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FOR MEN

YOUR SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND INFORMATION

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IN THIS ISSUE:



Devotional, p.5



Recipe,



Calendar, p.7

The Power of One Voice

by E.G. Andrews

elvin grew up in a Hispanic community near Los Angeles. As a child, he figured he was Hispanic like most of his friends, only to find out later that he and his family were members of the Muscogee nation, an Indigenous tribe. This discovery messed with his sense of identity.

On top of that, Melvin's parents weren't very emotionally expressive. He doesn't remember receiving hugs or hearing "I love you." He longed for their affection.

At a young age, Melvin began smoking cigarettes with his dad and sneaking beers from the fridge. "I was looking to fill a hole in my life," says Melvin. "Something was missing."

Later, Melvin tried marijuana. By his



He spent 23 hours a day locked in a cell. Now, he knows what true freedom is.

early 20s, Melvin had welcomed a son and a daughter with two different women. But Melvin still couldn't fill the void in his life.

He was working odd jobs and not making much money. One night, Melvin was short on cash and feeling hungry, so he stopped by a Christian revival in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to ask the "church people" for money. A large church service was not his usual scene; he often spent the afternoons at a local bar.

After the event, a friendly couple took him to dinner. They gave him some Gospel pamphlets and a Bible. As Melvin began to leave, the husband slipped him a \$10 bill.

Melvin headed to a bar to spend the cash, tossing the Bible and pamphlets in some bushes.

Eight months later, while drunk and high at a party, he was involved in a situation where someone's life was taken. Though he didn't commit the crime, he didn't try to stop it either. So at 23 years old, he was arrested.

When Melvin was incarcerated, volunteers and fellow prisoners tried to tell him about the Gospel. Melvin wanted no part of it. He even physically assaulted some prisoners who tried to share their faith.

He told his fellow Muscogee tribesmen, "You can't become a Christian. Jesus is from other people. He's not for us."

Awakened to hope

Melvin was transferred to Oklahoma State Penitentiary, where he sat alone in a cell for 23 hours a day. Weary and broken, he called to his grandfather in prayer, as was customary in his Native religion. Melvin pleaded for a new way to live.

He received a clear response from a voice he now believes to be God: "If you really believed in Me, you'd believe in Jesus, because I am Jesus."

The next morning, Melvin reached for a small Bible he had been given that was collecting dust under his bunk.

He opened it to John 1:14: "So the Word became human and made His home among us. He was full of unfailing love

Continued on page 2

5 Tips for Stress Relief

by S.L. Ray

here's a
difference
between "good
stress" and "bad
stress." Healthy, shortterm stress, like what you
might experience right
before an exam or an
athletic competition, can
motivate you and help
you to focus.

But unhealthy, chronic stress can have

long-term consequences on your mind, emotions, and body. It can lead to digestive and other health issues, depression, anxiety, and exhaustion.

The holidays can be stressful, life behind bars can be very stressful, and the holidays behind bars can be extremely stressful. Here are five simple ways to lower your stress levels when you feel overwhelmed*.

1. Practice self-care.

Some self-care activities include: massaging your own face and neck (use circular motions and move from the nose/lips outward); meditating and practicing deep breathing; and even simply showering and staying on top of daily hygiene. If you can't leave your cell,



sit-ups/push-ups and stretching exercises can lower blood pressure and reduce stress hormones, and if you can leave, jogging on the yard and weightlifting can also relieve stress.

2. Serve others.

Studies show that serving others can

Continued on page 5

Letters to the Editor

Edward in Florida

I am writing about a free Holy Bible. Can I get a King James Study Guide? I am trying to learn the Word of God better. I will use the Bible daily and grow.

Dear Edward:

We don't offer the King James version, but we do offer the easier-to-read New Living Translation of the Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible in largeprint English or Spanish. Please see the ad below for more information on how to receive your free Bible and workbook.

Michael in California

This is my fifth prison term, and I [was] passing through reception center ... and I seen one page of [Inside Journal] in a cell I was cleaning and I was inspired by what God is saying through [this newspaper]. I was hoping you guys can send me a few copies, maybe even back copies so I can spread the word.

Dear Michael:

Great news! We now have backorders of the most recent edition, so if you missed an edition, or if your chaplain needs to order more copies, they can contact us at subscriptions@pfm.org.

