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A Second Chance for Joy

by Emily Andrews

As a kid, Joy had big dreams and an ambitious spirit. She was inspired by her mother's and grandmother's sewing skills. She had dreams of becoming a fashion designer. By the time she was in high school, she had learned to design and sew her own clothing.

Joy grew up traveling a lot, thanks to her father being a flight attendant with easy access to flights. While visiting San Francisco, Joy discovered a college with an amazing design program. She eventually moved there to work and attend classes. But a lot of her college friends were more focused on their social life than their education. Joy drifted away from her studies and started partying. She experimented with marijuana and PCP.

Soon after, she entered a difficult chapter in her life, which included an abusive relationship, various challenges, and the birth of her son and daughter. Her addiction grew, as Joy used drugs as an escape from the abuse and pain. Eventually, she was arrested—several times.

"When you begin to get addicted to drugs, you have to find crafty ways to obtain them, and for me, that was where I got into credit card fraud," Joy recalls.

Joy was ultimately convicted for credit card fraud and sentenced to federal prison.

When Joy walked into Federal Medical Center in Carswell, Texas, to begin her sentence, she says she took time to process her choices and to "get right" with God. She thought of her young children, ages 3



Photo by Shana Thompson

Joy went from serving time for credit card fraud to serving others by helping pass a law that gives fairer career opportunities to people with a criminal record.

and 4, who were now being raised by their grandmother in another state. She thought of the hopes she had for their future, as well as for her own.

"It was my 'aha' moment, as they call it," says Joy. "In prison, you have plenty of time to

think, to read, to praise ... I was ready to make that change."

Starting from square one

Joy was released in 2006 after serving a year of her sentence. She left prison with a renewed purpose and a desire to live right. But reentry

felt like starting over: She had to reinstate her driver's license, rebuild her credit score, and find jobs to support her young children. And it felt like the strong work ethic, organizational skills, and outgoing personality that made it so easy for her to land jobs before prison didn't mean anything now that she had a record.

"I felt like this [prison sentence] was going to haunt me for the rest of my life," Joy says.

But she kept her chin up. She moved into a transition home in Oklahoma City where her son and daughter could live with her. While there, she worked for a mortgage broker and attended church. Soon she saved up enough money to move into her own place.

While Joy worked to get back on her feet,

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5 Tips To Declutter Your Cell

by Lexi Aggen

Our environment can have a great effect on our mental state. While we can't always control our prison environment in the larger sense, we do have some control over how we keep our living quarters. Keeping your personal space clean

and free of clutter can help you focus better, maintain a positive mindset, and relieve stress. Also, as an added

bonus: a tidy space can be more easily searched when necessary, and more easily restored after a search is complete.

NOTE: Be sure to follow your facility's rules and regulations and be respectful of the different viewpoints of your cellmate(s).

1. Get rid of unused items.

One of the main contributors to a cluttered living space is too many things. Get rid of items you no longer use. One helpful trick is to consider if you have used the item in the

last three months, or if you plan to use it in the next three months. If the answer is no, get rid of it.

Paper can create a lot of clutter. Do you have a lot of old notes sitting around? Or old receipts you no longer need? Consider throwing out any unnecessary paperwork.

It can be hard to get rid of items—especially those

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gesrey: Getty Images



Letters to the Editor



Ekely: Getty Images

Linda in Tennessee

When I lost my 3-year-old son (to gun violence), I felt like everyone abandoned me, especially God. But He sent angels to me to help me learn and understand that God has a plan and purpose for everything. The trials I faced made me feel hopeless. [But] now I have a love and freedom that is absolutely irreplaceable. God has opened my eyes and

heart to reach out to other struggling women. ... Helping others realize the love, grace, and mercy of our God is all we need to survive.

Dear Linda:

Your attitude is inspiring! Keep reaching out to others and sharing your stories of hope. We'll be praying for your continued healing, as the pain of losing a child can sometimes seem unbearable.

Charlotte in Pennsylvania

The concept of Lecrae's "Background" song's (see sidebar) creative inspiration further motivated me to write this letter. Thank you. Love Lecrae's "Blessings." ... If you don't act like you need or look for acceptance from the wrong people, it doesn't bother you when they act like they're rejecting you. Only live for God.

Dear Charlotte:

Music can be very inspiring. It's great that you find inspiration in Lecrae's lyrics. See page 7 to read about his lyrics contest for prisoners.

Sara in Texas

I have been in recovery for a year already, and this is a place where people lose hope. I am seeking support so I don't lose my way. Is there anything you can help me with or any Scriptures you would like to share?

