

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

## Worksheet for Matthew Schrier | How to Survive in a Secret Syrian Terrorist Prison (Episode 217)

Freelance photography can be just the ticket to a glamorous, globetrotting lifestyle ideal for any thrill seeker eager to test the boundaries of adventure — and a great way to get locked up and tortured by Al-Qaeda in a secret Syrian terrorist prison for seven months before escaping. You can ask [\*The Dawn Prayer: A Memoir\*](#) author Matthew Schrier, because he's got this exact experience practically stamped on his passport.

[In this episode](#) we talk to Matthew about how he was captured by Al-Qaeda on his way out of Syria, why he was detained and tortured for seven months, what the FBI did (and didn't do) during his captivity, and how even life in a terrorist prison can still be made worse by sharing a cell with a crazy roommate.

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## The Benefits of Blind Optimism

Homeward bound after his second trip documenting the conflict in Syria, Matthew had every reason to believe his adventures had paid off. But less than an hour from the Turkish border on New Year's Eve 2012, his car was stopped and he was taken prisoner by Al-Qaeda on suspicion of being a CIA operative.

"I was pretty calm, believe it or not," says Matthew. "I realized that speaking or begging or doing anything like that at that point was just a waste of time and energy, so I just kept my hands up — because I had a gun to my head — had my head down, and I just focused. I had a lot of high-ranking connections in the Free Syrian Army — generals and whatnot — and in a lot of past conflicts in the Arab world, when somebody has been taken prisoner and they give their references and they check on these references, typically they hand them back out of respect. So I was optimistic."

**In stressful situations, do you generally hold on to the optimistic idea that things will eventually work out, or do you simmer in the cold sweat of anxiety, certain of impending doom? In a situation you can't really control, which is the attitude most likely to ensure your arrival on the other side?**

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## Good Humor In Bad Times

When it became clear on day one that Matthew was being held captive by the inflexible, pious Al-Qaeda and not any of the factions with which he had connections, Matthew's instincts kicked in to help him avoid torture and possibly death. Humor was the key.

"All right. I've got to make these guys laugh, because nobody tortures the guy who makes them laugh." said Matthew. "Nobody dislikes someone who makes them laugh!" So when he asked the imposing figure in charge if they were going to kill him and they said, 'No,' Matthew shouted 'Happy New Year!' The room erupted in laughter, and Matthew was soon enjoying the favor of Mohammad, the guy in charge of the prison.

**Have you ever relied on humor to get you out of a jam or defuse a bad situation? The next time you're compelled to lash out at someone with whom you're angry, see what happens when you approach it with humor instead.**

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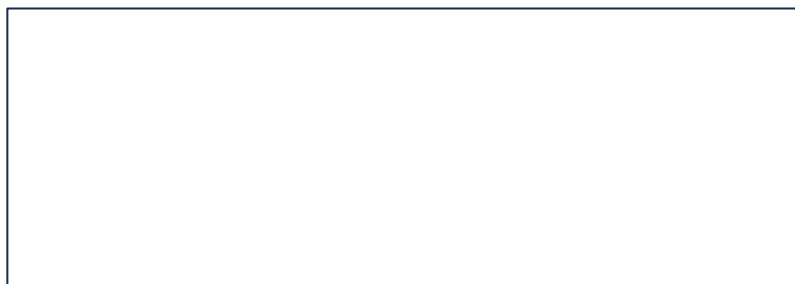
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## The Enemy of My Enemy

When time alone and in darkness started getting to Matthew and he began making more noise than his captors could tolerate, he was moved into a cell with 13 captured Assad regime soldiers. Initially keeping their distance because Mohammad had warned them not to mess with the American, they actually became the reason Matthew later told me he had no regrets about his entire ordeal.

“These guys literally turned out to be the best friends I ever had in my life. They didn’t hold anything against me — not for being an American, not for shooting with the FSA, who were their sworn enemies. They were just like, ‘We’re all in the same boat here. We eat together, we live together,’ and it was a privilege to know these guys.”

**Have you ever made unlikely friends as the result of unpredictable circumstances? Do these friendships dissolve once these circumstances have passed, or are the bonds somehow stronger than the cause that brought you together in the first place?**



*Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here.](#)*

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## About



Join us as we get deep into the untapped wisdom of the world's top performers – from legendary creators to intelligence operatives, iconoclastic writers to visionary change-makers.

We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth – and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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