Christian in Oregon

I've been blessed with a number of resources from you guys, i.e., Inside Journal, Shortimers booklet, and Prison Survival Guide. Beyond your organization, I've

enrolled in a number of Bible studies.
Unfortunately, I'm running low on activities to do on the unit. Are there any additional resources you guys have or any information for other organizations that might be able to help me stay productive?

Dear Christian:

To see a full list of resources, please have your chaplain (or other staff member if your facility doesn't have a chaplain) visit prisonfellowship.org/storehouse.

Sincerely,
The Editorial Staff

One Voice

Continued from page 1 and faithfulness. And we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son." (NLT)

"I started realizing right then that God was the one that they called Jesus, that walked this Earth," says Melvin.
"Right then I made the decision, 'OK, I asked You to put me on a path You want me on. If it's Jesus, then I'm going with it.' And I surrendered right then."

Melvin spent the next 27 years preaching the Good News behind bars, despite opposition from others. He ran into Aaron, a fellow prisoner and "Native brother" he had once ridiculed for being a Christian. Melvin cried on his shoulder and apologized for his past behavior.

"I've been praying for you, man," Aaron told Melvin.



The two remained close friends after Aaron's release. Then Melvin learned of the Prison Fellowship Academy®, where Aaron would be program manager. The Academy takes prisoners through a life transformation journey.

Melvin enrolled in the program and met a diverse community of men eager to grow. They shared a living space and practiced values like responsibility and integrity. Melvin even made peace with people who once threatened his life, and he became a mentor after he graduated. "That Academy was so influential in who I am today," says Melvin.

Walking free

He was eligible for release after nearly 40 years in prison. In late 2021, Melvin walked free.

Aaron connected
Melvin with a job at a
nonprofit in Oklahoma
City. His Muscogee
community helped
provide new clothes. He
found a church and even
preached on occasion.

In July 2022, Melvin married his high school sweetheart Tammy.
Aaron officiated the ceremony. Melvin also reconnected with his grown children and grandchildren.

Together, Melvin and Tammy founded Native Wings Like an Eagle, a nonprofit ministry serving the Oklahoma City area.

Melvin continues to minister to others, especially his fellow Muscogee tribe members, however he can. Melvin respects their strong heritage and treasures the opportunity to share Christ with them.

Recently, Melvin was allowed to attend a program graduation at the prison. As he approached, his palms grew sweaty. Inside, he recognized some men through the window of the visiting room. They clapped and jumped for joy at the sight of him.

When time came for "count," Melvin started to line up with everyone, out of habit. One of the prisoners stopped him and said, "Buddy, you ain't got to do that no more."

In June 2023, Melvin and Tammy received official clearance to volunteer there—the very prison where he spent almost four decades in a small, cramped cell.

"Sometimes, I get in the car, fill up the tank, and just drive," says Melvin. "I'm thinking, 'This is freedom.' But really, it's not freedom—I already had freedom. Freedom is in Christ."

NEED A **BIBLE**?

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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 gets delivered:

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



From Lies to Light: Caring for God's Creation

by Dillon Shaw

aybe you've heard that expression "The jig is up." It means a trick has been revealed; your lie or scheme has been uncovered. When your lifestyle is unhealthy, "the jig is up" is actually a good thing.

I spent 13 years behind bars. One of the most refreshing realities of being in prison was the fact that no one could hide that they were broken and in need of redemption. This reality of being outed as broken was a relief to me, because I had lived most of my life trying to hide my flaws and failures.

Ironically, when I went to prison, I finally felt free to live in light and truth. The jig was obviously up, I'd been caught, and I could no longer hide behind the darkness and lies. However, discovering the freedom to live in the light and choosing to actually live in it are two different things.

When I lived a life of darkness and lies, I felt a pull to abuse my body with drugs and alcohol. My destructive self-talk told me, "You're worthless, you're a failure," and "No one (including God) will ever love someone like you." It felt natural to mistreat others because they mistreated me, or to manipulate people for my benefit.

When I lived in my personal prison of darkness and deceit, it was easy to disregard the wonder of creation all around me. I didn't appreciate the world's beauty—in fact, I was living in a way that contributed to its decay. Most of this was the result of my sin and selfishness. Sin and selfishness thrive in darkness. So does loneliness.