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Do you have an inspiring story you want to share with our readers? Or even a great recipe using commissary items? Please send your poems, recipes, or other works to: **SUBMISSIONS**, c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. Please also write "I give Prison Fellowship permission to publish my submission" somewhere on your letter. NOTE: Submissions may be edited for content or space. Not all submissions will be printed. If selected, your works will be printed with your first name only; no last name or personal information will be included.

Second Chance for Joy

Continued from page 1

she didn't just feel different—she acted different, too. People noticed her grateful attitude and her gift for connecting with others. But, whenever possible, she hid the fact that she had a criminal history. In 2012, she enrolled in night school and began studying for her real estate license. But the next year, she was barred from sitting for the exam

because she had a felony. This was a default rule. It didn't matter that she had repaid her debt to society. **Using obstacles as opportunities** Joy had purchased a home, attended church faithfully, and supported her family. She worked as an administrative assistant at an engineering firm. But being denied something that didn't feel fair motivated her to do something about it.

In 2019, Joy founded Walter's Way, a reentry organization in Tulsa, Oklahoma, helping people regain their lives after prison with housing, furniture, job support, and more. She became a Prison Fellowship® Justice Ambassador (a program for volunteers to advocate for a more restorative justice system). She encourages policymakers, churches, and businesses to promote second chances.

Thanks in part to Joy's efforts, in 2022, Oklahoma passed a law that requires licensing boards to conduct an individual test of an applicant's criminal history and progress in rehabilitation, instead of automatically denying them a license. Oklahoma now has some of the nation's fairest licensing practices for applicants with a criminal record. Joy believes the way forward begins

with making space for people to succeed. In 2020, she applied for a formal pardon from the governor—and received it. She celebrates how far she has come, though she recognizes the barriers that still exist for her and so many others. "People need to have an opportunity to move forward in life," says Joy. "And a second chance is that opportunity that you're giving someone." ■

NEED A BIBLE?

Get a free Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible!

NOW WITH A WORKBOOK!



WRITE TO:

Tyndale House Publishers
Attn: Inside Journal Bible
351 Executive Drive
Carol Stream, IL 60188

Include this information to make sure your Bible or Workbook get delivered:

- ✓ Your complete name and prison ID number
- ✓ Your facility name
- ✓ Your facility address for prisoner parcel delivery
- ✓ Whether you want English or Spanish*

*Bibles and Workbooks are available in English or Spanish. You can order a Bible and Workbook together, or separately. Limit one order per person.

The song "BACKGROUND" by Lecrae features lyrics such as:

You take the leading role, and I'll play the background
I know I miss my cues, know I forget my lines
I'm sticking to your script, and I'm reading all your signs
I don't need my name in lights, I don't need a starring role
Why gain the whole wide world,
If I'm just gonna lose my soul?

I had a dream that I was captain of my soul
I was master of my fate, lost control, and then I sank
So I don't want to take the lead,
'Cause I'm prone to make mistakes
All these folks who follow me,
Goin' end up in the wrong place
So just let me shadow you, just let me trace your lines
Matter of fact, just take my pen,
Here, you create my rhymes
'Cause if I do this by myself, I'm scared that I'll succeed
And no longer trust in You, 'cause I only trust in me
And see, that's how you end up headed to destruction
Paving a road to nowhere, pour your life out for nothin'

Dear Sara:

The road to recovery can be long and difficult, so be sure to give yourself grace. Research says up to 85% of people relapse at least once, with an average of six relapses before finally reaching sobriety, so even if you backslide, don't give up. If you don't already own the Life Recovery Bible and accompanying workbook, see below for how to receive free copies of each. As for Scriptures, encouraging verses are seen all throughout the Bible, especially in Psalms, Ecclesiastes, James, and Proverbs.

Sincerely,
The Editorial Staff ■

The Blessing of Struggle

by Stacia Ray

A young boy found a butterfly cocoon outside and brought it into the house. He watched the cocoon closely, until he saw a small hole and the beginnings of a butterfly start to break through. But the butterfly appeared stuck. The hole was too small for the butterfly’s body, and it struggled to break through the cocoon. Soon, it grew exhausted and motionless.

The boy wanted to help the butterfly, so he got a pair of scissors and cut a larger hole. Now the butterfly was free—but its body was swollen and its wings were small and shriveled. The butterfly spent the rest of its short life dragging its underdeveloped body around, unable to ever fly.

The boy didn’t realize a butterfly needs to struggle in order to grow. When its body wriggles against the too-tight cocoon walls, it helps fill its wings with blood, giving it the ability to fly. The struggle gives the butterfly strength.

