

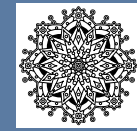
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# Living for Something Greater

by Grayson Pope

**W**hen LaDavid Taylor was young, he never felt at home. He was brought up in Dallas by his mother and his stepfather, who was his only father figure from the time he was a toddler. “The way that he showed love—he always provided, but he didn’t talk much. ... He was a wise man, but we didn’t talk much,” recalls LaDavid. His mother was young, and she and LaDavid had their issues, too. LaDavid struggled with feeling abandoned and misunderstood, so he tried figuring out life on his own. That didn’t go so well.

### Ups and downs

“I needed molding, I needed mentoring,” he says. As an adolescent, things spiraled downward. “I got into the streets and a lot of foolishness.” LaDavid believed in God, but he would often get upset with Him and

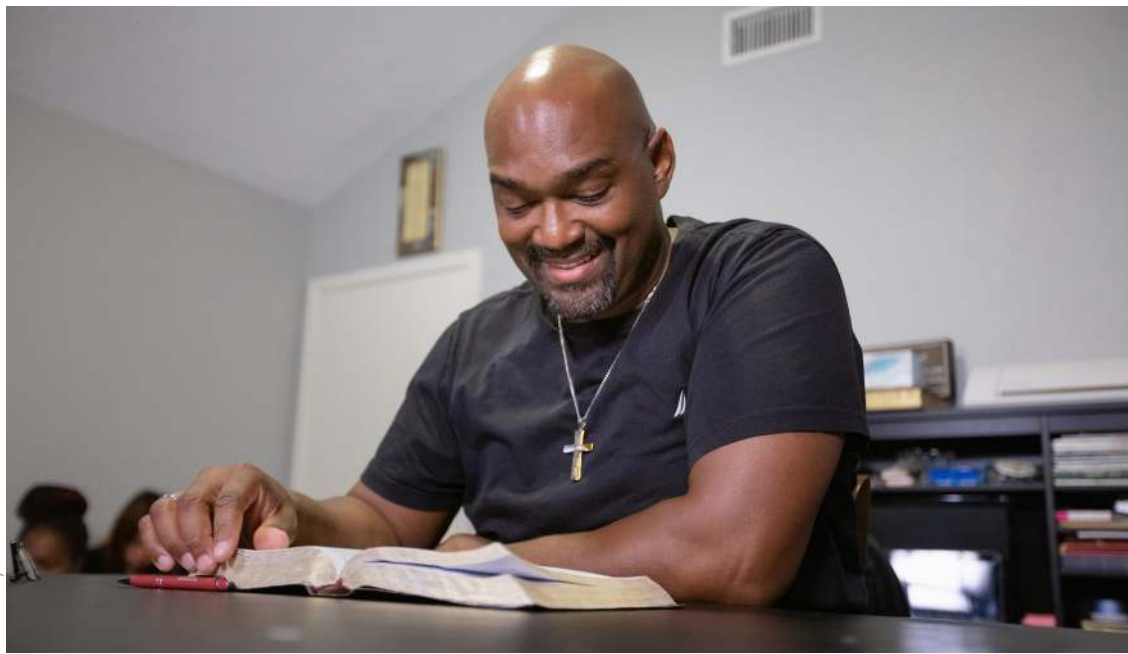


Photo by Chad Prince

Hoping to get his troubled life in order, LaDavid joined the military. But an injury sent him into a spiral of depression and binge-drinking. It took a trip to prison to finally heal him from the inside out.

turn away from Him.

LaDavid knew he needed to get his life together, so he joined the U.S. Marines. He really enjoyed Marine life—until he hurt his knee, essentially ending his Marine career.

That sent him into a depression, which he numbed

with alcohol. One day he woke up in a Veteran’s Affairs (VA) hospital. His friend had brought him there after finding him unconscious at home. The doctor told him his liver was damaged. “[He said], ‘All it’s going to take is for you to drink you a couple more beers, and you’ll die,’”

LaDavid remembers. “That was it for me.”

