

## From Prison to Perseverance

by Kayla Rector

I felt the adrenaline rushing through my body as the sound of percussion grenades exploded off in the distance. There was a loud thump on both doors leading into the house. As the sheriff's department barged in and shoved me face first into the dirty carpet, my only thought was "Man, I really messed up this time."

Although I knew the consequences of continual drug use, and especially the resale of them, I was not prepared for the events of this day. At the time, I had been using drugs for 13 years. I thought I was unstoppable. I had plenty of narcotics and plenty of so-called "friends." I had been to jail a few times before, but nothing compared to what I was about to face. I knew somewhere deep in my heart that I deserved to be punished.

As I was led into the justice center in cuffs, I had one thing on my mind, "How in the world am I going to get out of here?" They made me strip completely naked and then told me to bend over and cough. I felt humiliated. I was filled with hatred toward law enforcement from a young age, but this put it over the top. I imagined all of the ways I could get back at them for this act of chastening. They walked me into a cold brick shower room. An officer handed me a bottle of lice shampoo and told me to bathe. I was infuriated. After my very cold shower, I was handed a pair of orange scrubs and was led down a long hallway to the women's housing unit. I was thrown into a large pod with fifteen other women. All eyes were on me. It felt like torture. I carried a thin mat and tote up the stairs to my cell. These would be my only possessions for the next however many days. I had been high on methamphetamines for at least a week and was ready for some rest. As soon as my head touched the bunk, I was fast asleep.

I awoke the next morning to a loud voice telling me to stand on my feet; it was head count. I rose to my feet in a sleepy haze. I felt awful. Every muscle in my body hurt. My brain throbbed

in my skull. I had been to detox before, but never cold turkey. I was going to need a miracle. I walked down the stairs and grabbed a big, bulky breakfast tray. Although I was starving, my stomach churned, and I could not bring myself to take a bite. I gave my tray to the lady sitting next to me. I then rang the buzzer and asked to go back to my cell. As I walked back up the stairs, I caught a glimpse of myself in the plexi-glass window surrounding the pod. What I saw would haunt me forever.

Deep, dark shadows took the place of my cheeks. Dark circles surrounded my eyes. I had red spots all over my face from picking and prodding. I used to get so high that I would pull my hair out by the handfuls, so as a result I did not have much left. I looked down at my arms: nothing but red, inflamed, track marks from where I would repeatedly stick dull needles in a desperate frenzy to get high. I didn't even make it to my cell before tears started flowing down my face.

Time flew by for the next several months, and I was starting to think more clearly. My scars were slowly fading. I was gaining weight. The hair on my head even started to grow back. I had been clean for six whole months. A voice over the intercom told me to get ready for court; I would be sentenced today. As I walked up the hallway to the courtroom, I prayed. I had never prayed before this point and I did not know why I did it. I was convicted on both charges and was sentenced to four years in prison.

A few more months passed, and I was getting more comfortable with my new living arrangements. My friend asked me to start attending religious services with her. I reluctantly went. I believed in God but wasn't sure why. I was amazed at how many different religious groups there were and a little skeptical because they all taught different things. I knew they all couldn't be right. This caused a lot of confusion for me, so I did the only thing I could think of to do; I prayed. Little did I know, my prayer would be answered in just a short while.

A few days later, a voice came over the loudspeaker and asked us if we would like to sign up for a new Bible class called “Searching for Truth.” I was the first to sign up. The ladies who taught this class were incredibly genuine. Everything they taught could be backed up with scripture. Most importantly, they taught about obedience. Although obedience was hard for me, I took these lessons to heart and everything started to change. Before this class ended, I was sent to prison. A month later, I was baptized and my sins were washed away. I came up out of the water a new person. I completed the remainder of my sentence with overwhelming joy.

I walked out of prison on December 29, 2018, a free woman. Unlike what most others would say, prison changed me for the better. I am a completely different person. I now teach the same Bible class that opened my eyes just a few years back. Although I regret making bad choices at such a young age, I wouldn’t change my life for a second. This victory has made me into a symbol of hope for so many others battling addiction. I still struggle and see the effects of many years of drug use in my everyday life, but now I am able to overcome these obstacles and face life head on. With the Lord by my side, I am truly happy. Today, I can say that I am a Christian, and that I am four years clean and sober.