

# Lamentations of an Incarcerated Father

By J.S. Russell

It's frustrating because I care. I've been writing letters to my daughter before she could read or talk. Anything that I could possibly do to make sure that she knows that she is loved and assist in her growth and development. It's tough because the things that are important to me seem to only be important to me. Things that I want read or shown to my daughter don't get done. I can't count on her mother to do anything concerning me so I have to count on my mother. I didn't have my father so I want to be as present in her life as much as possible to have a positive impact and educate her.

I was an honor roll student so I hate that my daughter is behind in school when I know that this wouldn't be the case if I was there to give her the proper attention. I've assisted grown men with their education as a student aide, but I can't help my daughter with her homework because I'm in here. I remember what it was like as a child not having a parent around. I remember feeling like I wasn't receiving the help, attention or guidance that could help me in certain areas. I don't want that for my daughter, but it seems like it doesn't matter what I want because it's very little that I can do about it.

I may have an hour in a visit or thirty minutes on a phone call, but neither are enough and I have no control over that. I get to hear occasionally about what happens in school, but I haven't been able to see any report cards. I'm mostly in the dark until I have my moments with my daughter so I do my best to make them count.

I've given my daughter affirmations that she tells me when I ask, what are you? She reads well and I'd like to think that is due to me reading to her through The Storybook Project. That's a program that this facility provided where she'd receive a DVD of me reading to her a book I selected. I always emphasize how important reading is. She's behind in her math so I'm constantly working with her on her multiplication. I pass on various things that I feel that she should know in life like observing people to see who they are through their actions. I tell her don't worry about what her peers say or think about her because they most likely won't be in her life long. I've told her how being respectful and having manners go a long way. I also tell her to ask her parents and grandparents about the things she's concerned about because we all have been her age before.

My daughter is loved and very fortunate to have loving parents, grandparents, and family. Still, my absence, the prison visits, and phone calls aren't sufficient. I don't have an illusion like they don't have an effect on her. They definitely have an effect on me.



The first three years of my incarceration I couldn't see my daughter because I was fighting my case and the policy at the county jail where I was held wouldn't allow children to visit unless you were sentenced. My daughter hadn't yet turned two when I was incarcerated, so she has no memories of me with her prior to this. All the pictures and videos that I had of her were lost due to some of the things a man goes through when he gets locked up.

I've gone through a lot of hurt and disappointment just from the stuff I wanted to share with my daughter. There have been things that I wanted to leave her or get to her for specific reason and it never happened. I have to constantly remind myself and accept that this is my doing. I'm thankful that the communication with her mother has gotten better over the years. If it wasn't for my mother, I probably wouldn't receive anything for Father's day or birthdays. Even self-addressed stamped envelopes don't get used to write me back. I've learned to check my expectations. It is what it is until it ain't.

I'm very thankful for the relationship that I have with my daughter. She knows I love her and she most certainly loves me. My experience of parenting from prison has been challenging, but I exceeded my goal of being a better father than mine was. Now I'm doing my best to make sure this little girl grows into a responsible, productive member of society.