

LOVED... AND
NOT FORGOTTEN



LUTHERAN HOUR
MINISTRIES

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by Chaplain Steven C. Hokana

Prison life is often marked by a bleak desperation made worse by the self-condemnation that “doing time” brings. In this **Project Connect** booklet, Chaplain Steven C. Hokana speaks to inmates everywhere. He reminds those behind bars there is *hope* for prisoners, and it’s found in the forgiveness Jesus earned for each of us through His life, death and resurrection.



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INTRODUCTION – IF JESUS CAME A-CALLIN’

If Jesus came a-callin’ on you here in prison, how would you react when He sees you?

“Prison? Jail? Man, you jerkin’ my chain?

Jesus? In this hellhole? To see me?” It’s easy to counterpunch the idea. *“Jesus would never be here! He’s too high and perfect and I am ... well, He knows who I am.”* But think, if Jesus was here to see you ... in the woodshop working away, in the laundry room folding sheets, in the barbershop getting a haircut, in the library reading old Westerns, what do think He’d do if He saw you?

Think about this a little more. What about on your bed at night, staring at the cold, concrete ceiling? Jesus isn’t on your mind, is He? Maybe it’s parole, maybe it’s feelings of loneliness breaking your heart, maybe you haven’t heard from a loved one for a while, and you’re concerned. Stay with me here. What would Jesus do if He saw you? Using this booklet with the Bible as a guide, it’s time to encounter the real Jesus!

THE GREATEST SCAM IN HISTORY

The devil works overtime on you as you sit in prison. And so the scam begins: a seed of doubt, targeted to destroy your self-worth. The scam eats away at your soul. Your own negative thoughts tell you Jesus would never be here in *this* place. It's prison baby, c'mon! Nobody comes here but the worst, the swept-up garbage off the street. The scam continues, you might think Jesus is just another cruel, authority figure—all powerful, but not interested in helping. Jesus passes out favors as He pleases and just doesn't give a rip about you. The devil wants you to believe in a *demanding* Jesus. You've heard it all your life: God loves the sober, the wealthy, those who have their acts together. You can't count yourself as one of those people. The rap sheet says it all. The scam continues: Jesus requires perfect respect, allegiance and obedience *before* He claims you as His own. Yep, another scam.

It's not that you don't believe Jesus. The truth is you don't believe you're worth His time, energy and effort. Through the haze of addiction you've found no peace. Your relationships are busted, and your anger has gotten the best of you. Most of the time now you drift between thoughts of hurting somebody or hurting yourself. So the scam takes hold and weighs you down. Like a 100-pound plate from the gym lying on

your chest, the scam gets you down—and keeps you there.

In its final form, this is the scam—and it's a bruiser. Deep down in your heart, when you're all alone with your thoughts, your spirit is heavy with shame. If you saw Jesus, you'd look down; you'd look away and mutter under your breath, "Jesus wants nothing to do with me."

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Love's got everything to do with it! In John 3:16 we read, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Check it out. What would Jesus do if He saw you? Remember—*love rules*. He would run up to you. He would call you by name and give you the biggest, most honest hug you ever felt in your life! It'd take your breath away and give it right back again—fresh and new! He'd smile at you with a face of pure love. His gaze, immersed in honesty and truth, would see straight into your soul—not to indict or convict but to warm your heart. He'd cradle you in His arms as a mother to a child. We read in the book of Isaiah, "For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says

to you, ‘Do not fear; I will help you’”
(Isaiah 41:13).

Jesus might cry with you. No shame there! That’s His right! Tears make the measure of a man. He’s not afraid to let you and everyone else know with tears that He came for you in prison—just for you. He’d want to spend time with you and talk to you. Jesus wants to hear about your life. Although He knows everything, Jesus wants to hear it in your words. He expresses profound relief that He found you at last. Jesus would put His hands on your shoulder. Look! They’re hands scarred by nail holes. He would tell you, “You’re safe now, brother; rest in My mighty arms and outstretched hands.”

