

INTRODUCTION

Unlocking the Prison Doors

One of the most challenging experiences that I have ever had to endure in my life was my time being in prison. Each day I awoke in confinement feeling as though I was living a terrible nightmare. In my mind, I labeled my experience as a crisis. Consequently, my new experience did become a chaotic crisis. Moving about each day, I was seized by fear, hurt, pain, anxiety and frustration. Bewildered, I never had a clue what to expect next. I wandered about in a daze for many months, asking myself, “Is this real? How did I get myself into this?” I hated my situation and, slowly, I began to hate myself.

Prison life was a tremendous adjustment for me: From my three-level, million dollar luxury condo to a 5x9 cubicle shared with a Bunkie, surrounded by 69 other women; from freedom to chains; from lavish luxury to mere survival. I had to make the adjustment on my own. Once a decision maker, I was now given orders of what to do and when I could do it. Life was no longer about glamour, fabulosity and fun; now my life was about survival and keeping my head above water. I had to learn to swim – fast - to avoid drowning!

One day while I was lying on my bunk in a deep depression, I received a revelation, “Either do your best to see the good in this experience, or spend the rest of your time in misery.” It was at that very moment that I began to shift my perception.

As I changed my thinking, I freed myself from the chains of the constant depression haunting me. What I experienced was nothing short of a miracle. Over the next several months, I began to live again. I was able to see and experience life through a new set of eyes. I began – and continue – to live in recognition of and appreciation for what matters most in life.

I was fortunate to find my way along this dark journey, but I began to realize that many others were not so fortunate. As I served my time, I observed a consistent cycle: Women came in, were housed, left and, too often, returned. I quickly understood that prison is merely **punishment**, and does not provide a “solution” to one’s problem that resulted in incarceration. I recognized that prison is mere “housing” for the “problem,” and is not “rehabilitation.” The “problem” includes emotionally unstable women (including myself) who had been beaten down and broken by life. It includes women who possessed so much potential yet their minds were constrained by life-imposed “stinking thinking.” It includes women who allowed their environment to define them - highly influenced by parents, lovers, so-called friends, and acquaintances. It includes women who desperately wanted to be loved, to be cared for, and to experience a happy life, yet who chose the wrong paths to achieve their dreams. The women who surrounded me were not just ordinary women. They were strong, possessing courage and tenacity. Many of them were intelligent women who had committed complex crimes. They possessed passion and drive, yet all this potential was misdirected and misapplied. With no apparent resources to solve the “problem,” these women, labeled as “America’s trash,” or “the bottom of the barrel,” are tossed into the cage called “prison,” and are left to struggle to survive among many other lost souls. Instead of unlocking their potential, many prisoners embark on networking, becoming a part of the largest Criminal Networking

Enterprise (CNE) – comprised of thousands of women from all walks of life, all with different backgrounds, but all with the same common denominator - “criminal thinking.” Instead of finding healing and restoration in their prison terms, many women leave prison with new connections and new strategies to commit bigger crimes. They participate in prison board meetings, where they mastermind how they can pull off their next heist without getting caught.

Our nation’s leaders, judges, and judicial committees – not to mention taxpayers - would be startled to know how many networking plans arise courtesy of state and federal funding. I have watched the formation of many of these plans, but I decided that this would not be the path I would take. I vowed to live the rest of my life as a free woman, free from having to constantly watch my back. I wanted to be successful, but this time around, I vowed to do things the right way.

The prison sentence for me was a plea from Heaven to straighten out my life and to get things together for real this time. I desperately yearned to be free, and I was able to see that I had been locked in spiritual prison long before I ever experienced actual imprisonment. I sat in my cell and determined that I wanted to be spiritually and mentally delivered, emotionally healed and set free, yet I did not know how to do it. Locked behind bars, I felt helpless, but my drive would not quit.

One day, while in despair, I was handed the book *Houses of Healing* by Robin Casarjian- a self-help book written for prisoners and one of the very few such resources. This book showed me the roots of most offender behavior. Prior to reading this book, I had no clue that the problems I faced were also faced by others who were incarcerated. *Houses of Healing* sparked life into my spirit. It provided the means to release my

anger, frustration, shame and guilt, ultimately leading me onto the road of true self-forgiveness. Additionally, it gave me the desire to read other self-help books, furthering my journey to complete restoration.

