

I am writing a testimony about my husband, Jeff Bartik, who has been incarcerated for almost 46 years. I have known him since he moved into a house across the street from me when we were in 7th grade. We became friends. Jeff taught 3rd grade Sunday School at the church we both attended. He graduated high school a semester early and enlisted in the Navy.

One week after I returned home from college, I found out that Jeff had been arrested for a murder. He was high on PCP and alcohol at the time of the murder. No one who knew Jeff could believe it. Jeff himself will tell you that he deserves to be punished. His conscience is intact. His remorse over his crime is great. That is why he took responsibility for his actions and turned himself in to the police without the benefit of a plea bargain. He was 22 years old. How many people turn themselves in! He still has remorse for his crime. He has had no contact with friends from his life before his crime, except for me.

Our pastor suggested I write to Jeff so we started corresponding. A Gideon came to Jeff's cell in the county jail and led Jeff to put his trust in the Lord. The State's Attorney and judge tried to get the death penalty for him even though this was his first offense. The jury believed Jeff could be rehabilitated so they voted "no" to the death penalty. But the judge gave him the worst sentence he could give: Life without parole. Due to a trial error, he was never able to appeal his sentence. Jeff went to Menard CC. He is now in Dixon CC.

I have never had 1 regret about marrying him. Jeff has a purpose. He has greater compassion for others than he did before his crime and he makes himself available to inmates who need help. He attends the Spanish Bible Study at Dixon CC (there is a translator). He doesn't speak Spanish but he wanted to reach out to the Hispanic inmates. He helps a few Hispanic inmates understand their legal mail written in English. Jeff reaches out to inmates new to Dixon to help them adapt to their new environment. He leads by example. He tutored math to inmates studying for their GEDs at both Menard and Hill CC. The Freedom from Within classes at Dixon taught him his passion is to help others who struggle. You can see he values others in his many acts of kindness. One inmate that Jeff has befriended is mentally challenged. Jeff found out that this guy was being picked on. Jeff asked a sergeant to move him to Jeff's cellhouse so Jeff can be like a big brother and keep an eye on him. He did something similar to this for an inmate in Hill CC. He goes out of his way to help others.

Jeff chose to stay out of the gangs even though he was pressured and threatened to join. Many inmates respect and trust Jeff. He is older, he has wisdom, and he is a good listener. He keeps confidences when other inmates share personal details of their lives. They come to him for advice and he mentors them. He gets involved in other inmates lives, but only if asked. He cares about those in his community. He took college classes until he was ineligible because he is a Lifer. He has also held a job for most of his incarceration and earned a barber's license. A few weeks ago he put in an application to become a Peer Educator to teach a Civics class to inmates with a year or less to do on their sentences.

Jeff has been CONSISTENT in showing kindness to and helping others throughout his incarceration. He hasn't just "cleaned up his act" in the last few years just to get out of prison. Despite living in a very dark environment for the past 45+ years, he has made these positive changes in his life because it was the right thing to do.

Jeff has matured in his faith. Knowing God's love for him has convinced him that he has value. Seeing his value has caused him to say no to drugs and alcohol. He now co-leads an evening prayer circle in his cellhouse. At Hill, Jeff and other inmates studied the Bible together. At Dixon, Jeff also guided an

inmate as he studied the Bible and answered the questions he had. Last fall, Jeff met a new transfer inmate and in the course of their conversation he asked Jeff, "How do you do a life sentence?" Jeff responded, "One day at a time, and I look for someone to bless each day."

If released, he wants to work with the homeless. He also wants to serve in my church and minister to inmate family members through the Koinonia House Ministry (KHM). KHM brings the gospel into prisons and helps former inmates re-enter society by connecting them with churches and mentors. Their Thursday evening ministry, Radical Time Out (RTO), ministers to inmate family members. RTO is a caring group that welcomes everyone to experience Christ's love and grace regardless of color, class, culture, crisis, or crime. We worship, learn from God's Word, fellowship, and pray for each other and for inmates. Both my church and Koinonia House will welcome him into their ministries.

Jeff has me, his wife, committed to supporting and helping him adjust to life outside of prison. I believe in him.

Health-wise Jeff, at age 68, has arthritis and he is in pain every day. He has a few health problems that are more serious.

Now, quickly: THE REST OF JEFF'S AMAZING STORY! I told you that a Gideon came to Jeff's jail cell and led Jeff to the Lord. Forty years later, in corresponding with Jeff's victim's family, I learned that Jeff's victim's MOTHER called the Gideons and told them to send someone to Jeff Bartik and lead him to Christ. And that is exactly what happened. Jeff's heart was ready.

He expressed his remorse to the Macy family during his sentencing hearing and wrote them a letter several years into his sentence, again to express his remorse. The family has publicly forgiven Jeff and four members of the victim's family wrote letters supporting Jeff's release in clemency petitions we filed in 2018, 2020, and 2023. Again, 40 years later, in corresponding with Jeff's victim's family, one of them sent me a copy of Jeff's letter to them. **They still had it.**

Only God could dream up this stuff and bless us like this. After receiving support from the victim's family for the 2018 clemency, we were sure God was going to free Jeff from prison. That didn't happen. Now we can only speculate that God must still have work for Jeff to do in prison while we wait for the decision for his 2023 clemency petition.