THIS THING CALLED “SIN”

Did you ever ask yourself, “Why am I here?” The answer is a filthy, three-letter word: S-I-N. This nasty word is divided into two parts: “original sin” or the sin we all carry, and “actual sin,” the lifelong habit we have of breaking God’s Law. Sin is at the root of all the problems we face. It ruins relationships, destroys our dreams and tears families apart. Sin is the root of addiction, murder and sexual evil. You have probably heard all this before, right? But here is something new. All people—every last one

of us—are sinful and in need of repentance. That’s right. A brother in the cell on the next tier is a sinner. So is the “dude with the attitude,” who spends most of his time in the Special Housing Unit (SHU). Sin stains the most righteous people you know as well as those who are as ugly as can be. How can I make this claim? It’s in the Bible! In the book of Romans the apostle Paul writes, “... There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22b-23).

In chapter three of the Bible’s first book, Genesis, we read how sin came into the world. Adam and Eve sinned against God. As a result, death came to all humanity: “... for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19b). Death is sin’s calling card; it’s the great equalizer. At many prisons each wing has a TV. The wing’s “heavy” owns the remote control. The front row has murderers; the second row has armed robbers; the third row has less-violent prisoners. The last row—way in the back—is for child sex offenders. They have no choice in what to watch or where to sit. Despised and hated by the other inmates, these offenders *stand* in the back. There are no chairs for them. In the eyes of God which is worse—to kill or to steal? To lie or to cheat? To abuse or to neglect? In our messed up, fallen state we have decided which is worse and which deserves privileges. In the Bible it says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts,

neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8). What I’m about to tell you may be difficult to believe, but it’s true. God doesn’t discriminate between sins. God doesn’t see the difference: sin is sin. All sins are equal in the eyes of God, and all sin deserves death. This is a terrible and devastating predicament. Is there no hope for humanity? What are we to do? Where are we to go? Apart from God’s mercy, we haven’t got a chance. But God doesn’t leave us there, condemned and doomed. Instead, He responds by sending His Son, Jesus.

HEART SET FREE

Jesus sets your heart free. Prison is a bad place, but spiritual prison is much worse. Spiritual prison is confinement without God—a truly dark and brutal place. This is a real devil’s island, where the devil and his minions reside. Spiritual prison locks you away from God. It forever separates you from His presence and the promises of eternal life. It’s a dungeon of hopelessness, joylessness and unspeakable misery; it is to be abandoned by God.

Prison is an issue of the heart. You may have noticed that some of the most liberated people you’ll ever encounter are serving time. Some might even be in your cell block. Though they’re behind bars, they are free, truly free. They have a special joy in their hearts. Their candle cannot be snuffed out;

they are a light burning brightly. They are set free! They see every day as new, a wonderful and precious gift. Why? They've encountered Jesus. They have riches piled to the ceiling, beyond the dreams of any wealth you can imagine. All their needs are met in Jesus, the One who calls on you in prison. There is no place Jesus can't go. There is no heart so black He can't set it free from the junk and ruin of life.

Sadly, sometimes the most imprisoned, impoverished, repressed, soulless individuals you'll ever find are outside the walls of a prison. They're not behind bars, yet their confinement is frightening and eternal. They move from shallow lie to shallow lie, trying to find peace. They've bought into Satan's scam, and the dark veil of death hangs over their lives like rotting grave clothes. Never knowing peace, never knowing it's all a scam, they live in hopelessness.

But it's never too late to meet the real Jesus.

Jesus came into this world. He volunteered to set aside everything for you. He surrendered the rank of Lord God of the angelic army and the royal title, King of the Universe to become one of us. Jesus, the forever and eternal, chose to be fragile, temporary and human. He did this out of love, knowing full well the cost to save humanity from Satan's scam, to offer eternal life to all who would believe.