Freedom in the light

The Good News is that Jesus came to bring light to the darkness, and to set us free from the lonely prison of sin! In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus declares, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."

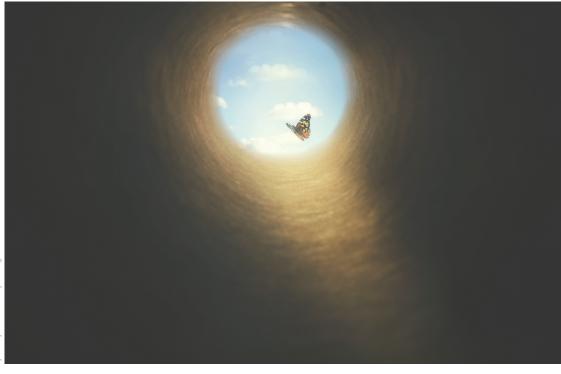
When Jesus sets us free to live in this new reality, He transforms us from the inside out into the kind of people who think, speak, and act like Him. This means shifting our thinking from selfish to selfless. When He walked on earth, Jesus valued all of creation, from the tiniest flower to the largest animal. He cared for the poor, sinful, and hopeless. He loved the criminals, outcasts, and untouchables. No one was unreachable in His eyes. No one was unworthy.

God challenges us to treat people with love, just like He did. All people. Even the difficult ones. Even the frustrating ones. "Love your neighbor as yourself" is the commandment listed in Matthew 22:39 as being just as important as loving the Lord. Notice how it doesn't say "love your friendly and likeable neighbor." That verse is referring to all types of neighbors.

A new life of selflessness

Not only does God offer us His love and care, but He invites us to share that love and care with His creation:

 He fills you with a sense of worth and calls you to help others to see their value (Romans 8:15-17; Ephesians 2:8-10).



 He calls us to represent Him to the lost world, and He welcomes us to invite others into His story (Genesis 1:26-31; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

- He comforts us in our troubles, and He invites us to comfort others in the same way (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).
- He cares for our needs, and He calls us to share that care with everyone (Matthew 6:25-34; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15).
- He wants us to care for others, both human and animal (Genesis 1:28). This verse says to manage the earth and

"reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground." This doesn't give us permission to abuse or neglect animals but to supervise and care for them.

Can you imagine a world where everyone cares for God's creation? If that's too hard to imagine, can you live today in a way that shows you care about yourself and others? Be a friend to the person who's always alone, pray for someone in need,

or point out something good you see in the people you interact with today.

Remind yourself that God created you unique and special. It won't always be easy it goes against the current of the world, and sometimes even of our own heart. But this new, others-centered life Jesus offers is far greater and more satisfying than the old, self-centered life of darkness and lies. It's freeing to no longer hide the you God made you to be. The jig is up, so stop pretending.

ARE YOU LIVING IN LIES OR IN LIGHT?

Take a close, honest look at your daily life. Do you ever act like you're better than someone else? Or on the flip side, do you beat yourself up as being unworthy? If you base your treatment of yourself or others on how you think you or they deserve to be treated, you might want to ask yourself if you're trying to play God.

If your gut reaction to being wronged is to do wrong to others, it's time for a new approach. That's not to say you should sit back and allow people to mistreat you. It's good to have boundaries. But if you walk around with a chip on your shoulder, living selfishly and not being loving to others, you are missing the life God called us to live.

In Matthew 5:14, Jesus tells His followers, "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden." And in verse 16, He continues, "Let your good deeds shine out for all to see." There was no loophole that said those good deeds should only be toward people you think deserve it. Jesus said in John 13:34b, "Just as I have loved you, you should love each other."

And Romans 5:8 says, "But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." We didn't deserve God's love, but He gave it anyway. Talk about selfless! All we have to do to receive this amazing love is ask Jesus into our hearts.

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

"Dear Jesus, I want to leave the prison of lies and darkness, and to experience the freedom of Your truth and light. I surrender my life to You, confess my sins, and ask Your forgiveness. Please help me to love others. 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 "LIGHT OF TRUTH," 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.

All Creatures Great and Small

by L. Haviland

he powerful bond between animals and humans is undeniable. Perhaps it's because animals encourage social interactions and don't judge us.

Many facilities have animal programs such as raising puppies, caring for cats, and training dogs to become therapy animals. These specialized programs help boost the mental health and skill development of the participating men and women.