Through long hours of reading and studying the Bible intensely, and poring over every self-help book I could get my hands on, I uncovered the principles that brought about my release from spiritual prison. I learned how to change my thinking, to release and channel the negative thoughts that were deeply embedded within me. I was able to receive strength in my spirit that I have now transformed into an enthusiasm to share my experiences with others. Through my discoveries, I was able to tailor a set of principles and techniques that would particularly apply to others in my situation. I immediately shared my learning and techniques with many other women who were incarcerated with me. Not only did these principles and techniques work miracles for me, they did the same for the women who also learned from them. As a result, we began to see positive changes in each other.

After being sent to the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, Connecticut, I met Latanya Jones, an inmate who is the author of a book entitled *Cannon Love*. Latanya was finishing her sentence for bank fraud, and we were housed together in the same unit. She encouraged me to publish my discoveries in order to share them with other inmates across the country. The result is *The Voices of Consequences Enrichment Series*, a volume of which you hold in your hands.

The Voices of Consequences Enrichment Series gives step-by-step instructions on how women can achieve their dreams, even after incarceration. Unlike many self-help books that are written by individuals who have never experienced the humiliation of incarceration, this series is written by an inmate

for inmates. I share in your dilemmas, and I identify with your hurt and your pain. I have slept in the same cells as you, have eaten the same prison food, watched and participated in prison fights, and, at night, pulled those same prison sheets over my head to cry, so no one could see my pain. I was that tough girl who could never let my opponent see me sweat. I moved about prison with my head held high, with my mean grill, and my New York B-bop swagger; in reality, afraid to express my true face and feelings. At first I latched onto the wrong people, trying to drown out my soul's inner cry for liberation. I walked around prison doubly locked up. I was locked up physically, and I was locked up emotionally. One day I made a decision to take my mask off, and to lift off the bandages to expose my psychological wounds. I exposed my inner vulnerabilities and, as a result, I allowed myself to finally be healed. I am no different from you. Today I ask you to take off your mask. Lend me your hand and let me help guide you through your journey to discovery. I care about you greatly, and my desire is to see you free! I have uncovered a process of healing that I know will help you, as it helped me. It is the truth you uncover through this process that will set you free!

In this book, I will share my life experiences and many testimonies of others who overcame the same challenges you now face. Many of our stories are similar to yours, making the solutions that we found to our problems, for the most part, also the solutions for your problems. We choose to share our problems with you so that you can also share in the resolutions. Many of us have learned that time in prison can be a gift and an opportunity to take the time to learn, to heal, to analyze, and to re-evaluate our lives. Our prison confinement raised our consciousness of the need to become free from the inside out. Our feelings of self pity dissolved as we learned to see God's intended purpose for our pain. We surrendered our feelings of hopelessness, guilt, shame, anger, low

self-esteem, fear, and powerlessness as we began to learn how to manage our emotions. Our goals moved from simply getting out of jail to a new mission to make the most of our time of incarceration in order to ensure a positive future for ourselves and for our families. This experience has become the turning point of our lives. This spiritual awakening transformed our experience from crisis into opportunity. You too can have this same experience!

Through this book, I will guide you on your journey. Unlike typical self-help books, I created this book with genuine care and compassion. This is the road map I used to overcome my dilemmas. Therefore, I'm not speaking down to you. I am with you, for we are the same. I understand your need and desire for true restoration. I thank God every day for His treasures that He revealed to me. My greatest pleasure now is to share these proven strategies and techniques with you.

Let this time of imprisonment be a "time-out" for the greatest and most important transformation of your life. Open your heart and mind with a willingness to change. Be real with yourself. All crimes come with consequences, whether they manifest instantly or in the future. The results are the same. The definition of an insane person is one who does the same things over and over, expecting different results. Don't be that insane person. Your time of incarceration is your opportunity to change and change begins inside your mind. We are each a result of our thought life: Our thoughts create our habits, and our habits become our lifestyle. In order to change our lifestyle, we must begin changing our thoughts. This book will help you recognize and identify your thought patterns, allowing you to ultimately shift those patterns to achieve a more positive lifestyle.

