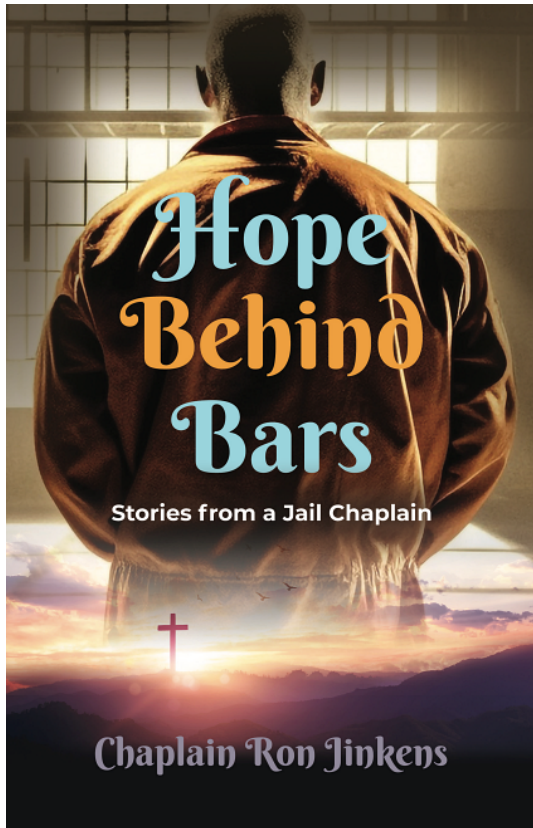




A head chaplain recounts his experiences with inmates in a large county jail over 20 years. His stories range from poignant to comical and reveal many insights into the jail environment.

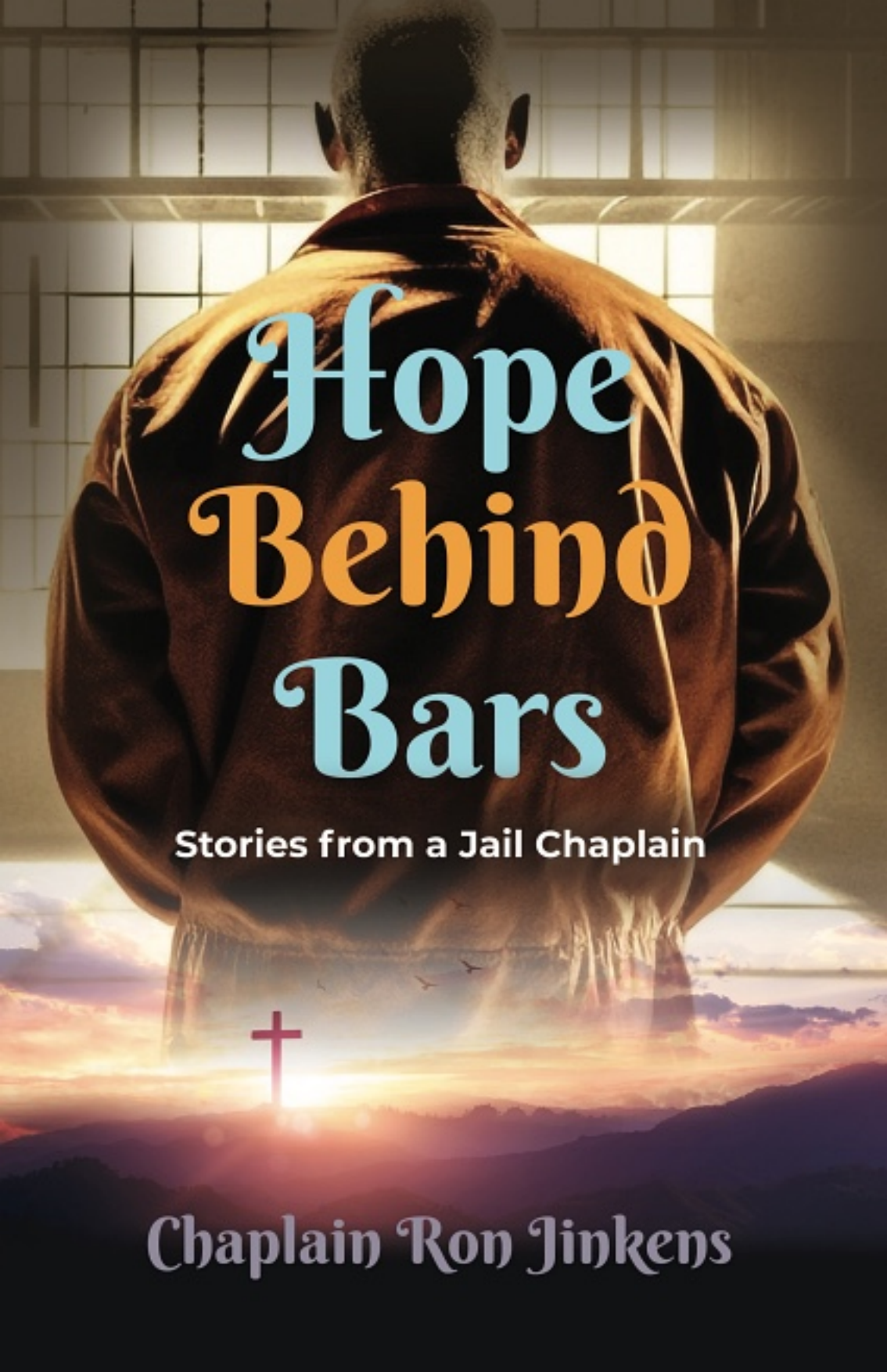
Hope Behind Bars: Stories from a Jail Chaplain