Thanks to interaction with their four-legged friends, participants of prison animal programs have greater motivation and a more optimistic outlook toward others, and some have been able to eventually leave prison with a new skill set.

Here are some of the unique animal programs found in correctional facilities throughout the country.

Dogs helping people

At the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in San Diego, California, the nonprofit organization Guide Dogs of America/Tender Loving Canines supplies the prison with dogs for its aptly named POOCH ("Prisoners Overcoming Obstacles & Creating Hope") program. The incarcerated men who have been trained to work with the animals prepare the dogs to serve military members and/or

veterans with

post-

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), people with autism, and others.

The organization brings the dogs onto the facility grounds, along with dog handlers and trainers who teach the men to train the dogs. After the day's training sessions, the handlers then bring the dogs to a kennel on the premises for the night.

Martin Dawson, a Prison Fellowship staff member familiar with the program, explains its ins and outs.

"There are about 30 or 40 dogs on the yard at one time," Martin says. "The dogs live [in a separate unit] with their handlers. Each participant works with their dog for about nine months. Once each dog has completed his or her training, they are matched to individuals or families in need of their services."

The program began at Donovan in 2014. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, it was put on hold. But it resumed in 2021, once pandemic restrictions were lifted. While the animals themselves are trained to change the lives of those who will eventually adopt them, the men doing the training might be the ones who experience the biggest transformation.

"I was a bad person when I came in here," says Chester, a dog training program participant. "When the judge called character witnesses, no one could say anything good about me. I deserved the life sentence I got. Now that I have trained these dogs, I can finally say that I have done something good in life."

Program participants take this dog-training responsibility very seriously. "The men have a great sense of accomplishment when their dog graduates," says Martin. "It really brings out their sense of nurturing."

photographer who took some of the photos for this article, explains that dog programs bring purpose, comfort, and companionship to people behind bars which can be lifechanging for participants who may otherwise feel lonely or unloved.



Not just dogs: lemurs, bulls, and horses too!

Animal programs in prisons do not simply teach incarcerated men and women how to train various creatures; they also simultaneously pass along values to them that they'll need upon release: patience, compassion, and teamwork, just to name a few.

And you don't necessarily have to train an animal to benefit from what they have to offer.

In southern Florida, a special animal sanctuary is housed at the Monroe County Sheriff's Office detention center. The Children's Animal Farm boasts about 150 domestic and exotic animals that had been abandoned, orphaned, or abused. It is overseen by Stock Island Detention Center supervisor Jeanne Selander and a crew of incarcerated men called "trusties" because they are given the privilege of caring for the animals and interacting with visitors. "It's calming, keeps you out of trouble, keeps your mind focused," one participant told FloridaKeys TV.

In addition to turtles, ferrets, and birds, the farm also features a lemur, a sloth, a 2000-pound bull, and a 10-foot Burmese python. Selander told Beastly TV, "I think this program is great for the inmates. I think the love that the animals give them, the unconditional love, some of them have never experienced that before. And the animals don't judge. They don't care that you're wearing an orange outfit. So I think the inmates and the animals benefit from the love."

And at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center, Alaska's state prison for women, dogs who were dropped from the Iditarod Sled Dog race take a pit stop for a couple of weeks. Several incarcerated women at Hiland provide the dogs with food, affection, and companionship until their handlers can return for them. Volunteers from this "pit stop program" told Todd Stafford, Alaskabased program manager at Prison Fellowship,

that the experience of helping to feed and care for the hardworking canines is often deeply therapeutic to these women.

Back on the East Coast, a program at Southern Maine Women's Reentry Center trains the women to raise puppies to become therapy dogs for various citizens. Director of Women's Services Amanda Woolford told Inside Journal, "You see a level of empathy increase with the dog handlers, knowing that they are raising and training a dog who will make a huge impact on another human being. That level of redemption can't be taught; it has to be worked on every day."

This center in Maine also houses a horse farm, where abandoned horses are brought to be cared for. Amanda notes the parallel experience between the women and the horses they are helping to rehabilitate: "They themselves had been abused and discarded, and the therapeutic value of earning a horse's trust and helping to nurse them back to health—there is something very cathartic about that process.'

