

Soon after my arrival at the prison I found myself laying stark naked, freezing cold, stripped of my clothing and possessions, strapped down in five point restraint, hands and feet both tied down, and a huge leather strap across my chest. Because I was still not peacefully complying, and to deliver their intended message, the guards were threatening to place yet another strap, this one across the forehead to prevent even the lifting of the head. Thank God I was able to avoid that last strap, but only because the Chaplain was able to reach my shattered heart and soul, and thereby help to interrupt the self destructive path I was on.

I was of the attitude that because life had not gone the way I thought it should have I may as well just destroy whatever was left of myself and my life. Still failing to accept responsibility for my situation, I released streams of vulgarities at the officers, blaming everyone and their mother for my problems. Aside from my own yelling and screaming, the noise level in a prison's isolation unit can be absolutely mind boggling. In a rare moment of relative silence in the cell block, I heard through the crack of my cell door a very soft, gentle, and faint voice saying to me "Is this who you are?". I stopped all thought, listening, wondering if I had really heard it, or if I was in fact beginning to lose my mind there in that dungeon. Then again, softly, "Is this who you are?". Demanding to know who was outside the cell door, I continued in my unruly tone. In the same quiet and well mannered voice he introduced himself as the Chaplain..

I contemplated the Chaplain's "Is this who you are?" question for hours on end. Was this wreck of a person I had become who I truly was? Could it possibly be? If not, then who was I, and how had I come to find myself in prison, and even worse strapped down in isolation? After many hours I came to the conclusion that, no, it was not "who I am". Far from being the end of the issue, I was then left seeking an answer to a new question, for if that was not me laying there in shackles, then who was I?

Still very young in my Christianity, and lacking

any of the refinement that comes with living a Christian lifestyle, I still knew very little about God, and therefore hadn't a clue who I was either. I decided to make a mental list:

I AM.....a man, a father, a son, a brother, a hard worker, etc... The list became quite extensive. I was as alone in my cell as a person can possibly get. Fortunately for me I had recently invited The Lord into my life, and He had accepted that invitation. He never fails to answer when called, and He never walks away when the going gets tough. I cried out in my desperation, "Lord, please help me to see the answer!" In classic Christ style, He provided me with an answer, but by no means did He do all the work for me. I began to feel as if the Holy Spirit were there in the cell with me, and I felt very strongly that He was prompting me to "Go deeper!". So, I began a new mental list.

Aside from the items on my first list, brother, father, son, etc..., there was another part of me that I had yet to address. My bout with cancer and the following emotional turmoil had left me feeling extremely empty. I had lost the love of my life just before the cancer, and then due to my increasingly erratic behavior after the cancer I also lost my children, my home, my vehicles, my job, etc...

Taking my lead from the Holy Spirit, and trying to be honest with myself about where my addiction had led me and why, I began the new and more honest list. I AM.....a drug addict, a liar, a man who can no longer be trusted, a man who is never home, etc... I was sickened!!! To lie there in that freezing cell, and to be the one to place those titles upon myself, it finally left nowhere else to run. It literally took being imprisoned, then further strapped down to a cement block, and for the very first time I was forced to truly accept that these descriptions were now part of me, and that was so because I had chosen the behaviors which led to that. In that cell there was no other person pointing a finger at me, there was nobody else to blame, nobody to lash out at when I didn't like what I was hearing, or in an attempt to detour the confrontation. In the end, when all was said and

done, I was left only with myself, a 6 X 8 foot cell, the hard and ugly facts, and my Lord.

So, I contemplated the contents of this new list. There was no question that here was a very large part of what had landed me in prison. Any logical person would know that there was no other way for it to end, it was either prison, or death, but I still felt that I hadn't identified the true cause of what led me to engage in those behaviors in the first place. The Great Councilor continued with His prompting, and I could still sense the need to ...."Go Deeper". The next list got even uglier, and the next list even worse than that one. I was becoming quite depressed and upset with the muck as I dug deeper and deeper into the ugliness that had become me, but right at the point where I was so disgusted with myself that I was about to give up it dawned on me that I had begun listing adopted character traits and behaviors, and not necessarily who I truly am as a human being. I needed another new list.