Determined to get his life on track again, he stopped drinking. The friend who took him to the VA hospital was his only friend at the time. Unfortunately, they were on different paths. The friend started drinking and

became aggressive, even taking the keys to LaDavid’s car. The two men got into an altercation when LaDavid tried to get the keys back. The friend had a gun. After a struggle, LaDavid shot him twice and was sentenced to 25 years in prison. He was 24 years old.

### Facing reality

LaDavid knew this was serious, so he told God he didn’t want to turn away from Him anymore. “[Then God] told me to prove to Him that I love Him,” says LaDavid. “And that meant just basically, ‘Seek My face in the middle of your darkness.’ And I grew from that.”

Prison might be a dark place, but LaDavid stayed focused on trying to seek God and to grow in his faith during his sentence. Hoping to improve himself and prepare for life after release, LaDavid applied to participate in the Prison Fellowship Academy®, an

*Continued on page 2*

# Art in the Dark: Choosing Faith Over Fear

by S.L. Segel

**I**n this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, life has felt a little more out of control than normal. No one knew whom the virus would affect, when the crisis would end, or whether the steps we took to limit the spread would keep us safe. Of course, when you’re incarcerated, not having control is a normal part of life. Men behind bars are pretty good at being adaptable and rolling with the changes. Even before this pandemic, many prisoners have shown they can handle being isolated and being present in the moment.

But that same uncertainty of daily prison life that

can lead to a strength of character can also lead to anxiety. So how do we stop worrying about tomorrow and instead live for today? How can we stay calm during the unpredictable? How can we overcome loneliness? One way is to tap into your creative side and face your anxieties head-on through art therapy. Here is a simple artistic exercise called “Art in the Dark,” which might just help you see your circumstances in a new light.

### What you will need:

- A pen, pencil, or colored pencil
- A piece of paper
- A Bible or this Inside Journal article
- 10 uninterrupted minutes to sit down and focus

### Step 1. Prepare your heart and mind by reading Psalm 139:11-14 (NLT):

“I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night—but even in darkness I cannot hide from You. To You the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to You.

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb.

Thank You for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.”

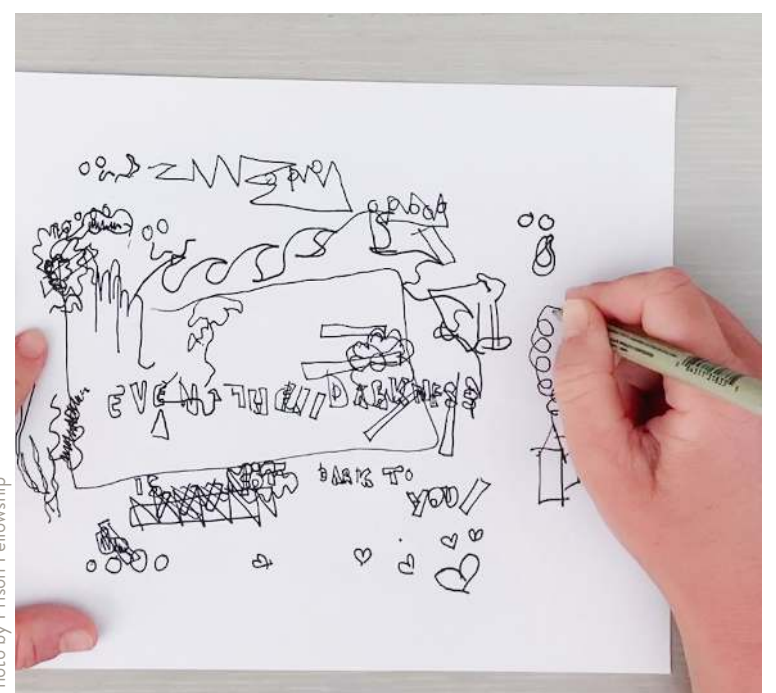


Photo by Prison Fellowship

Artist S.L. Segel draws shapes and swirls with closed eyes while reflecting on Psalm 139.