Jesus knows we're the same—all of us: inmates, guards, administrators, those from the block, and those we don't trust. We need rescue! We need a holy encounter to clean the garbage from our lives. If forgiveness and eternal life were based on *earning* points, heaven would be a lonely place, an empty mansion. No matter who you are, you need Jesus to come a-callin'.

Jesus came to take away the hurt and pain that grip and overtake our lives. He went to prison. He was abused and given a death sentence, and it was carried out in public. His mother and family watched Him succumb to the stranglehold of death. To make sure He was dead, a spear was thrust into His side. You'd think that'd be the end of Jesus. It would certainly be the end of our sorry lives.

But death can't hold the Son of God! His triumph over the grave was like a new dawn. He slammed shut the door of Satan and the grave. Life is different for those who cling to Jesus, who rose from the dead. Whatever challenges you face you can carry them to the victorious Savior. He walks with you as a true Friend and conquering Lord of all. Jesus desires to share His Good News with you—there is victory over death, hell, Satan and all his scams.

We can't overcome the mess of this life without Jesus. The broken dreams and messed-up situations can't be fixed by

anything we do on our own. Stuff happens. Sometimes it's not our fault. Sometimes it's entirely out fault, and the result is a load of problems we bring on ourselves. The ugliness, meanness, shallowness and shame are played out over and over again. It's all show and no go. We act like a prizefighter, you know, strutting all tough like nothing hurts. But at night the demons visit from the dark places in our minds. The ghosts of our worn-out past rise up; they're cruel and nasty and horrific. They cause us to cower like scared vermin. The past replays in our minds. We see images of cruelty played out on us. Those we trust scar us deeply. We're hurt by the unfairness of life. The internal repeat of our personal evils never seems to go away. God, it hurts! Who can take it away? The futility of our situation seems permanent. Self-medication by drugs and alcohol satisfy for a time, but we sober up and our problems are bigger than before. We take matters in our own hands, only to fall.

But Jesus sets the heart free. "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). He sets you free for no reason other than the most important of all—He loves you. Jesus loves you even when you don't love yourself. He makes no preconditions; He takes you the way you are. He does all the changing, all the transforming. He moves you from *lowlife* to *eternal life*. When God sees you, He sees His Son and the victory He handed to all of us. He loved you by dying for you. When you were in your

most awful, miserable condition, He still loved you. Now that's cool!

GOD'S STORY AND YOUR STORY

The Bible is God's story intersecting human history, meeting you and me and changing our lives. This is about you. You've seen others carry a Bible around the facility. You may have read the words but found them lacking; they were "old school," irrelevant, not fitting your situation. But wait! The problem isn't the Bible; the problem is your heart. This is understandable. How many times has someone *thumped* you on the head for your actions? Have you ever heard someone quote the Bible as an excuse for bad behavior? How sad it is that people are missing the main point of the Bible.

The Bible is a book that contains God's "yes" and "no" for all humanity. The *no* of God is His telling us any and all attempts by us to seek perfection and freedom without Him will fail. God's *yes* is what He does for us. Through Jesus we have eternal life. The great God of the universe sends His only Son Jesus to take the full brunt of our failures, flaws and misdeeds—our sins—and nails them to the cross. Jesus died that we may have life and hope and peace forever. God's *yes* is love, affirmation and

inner peace. You won't find it anywhere else, and it's yours for the asking.

Also, the Bible is like a compass that guides a ship through a storm-tossed sea. We need to know what we *should* and *shouldn't* do. No guesswork is required. Look at the compass, and you're oriented in the right direction. The Bible is an answer book to the deepest questions, thoughts and concerns we have.

How often we are reminded the Bible is God's story, God's *love story* with humanity. It contains the accurate retelling of the mysterious, all-powerful God. The Bible describes God's interaction in human history. The Bible clearly shows the need for God to rescue the world. The Bible describes the shortcomings and failures of everyone, even God's chosen people. In the end it all comes down to Jesus. He is the physical "real deal" answer to the Old Testament promise's of God. The eternal Son of God came to save you, me and all humanity from hell.