By Chaplain Ron Jinkens

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The background of the cover features a man with grey hair, seen from behind, wearing a brown jacket. He is looking out of a window with white bars. The light from the window is bright and warm. Below the window, the scene transitions into a sunset or sunrise over a mountain range. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and purple. A small, simple wooden cross is visible on a hill in the foreground, silhouetted against the bright light of the sun. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

Hope Behind Bars

Stories from a Jail Chaplain

Chaplain Ron Jinkens

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82—What Does It Matter?

Chapels in our jail ran on a strict routine. I arrived at jail about an hour before chapel to check through all of the protocols. Once cleared, I had to set up the chapel, overheads, screens, music, and chairs. Sweeping the floors might be necessary. Then I needed to get prayed up for the arrival of the inmates. Transport officers started delivering inmates from different parts of the jail, locking them in with me—and maybe other volunteers—as they left to go pick up more.

As the inmates arrived, we got the chance to shake the hand of each one. This kind of human contact was forbidden in the modules. It was during these moments before all arrived that I had the chance to chat with those I didn't know. When we got a new face, I tried to establish a relationship that I could continue later in his module.

Men sometimes attended for the wrong reasons. Maybe it was to meet up with a buddy. Maybe the man was just bored.

One inmate came in early, giving me a chance to chat with him. He didn't talk much. He was a man of few words. His outward appearance and demeanor told me he was street-wise, hard, and mean. He crossed his legs and arms, looking around him, casing the place. My chatting with him was of not much effect.

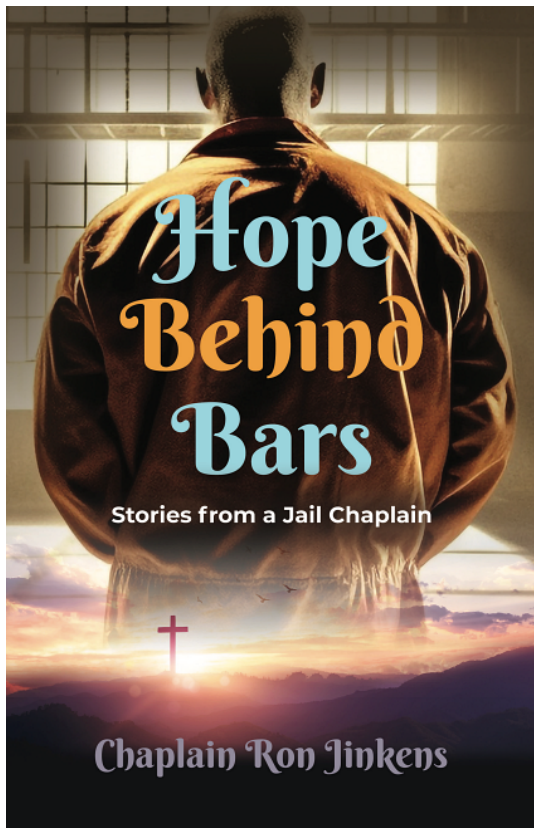
He looked me in the eye, unfolded his tattooed arms, pointed with one finger at his wrist on his other arm where he used to wear a wristwatch, which was now in the property room. "How long this thing gonna take?" he growled, making sure I knew he didn't care to be there after all. His voice was tainted with a bit of disgust and anger.

That's why we got prayed up; it was for guys like him. That's when the Holy Spirit spoke for us. I replied, "If it's good, what does it matter?" I remember thinking to myself, where did that line come from?

He was at a loss for words.

The rest of the men filed in, and we started the chapel with praise songs, a short testimony, and then the sermon. All of this sounds quite dry, but when the Spirit of God is in it, it is transformed into something that changes men's lives. It was amazing to see hardened men softened up by God's Word, whether they were there for the right reasons or the wrong ones. Strong men got humbled, confessing their sins, and they got right with God.

Oh, by the way, the wise guy who wanted to know when he could get out of there? He got saved that day.



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