*Continued on page 2*

# Letter from James J. Ackerman

To say this year has been a challenge is quite the understatement. Kobe Bryant's death, the COVID-19 pandemic (and economic fallout), the prison lockdowns, the worldwide protests (and riots)—and that was just in the first half of 2020!

After the tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Prison Fellowship issued a statement back in June:

"Prisons are already on tight restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic—creating an environment where our incarcerated men and women are unable to meet their loved ones and family members. In addition, maintaining social distancing is difficult at best and completely impossible in many facilities. Now, with the

lockdown order, prisons face another challenge. Prison Fellowship honors the life of George Floyd. We also recognize people of color are disproportionately arrested, prosecuted, and represented in our prisons and jails across the country.

That's why Prison Fellowship continues its work to end disparities in the criminal justice system and the many collateral consequences men and women face after paying their debt to society. We believe each person is made in the image of God and should be treated with the utmost respect and dignity.

Prison Fellowship's work in criminal justice reform began when our founder, Charles Colson, visited a prison not long after a serious

riot took place over prison conditions. He realized that personal transformation and growth are impacted when people are held and housed under conditions that are not humane or safe. Since our founding more than 40 years ago, we continue to oppose and advocate against abuse in all forms.

We applaud those citizens all over the country who have expressed their views in a peaceful manner, and we call on all our fellow citizens to protest peaceably—avoiding conflict and criminality. We ask for a return to calm, which will allow for some freedom of movement in our communities in and out of prison."

This year has seen so much devastation and sadness and has tested the limits of prisoners and their families. But we are in this together.

As 1 Corinthians 12:26 says, "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it." But that verse continues, "and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad."

We can come together as a community and pray for and help one another. And Philippians 4:13 gives us the most important reminder of all: We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

*James J. Ackerman is president and CEO of Prison Fellowship. ■*



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## Subscription Info

At Inside Journal® (IJ), we receive many letters each week from prisoners asking for subscriptions to our newspaper. However, because of staff and budget limitations, IJ is only available in bulk shipments to your chaplain, programming coordinator, or a volunteer who visits your facility. Chaplains, to set up these shipments for free, please contact our editorial staff at P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790 or [insidejournal@pfm.org](mailto:insidejournal@pfm.org).

## Something Greater Continued from page 1

intensive, holistic, biblically based program that helps incarcerated men and women transform their thinking. He was accepted into the Academy at the Carol S. Vance Unit in Texas.

"[The Academy volunteers] look past the front that you're putting up—this mask," said LaDavid.

The program helped him to ask the deeper questions and get to the underlying issues that lead to unhealthy behaviors. He adds that the volunteers also "address the boundaries, things we need to face, things we need to think about before we come home after all this time. How to think about family, how to deal with family, and how your current situation tells how you're going to react to the situations you're going

to face on the outside." He credits the Academy with helping him grow in his faith and his character.

### Peace that passes understanding

One of LaDavid's favorite Academy classes was Alpha, a course that creates a space where people have conversations about faith, life, and God.

"Alpha took me from head knowledge of my faith with Christ to an intimate knowledge, just through asking questions and being able to evaluate my personal views about my own faith," he says.

While LaDavid was growing as a person, he was also growing as a dad. He signed his children up for Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree® program, where incarcerated parents give their kids a Christmas gift with a personal



Photo by Chad Prince

## Art in the Dark Continued from page 1



Photo via iStock by arinahabich

### Step 2. Reflect on that verse and think about these questions:

- What does darkness mean to you?
- What do you do when you feel overwhelmed?
- How does it make you feel to hear that God is alongside you in the darkness?

