

MY FIRST MESSAGE IN PRISON

I can't believe it's been a year already. In some ways it's been the fastest year of my life. In others, it's felt like swimming through molasses.



Never in a million years did I ever believe I would end up in a Federal prison, sleeping in an ancient metal bunk in a dark and dingy dorm. I use a shoebox wedged in between the wall and my mattress as a nightstand to hold my alarm clock, my deodorant, and plastic container I made from the packaging that the alarm clock came in. I use it to hold the ear plugs I wear at night to try and silence the insanity. I have six pillows tied together under my four-inch mattress to try and soften it. On the left I have a calendar hanging from a piece of the shoe string I used to tie the six pillows together. I use it to keep up-to-date on all the Feast Days and Torah Portions. I have two lights. One is a shop light that is against the wall and shines down into my bunk. The other is above my small desk at the end of my bed. Somebody made some custom shades out of

leftover plastic and wooden knobs which allow me to open and close them to control the intensity of the light. I have a couple of pictures my kids drew of me getting out of jail taped to the side of one of the lockers that faces me when I lay down. And I found a grape juice box when I first got here that I cut the top off of and attached to the side of the locker with a screw. It holds my pens. At the foot of the bed, I have a five-and-a-half-foot locker with two shelves and there's a desk attached to it on the outside. I've filled the entire cork board of the wall part of the desk with pictures of my family. I oftentimes sit on the end of my bed, turn on the little light that's above the desk, and just stare at each picture until tears swell up in my eyes and my heart begins to ache. Other times, I cannot control the tears and I lie down, hanging up three of my shirts to form a curtain and I let it all out, trying not to make a sound.

My daily routine is fairly regular. I pray in bed from about 8:30–9 every morning, then get up. I'm scheduled to clean bathrooms twice a week. **NOT FUN**. I eat a package of mackerel every morning at breakfast for the protein. (Yeah, I never thought that would happen, either.) I eat lunch at 10:30 AM in the chow hall. Then I either teach one of the guys here for a couple of hours or I go to the computer and start writing and emailing. After a couple of hours, I eat a protein bar and another mackerel and then normally spend the rest of the day writing. At 4:00 we all have to be back in our dorms for them to count us. (We can't have anyone just walking off and leaving now can we?) After that, I go back to chow for dinner, which is normally terrible. I go back to writing until 6 PM and then I go work out. I mainly do pull-ups, push-ups, dips, and squats with ten to fifteen sets of jump-roping in between to keep my heart rate up. Then I hit the showers, down a mackerel and tuna concoction for maximum protein to help put some meat on these bones and then end up back at the computer until 10 PM count. While I'm waiting for count, I study Hebrew and work on reading and interpreting the Bible in its original language. Once they clear count, I meet up with Blake and we have a Bible study until midnight. Once that's over, I go back to my bunk, grab one of my journals (I have a regular one and one for just visions and dreams) and write down whatever amazing thing Abba taught me that day.

Once a week I teach a Bible study to a half dozen guys who are really on fire to learn as much as they can. The spiritual atmosphere is very strange. Everyone is very private with what they believe and there are a lot of different religions. Most have no idea what they believe in or why. I learned early on that my traditional ways of evangelizing were not going to work here and so I just focused on what He had me do every day and loved on people the best I could by building relationships, answering questions, and sharing when it was clear I was supposed to. I don't really attend the Sunday church services that the chaplains do. Blake and I have both tried hard, but it's more like going in for a root canal for an hour each week than it is spending time with God. So we just stick to the Bible studies.

On the weekends they play special movies that were in the theaters months ago. If it's a decent movie, Blake and I will watch it. Otherwise we just sit and talk about what God is doing and what He's teaching us. We midrash a lot, discussing the Scriptures, constantly mining for gold. On Friday nights we normally have a Shabbat dinner that we make ourselves in the microwaves. You would not believe the stuff people can make in a microwave! We've had incredible handmade pizzas, some of the best fried rice you will ever have, eggs, burrito wraps, cake, cookies, and even cheesecake! Blake is a tremendous cook and ever since he taught me how to make a cheesecake, I've gotten quite good at it. I make one fairly often and offer pieces to other

inmates. Giving away food has become a great witnessing tool for me and I enjoy the blessing, as well.

I played basketball last winter and softball all summer. It's time I get in shape and this is definitely the place to do it. I grew up playing sports and forgot how much I missed it. It's just like when I played on a church softball league except there's a bit more foul language and a **LOT** more intensity. Okay maybe I got it backwards. It's a bit more intense with a **LOT** more language. Or maybe it's both. I started working out every day back in July and am shockingly religious about it. I've learned a lot about diet and nutrition here from some of the inmates who know what they're talking about. All they do is eat and work out. For me, I am determined to gain a little weight and get in good enough shape that I can run around and play soccer with my kids without EMS having to be called.

I haven't seen much fighting, but there is definitely a lot of yelling and language. One day I counted over 100 f-words alone. I don't think I will ever get used to that part. There are some people that if you break down a 30-minute conversation, they really only have 5 minutes of actual words. All the rest are just curse words.

Oh yeah. My prison nickname is **Preacher**. Somebody gave it to me after I'd been here about two weeks. I was playing in a basketball game, stole the ball from a guy, and went in for a layup when one of the black guys yelled from the sideline, "**Kill Preacher man, kill!**" Then he paused a second and said, "**Wait a minute! No Preacher man! Thou shall not kill! Don't kill Preacher! Don't kill!**" It was pretty funny.