We are a lot like the butterfly in this story. We can grow from our struggles. Starting at a very young age, I struggled with depression. By the time I was a young adult, I was diagnosed with eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety, depression, and several other issues. I often felt hopeless and helpless. The emotional and even physical pain from these disorders was so intense. I prayed for God to take my struggles away—and quickly.

But God didn’t just poof away my pain like some magic genie lamp. I went through years of a personal

nightmare. Sometimes I grew exhausted and motionless, just like that butterfly. Still, I didn’t stop praying. I admit that sometimes my prayers were half-hearted. Sometimes I was praying through tears. Sometimes I was mad at God. But I kept talking to Him and asking Him to take away my struggles.

I often wondered why God was taking so long. And I sometimes even questioned whether this suffering would last forever. But many years later, after intense therapy, medicine, and prayer—so much prayer—I was released from my cocoon.

The long but necessary road

The definition of “endurance” is the ability to continue doing something difficult or painful for a long time, despite stress or fatigue. Romans 5:3–5 says, “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love” (NLT).

Looking back years later, I can see how my struggle brought me *endurance*, as I now have more patience and tools and experience to handle hard times better. Those decades of pain now make me feel proud that I endured.

I can see how my struggle brought me *strength*, as now I feel like a warrior who has overcome my enemy. Romans 8:37 says, “No,



Barbara: Getty Images

despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.” Some translations say, “We are more than conquerors through Him.”

I can see how my struggle brought me *character*, as I’m now much kinder to others and try not to judge people, since I have no idea what struggles they’re going through. And after my years of pain, I now appreciate every single day that is pain-free in comparison.

I can also see how my struggle brought me *confidence* and *hope*. As I relied on God more, crying out to Him through my suffering, I learned what true surrender looked like.

And although I couldn’t always feel His love during my darkest moments, deep down

I somehow just knew it was there. I held on to hope—sometimes barely hanging by a thread, but still holding on.

Holding on to hope

For believers in Jesus, this world is a temporary home, and our best day here will be nothing compared to our life in heaven. Our everlasting life will be glorious—with no more pain and suffering. 2 Corinthians 4:17 says, in comparing our struggles in this life with the awesomeness of eternal life: “For our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!”

Some of God’s most beloved followers in the Bible, such as Moses, Job, and Esther, endured intense and long-term

suffering. And one of the Bible’s most faithful followers of Jesus was Paul, a man who endured major suffering and spent several years in prison. He went from considering himself one of the worst sinners to becoming one of the most faithful followers of God. Talk about transformation through suffering!

I still have struggles, but my view of them has changed. I can now see myself in the butterfly. I can trust that a transformation will happen, even if it takes a long time.

This butterfly comparison isn’t to say we shouldn’t ask people for help. But we often want a quick fix, someone to take scissors and cut us free from our cocoon.

To clarify: Sometimes we do need help right away, like when leaving an abusive relationship or making that tough decision to check into rehab. But enduring struggle can help us grow in our faith in God, learn to fully surrender our control, and have more gratitude. Through the grace of God, our struggles can help us to fly free. ■

IS YOUR HEART TROUBLED?

Do you ever feel like life is just one struggle after another? Are you tired of suffering?

The world is full of sin, and we are all sinners. Therefore, unfortunately, in this world there will be struggles. But even if we live to 100, and even if we spend most of those years suffering, that’s a blink of an eye compared to what an eternity of no more suffering will be like. There’s just no comparison! Similar to what it says in 2 Corinthians 4:17, Romans 8:18 says, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

So how can you access this pain-free, struggle-free eternity with zero suffering ever again? First, you need to ask God into your heart and accept His free gift of eternal salvation. That doesn’t mean just keep living your life your way, pushing God away until your last breath. It means living your life differently, and thereby seeing your struggles at a different angle. Romans 12:2 puts it this way: “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.”

1 Peter 5:10 explains, “In his kindness, God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.” There’s that same message again about *temporary* struggle on your way to *eternal* glory. Jesus came to pay the ultimate sacrifice on the cross, so that those who believe in Him can trade suffering for eternal joy. You just need to accept Jesus into your heart and let Him transform your struggle into freedom.

Not sure where to begin? Start with this simple prayer:

“Dear Jesus, I surrender my life to You. I confess my sins and ask Your forgiveness. Please help me through my suffering and my struggles. Remind me that this pain is temporary, and help me to be transformed through Your grace. Amen.”

To learn more about Jesus or to sign up for a free correspondence Bible study through one of our trusted partner organizations, write to us at “STRUGGLES,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. For a free Bible or accompanying study guide/workbook, see our ad on page 2.