### Step 3. Begin the art project:

Place your paper in front of you. You'll be closing your eyes in a moment, and it will be difficult to know where the borders of the paper are in the dark, so place objects on each side of the paper to mark the edges. Now close your eyes. Let your mind wander, thinking about Psalm 139 and the three reflection questions.

Keeping your eyes closed, begin to draw. Make lines, draw shapes, write words—what you are drawing does not matter. All that matters is that you let your hand move however it feels like moving. The final result is not going to look pretty or perfect. This is about the process, not the artwork itself. As you explore what darkness means to you and reflect on the comforting words from the Psalm above, just let your pen or pencil move freely across the page.

It doesn't matter if your shapes cross or if you scribble or make a mess. Although it is tempting, try not to peek. Trust your hand and embrace the darkness. Do this "free drawing" for 10 minutes. Once your 10 minutes are up, open your eyes. When you examine what you've drawn, you can add to it or color it in.

This simple art exercise is a way to explore how to choose faith and beauty over fear and confusion—no matter what is happening around you. It's an exercise in trust. You can learn to be still and "see" God's light even in the darkness. Embrace time alone with your thoughts and seek beauty even in the messes. Find a new perspective on the situations that make you fearful.

When you're all finished, hang the picture in a place you will see it often, to remind you not to fear the darkness and to choose peace when life feels out of control.

*S.L. Segel is a professional artist and co-founder of Prison Fellowship's Create: New Beginnings®, an in-prison restorative art program in women's prisons across the country. ■*

message, delivered by volunteers. The year before his release, LaDavid asked his girlfriend—who stuck with him the entire time he was incarcerated—to marry him. She said yes.

LaDavid was released on August 8, 2018, at 44 years old. He and his family are doing well, though he's realistic that life after prison—just like life in prison or before prison—isn't going to be easy or stress-free.

"There's always problems," LaDavid says. "But God has given us a peace to walk through them that has been so smooth. I don't understand it. But I'm grateful."

The greatest lesson LaDavid learned from his time in the Academy is one he is still practicing today: "Living life for something greater than yourself." ■

# Drowning at Sea but Refusing a Life Raft

by Grayson Pope

There once was a man who lived in a two-story house near a river. A huge storm caused the river to flood, and people in town started to evacuate.

A neighbor in a van came by and shouted, “Your life is in danger! Get in!” But the man stood calmly on his porch and said, “No thanks. I have faith that I’ll be fine.” And the man went back inside. But the flood water started to seep into his home and began to rise.

A family in a boat came by and shouted, “Your life is in danger! Get in!” But the man said, “No thanks. I have faith that I’ll be fine.”

Then a police helicopter came by, and the pilot shouted down, “Your life is in danger! Grab this rope, and I will lift you to safety!” But the man, now stranded on his roof, replied, “No thanks. I have faith that I’ll be fine.”

Soon the water rose above the rooftop, and the man cried out, “Help!” to whomever would hear him. But no one was left in town, and the man drowned. When he met God, the man said, “I had faith that everything would be OK. Why did You let me drown instead of rescuing me?!”

God replied, “What do you mean? I sent you a van, a boat, and a helicopter!”

**Signs, signals, and life rafts**  
When facing a big decision

or big issue, sometimes we wait around for a clear sign to help us decide. The man stranded on the roof seemed like he was waiting for some unknown “sign.” He convinced himself that all he needed was to stay calm and have faith that he’d be fine. But faith in what?

We turn to many things to try to rescue us from life’s storms—money, drugs, popularity—but none of that will rescue us from pain, desperation, loneliness, and hopelessness ... at least not for long.

God is the only One Who can truly rescue us. He sent us His only Son Jesus, Who died on the cross and rose again, defeating death and bringing everlasting life to all who believe in Him. We were drowning in our sins, and He threw us a life raft of eternity in heaven. The ultimate rescue!