So you think the Bible has no understanding of prison life. How could this love story possibly understand the isolation, loneliness, intimidation, fear and hopelessness of prison life? Let me hit you between the eyes on this one! The Bible understands prison and confinement more than you can imagine. The writers of Scripture experienced confinement first hand. Prison has always been a symbol

of oppression and suffering (see Psalms 79:11). The Bible paints a picture of release from prison as happiness brought back to salvation (see Psalms 102:20). The apostle Peter, who was himself a prisoner, likened those in hell to being in a prison cell (see 2 Peter 2:4). In the New Testament some of the apostle Paul's letters were written from prison. Jesus shows his concern for those incarcerated by telling His followers to visit those in prison (see Matthew 25:31-46).

In the Bible there are three people I want you to meet. Each one confronted prison. They are Joseph, Jeremiah and Jesus. When you read each story ask yourself these questions:

1. What am I feeling as I'm reading this?
2. Where do I see myself?
3. What would I do differently?
4. What do I think God is trying to tell me?

JOSEPH – YOU NEVER KNOW HOW GOD IS GOING TO CHANGE YOU

Joseph was a good-looking kid from a wealthy family. His dad, Israel, was a local “big-wig” (see Genesis 37, 39-47). Israel made it clear Joseph was his favorite son. Not surprisingly, the other brothers hated Joseph because of this. There was another thing that fueled their anger too. Joseph had

the gift of dreams and dream interpretation. The dreams always came true and his interpretations were “spot on.” In one dream Joseph paints a colorful, strange picture of a wheat field. The wheat waves back and forth in a field, then stops. All the wheat turns and bows down to one single shaft. Joseph tells his brothers the dream is about his rule over them, and that they will eventually submit to his authority. Well, this went over like a lead balloon. It drove their anger over the top! The brothers decided to take Joseph out of the picture. They trashed him and threw him in a hole. They told their dad that Joseph was killed by a wild animal. They peddled him off to slave traders who, in turn, sold Joseph to Captain Potiphar, the Egyptian pharaoh’s head of security. At this point the life of Joseph really gets interesting.

One day while in the home of Captain Potiphar, Joseph is minding his business. Potiphar’s wife takes notice of Joseph’s good looks. He is alone in the house with Mrs. P—a bad place to be. As a slave with no life of his own, she orders him to have sex. He refuses. Joseph leaves the area, but Mrs. Potiphar grabs his cloak. Her husband, *Mr. Head of Security*, comes home and is met by Mrs. Potiphar, who, with tears, frames Joseph for attempted rape. Captain Potiphar is so mad he has Joseph thrown in prison to wait out his sentence, which almost certainly would be death. But God did not abandon him.

“The LORD was with him; He showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden” (Genesis 39:21).

While locked away Joseph met two others, who worked directly for Pharaoh. Both had weird dreams. They knew Joseph saw dreams and images of the future. Joseph interpreted one dream of a fellow inmate and provided comfort for him. He was released and returned to serve Pharaoh. Concerning the other, Joseph predicted his death. Three days later he was executed. After the one man's eventual release, he recommended Joseph to Pharaoh. Wow! God used prison to further His good and divine will. If it weren't for Joseph and that steward in prison together, Joseph would have remained a house slave to a wealthy Egyptian. Instead, Joseph became a powerful ruler in Egypt.

God was with Joseph in prison. He protected him and watched over him. Joseph proved himself useful. Eventually, he was released to serve God in a far different vocation than he ever would have imagined.

JEREMIAH – CAN IT GET ANY WORSE?

In the book of Jeremiah you read about this great prophet of God imprisoned and made to suffer. His only crime was to proclaim justice against an evil king and his court. It's never popular to take a stand against society. But Jeremiah, though he suffered for it, proved his worth a million times over as one of the greatest prophets of God. The story here picks up as Jeremiah is confronted by the king's men.