This final list was to be different than any before, for this final list had only one entry, and it wasn't something I had done wrong, or something I was ashamed of. All of the things I had learned from the Chaplains, volunteer Bible teachers, and Bible correspondence lesson graders began to swirl around in my mind and to mesh with all of the ugliness of the moment. Suddenly I began to calm down for the first time since being tied down to that cold concrete slab, and the anxiety began to fade away. The new list read quite simply: I AM.....A child of God

I began to truly think about that last, and about the fact that since I had accepted and trusted Christ as my personal Savior my behavior had changed very little in order to reflect that fact. It became sickeningly apparent to me that I was 100% responsible for the situation I found myself in, and that the answer was to put into practice what I had already learned, and to begin benefitting from behaving in a way that the Good Lord would find pleasing. My hogtied screams and curses soon turned to the singing of hymns, the frustration and anger began to subside, and with the Holy Spirit at my side I finally began my first truly honest

attempt to adopt a Christian lifestyle. My days of being strapped down were soon to be over.

So, I now invite you my Christian Brothers and Sisters to inquire within yourselves, and to join me in my journey as I continue my study of Self, God, and the New Creation born of the blending of the two. (2 Cor.5:17)

It is now a regular practice for me, especially when life's challenges attempt to get me down as they often do, to go through my mental "I AM...." list. The key difference is that it's no longer a depressing roster of my mistakes in life, but instead it has become a personal check list to reinforce my connection with the Holy Spirit that now dwells within me, to remind myself of who I truly am as a Believer in Christ, and to serve God to the best of my ability, because His child.....I AM!!

(Don't just read what's written here - The most important thing you can do is LOOK UP THE VERSES and read the truth directly from God's Word, the Bible.)

I am a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17

I am God's child. John 1:11-13

I am Jesus' chosen friend. John 15:15-17

I am justified. Romans 5:1-4

I am united with the Lord and am one spirit with him. 1 Corinthians 6:17

I am bought with a price and belong to God. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

I am a member of Christ's body, part of his family. 1 Corinthians 12:27

I am a holy saint. Ephesians 1:1

I am God's adopted child. Ephesians 1:3-5

I have direct access to God through his Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:17-20

I am redeemed and forgiven all my sins. Colossians 1:13-14

I am complete in Christ. Colossians 1:8-10

I am forever free from eternal condemnation. Romans 8:1-2

I am assured that, loving God, all things work together for good. Romans 8:24-28

I am free from condemning charges. Romans 8:31-34

I cannot be separated from the love of God. Romans 8:35-39

I am established, anointed and sealed by God. 2Corinthians 1:20-22

I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected. Philippians 1:6

I am a citizen of heaven. Philippians 3:20

I am hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:1-3

I have not been given the spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. 2Timothy 1:7

I can find grace and mercy to, help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16

I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me. 1John 5:18

I am the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Matthew 5:13-15

I am a branch of the true vine, Jesus, a channel of His life. John 15:1, 5

I am chosen and appointed by God to bear fruit. John 15

I am a personal Spirit-empowered witness of Christ. Acts 1:8

I am God's temple, His Holy Spirit living in me. 1Corinthians 3:16

I am God's ambassador to bring others to Him. 2Corinthians 5:17-20

I am God's coworker. 2Corinthians 6:1

I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm. Ephesians 2:4-7

I am God's workmanship created for good works. Ephesians 2:10

I may approach God with freedom and confidence. Ephesians 3:1-12

I can do all things through Christ living in me. Philippians 4:12-13

# My New Life *in* **Christ**

The beginning of  
Matthew's  
new life!