Even today, God sometimes sends us obvious signs: giant blinking life rafts to rescue us in the form of audible messages or “God-incidences.” But He usually helps us through ordinary means, like through other people or everyday circumstances. The man on his roof needed a rescue, but he was so unsure of what to look for that he missed all three ordinary ways God tried to help him.

**Are you really listening?**

In the Old Testament, God used obvious signs—like

showing Gideon a damp fleece (Judges 6:36–40)

—and subtle signs—like when Elijah couldn’t find God in the attention-grabbing events of an earthquake or fire but found God in a still, small voice like a gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:12).

Before we can listen, first we need to hear. Tune out the world’s busy distractions and spend quiet time with God in prayer.

Then, watch for the big and small things in your daily routine. Is there someone or something you’ve been ignoring? Something that keeps getting brought up? Are trustworthy people trying to warn you you’re in “danger”? Consider keeping a journal of the things you notice.

But be careful: Not all “signs” are God trying to get your attention or rescue you. Your own desires and imaginations can deceive you. To know if something is a sign from God, test it against the teachings in the Bible, and ask a trustworthy Christian mentor or your chaplain to help you think it through.

Let’s say you’re determined there’s no way you’re attending a prison program. Then, out of the blue, someone mentions how awesome that program is. Next, you walk down a different hall than usual, and you see a “random” flyer for that program. You ask yourself if joining the program would be in line with God’s heart, and you ask your Christian

## ARE YOU IGNORING THE SIGNS?

Have you ever tried to convince yourself that a problem will “all be fine” somehow, only to watch it grow bigger and bigger? Might you be waiting on your idea of a sign only to end up missing the sign all together?

God sometimes uses other people to get our attention or to help us. And He gives us the biggest life preserver in the form of Jesus. It might not be the rescue you were expecting. But if you trust in Him, it will be exactly the rescue you need.

Not sure where to begin? Start by saying this simple prayer:

*“God, I need Your help. I’ve put too much faith in myself. Show me how to tune out the world’s distractions and listen for Your signs and guidance. Please rescue me from my storms. Amen.”*

To discover how Jesus can rescue you, sign up for a free correspondence Bible study through one of our trusted partner organizations. Just write to “Life Raft,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. Need a Bible? See the offer on this page.

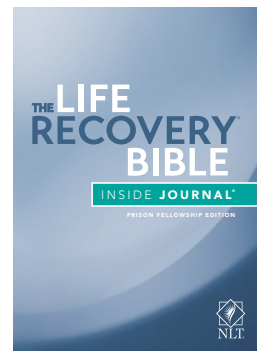
friend if you should join. If everything lines up, it might just be a sign!

God may rescue you with something you don’t think you like or haven’t done before, or it may even be out of your comfort zone.

But just remember that you can’t rescue yourself. And the longer you practice carving out time to read the Bible and pray, the better at understanding God’s signs and rescues you’ll get. ■

## Need a Bible?

To get a FREE *Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible*, write to: Tyndale House Publishers, Attn: Inside Journal Bible, 351 Executive Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188. Please include your name and prison ID number, your facility name, your facility address, and whether you want English or Spanish. Limit one Bible per person.



## From the Inside Out\*

Studies show that listening to music can lower stress, ward off depression, help process trauma and grief, and even lower blood pressure and heart rate. Several prisoners wrote to us with some of their favorite tunes to uplift, unwind, and inspire.

- **Miley Cyrus:** “The Climb”
- **Marvin Sapp:** “Never Would Have Made It”
- **Zach Williams:** “Chain Breaker”
- **Lauren Daigle:** “Still Rolling Stones”
- **FLAME, Feat. NF:** “Start Over”
- **Lecrae:** “I’ll Find You”
- **Hillsong:** “Who You Say I Am”
- **MercyMe:** “I Can Only Imagine”
- **India.Arie:** “I Am Light”
- **Matthew West:** “Mended”
- **Big Daddy Weave:** “Redeemed”

- **Hymns:** “The Old Rugged Cross” (George Bennard); “How Great Thou Art” (Carl Boberg)

Quotes about music from various prisoners who wrote in:

“Stay away from songs that bring out negative emotions and memories or glorify drug use.”