“They were angry with Jeremiah and had him beaten and imprisoned in the house of Jonathan the secretary, which they had made into a prison. Jeremiah was put into a vaulted cell in a dungeon, where he remained a long time. Then King Zedekiah sent for him and had him brought to the palace ...” (Jeremiah 37:15-17a). Jeremiah continued to prophesy God's Word to the people.

Things looked ugly for Jeremiah. His capitol city was surrounded. The people were near starvation. The enemy army was getting stronger every day, and the soldiers within the walls of Jerusalem were getting weaker. They blamed Jeremiah. They made him the scapegoat for the destruction of the city and all their travails. Jeremiah is trapped inside its walls by people that hate him. As the city is being attacked, Jeremiah

is attacked as well. Because of his obedience to God as a prophet, he's beaten up, put in prison and held in a cistern. He's left to rot and die. In the book which bears his name, Jeremiah describes the smell, his feet stuck in slimy ooze (see Jeremiah 38:6). He details the darkness of the hole, the loneliness of his condition and his abandonment for doing the right thing.

After a time, a slave of the king, a non-Israelite, persuaded the ruler to pull him from the well. It was such a dangerous job it took 30 men to conduct the operation. Some lifted as others likely provided security from the angry mob. Remember that Jeremiah was unpopular because of delivering God's message to the king. He was released, still under house arrest, and eventually shown mercy by a commander in the army that destroyed Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 40:5). The king in Jerusalem and his court met a horrific demise. King Hezekiah was forced to watch the execution of his sons. As they lay dead in front of him, the executioners then gouged out Hezekiah's eyes. Thus, the last visual memory he carries off to his permanent captivity is the image of his adult children being executed (see Jeremiah 39:5-7).

JESUS – GOD’S GREATEST RESCUE

The highlight of the Bible concerning prison and how God’s mercy is for all of us is shown in Jesus’ death on the cross. Jesus does all this for you out of love. His death involves betrayal by a friend. Judas was a trusted man. He was responsible and was the *money-guy* of the disciples. He identifies Jesus to the authorities by giving Him a kiss on the cheek. This is where Jesus’ ordeal begins. He experiences horrific abuse at the hands of His captors. He is beaten, tortured and shamed publicly. The Lord becomes a political pawn between the local authorities and the Roman rulers. They pass Jesus back and forth, hoping somebody else in charge would judge Him, so His innocent blood wouldn’t be on their hands. After all the anguish and abuse comes an execution by crucifixion, a slow, agonizing death on a cross. Describing Jesus’ suffering and death is not intended to gross you out or make you sad. His life-giving sacrifice gives us hope and demonstrates the depths of His love for each one of us. It’s on that dark, lonely, windswept hill called Golgotha, the place of the skull, where your life and His intersects. You can’t walk away from this without understanding that Jesus is Lord, and that He loves you with a love beyond all love.

The Bible tells us Jesus was not executed alone. With Him were two others being

executed on wooden crosses. Three men—each one condemned by society. Jesus was in the middle and one on each side. Both were convicted of crimes and sentenced to death. One man was showing off his tough-guy attitude. While slowly dying he was cursing and swearing. At one point, he turned to Jesus and told Him to prove Himself by getting all three down from their crosses. The other criminal, often referred to as the “thief on the cross,” rebuked the tough guy. He told him they *deserved* execution, but Jesus was *innocent*. This man then made a request of Jesus, a statement of profound faith: “Then he said, ‘Remember me when You come into Your Kingdom’” (Luke 23:42).

If one were to halt the crucifixion account at this point, it would be a poignant ending to a gruesome story. But Jesus’ response demonstrates the love of God in operation between these two men. Dying in agony, “Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise’” (Luke 23:43).

Jesus didn’t ask about his past, his criminal record, or anything else. Jesus simply loved him. For the asking, the man hanging on the cross went to live with Christ in heaven forever. Does the Bible know about prison and living under imprisonment? You better believe it!

