

IN THIS ISSUE:



Life Raft
p.3



Inside Out
p.3



Art Project
p.4

Rhonda's Rescue from Opioid Addiction

by Emily Andrews

Rhonda Rush was reluctant the first time she publicly shared her life story of opioid addiction. She had to swallow her pride. For years, she had just wanted to hide from her story.

Rhonda's family had gone to church when she was younger, but most of what she heard were shame-filled sermons. Her image of God wasn't pretty.

Home was chaotic, and she grew rebellious. She also had the added stress and pain of frequent migraines that left her unable to function.

In her early 20s, after several years of migraines, Rhonda was finally prescribed painkillers for her headaches. Rhonda loved the relief. She had no idea she was playing with fire.

"The more I took [the pills], the more I wanted them, the more I needed them," Rhonda says plainly. "The more I needed them, the more I wanted them. And the



Photo courtesy of Rhonda Rush

Painful migraines led to a painkiller addiction, and before she knew it, Rhonda was in a downward spiral. But time behind bars brought her healing through Jesus.

cycle began way back then."

At 27, Rhonda got married and started a family. Life was good. Pain pills helped her feel even better, with no negative consequences. Or so she thought.

Rhonda believed the pills gave her energy to be a better wife and mother. She

turned to opioids for more than just pain relief. By her 40s, she had to be sneakier and see multiple doctors for prescriptions. She purchased pills online and even bought them off the street.

Looking back, Rhonda explains, "I was what you call a 'functioning addict.' ... I

didn't realize I was numbing everything."

Wandering in darkness

During this time, a friend invited Rhonda to church. It was the first time Rhonda had really heard about a gracious God instead of the harsh God she remembered from her

youth. The idea of a loving, healing God intrigued her, but she was too lost in her addiction and pain to pursue this much further.

When her husband unexpectedly passed away, just two weeks before their 20th wedding anniversary, her world shattered. Living alone and working mostly from home, Rhonda felt empty and afraid. She turned to painkillers to escape the grief and loss.

She'd sometimes swallow 60 pills a day.

"I wasn't living," says Rhonda. "I was just existing ... holed up in my house. I kept it as dark as possible, closed the curtains. And I took pills, day in and day out. That went on for a long time."

Two and a half years after her husband's death, at age 50, Rhonda received a DUI charge—the first of many. Five years later, she was charged for the last time, after driving under the influence in broad daylight. This time she landed in county jail.

Continued on page 2

Art in the Dark: Choosing Faith Over Fear

by Stephanie Segel

In 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. Women 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

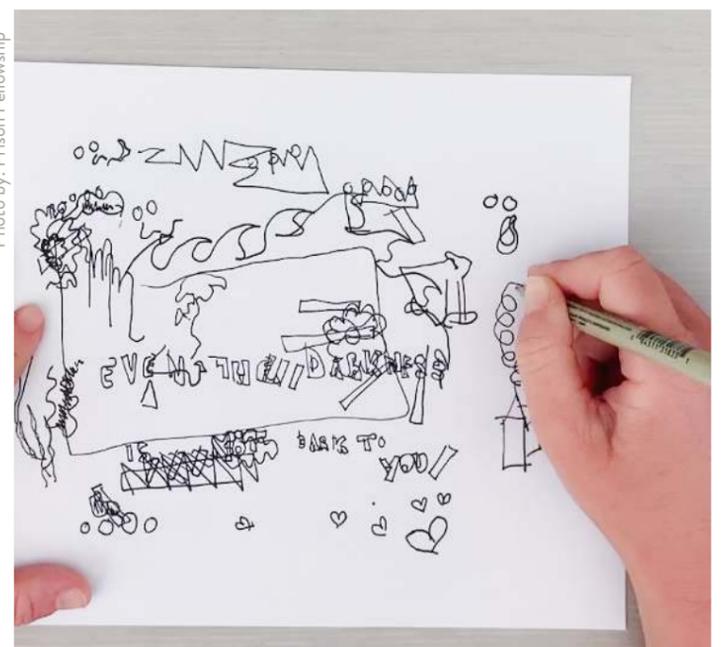
Step 1. Prepare your heart and mind by reading Psalm 139:11-14 (NLT):

"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 Stephanie Segel draws shapes and swirls with her eyes closed while reflecting on her faith.

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. ■



Photo via iStock by wildpixel

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.

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. 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.

Stephanie 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. Ask your chaplain or program coordinator to contact Prison Fellowship about bringing Create: New Beginnings to your facility. ■



Photo courtesy of Rhonda Rush

Rhonda's Rescue Continued from page 1

“God, why me?” she cried. Rhonda needed something to pass the time behind bars. She joined a recovery program.