“Singing songs yourself has more power than just listening to the songs. Music and singing improves our memorization skills.”

“Vulgar, profane music that glorifies sex, drugs, alcohol, and violence usually keeps me stuck in my old ways of thinking.”

“Music has the power to change your mood to positive.”

“Many of us before coming to prison didn’t listen to Christian/Gospel music. We mainly listened to music that encouraged our unhealthy lifestyles.”

What about you? Have you ever really analyzed your music choices? What songs uplift you when you’re depressed? What songs inspire you to be a better person? Do you listen to any songs that might be encouraging negative behavior like stealing, cussing, getting revenge, putting people down?

The next time you need a good pick-me-up or a calm-down, try one of the songs suggested above. Or maybe start a list of your own. You might be surprised by what you learn when you look more closely at the music in your life.

\*From the Inside Out is a new segment of *Inside Journal*, in which we will occasionally feature encouraging words and “if I knew then what I know now” insight from former (and sometimes current) prisoners. ■

## RECIPE CORNER

### Scalloped Ham and Potatoes

(submitted by Angelina in Minnesota)

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 2 powdered cheese packets from 2 boxes of macaroni and cheese
- Chunks of blocked cheese (optional)
- 1 bag of ruffled chips
- 1/2 cup chopped ham or spam
- Salt to taste

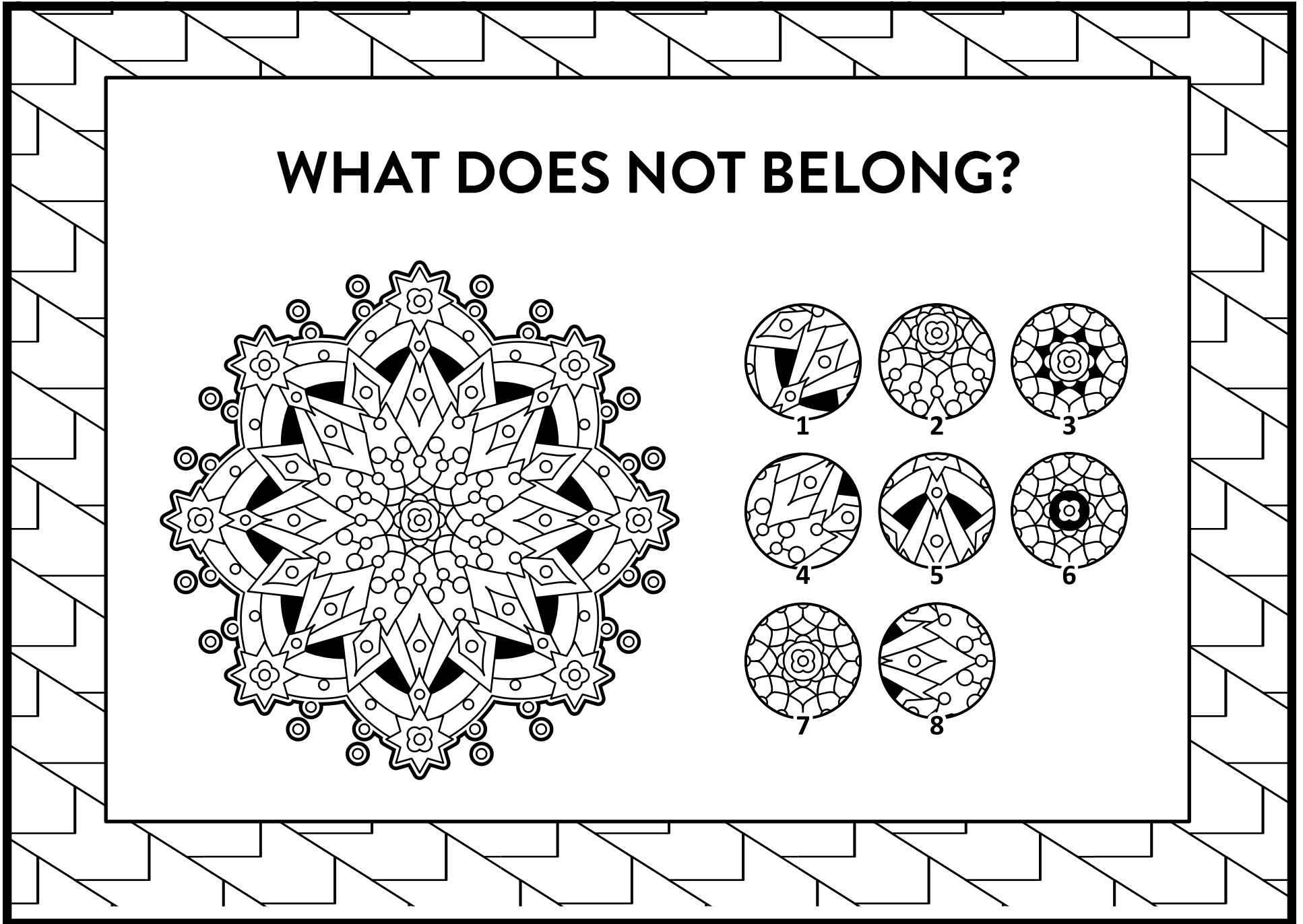
Crumble chips and place in a bowl. In second (microwave-safe) bowl, pour in powdered cheese packets and stir in enough hot water to turn powder into a cheese sauce. Add other cheese chunks if desired. Microwave for 2 minutes. Pour hot cheese sauce into potato chips bowl and add ham/spam and seasoning salt. Stir together and microwave for about 4 more minutes. Cool and enjoy!