FORGIVENESS

And so it is with you. Jesus doesn't ask about your past. He came to forgive your past by giving up His life. His death sets you free. Some think their behavior is unforgivable. They think the crime committed, the hurt on others and the feelings of guilt are too excessive for God to forgive. Let's set the record straight on the Almighty. This is God we're talking about here. He's the One from eternity, the King of the universe, who placed the stars in the sky and plans the unfolding of time and eternity. God forgives you for the asking; He extends His offer of peace and reconciliation to everyone. He doesn't care about your criminal past. The slate has been wiped clean by the shedding of Jesus' blood on the cross. Yes, the Bible tells us God knows about prison. Even more, God is interested in where you are right now. He loves you with an everlasting love.

Where in your life are you heading? The wondrous beauty of God is that in His Son, Jesus, the love story of peace and eternal life intersects with your story.

NOW WHAT?

Grab a Bible. You probably have one in your cell. If not, talk with the pastoral care department in your facility. A chaplain or pastoral volunteer can help you understand how the Bible and your life weave together. You can see God's love in action and His desire to make you His child. You can read about the struggles good and faithful people have had with their sins. These areas include violence, jealousies, family issues and addictions—to name a few. The purpose of seeing the shortcomings of His people is to realize that God through Jesus forgives, loves and restores us to His compassionate care.

As you read the Bible, don't put aside your own story; make it a part of your growth in the faith. You can see how Jesus has sent many people into your life and, even though you're in prison, your story with God through Jesus grows. He takes your past, your shortcomings, your problems with anger and drugs, your problems with money and violence and, by your asking, forgives you completely. God takes your story and makes it one of forgiveness, righteousness by faith and ultimate victory. His love surrounds and transforms all the sadness, trauma and drama of your life. Through Jesus, God takes your pain and offers healing. Your story is not complete. The last chapter has not been written yet. It contains the most important event of all: being returned to a loving, Heavenly Father

by His Son, who is King of your life and the very center of your being.

CONFIDENCE, ASSURANCE AND BELIEF

As liberating as God's love is, how can you believe it's there for you? How can you trust Jesus' words? It's not that easy. You've been hurt, abused, run through the grinder, and all this might just sound too good to be true. It's nothing less than astonishing to think that God's Son, Jesus, took human form for the sole purpose to die on a cross for you and me. How can you sing with joy, knowing you're honestly and truly forgiven? The answer may surprise you. *Belief isn't about you.* To grasp God's saving truth in faith is impossible by your own strength or desire. To say and believe "Jesus is Lord" is beyond human comprehension and ability. The capacity to believe comes from God. *He gives it to you.* Faith is a gift from God (see Romans 6, especially verse 23). Believing in Jesus as your Savior comes from the Holy Spirit; it is freely given, life-changing and powerful. Faith is yours for the asking. When in prayer ask God to give you faith in Jesus. Ask Him to strengthen your faith, to change your life and to make you a godly influence for those around you. Without faith we can't move forward; we flounder and fail. God's gift of faith to us changes everything.

FROM DEATH TO LIFE— NOTHING HOLDS BACK THE POWER OF JESUS

Jesus is a-callin' on you. He wants you to know that prison walls, separation from loved ones, difficult people, addiction struggles, dealing with threats, seemingly unfair rules, illness and even death can't separate you from His love. Jesus invites you to become His own. He wants you to be loved and cherished like you've never been before—no strings attached, no gimmicks, no scams. Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross earned us our forgiveness; His resurrection from the grave three days later cinched the deal for eternity. (See Philippians 2 for an excellent summary of Jesus' divine mission, His perfect nature, and how we are to live as His followers.) This is your Savior. He loves you and wants to make you His forever.

So what's your response? Here are some things to consider:

1. Talk to Jesus. It doesn't matter where you are, He's listening. Talk to Him as if He is sitting across from you. He isn't looking for your words to be right, perfect or eloquent. Jesus is looking for your open heart. He longs to have a conversation with you.