Many of us dream of success and a good future, yet we pursue success relying on external factors such as people, places and things. True success comes from within and not from without.

This book will help you begin to evaluate your most important asset, which is your “self.” When you discover who you truly are and the power that lies within, you will be able to regain your dreams. The goal is to look inside yourself and honestly evaluate your shortcomings and any other unnecessary baggage you need to unload. Once you empty the “trash,” then you can renew your mind with an abundance of wisdom and knowledge that will help you reach your goals!

We all have choices. In order to change, you must choose to change. No matter how badly our loved ones and friends want change for us, change will not happen until we make the initial choice to accept it. This choice requires that we surrender our will and seek the will of our “Higher Power.” We must recognize that life will not conform to our vision, until we surrender to the will of God. God’s will for each and every one of us is for us to be prosperous in every aspect of our lives, but we must live life according to God’s plan.

By opening the cover of this book and reading this far, you are making a great choice by accepting the possibility of a new life. Follow me through this journey, and use this time as an opportunity to grow emotionally and spiritually, while developing your knowledge and skill sets. Outside the prison walls, it would be extremely difficult to devote such an enormous amount of time to improve “self.” Return to the world ahead of the game. “Fix” yourself, so you can share your growth and lessons learned with many others who so desperately want it, but do not know how, and where, to begin! Let’s make up for lost time!

Take the time to go through the steps in this book patiently. Absorb what you read by studying the contents. Take out your *Voices of Consequences*, “*Unlocking the Prison Doors*” Workbook/Journal and take notes as you read this

textbook. This book is not written to be read straight through; it is written to be studied and experienced. Do the exercises. Meditate and place the material in your heart. Practice the principles you learn on a daily basis. Eventually they will become your habits. Those new habits will help you create a new and victorious lifestyle.

Sit back, take a deep breath and enjoy the process! You have embarked on “Mission Change.” I have only one request of you: When you arrive at your destination and enter the new ground called “freedom,” please share the keys and the map of the path of your journey with as many others as you can. Pass this book along. In fact, you may want to do the exercises with a group, as well as by yourself. Whatever you do, don’t keep this message to yourself! As you share this message with others, the law of reciprocity will return to you an abundance of blessings and opportunities.

May your journey forever be blessed and prosperous.
God Bless.

-Jamila T. Davis

CHAPTER 1

Learning to Surrender

Before we begin this journey, let's pause a moment. Now is the time to evaluate our lives and determine if we are truly ready for change. Stop, look around and examine your environment. The walls that surround us seem so defining. Observe your peers; pay close attention to their actions. Now, ask yourself: Is this the place you want to be, or is there another plan for you, in order to fulfill your destiny? Time is ticking, the clocks aren't moving backwards, and you aren't getting any younger. How much more time can you afford to give up? So, what's next for you after this? Will you leave jail and get a good job? Will you settle down and provide for your family? Or, will you go back out and try to hustle up some cash and take the risk of being caught up in the madness again? Do you return to the old neighborhood, and pick up where you left off? Or, do you hit the streets and party like a rock star, making up for lost time? You have many options, and you make the choices. The choices you make are critical; they determine your future! And the choices you make will answer the question: "Will you return to this place and have to start again, at this very same point?" You control the answer to this question. What will life be like this time around? Will you fail or will you succeed? What do you want your life to be like going forward? Do you want success, or will you accept defeat?

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Before we can begin anew, we must be ready to surrender, much like the old saying illustrates - You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink. I can expose you to the power of choice, but I can't make you choose. Only you can make the choice. You determine your destiny. It's important that you clearly understand that if you remain on the same destructive path in life, you are guaranteed that the results will not be different. Life will continue to deal you the same old hand. Ultimately, there are no exceptions! The consequences for living a life of crime are costly. Initially, you may appear to be getting ahead, but a life of crime will always cost you more than what you have gained. In fact, you will pay double tomorrow for what you gain today. It's not worth it! Think about this honestly: How much did you truly gain? How much did you lose? Now ask yourself the question: Was it worth it?