*Be sure to comply with your facility’s rules and regulations whenever cooking.*

# Art Activity: Color Therapy

Find the sections that don't belong and then color the picture.

Do you ever feel like YOU don't belong?  
When you accept Jesus into your life, you  
belong to the Kingdom of heaven.



## WHAT DOES NOT BELONG?

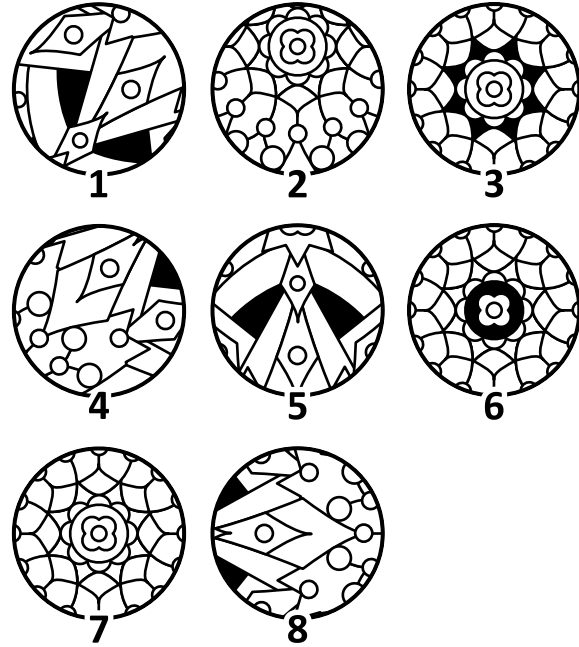
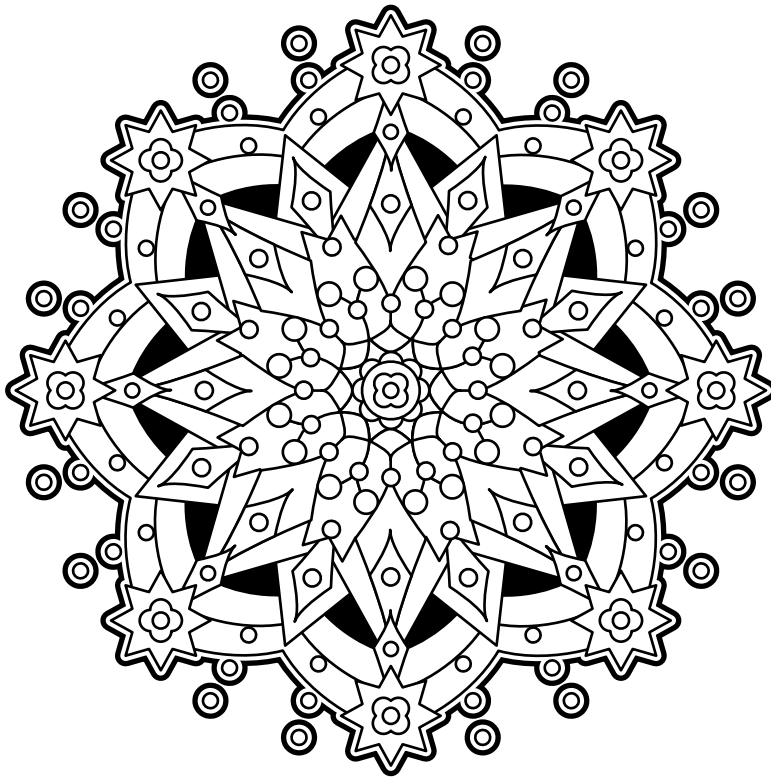