OBJECT LESSON: The Fruits of the Spirit

by Cherise Bopape

When reading about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, you won't find any mention of apples and oranges. Instead, these verses offer nine traits, or "fruits," the Holy Spirit gives us. When believers in Jesus consistently live out these behaviors and traits, they testify to the Holy Spirit's presence in their lives.

The object lesson below is to help illustrate what it's like to flourish under the influence of these fruits of the Spirit.

What is an object lesson? Object lessons are teaching methods that involve the use of practical items to illustrate an abstract topic in a relatable way.

OBJECT: Paper

LESSON: When you rely on the Holy Spirit, you set up yourself to thrive.

Select any item made of paper (if you don't have a piece of paper nearby, use this newspaper). Examine it. What is its purpose? Do you notice any imperfections? Think about some of the characteristics of the paper you've selected. Is it crumpled, glossy, sturdy, or thin? What do you know about trees and how they're involved in the papermaking process?

Whether you're holding a flyer, newspaper, magazine, or some other paper product, consider the steps that had to occur before you could place the item into your hands. What started out as a tiny seed eventually became a seedling and grew to become a tree. Once the tree was harvested, the papermaking process could begin.

The final product—paper—is evidence that a tree has experienced a transformation. Although the tree has become a new creation with a new purpose, it had to be chopped down first. Only after it was cut down could it take on this new purpose, one that will serve in ways it could never have imagined if it had stayed in the forest.

Once a tree has been converted into paper, it can serve many more people. One tree can provide thousands of sheets of paper that, in turn, can be recycled at least five times for other uses. New life and purpose can spring from dead, broken things!

Likewise, when you trust Jesus to transform your life, you may feel like a 45-foot-tall pine tree that's being groomed for

"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!" —Galatians 5:22-23

papermaking. When that happens, what might that look like? What might God's transformation mean in your life?

- You won't end up in the same place that you started. You'll begin to realize God designed you for a purpose, so you'll allow Him to prepare you by plucking you from the crowded, dark places where you used to hang out. When the Spirit takes your brokenness and exchanges it for love, joy, and peace, you'll be more willing to grow.
- Showing patience, kindness, and goodness will become easier, too. Scenarios that used to make you clench your fists might encourage you to fold your hands in prayer instead. You won't be perfect, but you'd rather thrive with Jesus Christ than hurt yourself (or others) by forcing an outcome based on your own terms.
- Because the Holy Spirit produces faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in the believer, you'll begin to set goals and become better at keeping them. You'll give yourself a little grace when you fail. Essentially, the way you live your life will be evidence of who's in charge.

Like a tree undergoes a transformation to become paper, you take on a new purpose when you trust in the Lord and live your life with His nine fruits of the Holy Spirit. Under the right influence, you can grow and thrive, like a piece of juicy fruit. But when you reject the Holy Spirit's guidance, destruction awaits, like rotten fruit. Practicing the traits of these fruits can help you fight off the toxic parts of prison life, giving you opportunity to influence the overall prison culture for the better.

This spring, whenever you see paper, think of the growth and transformation it represents. Remember, when you yield to the Holy Spirit, you set yourself up to thrive. ■



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GROWTH TREE:

What parts of your life need nurturing? Do you have any "rotten fruit" that needs to be replaced by healthy fruit? Write or draw goals, traits, relationships, or other areas of your life you want to see growth. Start planting the seeds for these things by tearing out this section and placing it somewhere visible. Then "water" these seeds by praying over them daily. Color the tree to further personalize it.

Flourishing Behind Bars

by L. Haviland

There is no prettier sign that spring is on its way than a garden blooming with vibrantly colored flowers and ready-to-harvest fresh vegetables. In fact, gardening and horticultural programs are sprouting in many correctional facilities around the nation. These kinds of programs enable prison residents to learn to grow their own food and develop new skills.

Prison Fellowship staff recently visited two facilities: Maine State Prison for men in Warren, Maine, and the Christina Melton Crain Unit for women in Gatesville, Texas, where gardening programs maintained by prisoners create a harvest of plants that can benefit everyone in the prison.

Gardening programs such as these can bring beauty not just to the facility they are housed in, but also to the lives and moods of those who live there. As discussed in the book *Doing Time in the Garden* by James Jiler, prison gardening programs are a positive force, allowing prisoners to improve their gardening skills as they build, plant, and maintain gardens. The gardening experience, additionally, may ultimately serve as a resume-builder upon release from prison.

