

Every once in a while, one of the folks I have worked alongside and learned so much from over many years pulls a tried-and-true saying out of his hat that makes me laugh every time he says it, even though I've heard it lots of times now. And, like all great humor, it's rooted in a certain measure of truth—and in many cases, even a *full* measure of truth! And it can apply in a wide range of situations.

So, what I'm going to do here to start this out is set a possible context, yeah, a context that every decision maker could and does easily face, sooner or later. So, let's say you are confronted with a key circumstance, perhaps it's a threat, perhaps an opportunity. Likely it's a combination of both threat and opportunity!

Maybe it's an expansion of your business. Perhaps it's a new marketing strategy. Might be a proposed strategic alliance for your nonprofit. But it could be an entirely different trajectory: is it a move to another city, or even another country? Maybe you're considering buying a 100-year-old house to "fix up" and flip... or maybe even live in as your dream home! But no matter the enticing allure of the project or the seeming wonderfulness of the opportunity...when weighing the possibilities, suddenly the possible long-term downsides become a bit more clear. That's when that clever saying bubbles up...

"You don't wanna break into that jail!" That's right... "You don't wanna break into that jail!" Funny, huh? 'Course, completely opposite to that, some of the best movies ever are about *breaking out of forced captivities*, from prisoners of wars to long prison sentences for crimes committed. How about *The Great Escape*, an epic film starring Steve McQueen and a fabulous cast about prisoners of war teaming up to break out of a German prison camp in World War 2? Then years later... Steve McQueen starring again... this time with Dustin Hoffman, in the exquisite movie *Papillon*, a story about a harsh labor camp in the jungle.

And then there's Clint Eastwood stepping out of westerns and cop movies into his *Escape from Alcatraz*, you know, the story of a prisoner trying to get off the famously-inescapable prison island in San Francisco Bay. But maybe you were thinking of the animated movie *Toy Story 3*, where Woody and Buzz and the crew were trying to escape a horrible daycare situation!

But look, real-life incarceration is no laughing matter. And some people do stupid things that risk prison-time...often addictive things like doing fentanyl or driving drunk multiple times. That's when the saying is very real: "you don't wanna break into that jail." Yes, the jail of addiction can easily lead to a physical jail.

However, some have taken the clear risk of "breaking into jail"...or even worse—but that largely on behalf of others. Jimmy Lai, one of the wealthiest people in Hong Kong, is a serial entrepreneur with enterprises ranging from the publicly-traded Next Digital...to the Asia-Pacific clothier Giordano operating in 30 territories with thousands of employees...to the popular newspaper *Apple Daily* that has often critiqued the ruling Chinese officials. Jimmy escaped as a stowaway from Communist China at age 12 and is now well into his 70s, now currently languishing in solitary confinement in a maximum-security prison for his political stances. The striking thing is, Jimmy Lai had plenty of time to leave Hong Kong and avoid prison. He chose to stay in the name of human freedom. Yeah, Jimmy Lai actually broke into jail—possibly worse!

How about Martin Luther King, Jr., a gifted orator and Black pastor who bound his fate with many experiencing racially-based injustices. King joined an event in 1963 with folks in Birmingham, Alabama... not even his hometown. King responded to a request to come by the locals, intrinsically pitting himself nonviolently against Bull Connor, the segregationist Democrat Commissioner of Public Safety, whose approach was to use fire hoses and police attack dogs against protestors. King landed in Birmingham Jail, and it's there he wrote his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Yes, King understood the possible consequences, and he chose a path that fully anticipated "breaking into jail." Wow. And the price he *ultimately* paid for such activities was his very life.

How about Paul and Silas, proclaiming the Gospel in Phillippi? In due course, Paul cast a demon out of a slave girl, and her angry owners precipitated the beatings and then the imprisonment of Paul and Silas. Acts 16:25-26 (ESV) tells us, "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations

of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened." Yes, a miracle. *But Paul and Silas didn't leave the jail!* When the jailer awakened, he supposed the prisoners had escaped and tried to kill himself. But Paul and Silas had stayed in the jail! The astonished, grateful jailer asked what he must do to be saved, and Paul told him "to believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved." Yes, Paul and Silas actually stayed in jail on behalf of the jailer!