At first, she attended for the perks, hoping to earn time off her sentence. But through the love of faithful Christian volunteers, she finally gave Jesus her full attention.

Christian mentors like Pastor John Spurgeon, Prison Fellowship field director for Tennessee, helped her process past hurts. She began reading the Bible and recognized her need for Jesus.

“The layers of hurt, bitterness, betrayal, grief, denial, all the poison to my soul—it started to peel away,” Rhonda explains.

A walking miracle

By the time of her release,

Rhonda felt whole. She also got involved with Doors of Hope, a transitional program in Tennessee for women leaving prison or drug rehab. She became a mentor to new program participants, sharing her story of being two and a half years clean after decades of addiction.

“Don't give up hope, because God is in the miracle-working business,” she would tell them. “If God can do it for me, He can do it for anybody.”

Late one night, Rhonda typed out her story. She prayed God would give her the courage to share it. Since then, she has told her story in front of several churches and groups. Sharing publicly doesn't scare her anymore, because it's not just her story. It's God's.

In 2019, Rhonda became a certified peer recovery specialist in Tennessee. She works as the recovery

director at her church. Recently, she volunteered at a Prison Fellowship Hope Event™ at the Tennessee Prison for Women, praising Jesus and sharing His hope. Pastor John Spurgeon was also there, volunteering alongside her.

Soon Rhonda will be returning to a correctional center—only this time, as a volunteer with the Prison Fellowship Academy®, an intensive, holistic, biblically based program that helps incarcerated men and women transform their thinking.

Thanks to God, Rhonda is now able to face life's struggles head-on. And she can find hope in any pain or struggle.

“I used to tell myself I couldn't live without pills,” she says. “Today, I can't imagine going back to that life.” ■

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 be in line with

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.

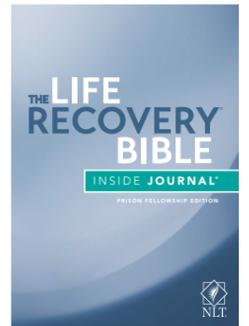
God’s heart, and you ask your Christian mentor if you should join. If everything lines up, it might just be a sign!

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

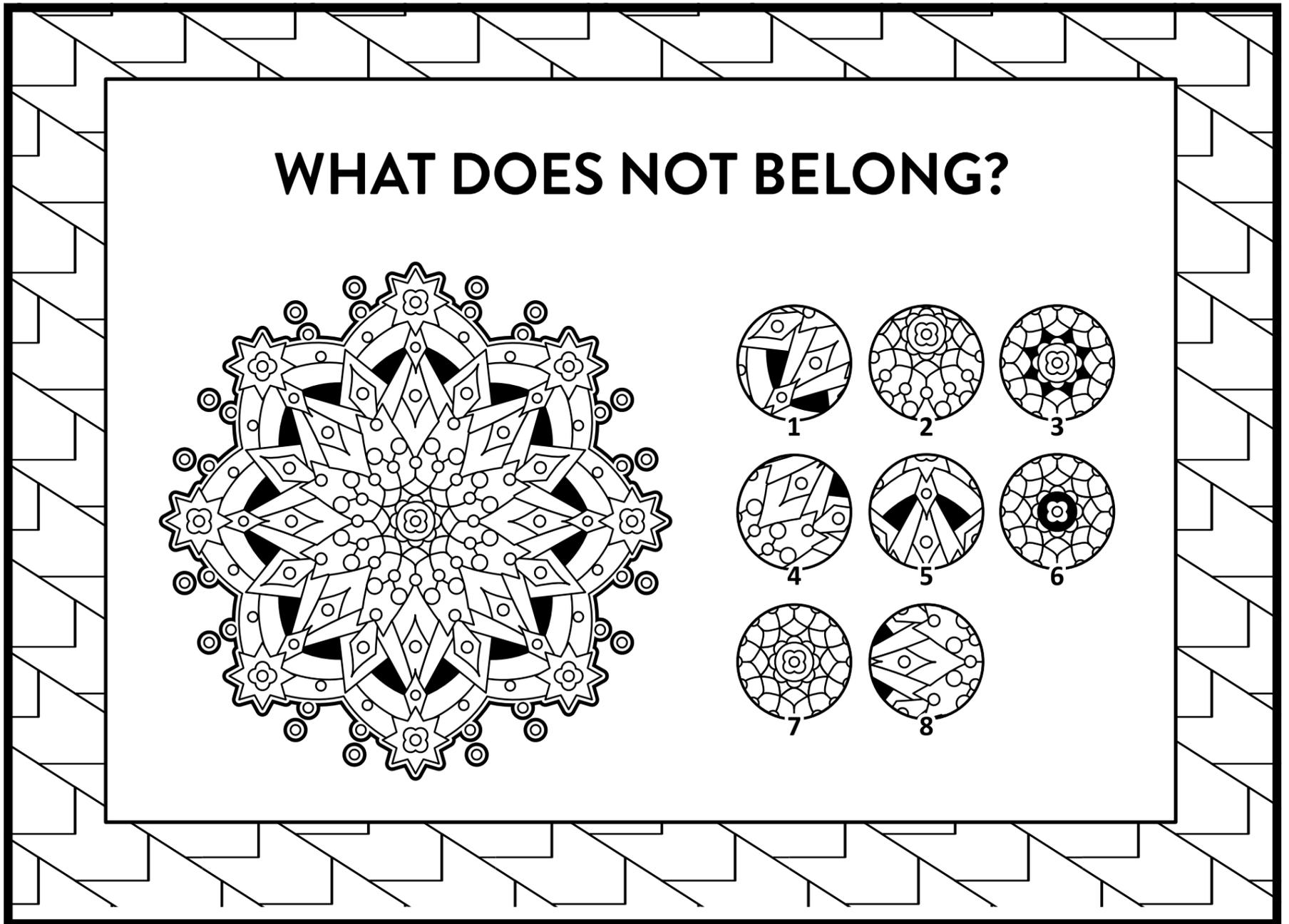
Crumble chips and place in a bowl. In second (microwave-safe) bowl, pour in powdered cheese packets and stir in enough hot water to turn powder into a cheese sauce. Add other cheese chunks if desired. Microwave for 2 minutes. Pour hot cheese sauce into potato chips bowl and add ham/spam and seasoning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