Growing food and skills

Can you imagine spending \$35,000 a year on lettuce? That is exactly what Maine State Prison was once spending annually on the leafy vegetable, as Commissioner Randall Liberty explained to Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners. However, ever since the prison started growing its own lettuce—planted

and cared for by its residents—the prison has saved a good amount of money, and not just on lettuce. They also raise their own tomatoes, peppers, string beans, cabbage, beet greens, collard greens, cucumbers, and onions.

And the gardening program over at the Crain Unit in Texas impressed Prison Fellowship’s editorial manager J.R. Breault, who recently visited there. Breault says the garden was beginning to show the fruit of the residents’ labors. The care that the women put into the beautiful grounds—faithfully weeding the garden, breaking up clumps of soil, and removing stones—demonstrated “a deep sense of purpose and meaning in maintaining something,” according to Breault.

In addition, at the Minnesota Correctional Facility – Shakopee, green-thumbed residents there include Angelina, who says the gardening program “gave us not only nutrition for our bodies but [also] an opportunity to try new things and broaden our horizon.” Angelina adds that the facility’s garden has allowed some pretty incredible cuisine to come out of their kitchen, including pickles, kale shakes, roasted radishes, fresh salsa with cilantro, and even tomato jelly.

Marsha at Shakopee says that producing “something so pure and healthy for one’s body, mind, and soul was completely satisfying,” and Amanda added that garden work kept her busy, catching bugs that were “harmful to the garden,” pulling weeds, replanting when necessary, and watering the gardens.

Beauty beyond the garden

While the Crain Unit boasts crops including corn, beans, peppers, and cucumbers, the facility’s creative expression isn’t just horticultural. A mural on the walls of their meeting space and their dorm is another display of creativity, bringing color and beauty to life in the prison, showcasing the prisoners’ imaginations, and brightening the areas where they live and learn.

The prison’s warden Kimberly Garza notes that the facility’s female residents work hard to beautify the area, and that the mural’s effect on residents and visitors alike is undeniable. With its splash of vibrant colors, Garza says, “You see a change when you walk in; it doesn’t even appear to be a prison.” The prison’s garden and its mural are spirit-lifters, creating an impact on its observers and surroundings.

Brittany, who is currently incarcerated at the Crain Unit and participates on the facility’s garden committee, adds that a variety of new plants has been added to the prison’s garden collection. Her excitement in watching the prison’s plants, flowers, and produce grow, she says, is matched by how she views her own personal growth: “I’m just relating myself in the same way, from dirt to a beautiful flower.” ■



SEEKING BEAUTY ALL AROUND YOU

Gardening programs may not exist in every prison, and if one isn’t available in your facility, you can still seek out the beauty on the yard this time of year.

Be more aware of your senses while you’re outside with these practical ways to delight in spring wherever you are:

- Challenge yourself to look for green sprouts poking through the cement.
- Make a game out of finding green blades of grass popping out of the dirt.
- The next time the grass is being mowed (if your facility has any), take a few deep breaths and take in the uniquely flowery and even fruity fragrance of freshly mowed grass.
- While you’re outside, listen for birdsongs and try to distinguish their calls.
- Bring spring colors inside by drawing, coloring, or even painting if possible. You might be surprised at how much it can boost your frame of mind.
- Try sketching trees and all that you observe around and in them.

Renewal is at work all around us. It’s up to each of us to look for and find it wherever we can!



Photos by Prison Fellowship



DAILY DEVOTIONAL TEAR-OUT

Tear out this daily devotional and then start each morning and/or end each night saying it and praying over it. You’ll be amazed by how a healthy spiritual habit like this can bring encouragement and focus to each day!



asbe: Getty Images

Finding Rest in Times of Suffering

by Rose Shannon

Missing a loved one? Feeling burdened by a difficult person? Facing uncertainty about an upcoming parole hearing? When we are weighed down by suffering, it’s easy to believe God is too big to provide for our individual needs. But whether you are struggling with a small disappointment or large devastating grief, God sees your pain and offers empathy and restoration.

The Bible tells us the story of Elijah—a prophet of God who, after many challenges, was alone, afraid, and wishing for death.

1 KINGS 19:4-7:

[Elijah] sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.” But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him ... He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again ... the angel of the LORD came again and touched him and said, “Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you.”

In the face of unbearable sorrow, Elijah was ready to give up. But God not only listened to Elijah’s cry, He comforted him by meeting his immediate physical needs. Our God is not disconnected from the things that hurt us, but is instead personally familiar with human pain. Jesus Himself, a man “acquainted with deepest grief” (Isaiah 53:3), experienced betrayal, loss, rejection, and dread during His time on earth. Like Elijah, our journey ahead may be long, but God wants to nourish us when we feel empty. He gives strength to the weary, understanding our emotional and physical burdens. When we feel powerless, He offers His presence so we never have to journey alone.

