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## RICKY SALMON

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Ricky Salmon is an ordained minister and self-employed with his own construction company. He and his wife, Suzette, dedicate their lives to helping men and women who are released from prison. In addition to their own non-profit ministry, they do much volunteer work with God's Treasure House in Landsdale, Pennsylvania as well as Yokefellowship Prison Ministry.**

**GFSF:** Good morning, Ricky. How are you today?

**Ricky:** Great, thank you.

**GFSF:** Thank you for taking the time to share your story of hope and transformation. Before we dive into your story, Ricky, please share a bit about yourself.

**Ricky:** I was released from prison in 2007. In 2009, I started a prison ministry, which I still do today. I also have my own home improvement business with a friend, which I started around six years ago when I lost my job. I have been married 26 years, and my wife is in the prison ministry with me. I love helping people who get out of prison stay out. That is my passion and keeps me moving forward to let people know that when they get out, they can stay out.

**GFSF:** Great, so go ahead and share your story, starting with your childhood years.

**Ricky:** My mother passed away, and my sister started raising me at 13 and could not keep me under control. My brother then took me into his household, and it was not a good place to be because it was filled with drugs, women, and all kinds of those things. That lifestyle led me to the wrong people, places, and things. He was selling drugs and would have me pick up and deliver his drugs, and of course, I started selling.

This is how my life started going down the wrong path. I connected with the wrong people, and this led to drug trafficking. The federal government arrested my brother and me both after we were raided. This arrest led to my first incarceration. I was 15 years old. I was not in for long because I was a juvenile, and my arrest had more to do with a stolen vehicle than the drugs. They took me to the hole, and within a few days, they drove me to juvenile court and released me. My brother was

taken to prison, and I had gotten used to the lifestyle of cars and money, and I started going out on my own.



Website [www.GetFreeAndStayFree.com](http://www.GetFreeAndStayFree.com)

Email [contact@GetFreeAndStayFree.com](mailto:contact@GetFreeAndStayFree.com)

Mailing Address Get Free And Stay Free

P.O. Box 326 Gilbertsville, PA 19525

**GFSF:** Like many kids growing up in lower-poverty urban areas, you did not have any positive role models.

**Ricky:** That's right. I grew up having no mentors, hanging out with the wrong people, and learning the wrong things. From the ages of 15 to 45, I was on drugs and committing crimes when I wasn't in prison, which was eight different times, serving a total of 25 years.

**GFSF:** Much of your adult life was spent in prison, which unfortunately is not uncommon for many men incarcerated in our country. Many of our readers can certainly relate to your story. Something changed in your life because you are now living a life of freedom from drugs, alcohol, and incarceration. You also share your story of hope and transformation with other men through prison ministry. If you will share your transformation story. Did it happen in an instant, or was it gradual?

**Ricky:** In 1994, I was arrested by the federal government and looked at ten years and three months. I always went to church but never really had a relationship with God. Then, I was arrested and prayed that God would give me a changed heart. At that point, I was sick and tired of being on drugs all of those years since I was a juvenile. I just knew there had to be something else better.

**GFSF:** How old and where were you when you prayed that particular prayer?

**Ricky:** It happened in the federal holding cell in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and I was probably about 43 years old at that time. I prayed to God, 'please change my heart.' I knew things had to change with my thinking and behavior, and I felt something was going to be different this time. The reason why was because my prayers before this time had always been to help me get out of prison. This time I wanted to change badly and not just for the reason of getting out of jail, and things started to happen. I began to go to bible study and church, and I began to find a hunger and thirst for God's word. When I started applying scripture to my life, I began to experience a transformation. I was giving up my ways and replacing them with God's ways by doing this. I believe that I am the man I am today because I surrendered my life to Christ.

**GFSF:** The story here is that no matter how old we are or the circumstances in our lives, there is always hope. What can you share with those who are currently incarcerated to encourage them to find freedom? Not only continued freedom when they get released but freedom in their mind while they are still in prison? So many men and women want to live honorable and Godly lives, but they face so much opposition within their minds. What can you say to encourage them to press forward?

**Ricky:** Try to keep your mind on God and not on yourself. Once you do this, your thinking will begin to change. What you tell yourself is what you are going to respond to. Over time, the more you feed yourself spiritually, the more your mind will be renewed. Your renewed mind will give you a much better way of handling every new challenge. During this process, we will continue to have thoughts, problems, emotional ups and downs, and situations. What is important is that we must think before we respond. We have to look at the whole situation and count the cost. We have to ask ourselves, 'do we want to give up this newfound peace, freedom, and joy?'. The question becomes, is it worth it?

**GFSF:** What practical advice do you have looking back on your incarcerated days to those incarcerated today?

**Ricky:** I would encourage those incarcerated to ask themselves some questions. I would also share that there may be some things in life that you have to give up. It may be old friends. Although we may have grown up with or have known someone for 20 years, we ask, are they really your friend? A self-evaluation of these kinds of things is important if you want to become a better version of yourself. A 'friend' may encourage you to do something wrong, but a true friend is not going to lead you down that path.

I separated myself from certain people I knew were not doing the right things. My advice is, and the Bible says, corrupt company corrupts good men. If I continue to hang around with the wrong people, their stuff will rub off on me. In my case, I would begin to do the wrong stuff again, so I looked back into my childhood days and noticed where that behavior only led me to drugs, prison, and destruction. So practically speaking, we have to reevaluate and understand that life is full of choices. Every choice, every decision has a consequence. We have to know clearly, what we want out of life and then determine to head in that direction. Once you know what you want, do not let anyone tell you what you can or cannot accomplish.

**GFSF:** Great advice. In summary, if there were three primary things you could share that helped you during your incarceration, you have already shared two. #1 is deep self-evaluations, #2 is to hang out with the right people, and what would the third piece of advice be?

**Ricky:** Yes, the third and most important thing would be spiritual. Search and connect with your creator spiritually. Along those same lines, you have to think about what you are thinking about constantly. Is it worth just thinking about something, or would it be more valuable to apply what you are thinking about? You have to know what you want clearly and have the motivation to make it happen. Do not let anyone tell you differently. People told me I was never going to be right or that I would be on drugs or in prison for the rest of my life.

**GFSF:** Many people want to be close to God and want to live a godly life, but there's so much opposition in doing that. How can you encourage them to continue to press forward?

**Ricky:** As I said earlier, we have to count the cost. I had to calculate the cost. I had to look at the whole situation and ask myself, 'do I want to give up this peace of mind and joy and go back to a world of unrest and insecurities that existed in my mind, or do I cling to faith?. A good way to connect more regularly with God is to do the right things. Your spirit is more receptive to hearing the voice of God during those times than when you are not doing the right things. From there, cling to your faith and move forward.

**GFSF:** What were some of your challenges during the first 100 days of your last release back to society?

**Ricky:** Money was a challenge. However, when you think right about money and your long-term goals, you make better decisions between what you need and what you want. This is also the time to follow through with new ways of thinking related to how you will make more honest money in the future, whether it is planning to learn a new skill or trade and those kinds of things.

In prison is the best time to lay a new and strong foundation. When I was incarcerated, I used to think early on, and I would hear many men say, 'when I get out, I'm going to do this and that' when in truth, many of those things could have and should have been figured out while in prison. The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.

**GFSF:** What a perfect quote to end on, Ricky. Thank you very much for taking the time to share your story of hope and transformation, and congratulations on your long-term freedom and sobriety.

**Ricky:** Thank you.