Even if your facility doesn't have an animal program, you can still appreciate creatures where you find them: bumble bees pollinating, ants actively arranging their world, and perhaps even a frog or rabbit hopping through the yard. Observe their energy and colors, notice how they interact with the space around them, and give thanks for what they bring to your day in that moment.

NOTE: Animal programs such as those mentioned in this article are not available in all facilities.



DAILY DEVOTIONAL TEAR-OUT

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

Protection from the Storm

Submitted by Alicia in South Carolina

"You need not be afraid of sudden disaster or the destruction that comes upon the wicked, for the LORD is your security. He will keep your foot from being caught in a trap." Proverbs 3:25-26

Being in confinement, I have all kinds of sins going on around me. It's so easy to get caught up in it all, to fall into a trap. So I have to stay

prayed up and rely on God to help me stay on the right path and know that He will protect me from the evil around me.

This Proverbs verse reminds me to be calm even in the midst of the storm. To have faith and trust in God, that He will keep me confident in His protection of my soul.

"Dear God, I pray for complete faith and trust in you, Lord. And that you will calm my fears and protect me. In Jesus name, Amen."



JutchScene

WRITERS WANTED!

The above devotional was written by one of our readers. If you'd like to write a devotional for Prison Fellowship, please list a Bible verse, followed by a personal short story (2–4 paragraphs) that ties in to that verse, and end with a daily prayer/meditation on that verse or topic. Please add the line "I give Prison Fellowship my permission to publish my works." Send it to "DEVOS," c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146. Note: No previously published works allowed. Submissions may be edited for content. Only your first name/state will be used. Not all submissions will be chosen.

Tips for Stress Relief Continued from page 1

reduce stress, improve moods, and release chemicals to activate the "reward center" of our brain. Helping others can serve as a healthy distraction from our own problems. See if there are volunteer serving opportunities available (like if your facility has a tutoring program or hospice unit), or even just ask a friend how you can pray for them. Make a holiday greeting card for your loved ones or cellmate using the activity shown on page 6.

3. Connect with nature.

Search for squirrels, frogs, birds, or insects on your yard and observe them for a moment; note as many details as you can about their features, behaviors, noises. Give an animal a name and a fun back story. Listen to the breeze. Look for shapes in clouds. Connecting with nature reminds us we're not alone.

4. Connect with God.

Philippians 4:6 is often summarized as "worry about nothing; pray about everything." God wants us to come to Him about everything big and small. Try talking to Him like you would a close friend, sharing your stressful moments and asking Him for peace. Reading the Bible can be soothing, as well. See the sidebar on right.

5. Find a healthy release.

Oftentimes when we feel stressed out,

we just need to let it out. Try yelling into a pillow or using "progressive muscle relaxation" (inhale as you tense one muscle group one at a time for five seconds and then exhale as you fully relax that muscle group). Vent to a friend or make an appointment to see a staff counselor. Just feeling heard can be a big stress relief. Drawing, journaling, and even swirling a pencil around and around on a piece of paper in quick, frantic

circles can also release some tension.

*Be sure to follow your facility's guidelines and be respectful of others (ex: Yelling into a pillow isn't a good idea if it's disruptive, and serving others may be mistaken as "owing a favor," so be wise about what service you offer and to whom).

STRESSED OUT?

Here are some good Bible verses to help you through. Try reading these while taking slow, deep breaths and meditating over the words. (Note: All verses in this newspaper are shown in NLT translation.)

- Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. —Philippians 4:6
- Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? And if worry can't accomplish a
 little thing like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things? —Luke 12:25–26
- I cried out, "I am slipping!" but your unfailing love, O Lord, supported me. When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer. —Psalm 94:18-19
- As pressure and stress bear down on me, I find joy in your commands. —Psalm 119:143
- "The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm." —Exodus 14:14
- I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears. —Psalm 34:4
- "This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." —Joshua 1:9
- Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." —Matthew 11:28
- Each time he [Jesus] said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."

 So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

 —2 Corinthians 12:9–10



Signs of Addiction

Physical Signs of Addiction

Examples of physical warning signs include:

- Noticeable changes in appearance, movement, and speech.
- Sudden increase or decrease in weight and appetite.
- Lack of grooming and hygiene.
- Unusual body odors.
- Unkempt clothing.
- Enlarged or small pupils.
- Bloodshot eyes.
- Tremors, seizures, or excessive sweating.
- Marks on the skin.
- Slurred speech.
- Insomnia, excessive sleeping, or changes in sleep patterns.

