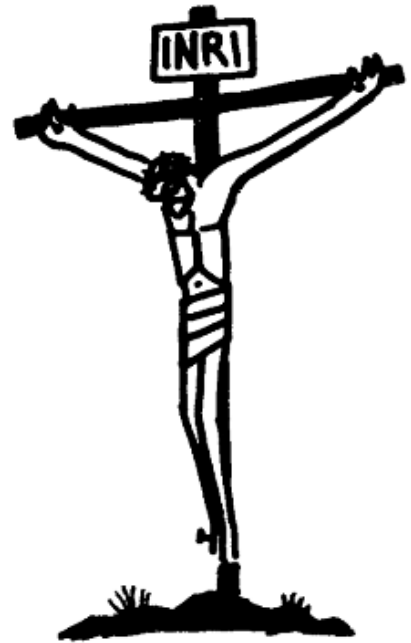
Peace and Joy be yours, forever —

Brother Roland



**He died ... for you.
Will you live for Him?**

Burnt Biscuits
(Author unknown)



When I was a kid, my mom liked to make breakfast food for dinner every now and then. And I remember one night in particular when she had made breakfast after a long, hard day at work.

On that evening so long ago, my mom placed a plate of eggs, sausage and extremely burned biscuits in front of my dad. I remember waiting to see if anyone noticed! Yet all my dad did was reach for his biscuit, smile at my mom and ask me how my day was at school. I don't remember what I told him that night, but I do remember watching him smear butter and jelly on that biscuit and eat every bite!

When I got up from the table that evening, I remember hearing my mom apologize to my dad for burning the biscuits. And I'll never forget what he said: "Honey, I love burned biscuits."

Later that night, I went to kiss Daddy good night and I asked him if he really liked his biscuits burned. He wrapped me in his arms and said, "Your Momma put in a hard day at work today and she's real tired. And besides - a little burnt biscuit never hurt anyone!"

Life is full of imperfect things ... and imperfect people. I'm not the best at hardly anything, and I forget birthdays and anniversaries just like everyone else. But what I've learned over the years is that learning to accept each other's faults — and choosing to celebrate each other's differences — is one of the most important keys to creating healthy, growing, and lasting relationships.

So, please pass me a biscuit, and yes, the burnt one will do just fine!

We Are Easter People

Our Lord Jesus died for us, horribly, then rose from death victorious! In Him, we have that same victory. Let's live to demonstrate His power and His love to others. Hallelujah! He is Risen!

Puzzle:

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Words:

JESUS REALLY DIED
FOR ME, FOR YOU
THAT BLACK FRIDAY
HE WAS TORTURED
BEATEN WITH WHIPS
LAUGHED AT
SPIT UPON
STRIPPED NAKED
NAILED TO A CROSS
HE WAS CRUCIFIED

THE UGLIEST DEATH
MEN COULD DEVISE
BURIED WITH CARE
BY LOVING HANDS
LAID IN A TOMB
SEALED WITH A STONE
SUNDAY MORNING
MARY AND MARY
WENT TO THE TOMB
STONE ROLLED AWAY

ANGEL TOLD THEM
DON'T BE AFRAID
HE HAS RISEN
SEE WHERE HE LAY
TELL HIS DISCIPLES
GOING TO GALILEE
MEET HIM THERE
OUR SAVIOR LIVES
HE IS ALIVE
AND HE TELLS US

GO MAKE DISCIPLES
IN EVERY NATION
BAPTIZING THEM
IN THE NAME OF
FATHER, SON, HOLY
SPIRIT
TEACH TO OBSERVE
ALL I'VE COMMANDED
AND I AM WITH YOU
TO END OF THE AGE