Anyway, there you have it. A little bit about what my daily life looks like from within my new "boot camp." While there can be no doubt that this has been the hardest experience of my life, it has also been equally rewarding, transforming every part of me to be more like the Father. He seems to always meet the level of challenge with the same level of power to overcome it. Who needs a sea opened up for them when they're not being chased? Who needs an earthquake to swallow your enemies if you're not being attacked? So although I have been tested beyond what I thought a human could bear, I have seen more of the supernatural hand of God in the last 12 months than in the last 42 years combined. So if it took coming to prison to refine me and mold me into the instrument He desires for me to be and to experience this level of His Spirit, then may His great name be praised! All I can say is I can't wait to get out to share it all with you!

The most important thing I've learned since I've been here is how to actually let Him lead me as I lead others. Although the results and fruit of Passion for Truth were great, the Father showed me that it was only a fraction of what He had planned. And my leading the ministry the way I was would crush me. Before I came to prison, a prophet from Russia saw a vision of me riding a bicycle with a bag of books strung over my shoulder in a fish net. I was only using one hand to steer so although the bike was very wobbly it was making headway and everyone was excited to see the truth (books) and the Spirit (bicycle) operating together. The problem was that the bicycle could only go as fast as I could physically pedal and I was reaching top speed. Then he saw me get off the bicycle and walk for a bit in transition to the other side of the road where a brand new race car was waiting. I walked around the car and opened the trunk to where the engine was and put the bag of books into the engine. I then got in the car and the Spirit said, "**Now you can go as**

fast as you want." None of us knew what it meant at the time, but it's extremely clear now. I am off the bicycle right now and in the transition, learning how to drive the race car, the new vehicle of the Spirit.

In order to kill the habit of me wanting to "**pedal**" with my own strength, Yahweh had to take all my strength away. Then He had to teach me how to live in the Spirit and learn to do only what He shows me to do. This would take almost all year. Instead of me coming to a fork in the road and choosing which way was the most logical choice, He would bring me a vision or a dream to tell me exactly which way He desired me to go. He activated several people from my ministry into the prophetic realm like nothing I had ever seen. Then He sent me Blake, a man so gifted in prophecy and so mature spiritually that it's like I have my own personal coach for all things in the Spirit. All I've had to do is teach Him Torah. God has taught me not to move or speak unless He says so. I've learned that I had so much zeal to serve Him that I was just doing whatever my heart came up with to try to reach out to more people in my attempts to please Him. Looking back, it's easy to see that I initiated and had my staff work on tons of projects that He did not ask me to do. I hate to say it, but I would imagine that over 50% of those in ministry are doing things that look good and spiritual but are not at all what He wants. He would rather we get 100% return for Him on the one thing He tells us to do than get 10% on the 100 things we decided to do ourselves.

Learning this new lifestyle with Him has definitely been a learning curve. I thought I had a grid for the prophetic. I have had words from the Lord, have seen people healed when someone prayed over them, and have had people bring me visions. But nothing would prepare me for what I would encounter here. He has had to teach me how to decipher this code language and stay very close to Him to really see what He is trying to get me to see. If He doesn't give a dream or vision or a clear prophetic word and I need to make a decision, I will move ahead slowly with what I feel at peace with, all the while keeping my ear to His chest, listening for that still, small voice to bring a check to me or my wife's spirit. Learning how to track what He is doing and follow His breadcrumbs has probably been the number one upgrade I've received in my time here. No more guessing or praying for Him to bless what I'm doing. If I know for sure what He's telling me to do, He's already blessed it.

There are dozens of other things I've learned – enough to fill a whole book – but these are the most powerful. *In the end, I miss my family more than anything.* I miss being in a real live worship service and I miss my congregation. I miss deer hunting, Olive Garden salads, Applebee's triple chocolate meltdown, my bed, my pillow, and a thermostat I can adjust (it's always a freezing 60 degrees in the dorms...like a real cave). I miss wearing jeans, my digital Bible apps, a real shower head, eating a **STEAK**, Google, my iPhone, being able to text my wife and kids throughout the day, watching a movie with my family, **SHABBAT DINNER**, teaching and preaching, real silverware (I hate sporks!), real pizza, chocolate chip cookies, driving, waking up to my wife, a dishwasher, sleeping without having to use ear plugs, eating from a real plate, my wife's cooking, fireworks!, celebrating the feast days, root beer, my laptop, purified water, Qdoba, Wal-Mart, Bass Pro, golf, watching a sunset with Cheryl, sitting on a couch, and a real office chair (Blake found me the one I'm sitting in now in the dumpster. It took me an hour to clean it and then someone stole two of the wheels so I have to lean back to keep from falling

over. Geez). There are a million other little things I miss too, from having a real dresser to watching my kids play with (or even fight over) toys.

So although life has been tough, I would not trade where I am with any of you out there. The light is simply brighter when you're in the dark. His voice is clearer in the solitude. His love is more tangible and His Spirit more alive when you're on life support. I am grateful that He has chosen to train me in this intense experience. I'm learning a lifetime full of lessons compressed into this short period of my life. And when I'm finished being trained and purified and am ready to drive the race car, He will intervene supernaturally and release me onto the track where I belong. Until then, know that if I can make it through this, you, too, can make it through whatever trial you're facing. He will never leave us or forsake us. And if you let Him finish the pressing process, your oil will be so pure it will be worthy to be used to light the Temple.

“But I, like a deaf man, do not hear. And I am like a mute who does not open his mouth. Thus I am like a man who does not hear and in whose mouth is no response. For in you, O LORD, I hope. You will hear, O LORD my God....Do not forsake me, O LORD, O my God, be not far from me! O Lord, my salvation!” – Psalm 38:13-15, 21

Shalom,
Jim Staley