If you find yourself in need of renewal today, cry out to the Lord and be fed by His endless care for you.

When words are hard to find, try beginning with this prayer:

“God, I am tired and in need of rest. Show me how to take comfort in Your presence and ease this burden I am carrying. Thank you for Jesus, Who understands how I am feeling. Like Elijah, let me find restoration in You.”

Find the Differences

Find the 7 differences in these spring drawings. Answers on p.8.



Armation74: Getty Images



READER RECIPES

Pork Bowl

Submitted by Lydell in Georgia

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/2 bottle of hot sauce
- 1/2 package of Kool-Aid (fruit punch, or whatever flavor you prefer)
- 2 packages of ramen noodles (chili, or whatever flavor you prefer)
- 1 grilled or fried summer sausage
- 1/4 bag of cheese puffs
- 1 bag of pork skins
- Little bit of lettuce or cabbage from the cafeteria, if desired

Not all ingredients will be available at all facilities. Be sure to comply with your facility’s rules and regulations whenever cooking.

Warren_Price: Getty Images



DIRECTIONS:

Mix pork skins with Kool-Aid and hot sauce until skins are fully coated. Set aside. In a separate container, mix dry noodles, crushed cheese puffs, chopped sausage, and lettuce. Add small amount of water (just enough so the meal mix is not too dry, but not soupy) and heat until noodles are fully cooked. Note: You can use one or both ramen season packs, keeping in mind they’re high in sodium. After noodle mix is ready, take your coated pork skins and place on top of noodle mix. Optional: Add cheese squeeze on top. Enjoy! ■

FROM THE INSIDE OUT:

Winner of Lecrae’s Prisoner Hip-Hop Contest Announced

by Stacia Ray

Grammy award-winning rapper, hip-hop artist, and author Lecrae partnered with Securus Technologies (the communications firm providing phone and tablet services to correctional facilities) for a first-of-its-kind songwriting contest for men and women behind bars. The “Original Hip-Hop Track Contest” presented participants with three pre-recorded beats to choose from. Participants then wrote lyrics and a title to one of the three beats.

The contest, whose goal was to “bring hope through the power of lyrics,” was open to individuals at state prisons throughout the country, and hundreds of submissions were entered. As Lecrae explained to Chance Seales of Newsy, “Some [prisoners] have made some mistakes ... but at the end of the day, they’re still human beings, and they have a voice, and oftentimes their voice is not heard. So, we’re providing them with an opportunity to be heard.”

In the summer of 2022, a winner was selected: 37-year-old Carmela Mose (rapper name “GOOD”) at Central California

Women’s Facility (CCWF), a maximum-security prison in Chowchilla, California. Lecrae arrived at CCWF for a recording session with Carmela in an education room. Lecrae’s music label, Reach Records, then mastered and released the finished song. All streaming proceeds from the song will be donated to Prison Fellowship.

“Being given the opportunity to be supported, and listened to, by so many talented visionaries has been a truly humbling experience,” Carmela told CBN News. “As I sat there recording my track, I felt a stark contrast between the me who was rapping into that mic, and the old me that was sitting on a bus on the way to prison.”

Lecrae told CBN News, “I’m proud to be part of a campaign that invests in those who often feel forgotten, and hopefully this contest will open doors for other creative campaigns to reach the incredible talent behind bars.”

Dave Abel, the CEO of Securus Technology’s parent company, told news outlets that he also looks forward to hosting future contests, to give the incarcerated community opportunities to share their creativity and spread hope. ■

Here are a few lyrics from Carmela’s winning submission, from [genius.com](#):

“I Think” by GOOD [feat. Lecrae, in italics]

My work ethic is so impressive
From the shoe to work boots (*Woo*),
don't bet against me
I'm a beast (*Beast*), I'm unleashed (*Yeah*)
Pss, y'all can't chain me (*Nah, let's go!*)
Spend my vacation, EOP
No shame could stand and take me 'cause
they still slide right off me
I achieve (*Yeah*), I succeed (*Bing*)
Oh, I believe (*I believe in you too, let's go*)

May I draw your attention to the structural
meds in question?
'Cause inspection's in session, yeah, I'm
shadin', needs some depth
I bet you sense my perspective, I'm slidin'
corrosions and tensions
Stressed fractures apparent in the chronic
gazes of our children
(*Straight out of Chowchilla, baby*)

Reader Submissions

Several Inside Journal readers have submitted poems or song ideas of their own. We at Inside Journal are truly blown away by the talent we've seen. Here are a few of our favorite poem or lyric submissions.