2. Ask the prison chaplain about Bible studies to enrich your faith.
3. Get connected to a group where you can study and pray with others. Some prisons have a volunteer program, where Christians from the community can help guide you along your faith journey.
4. Spend time in the Bible every day. *This is a definite must.* Through the Scriptures God speaks to us. Begin with the Gospel of John. Its powerful words go right to the heart. Make it a habit to spend *at least* 15 minutes a day with the Lord. Find a time that works best for you—morning before work-call, in the evening—make it work for you. Bible reading isn't a sprint; it's a long-distance event. As a seasoned runner trains to increase stamina and endurance, so let God's Word work its power in your life, transforming you daily into a more Christ-like individual.
5. As you read, ask questions, place yourself in the story. Take notes, keep a journal. When you find a study group, you can ask your questions during group discussion.
6. Make this newfound relationship with God meaningful. Seek to integrate it into your daily life.

7. This isn't going to be easy. Take it one step at a time. Be patient with yourself and others.
8. Ask God daily for forgiveness. Learn from the example of Jesus how to forgive others.
9. Find something positive in your day you never noticed before Jesus came a-callin'.
10. Keep in mind that growing in faith occurs at different speeds for different people. Here's where becoming familiar with God's Word is so vital. Did we mention how important it is to spend time in the Bible every day?

A PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I thank You that
You have come to me. You
have searched me and found
me. My heart leaps for joy.

I am forever grateful for the
cross. Your death gives me life
and Your resurrection is the
promise fulfilled that makes
heaven my true home.

Help me grow daily in Your
love, so others see Your
likeness in me. Grant me
courage. Please give me
patience, a kind word to
say, an understanding ear,
an attitude of love and a
forgiving spirit with others.
Instill in me a burning
enthusiasm to study Your
Word. Fuel me with the
desire to hear Your gracious
promises of comfort. Make
the Bible a true lamp to my
feet and a bright light to
my path. Grant me words of
hopeful assurance when I'm
afraid, and I feel like giving up.

I pray for my loved ones, who
are separate from me now.
You know the concerns on

my heart and the burden I
have for those I love. Be with
them, help them and draw
them to Yourself—just as
You have done with me.

Shower Your love on Your
children in this facility and
those throughout the world.
Look with mercy on my
fellow inmates. Keep us safe
and let no harm come our
way. Give peace to the hearts
of those filled with grief.
Lift the crushing weight
of guilt from the shoulders
of those who are burdened
and broken.

Grant us safety by Your holy
protection and loving care.

Lord Jesus, help those who
don't know You. Calm their
anger. Give them that peace
only You can offer. Touch
them with Your love and let
them see Your face—the face
of forgiveness, hope and joy.
In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

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N2M 1Y4



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You can now reach
Lutheran Hour Ministries by

E-mail:

U.S.A.

lh-min@lhm.org

Canada

luthhourmin@lll.ca

or on the Internet:

www.lhm.org

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LOVED... AND NOT FORGOTTEN

More than two million people are incarcerated in the United States, which is the world's largest prison population by far. While those imprisoned are there for a variety of offenses, none are sentenced to a life that excludes the Gospel. Penned by Chaplain Steve Hokana, this **Project Connect** booklet reminds readers that God's love in Jesus transcends all barriers, all crimes, all sins committed. God's grace is the ultimate game-changer; it brings a world of hope to the abject hopelessness that often marks the lives of those *on the inside*.

Without God we are all in prison, awaiting the sentence we deserve. Jesus' life, death and resurrection are God's guarantee that salvation is for everyone—no matter who we are, no matter what we've done.

This is the message the *prisoner* needs to hear.
This is the message we *all* need to hear.

Pastor and Army Chaplain Steve Hokana has contributed more than 25 years of service to our nation. He is familiar with the plight of prisoners and understands that God's grace reaches out to everyone—even those who seem lost and beyond hope.

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