But you know that Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of blamelessly enduring undeserved consequences on behalf of others, going to the Cross for every person in the whole world—and isn't that everlastingly stunning? Perhaps remembering physical prison himself, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers about the *spiritual* prison that Jesus released His followers from: "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives...'" (Ephesians 4:7-8) Yeah, we were captives to sin before Christ set us free, now we are slaves to righteousness! (Romans 6:18) And, yes, Jesus did selflessly lead the way, knowing the consequences awaiting. Jimmy Lai, M.L. King, Paul, and Silas "breaking into jail" merely modeled Christ's example.

Others are incarcerated in a different sense due to no personal fault of their own—for example, for political reasons, with virtually no freedom, in a country like North Korea. And then there's the Joseph of the Old Testament, confined in Egypt due to the false testimony of Potiphar's wife because Joseph rejected her sexual advances. Then there's Esther along with her fellow Jews as a captive people in a precarious position in a foreign land—and haplessly there due to the folly of their ancestors in not following God. Yeah, in a sinful world, it's not very difficult to land in a bad spot circumstantially.

But, of course, the intended context of that phrase—"breaking into jail"—is simply just a metaphor the vast majority of the time...but still possibly a quite serious one! It's the making of a choice...or executing a decision...or taking a path that leads to undesirable consequences that a person or a family or a business or a church endures for a very long time. And, yes, in certain cases, there could be physical jail time!

In a sense, this issue of "breaking into jail" is almost unavoidable—that's because many current decisions have longer term consequences that are difficult, if not impossible, to factor in at the time of the decision. And frankly, sometimes personal ambition can get in the way of common-sense decision-making and easily lead us into costly consequences. When we do that badly on a company-wide scale, the price paid can be lots of unemployment or even the whole company failing. To try to avoid that, our humble task is to use hard-earned knowledge, seek wise counsel from others, and access the leading of the Spirit.

And, as for the opposite direction that may be taken, an all-too-human desire to avoid looming, difficult responsibilities that are coupled with the right decision! But here's the deal. Part of life is making choices—smallish or larger—yes, choices that cost us far more time and resources than we hoped they would. This *will* happen for anyone living a robust life—the trick is to not make that a lifestyle of bearing little fruit!

Recall the prison movies? Well, there's one more prison movie to mention, *The Shawshank Redemption*—an ingenious film where an innocent man desperately wants to break out of prison and does so, but sadly, another cannot abide his freedom and commits suicide after being released. And, for much of the movie, a key figure played by actor Morgan Freeman has lost hope, even though his release was in his future. Yes, some settle into a jail mentality that robs them of hope, even when freedom is here or on the horizon!

Here's a sad reality: many churchgoers have broken into a jail of their own making! These religious folks are choosing to live their lives trying...and failing...to fulfill the Law of Moses, often while self-righteously condemning others! That's unwise—because Christ has given us grace instead of law and loving instead of condemning. Still, every day, these religious folks elect to stay in the prison of the Law of Moses. Worse, they often are doggedly passing on that lifestyle to their children and grandchildren—and to future generations attending churches! Yes, *having broken into a God-unprescribed jail*, they wrongly position it as actually following Christ—then work to ensure everyone else in their orbit breaks into that jail, too! Hey, you don't wanna break into that jail! And it's never too late to break *out* of that jail, either! *Jailbreak!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Has your workplace enterprise “broken into jail” regarding something vital to its long-term success—perhaps its strategy, its marketing, or its strategic alliances? Discuss.
2. How about perhaps someone close to you...are they living a God-unprescribed life under the law of Moses? Is that person perhaps even you, defying Paul’s instructions to the Romans (6:14) and trying to live under the Law of Moses...yet still labeling it grace? Discuss.
3. How do your church and its leadership successfully teach and live the model of living under grace, not the law of Moses (Romans 6:14)? Give examples.