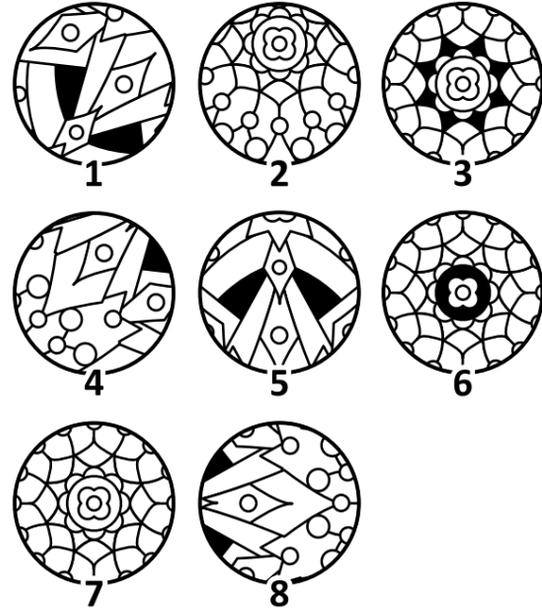
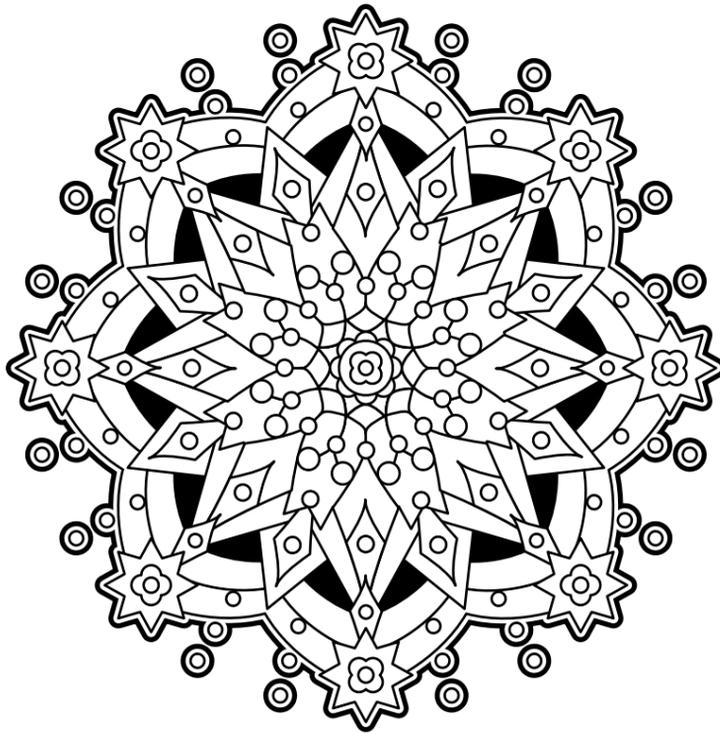


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ANSWER: 3, 6

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 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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