

I'll Promise Not To Give Up, If You Do Too

I receive letters from all over the country, from people willing to share so much about their lives with me. Their joys and aspirations, their fears, drawings and poetry, or simply what's going on with them and their friends. I am grateful for every letter that makes its way to me. Even the ones that are overflowing with sadness. I save every letter and will take them all home with me when I leave this place.

Lately I've been thinking about folks who wrote a particularly hopeless letter and then I didn't hear back from them anymore. I don't know what it's like to live out there while the pandemic is going on. I've been locked up since before it started. But through the letters I receive, it has been made clear that a sense of sorrow, hurt and even helplessness has touched the lives of many of you.

My heart goes out to all of you. I too know what it's like to be taken over by such feelings. Here in prison, I had to sit by while my fiance lost her father and her aunt. I had to sit across from a guy who transferred from another prison, and before he made any friends here, he got word that his son had died. I've seen men's relationships crumble under the strains of forced separation during their prison term.

Sorrow, hurt and hopelessness are real. Stuck in a prison where these emotions arise, it can feel like there is nothing to do but wait, and that's a very vulnerable place to be. It can feel like you've been lost or forgotten in the shuffle of life. But there are ways to respond that can be helpful. Together we can find these ways of responding and share them. But before we do, I'd like to say something.

I'm not sure what happened to the people who stopped writing, but I'd like to make a promise to them and to the people who still write, and to you who is reading this right now. I promise not to give up, if you do too!

SIX THINGS THAT CAN BE HELPFUL DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

- **REMEMBER YOU ARE TWO PEOPLE.** You are who you are today and who you could be tomorrow and next week and next year (and so on). This simple, but profound fact shows the tremendous potential we all possess. What you do today will help create your future self. It's helpful to know we have some control today over who we can become tomorrow.
- **EMBRACE YOUR COMMUNITY.** Whatever you do, don't isolate yourself. Reach out to family, friends, your network or online forums, and solicit their thoughts on what you're going through. It's a great way to find hope and hear new ideas that can help you. It's helpful to know we are not alone and that others have made it through similar

experiences.

- **ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY.** Avoid entitlement, the belief that we shouldn't have to deal with a situation. This will only lead to inaction, or worse, bitterness. Do not run from your problem. It will grow into a monster that follows you everywhere. Whether you created the situation or not, it's up to you to choose how you respond to it. It's helpful to turn and face your struggles willingly, in a responsible manner.
- **GET PHYSICAL.** Take a walk around your neighborhood, create a morning workout routine, go for a hike or try yoga. Get your body moving and your blood flowing. Even if it's only a few minutes at first, just get started and you can add to it as you progress. It's helpful to create a sense of motion to propel you forward into a new horizon.
- **MEDITATE.** Learn from a friend, a video or an app. Instead of dwelling on a past situation, meditation will help bring your attention into the present moment. It can help fortify the mind and also become a spiritual practice if you wish. It's helpful to invest in your mental and spiritual health to create more resilience in your life.
- **YOUR HEART IS A MUSCLE THE SIZE OF YOUR FIST,** so keep on loving and keep on fighting. A friend wrote this in a song that has inspired many people. Us humans are capable of surviving the most difficult trials that life can throw at us. History is full of amazing feats of perseverance. We can continue to love and fight, no matter what we are facing. It's helpful to remember: I will not give up, if you don't too!