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ANSWER: 3, 6

## News + Notes



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### COVID-19 Updates

The early days of COVID-19 really pushed prisoners to their isolation limits, but they managed to get through it with grace. As the fall brings more uncertainty, they're going to continue to need to deal with whatever gets thrown at them. And they'll do so with the kind of strength and dignity that people behind bars need to have. Meanwhile, prisoners are

teaching the world just what that strength and dignity look like.

For instance, an in-prison sewing club at Mabel Bassett Correctional Center (MBCC) for women—which includes several Prison Fellowship Academy participants—helped to protect Oklahoma City from the disease by hand-making face masks one at a time for frontline healthcare workers. “It means a lot to

me to be able to give back to the community, to make a difference, to show that we are more than just a number,” Kelsey, one of the sewing club members, told a local news station.

This mask-making effort has expanded to giving masks to other high-risk populations in the community, from retirement communities to homeless shelters. The initial goal was to produce enough masks for all the women and staff at MBCC. To date, those involved in the sewing project have donated more than 10,000 handmade masks to the people of Oklahoma City. And the MBCC ladies are still busy sewing.

While programming is still canceled, and many facilities are still on some sort of lockdown or restricted visitation, Prison Fellowship is offering state DOCs free access to its new Floodlight™ platform. Floodlight, an online portal that launched back in the spring, provides free, uplifting video content for corrections staff to download and share on internal TVs and devices. One chaplain in Illinois shared that

Floodlight is now in almost all 50 states, with a potential to reach more than half a million viewers.

Floodlight has been loaded onto the tablets of each person in his prison, adding, “You are changing lives and making a huge impact with this.” Floodlight is now in almost all 50 states, with a potential to reach more than half a million viewers.

Prison Fellowship is also working hard to be a voice for those affected by incarceration, making their needs part of the national response to this unprecedented health crisis. The organization is

committed to pursuing a more restorative criminal justice system for all—including fairer sentencing, more constructive correctional culture, and closure for those with a criminal record. That commitment will continue long after the pandemic has passed. ■



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**703.478.0100**

Editorial Manager:  
**M.M. White**

Managing Editor:  
**S.L. Ray**

Writers:  
**Grayson Pope, S.L. Ray,  
S.L. Segel**

Graphic Designer:  
**J. Davis**

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