

Prisons Today It doesn't take iron bars to make a prison. A young man wrote in his suicide note, "Life is the sentence we pay for the crime of being born."

A lot of us feel trapped in bad and painful situations with no good way out. It can be a bad marriage; a good marriage in which you are bored; bad relationships with a son or daughter; a son or daughter on drugs; a lost job; a bad job; crippling arthritis; depression, etc.

Call it joy, happiness, peace of mind – it is what all of us want and look for, but few find. This little Book, from the soul of a tortured man, tells us how to find it.

An aged artist was painting his masterpiece – a beautiful sunrise reflection off the walls of the Grand Canyon. Half-way through, he suffered a stroke and lost the use of his right arm - his painting arm.

In rehab, he learned to use his left arm. And the day came, when he resumed work on his painting. He exhibited it; and it was a masterpiece, the best of his paintings, many said.

They looked at the name in small letters, in the corner, and it was, "In Spite Of". They asked him why he gave it that strange name and he said, it was because he painted it, in spite of having that stroke.

If you and I want happiness, it will be in spite of some bad things. If life is "good" most people don't find it that way, they made it that way.

"It is not what happens to us in life, it is what we let happen to what happens to us."

"Two men looked out of prison bars,
One saw the mud and one saw the stars."

JOY IN PEOPLE

(Philippians 1:1; 3-4)

"Paul and Timothy – To all of God's holy people at Philippi - I thank my God, every time I think of you. In all of my prayers for all of you,
I always pray with joy."

If we knew the bombs were coming and we would be dead in 30 minutes we would all be on our cell phones with those we love, telling them how much we love and appreciate them and apologizing for any hurt we may have brought them. When life beats you down, remember the people who love you and have helped you.

First on the list, is Jesus. Paul was humble. He did not call himself, "Most Excellent Apostle". He called himself a "slave" of Jesus. And it was the term for the lowest slave of that day – the one, who today would clean the toilets.

He did it for Jesus, who he said, "***loved me and gave Himself for me***" (*Galatians 2:20*). And he sure didn't deserve it. The name "Paul" stands out like a beacon of hope for everyone. It was the new name he took after he let Jesus come into his life (Acts 9).

If anyone did not deserve to be forgiven and made a child of God, it was him. He persecuted Christians, and in his own words, said he tried to "destroy" the church (Acts 8-9 / Galatians 1). He called himself, "the chief of sinners" (1 Timothy 1). Paul knew God scraped the bottom of the barrel to get him.

That's why he could be joyful in prison. He was forgiven. He had served Jesus all his life. And if Nero beheaded him, he was going to be "with" Jesus (1:23)

Jesus did not have to free Paul for Paul to love Him. Suffering on that cross for him, meant Paul would love Jesus with all his heart and soul, until the day he died; no matter what life threw at him. In this life and in the next, his heart sang:

I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me
How He left His home in glory
For the cross of Calvary.