



Get Free And Stay Free are stories of hope, and transformation told only by those who have been in prison and who have become productive and honorable returning citizens. All stories are recorded by audio and transcribe into words. All transcripts are available for free at www.GetFreeAndStayFree.com

JAMES ATKINS

James had spent 26 years in prison before being released in 2007. His gratitude for his life, through Christ, for both his physical and spiritual freedom is evident each day. James can be seen on any given day being encouraging to his neighbors, friends, strangers and those whom he helps re-enter into society after incarceration.

GFSF: Good morning, James, how are you today, and what is the weather like in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania?

James: I'm doing fantastic, and the weather is beautiful in southwest Philly with bright skies and a nice temperature.

GFSF: If you would, go ahead and begin to share your story of hope and transformation.

James: Sounds good. I was given a 15 to 30-year sentence to which I did 26 years straight in prison. I was never in jail before and not since my release on October 10, 2007. I never planned on going to prison, as most of us have not. Unfortunately, because of circumstances and situations, we sometimes face, we don't take the time to think before we act.

I was introduced to drugs when I was in my thirties, and it began to take effect. The drugs led me to live a chaotic and very unproductive life. As the scripture shares where there is no vision, the people perish, and I began to perish. I started not to feel good about myself, had no purpose and lived a life of lies.

GFSF: Unfortunately, many people who are incarcerated got caught up in the world of drugs. What would you share with those in prison to keep their minds off the drugs and negative thinking in general?

James: One of the best things someone can do when in prison is to get as much education as possible. That was a big thing for me. When I went into prison, I did not have a GED, but when I got out of prison, I did. It took me about five times, but I obtained it. From there, I had the opportunity to take college courses, and even to this day, I am taking college courses with Lancaster Bible College. Education gives me the tools to help me reinforce my choices to be much stronger, spiritually, and emotionally. I believe this is one of the biggest reasons why I have not gone back to prison.

GFSF: Yes, education has often proven itself to be one of the best resources used to reduce recidivism.

James: If I could, I would like to give hope to those who are incarcerated about an experience I had when I was in prison.

GFSF: Absolutely.

James: I used to run a bible study just for the men who would get out of prison and had returned. I would ask them about their past and what brought them back. I would listen and hide their stories in my heart and would promise myself that I would learn from them and never come back.



To help safeguard against my returning to prison, I would surround myself with mentors. Not just one, but as many as four mentors at one time. I could trust my mentors to hold me accountable. I would allow myself to be vulnerable to them and could share anything with them. This was a powerful thing for me.

GFSF: So, from a man who spent 26 years in prison, you used two primary strategies to ensure your long-term freedom. Education and making sure you hung out with only those types of men that would help you to become the man you desired.

James: Exactly. I have also been fortunate to have influential people in my life that helped me to reach for things that I would have never achieved. They helped give me confidence that I could do something if I tried.

GFSF: That is great James. If there were one more strategy that you could share, what would that be?

James: Yes, there is one more thing, and it can be at your fingertips at any time that you want, and it is your spirituality. I am talking about being born-again and having a set of ethics that you can live by no matter what you may face. When I was incarcerated, I promised myself that I would not become institutionalized. I did this with my spiritual life. I not only read the Bible, but I tried to do what it says. By doing this, it will change your life.

GFSF: A healthy spiritual life is a huge advantage to living a joyful and productive life. What advice can you give to those in prison who have not been able to find faith or spirituality although they would like to? Especially considering different types of religion.

James: I would say try the different religions if need be. For me, God, Christianity, was all that I needed. I didn't need to search any further. I was able to find all my answers, hope, and desires in Him. If you need to explore, as I say, search, and you will find what suits your soul

GFSF: Spirituality is big. Humanity has a spiritual desire to know and please its creator. Spirituality can be good or evil, as evidenced by the actions of suicide bombers. Before we end this interview, James, please share some closing thoughts that will encourage those in prison both physically and mentally.

James: For the 26 years I have spent in prison, I know what disappointments and discouragement look like. It could be waiting to be paroled or one of many other things that are on our minds. No matter what you are facing, please know that there is hope. There are a lot of good people, brothers, and organizations that are passionate about helping you succeed. Keep your eyes and ears open for those kinds of people and continue to fight the good fight.

GFSF: Thank you James for your time and congratulations on living a life free from incarceration and emotional bondage.

James: Thank you.