I would like to share a poem I wrote that I believe many inmates can identify with. The poem urges us to recall our past, and to reflect on the high price we have paid for our misjudgments:

I Surrender – A Prisoner's Cry

By Jamila T. Davis

*There comes a point in our lives when enough becomes enough!
When constant troubles arise, and life is way too rough.*

*Like a bomb that drops, all hell breaks loose, without a person
in sight to give us a boost.*

*All our poor judgments backfire in our face, and those who we
trusted become informants in our case.*

*Everything we try begins to quickly fail, surrounded by these
cinder blocks, in our new home we call jail.*

*On our bunks we stop and think, "How in the world did we land
here?" That's when our problems come to light, causing
pain too great to bear.*

*Some of us started off as that sweet innocent child.
She had two ponytails, big fat cheeks and an irresistible smile.
One day she was lured by someone she thought she could trust,
Who snatched away her youth as his hands fondled her bust.
The shame never left, the reproach settled in.
Next thing she knows she's caught up in a lifestyle of sin.
Then there're those of us who started off fine, who lived in a nice
house, whose parents were kind.
Things were great, she's headed for success! Then she met her
love, that's when her life turned into a mess.
Blinded by love, she couldn't see, had no clue this kind of love
would ruin her destiny.
Then there's one who struggled from the day of her birth,
With daddy in jail and momma on crack, since she entered this
place called "Earth."
There were many nights the cupboard was bare, she had no
food to eat.
In a quest to survive she sought love, now she rocks designer
shoes on her feet.
Her love had the money rolling in, but as a drug dealer's girl,
her new problems begin.
When the troubles came many of us tried to escape, looking for
the solutions to bypass the yellow tape.
She started with weed and it put her at ease.
But one day she discovered the weed would no longer please.
Then she tried coke, then crack, then dope.
When that didn't work she lost her hope.
Whatever it was we were all sold out!
For a moment no struggles, no worries, no doubts.
Then like a whirlwind, the storms began to come:
The things we did we thought were wise, turned out to be so
dumb.*

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*In the storm we learned so much, no longer blind to life.
We learned that love wasn't love at all when it stabbed us like
a knife.*

*Where are all our friends who were around when everything
was up?*

*They're out seeking a free ride; who'll be next to fill their cup?
Things aren't what they seem to be. What we thought was an
escape, became a tragedy.*

We found out in the end we only have our self.

*Some of us are left beat down and robbed, HIV done stole our
health.*

*Bad choices and poor decisions led us to this very place. And on
top of all that misery, now we got this case.*

*There's got to be another way. Things can't stay like this! Left
inside this lonely place, our families greatly missed.*

Pushed so hard against the walls, depression has us bound.

It is not until we get to this place that true help can be found.

Are you tired of running in circles?

Are you tired of the hurt and pain?

*Are you finally convinced you must surrender because life will
never change?*

What about the kids you left behind?

Is it fair to them, that they, too, must do this time?

*What about the others who hurt because of our pain? Will you
change for them or will you stay the same?*

It's time to make a choice; is enough, enough?

Are you ready to release the shackles and take off the handcuffs?

*Are you ready for a brand new life? Where you can be a mother,
a friend and a wife!*

*Are you ready to achieve your dreams, without having to watch
your back? When life can finally be filled with plenty and we
no longer suffer lack!*

You can have it, it's your choice! You can sign the agreement with your voice!

I surrender, I surrender, is all you have to say. That's when help will come your way.

Are you ready to follow me now, down this road called change? I promise, if you surrender today, your life won't be the same.

Open your mouth and throw up your hands.

With your voice release the shackles and bands.

There's nothing left but for us to say, "I give up this old life, I surrender today!"