<p>New Life <i>by Jonathan in New York</i></p> <p>Addiction and sin Have no compassion. My old life was filled With lust and distractions. Consumed by darkness, Led to sinful actions. Satan had me in his grip which gave him satisfaction. I saw myself in chains, Filled with so much pain. Within these prison walls I put my head down in shame. Feeling hopeless, Waiting to be saved. Every day was a battle, 2 steps from the grave. Then the day came When I heard his name. To the heavens I cried, “Can you ease this pain?” With tears in my eyes I could finally see That sinners are brought to life With the blood of Christ. I went on my knees Praying for my needs. He heard my plea And now I am spiritually free. With my life redeemed My future is bright Because I put my faith In Jesus Christ. I am guilty in my old sinful life, But I am innocent in my new life Through Christ. Oppose Satan, who brings Darkness and destroys life. Walk with Jesus, who brings Light and gives life.</p>	<p>Far From the Shores of Victory <i>by Jim in Pennsylvania</i></p> <p>A mother’s heartache A wayward son A faraway shore Where victory’s won A fading promise A dying light And love’s lost sorry A tear in the night An oft told story A father’s shame Had suffered long The family name A mother’s prayers To no avail? Would tranquil waters Her son yet sail The hour grows late The years draw nigh Will Heaven’s light Entreat his eye Or would he founder Dark tempests deep Doomed forever, Lost tears to weep Sentenced to battle A raging sea Far from the shores of Victory</p> <p>We Gonna Make It <i>by Bernard in Maryland</i></p> <p>We gonna make it We are the ones who wake up Do we look into a mirror For comfort or confrontation How long did we crawl Before we stand tall So many times we cried And doubted until we believed (cont.)</p>	<p>Why do we work so hard For an “A” but earn a “B”? No grim reaper came When you were off your element Long as the passion consists Of light, grace, peace, and honor We gonna make it You prominent prophet profits Profoundly Promising, prognosis, promptly, Prolonging, Patience, prolifically, proving, Prosperity In other words, When you’re weak, you’re strong When you’re down, get up It’s your right to know We gonna make it Dry skin, nappy roots Lotion up, brush your hair We gonna make it Gotta job interview, someone to visit, no transportation Break five dollars, get change, You can’t change the coins Too cold to wait for a bus We gonna make it Don’t stress that you’re in prison We gonna make it Thank God for Mistakes and blessings Overcome hurt, pain, Being abused in all ways Grew up in a home No father figure We gonna make it Cause reality is We came into the world With nothing, We gonna leave the world With nothing But peace and happiness Cuz we gonna make it— WITH THE HELP OF GOD OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST</p>	<p>Patiently Waiting <i>by Sterling in Georgia</i></p> <p>Patiently waiting For my prayers to be answered. Patiently waiting... Does God understand My plight? My fight? Is he looking down from heaven At my ever-dying light? My life has been trampled. But who did it? It was me! In my need, in my greed, I was sowing wild seeds. And the only thing I reap Is this agony I see. Why? Because inside of me is death, A curse that I received. And the only way to free myself Is get down on my knees And plead! LORD help me, I know it’s not too late I know that you can take this man And you can change his fate I know that you can raise me up So I can take my place. I know that in your light, My LORD My fears will melt away By your presenc You will guide me By Your power I will stay And all these chains will fall away. And then all this misery Will wash away like history And I’ll be shedding tears of joy Surrounded by your mystery. Patiently waiting...</p>	<p>Unspoken Voice <i>by Melissa in Texas</i></p> <p>Unspoken voice Steers me in the right direction, My gratitude for your guidance. A faith to the unknown It was etched in my bone. You are the one to be admired A love for you Will always be desired You are my Lord, my God, My Sarayu* too. Thank you for my blessings. My soul belongs to you.</p> <p><i>*Editor’s Note: Sarayu is a character from “The Shack” that represents part of the Holy Trinity.</i></p> <p>True Story Untold <i>by Mohamed in Oregon</i></p> <p>I been trying to be in tune with my mind, body, and soul. This is a true story untold. Stay solid, can’t fold. From a land that everyone know, my mind is gold. Stayed away from the young heads, always hang with the old. Oldest so I never had a big bro to teach me life lessons as I grow. True story untold. Miss the old me, I got to unfold, watch me overcome this everyone will know. Hard to figure out, can’t stay bold. Yeah true story untold. I hope for knowledge and wisdom as I get old. Yeah true story untold.</p>
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NEWS + NOTES

Football Connects Families and Community

On an overcast Atlanta morning in November, Prison Fellowship®, along with ministry partner ViaPath and Chick-fil-A catering, came together to provide a day of memories for children of incarcerated parents through Angel Tree® sports camp.

