



Do Not Be Afraid

The spectre of fear falls like a never-ending shadow on those who live inside prison walls. From the day men enter, they steel themselves to show no sign of fear, never be submissive, and be wary of others. It creates a constant toxic tension because prison *is* a frightening place. It is a place filled with men who are angry, frustrated, and have long histories of poor choices. The greatest fears however, are the ones lurking in their hearts.

Dennis and I were standing in the gym away from the other men when he uttered the words “*Doug, I’m afraid,*” in a hushed tone. Prison is not a place where men confide their fears to others. It is a place where Men in White erect walls around their innermost fears to guard them from the world.

Dennis was about to tear down some walls. “*Doug, I am getting out in eleven months. I don’t know if I can make it. I have been in prison since 1994 and the world has changed. I’m not sure I am ready.*”

The world has changed a lot since Dennis entered prison, but Dennis has changed, too. He is no longer the white supremacist gang member who entered prison. Dennis spent thirteen years in solitary confinement because he was deemed, “too dangerous,” to be with the general prison population. Now, he is one of the most well-liked men in our Christian community.

That Dennis could openly share his fears reflects a vulnerability that is rarely seen in a prison unit. Dennis is now a man of God, but the Christian journey is filled with trials and tests.

When angels appear they often begin with the fiat, “Do not be afraid.” This unusual greeting is to prepare the recipient for change. Fear of change is older than the scriptures. We need the assurance of angels. The promise of change often comes with the promise of tribulation before the ultimate victory.

Re-entry into the free world is difficult. It is no surprise that those most likely to succeed are the ones who participate in faith-based programs.

Do not be afraid.