

Matthew 6:8b, 25, 31-34 (NIV)

“Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

That verse when I found it, I had read it several times before. But it also means a lot for a friend of mine that at first glance you couldn’t find a more different yet the same pair of men.

My first test came when I was brought to Marenisco, Michigan at Ojibway correction facility. That was 10 miles outside of Wisconsin, and a level 2 prison where low level violent offenders and lifers who have earned their way down would go. It was also the lowest they would ever go in the security levels. This was where I met a man, that we both changed each other.

When I first heard of Allie, it was in the form of two corrections officers betting on how long it would take before they would be scraping me off the floor. Not a lot of comfort in that. But by then, I had learned to trust in God, and to leave it in His hands (from the Christians I had met in jail as well as the volunteers who gave us a service once a month).

Allie was always in solitary confinement for fighting, or some other things I won’t get into. He would put just about any roomies he had in the hospital. And at the day I moved in, he happened to be getting out of solitary that night. I just unpacked and prayed.

I was reading my Bible the night he had come in. I had finished dinner, and remembered the jokes of “I hope you liked your last meal.” I just pulled out my Bible a volunteer had given me at quarantine and read its well worn pages, and left it in the hands of God.

Allie walked into our two-man room. He walked up to my bunk and glanced over my shoulders so see what I was reading. Then he sat down in his bunk and lay down to watch TV. He didn’t say anything, but I felt at ease in the fact no one was going to scrape me up off the floor that night, and God was watching out for me yet again.

A few weeks went by and I had signed up for services provided by volunteers of the nearby town. Men and women who would take a Sunday and come down to preach the word of God to what I felt where men who needed it the most.

I had returned from church one night and Allie looked up on the bunk and observed what I was doing with curiosity. I had a particularly rough day and I always found when I was angry, lonely or stressed, the Bible had a calming affect.

“What you doing?” was the first words Allie had said to me. “Reading the Bible. Helps to unwind.”

Did you believe in God before you were sent here?” He asked me. I had to think of that one. And I simply said “no, but I believe the point is, I have come back to Him now and am learning more each day.” Allie couldn’t read very well so that night he asked if I could read a few things to him for him. Of course I did and we ended up reading some passages till lights out.

This began to be something that would come every night for the next month. I didn’t pretend to understand them all, and then later I asked my mom for a study Bible for a present. This helped a little, but I could tell Allie was getting flustered with it. Then he surprised me by bringing a request form and asked me to request like I did to go to service.

It was Sunday evening that Allie woke me up out of a dead sleep after a hard day of shoveling snow to go to service. I don’t think I have ever seen him more excited about anything in my life. And in service all the questions he had were answered.

We both had changed while God was in our lives. And the fact that I was discovering that God knew what I needed and that if I hadn’t gotten that 12 months, I would have never met Allie. I might have gone back to who I was before if I hadn’t seen the world I was in and what God had done to not just me and Allie but the 800 Christians in the prison.

A lot of time, the violence around us would avoid us, though I’m not going to lie and say I didn’t have any hairy situations. But they never ended in a fight. I never had to fight to earn the respect of the other prisoners; a simple act of kindness goes a long way, no matter where you’re at. Even if it was as simple as giving someone a simple bar of soap if they needed it and didn’t have the funds to pay for it. Then not asking for it back when they asked when I wanted it back. That was how I got the trust of untrusting men.

We would sit on the yard and talk about church and often my favorite Bible passages. Or pitch horseshoes to stay away from the temptation that moved through

the yard. We looked out for each other by helping to keep God's teaching in our heads and helping us use them in our everyday lives.

I happened to be blessed with an awesome pair of parents who would drive 10 hours just to see me, and a stepfather who made a point to take my mother to see me. That's when I noticed the troubled look on my new friend's face. Allie had lost his visitation rights because of the fights he had been in. When I asked what was wrong, he said he longed to see his wife, daughter, and grandchild. "Why don't we pray on it?" I asked him. Then we both did just that.

A month went by and Allie was becoming frustrated, like we all do when prayers aren't answered in the time we would like. We had just got back from weight lifting (another way we had kept ourselves out of trouble. Not to mention that you couldn't ask for a better spotter than a man who could bench press a house!) there was a yellow form on his bunk telling him he had earned his visitation privileges back and all he needed to do was get the list approved to see his family.

A week later, he saw the daughter he hadn't seen since she was 11, as well as his wife. Finally, he met the granddaughter he had never seen. I'd never seen Allie smile or cry a day in his life. And the first thing he did was thank me. I told him I'm not the one you should thank; that you should thank God. He did just that.

God also knew what we needed when we both had a security dropped. Mine was dropped a month early, and Allie wasn't supposed to be dropped without a year of no fighting. And wouldn't you know it? We were also in the same prison and later on in the same bunking area.

Later we were sent to anger management classes together. The final class we both needed to complete our state requirements to get out. A course offered in level 2, but not easily gotten into.

Later, one of many tests of faith was given to Allie and me. One was in the recreation room. I was playing hearts and Allie spades when another prisoner decided to challenge Allie by getting in his face and telling him he was in his chair. A year and a half ago, Allie would have put the man in a hospital. He just turned the other cheek (the volunteers' message at church that day) and gave the guy the chair. Then he left the room to our 7 man room. That day I found him laid back on the bunk reading his Bible. He just looked up at me and said: "You're right. This book does relax you."

Two years later, we faced the parole board, but since we hadn't finished anger management, we knew we would get an extension. Allie and I had finished our anger management course, but we also had a few strikes against us.

Allie, his fights and the violent crime he had committed. And I for the violent crime I had committed and the fact that I had prayed in front of the psychiatrist in quarantine who put on my report "He talks to God." When he caught me talking to myself and asked "who was I talking to?" I simply said "God." We both prayed that night and handed the matter over to God. Knowing that if we were denied it was because God needed us to stay a little longer.

A month later, we both got our paroles, but this was when Allie got his next test. Two weeks later, they revoked his parole. One reason was because of a fight that he was accused of with a corrections officer. A matter that the state closed and he was found innocent, but the department of corrections hadn't removed it from his record. Even after that blow to his heart, he still thanked God for trying, and believed that the truth would come to light.

I left Allie for Jackson to go home two weeks later. I wasn't able to find out what happened to Allie. Being on parole doesn't allow me to send letters to him. Three months ago, I looked his name up on a prison directory that tells you the name and address of the prisoners so you can send them mail. I was off parole for a little over six months and was going to send him a letter. His prayer had been answered. He was released six months after I was.

There isn't a day I don't think of my friend Allie and how we helped each other in a faith journey for the books.

To me, God knew what I needed by having me meet Allie that day in Ojibway. To help him find God, and to help reinforce my fledgling faith that started in Oakland County jail. God still speaks; you just have to listen hard enough to hear him. Thank you for letting me share.