The morning began with over 100 children being fitted for Nike shoes before heading out to the field where Gospel singer Anthony Brown was waiting. He sang for the children and caregivers, teaching everyone sign language for the song “Victory”

and getting the group to cheer: “You are worth it!”

After the concert, the children took to the field to run drills, coached by former NFL wide receiver Frank Murphy.

One student’s favorite part of the day was “proving myself to be faster than everybody else.”

While the students learned new skills, the caregivers had a breakout session where they heard testimonies and shared with small groups about their experiences.

One caregiver said, “I enjoyed hearing all of the different stories, the testimonies, and just to know that there are a lot of people that are dealing with similar

things like me and being in connection and community with them was really, really good.”

After running drills, the kids were able to listen to Frank Murphy’s testimony and hear the Gospel from local pastor St. Claire. The children then got into small groups, where volunteers reminded them that there is hope for their future.

“I did learn to trust in God more. You want to find things that you want to do and to work towards your goal and not to give up. It has been helpful to know that. Keep that in mind,” said one Angel Tree student.

That day, 40 children decided to follow Jesus.

Prison Fellowship CEO Announces New Leadership

Prison Fellowship President and CEO James J. Ackerman has announced his plan to step down in 2024. As the ministry, founded by Chuck Colson in 1976, shifts to a new leader, it will remain focused on its vision of restoration.

Ackerman joined Prison Fellowship in 2016 after years spent volunteering. He has helped the ministry build its identity following the death of Chuck Colson and make it through the challenging days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ackerman spent time praying for God’s will about how long he should stay at Prison Fellowship. He says that in part, God’s plan first became clear through

a conversation with an incarcerated man named Sean, who was a member of the Prison Fellowship Academy® at the Carol Vance Unit near Houston, Texas. Through that talk and much prayer and discussion, Ackerman came to believe that God was calling a new leader to take Prison Fellowship into the future.

Ackerman will be succeeded in July 2024 by Heather Rice-Minus, a longtime member of the ministry’s senior leadership team. Rice-Minus has led efforts to serve children of prisoners through Angel Tree, mobilize churches to serve the incarcerated and their families, and advocate for restorative criminal justice reform, including the FIRST STEP Act. ■

Declutter Your Cell

Continued from page 1

with sentimental attachments. It’s okay to hold on to items that carry memories or remind us of loved ones. If you have sentimental items that you don’t want to throw out, see if you are able to send it to a loved one to hold onto for you, or check out the next tip.

2. Give everything a home.

Make sure that every item in your cell has a place of its own. Even small items need a spot. If you can’t find a home for something, consider getting rid of it.

Once you have given everything a home, organize items in a way that is visually appealing. Do you have a few books? Organize them by height or color. Make sure your clothes are neat and tidy.

Another way to make sure everything has a home is to

use organization tools. Check out the commissary to see if they sell anything you can use, like a locker organizer for larger items or a file folder for paper items. You can repurpose some items as well, like boxes from the commissary. Do you have a small box? Make it a pencil holder!

3. Aim for inspiration and encouragement.

Make your cell a space of positivity. Place inspiring messages on your wall. Hang up photos of loved ones or certificates from courses you have taken, to remind you every day to keep growing. Tear out inspirational photos or words from personal media or from this Inside Journal paper (such as the activities/articles on pages 4–7).

Consider changing your wall décor with the seasons. A change in scenery can help change your perspective

and keeps the room from feeling stale.

4. Consider others.

If you don’t live alone, an important part of decluttering is having an open and honest conversation with your cellmate(s). Tell them what you want for the cell and listen to what they have to say—their habits, style, and ideas. You may not agree on everything, and that is okay. Let them know your vision and try to come up with a system that works for both of you. If you can’t find something that works for the entire cell, be respectful of their decision and their area/property. You can only control your actions and items.

5. Create a regular clean-up routine.

Make decluttering a part of your routine. Every night, be sure all items have been returned to their home mentioned

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in #2. Every week, evaluate your papers and items to make sure they are orderly, needed, and maintained. Consider doing a monthly decluttering to make sure you haven’t acquired more items that you don’t need.

It can feel difficult to remove clutter from your life at first. Start small. Start with one of these tricks first, or pick one area to declutter first, and then keep working until you have learned good habits for clearing your space. Decluttering your space can sharpen your focus, relieve anxiety, and boost your mood. Give decluttering a try and see how it changes your mindset! ■



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