Many of us have been in denial, which has caused us to stagnate, trapped in the same place. We don't want to admit our shortcomings, so we live a lie. We are covered with masks of deception, acting as if life is fine and everything is okay. We hide behind people, places and things and we use them to justify who and what we are. If we would admit the truth, which is hidden deep down, we'd see we are empty and lonely, caught in a high-speed pursuit for fulfillment. In reality, we are on a path of self-destruction. While we search outwardly for fulfillment, we remain unaware that the solution lies within.

For example, many of us have sought men, believing – and convinced - that our fulfillment lies with one of them. "Once I find the right man, he will complete me, and my life will be good," we say. Others turn to drugs, thinking they will provide our sustenance. There are those who pursue money, saying, "Once I get enough, I'll be okay, because money is surely the solution that will take my problems away." On this high-speed pursuit we've been racing through life, only to hit these cement walls called "prison." A place none of us ever wanted to be in. We did not want to start the next chapter of our lives here.

Where did we go so terribly wrong? It all started with a choice. Usually ONE bad decision can be identified as the very thing that landed us in prison, supported by a series of cycles, wrong thoughts, and wrong habits that brought us to a lifestyle of criminal behavior. And, of course, we had the mindset, “I’ll never get caught,” or “I’ll do this just once, get the money and I’m done.” Many of us never stopped to think about the severity of the consequences. Self-absorbed, we never thought about the lives that would be affected by our actions, including the suffering of our loved ones who would be left behind with our imprisonment. We failed to calculate the cost of our projected gain. In the middle of this mess, we now can clearly see that the crime was not worth it. Left to hold our bags of despair, many of us are lonely, with very few who really care. What is left to do? It is truly time to break free by surrendering our hearts and minds, and recognizing that this is not the way our lives are intended to be. We must change!!! We can change!!!

Change is a process that requires willingness. We must surrender our old ways in order to embark upon a new lifestyle. Aren’t you tired of the havoc? Are you tired of taking one step forward, only to take two steps back? Wouldn’t it be nice to live in peace, surrounded by love, and immersed in happiness? Would you like the chance to finally make your loved ones proud, and to prove your greatest critics wrong? Wouldn’t it be great to be whole and to finally feel complete, without the crutches of people, places and things? That’s real freedom! You have a choice, and only you can make it. The decision is yours! Choose life and surrender.

Surrender, by definition, means to give up attachment to results. Typically, we do things to receive an expected result. When we learn to surrender, we release our attachment to our

expectations. We transition our efforts to control the external world to focus on our internal world, which lies within us. When we learn to surrender, we open the gateway to receive peace and restoration.

****WARNING**** To surrender is one of the most difficult choices for people to make. Man's nature is to be in control. We believe we have all the answers, and know what is best for us. The common response is, "I'm grown, and you can't tell me what to do." Everyone has their plan and agenda. But when we reach a point of crisis, we become desperate. Then, in our desperation, we face the critical moment when we realize we are helpless to change the situation. Crises and failures lead us to fall on our knees and surrender. Hardships humble us and allow us to admit our shortcomings. Unfortunately, for many of us, things have to get really bad before we surrender and begin the search for an escape from our pain.

Surrender is acceptance. Acceptance is what relieves the pain. When we accept our shortcomings, we can find a solution to alleviate that pain. It truly is simple. If we admit our problems, we can receive help. The first step in this journey is for each of us to simply admit that our lives have become unmanageable in their current state. We must admit that we need to make adjustments and that we need help in our pursuit to change. Surrender is simply our admission that we need help.

Are you ready to break the cycles of crises and failures? Are you ready to surrender and make a change? If so, join me in saying these words: *"I admit that my life has become unmanageable. I recognize that I'm at a point in my life where I need to experience change. I realize that I cannot make it by myself. I formally surrender."*

That's it! You are now on the path called *CHANGE*. By surrendering, you have opened the doors for help to come your

way. The journey will be exciting. There's so much to learn! Now you can work on your biggest asset, which is "self." Get ready and expect the best to come!

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

- 1) What does it mean to surrender?
- 2) Why is it necessary to surrender in order to move forward in life?
- 3) Why does it take people a long time to surrender?
- 4) Why is it difficult to give up control?
- 5) How do you surrender?

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Explain some of the activities you were involved in that you will need to surrender and why you need to surrender them.