

Pretty Prisons

- David Novak had it made in the shade. As the owner and operator of a flight school in the Seattle area, his business contacts read like a who's who. He served as a consultant for Microsoft, working with their Entertainment Business Unit on various Flight Simulator products. He also served as a Contracts Manager for Boeing Defense & Space and as regional manager for a telecommunications company. But the high rolling lifestyle came to a crashing halt – quite literally – when David staged a small aircraft accident in an attempt to fraudulently obtain insurance money.
- David pleaded guilty and was sentenced to serve one year plus a day at Eglin Federal Prison Camp, a minimum security facility near Pensacola, Florida. That certainly didn't seem so bad. After all, Eglin is still to this day known among the corporate world as "Club Fed," with a notorious reputation for being soft on the white collar criminals who routinely request it as their prison of choice. Speaking of who's who, fashion designer Aldo Gucci did time at Eglin; so did Watergate conspirator Howard Hunt and former Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel.
- Mr. Novak finished paying his debt to the US Federal Government two years ago, and since his release has authored a book based on the journals he kept during his prison experience: "DownTime – A Guide to Federal Incarceration." He's also turned his prison sentence into a second career as a \$125-an-hour consultant to first-time corporate felons, preparing them for what to expect on the inside of the prison system. He now lives in Portland, Oregon and has clients in 65 different federal institutions in the United States. Here's what David Novak says about "Club Fed" ...
- When you arrive at Eglin, your first view is a beautiful wide-open space devoted to recreation – basketball, soccer and softball fields. It almost seems like being at a country club. There are old oak trees with Spanish moss. Aesthetically, it's gorgeous. There are no fences, barbed wire, or guard towers. And ... it's FLORIDA!
- You work a 40-hour week at Eglin, but other than that you're free to do anything else within reason. In fact, that's one of the biggest challenges for most white-collar types – suddenly having more time than they know what to do with. There's free access to newspapers and TV. Lots of inmates work out diligently, and actually leave prison looking better than when they went in. It's not uncommon to come out of Eglin twenty or thirty pounds lighter and with a nice tan. Then, of course, people say, 'I want to go to Club Fed.'
- But with all the perks, there is one constant reminder that Eglin is not just another southern resort. It's a yellow line painted around the border of the compound, which every inmate has to stay behind. Of course, if you wanted, you could simply leave; they call it a "walk away." But the consequences are swift and severe. You WILL get caught and then you WILL have to serve an additional 18 months or more in a higher-security facility. That's a pretty strong deterrent.
- **It may be pretty, but it's still a prison!** In fact, one of the things David Novak suggests to help clients psychologically prepare for prison is to tape off a six-by-eight foot area in their living room and get used to spending time there. That's the size of each prisoner's cubicle in the dorms at Eglin.
- Several of these "**pretty prisons**" existed in ancient Israel, according to the book of Numbers. The Bible calls them "Cities of Refuge." There were six of them, three on each side of the Jordan River in the north, middle and south of the nation. In this way, no one would ever be so far away that they couldn't flee to one of these cities if they were accused of killing someone accidentally. The roads to the Cities of Refuge were kept in good repair and well marked, and some historians even indicate that two scholars of the law were dispatched to run along with the accused to defend him if the revenger of blood (the victim's next of kin) ever caught up with him.
- Once inside the borders of the city, the accused was SAFE! The revenger of blood could no longer harm him. He would be able to live, sleep, work, eat, shop, even play ... but he wasn't really free. The moment he stepped outside of the walls, he became the potential victim of violent attack. He never knew where it might come from, and worse, never knew when it might come. He could not leave the city walls for fear of his life. So, while the city might be beautiful, comfortable, and even spacious, it was still just a "pretty prison."
- **Numbers 35:26-28** But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood: Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: **but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession.**
- Life went on much the same year after year for the accused, until the death of Israel's High Priest. At that moment, he was free to leave the City of Refuge WITHOUT PENALTY – and the WHOLE LAND became a City of Refuge to him. He was finally, actually, totally free!

- FREE ... to go back to his family ... to go back to his home ... to go back to his friends ... to go back to his property ... to go back to his possessions ... to go back to his LIFE!
- You see, in only one little area had he been “free” until now. His movement had been so limited, but it had been so long that he didn’t realize just how restricted he had been. He had gotten used to bondage and called it his “refuge.” But there was a whole world out there, just waiting for him at the death of the High Priest.
- **Strange, isn’t it, how accustomed people can get to their prisons?** Even David Novak says that there are times when he misses the freedom from all responsibility, the recreational facilities and the huge blocks of time to read that he had in Eglin prison. But ask him today, now that he has had a taste of real freedom, if he would be willing to go back. The answer? Absolutely not!
- **Isaiah 28:15** Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: **for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:**
- Many people spend their lives hiding behind the lie that they are free, when actually they are in bondage to sin!
- In North Africa, trappers have a clever method of capturing monkeys. A gourd is filled with nuts and firmly fastened to a branch of a tree. It has a hole just large enough for the unwary monkey to stick his paw into it. When the hungry animal discovers the scent of food, he will quickly put his hand in the gourd and grasp a handful of nuts, but the hole is too small for him to withdraw his clenched fist. The monkey doesn’t have enough sense to open up his hand and let go in order to escape, so he is easily taken captive. **He doesn’t realize that his “liberty” to make a choice has actually stolen his freedom!**
- **Hebrews 11:24-26** By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.
- It is indisputable that there are pleasures, perks and privileges in the pretty prisons of sin. But they are **TEMPORARY** ... and they are **INCOMPLETE**. Only in Jesus do we find the fullness of life.
- That’s why Jesus came – to set us free!
- **Isaiah 42:7** To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.
- The first thing we have to do is admit that we are in prison! We’re in bondage to sin, to lust, to bitterness, to hurts and offenses, to depression, to circumstances, to the opinions of others, to the past, even to our own patterns of thinking! No wonder the Psalmist cried:
- **Psalms 142:7** Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me.
- There is only one event that can take us from our confined little “refuge” into “the land of our possession.” It’s the death of the High Priest. The good news is that Jesus Christ fills that role!
- The High Priest entered the Most Holy Place
Hebrews 9:24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:
- The High Priest made atonement for sin.
Hebrews 9:11-12 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.
- The High Priest interceded for the people.
Hebrews 7:24-25 But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.
- The High Priest’s work was never done, but Jesus finished it!
Hebrews 10:11-12 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;
- **Hebrews 9:15-16** And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

Psalm 9:9 The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 91:1-2 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

Deuteronomy 33:27 The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.