Behavioral Signs of Addiction

Examples of behavioral warning signs include:

- Extreme mood swings and emotional outbursts.
- Skipping activities or obligations.
- Anxiety, depression, anger, or paranoia.
- Loss of interest in programs, extracurriculars, and hobbies.
- Asking for, demanding, or stealing money.
- Shifts in relationships and emotional withdrawal.
- Lack of motivation and inattentiveness.
- Abusive or manipulative behavior.

If you or someone in your life needs help fighting addiction, there's hope. Reach out to a counselor or trusted staff member for help with getting the right tools for the right situation.

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THE OUTSTANDING **CHAPLAIN AWARD**

Do you know a chaplain who serves with compassion and dedication? Does your chaplain go above and beyond to bring hope and inspiration? Nominate your favorite chaplain for the Prison Fellowship® Outstanding Chaplain Award!

The Outstanding Chaplain Award seeks to honor dedicated chaplains who faithfully and lovingly serve those behind bars. Mail your nomination to OCA, c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. Or if you have access to a computer, you can email your nomination to chaplainresources@pfm. org. Be sure to include the name of the chaplain you want to honor, the name of their facility (including city and state), your name, and your personal story or paragraph about why this person should be recognized as outstanding. Nominate your chaplain today!

ACTIVITY: Christmas Card

Color and personalize this Christmas card (or trace it if you have thin white paper) and send it to a loved one or a fellow prisoner, or use it as inspiration to make cards of your own. If you have kids, you could even send it to them and have them color it for you. It's important to try to find joy in the holiday season and spread that joy wherever you can.



M RECIPES

Soup Burger Submitted by Anika in Texas



DIRECTIONS:

INGREDIENTS:

- Ramen noodles
- 1 can of beans
- Chicken (or tuna or other meats)
- Squeeze cheese or cream cheese
- Jalapeño pepper, ${\sf chopped}$



DarkRay27: Getty Images

Sprinkle just enough water onto the ramen noodles to make them slightly soft/no longer crunchy, but don't cook them. Then divide noodles into two equal portions, as these will be your burger "bun." In a separate bowl, mix beans, meat, and jalapeño. Place the bowl in the microwave (or if you don't have a microwave, put in a plastic bag, and place bottom of the plastic bag in warm water to heat). Spoon the burger mixture onto the bottom ramen "bun," and then add the cheese to the top of the "burger" before putting the top "bun" on the burger. Enjoy!

2024 CALENDAR

Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. —Ephesians 4:32

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DECEMBER 25 – Christmas Day

JUNE - Ask your chaplain for an

NEWS + NOTES

by L.C. Aggen

Finding Vision for the Future

A program offered through the California Prison Industry Authority (CALPIA) is changing lives in and outside of prison walls. The Braille program offered at the Folsom State Prison teaches men how to transcribe books into Braille, a form of writing for the visually impaired. Braille uses six raised dots in a pattern to represent letters, numbers, and punctuation, allowing a blind person to read through touch.

According to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, the Braille program at Folsom began in 1989 and has been nationally recognized by the American Printing House for the Blind as one of the best Braille programs in the country. The products that have been created in the prison have been described as "top-notch."

Participants of the program are able to complete certifications from the Library of Congress and the National Braille Association, which can help them find employment upon release. The certifications offered through the Braille program require up to 700 hours of studying—which for

those outside of prison, could take up to a year to complete.

One participant from the in-prison program was able to earn certifications in Braille for math, music, and writing. He is now one of only 20 people in North America to hold all three certifications.

CALPIA offers a variety of in-prison programs throughout the state of California, with certifications for activities such as scuba diving, coffee roasting, welding, and more. Their mission is to change incarcerated individuals' lives through innovative job training for a safer California. CALPIA's programs have a 15% rate of reincarceration, much less than the national average of 67%. The Braille program at Folsom has an even better success rate. Out of the nearly 100 participants who have graduated from the Braille program, only one has been rearrested.

Learning how to produce Braille isn't the only thing the program offers. Participants are also trained in how to refurbish and calibrate donated eyewear. The glasses that are rebuilt by the men at Folsom are then distributed to those in need—both locally and globally.

Through these programs, participants

are able to gain a new view on their own life.

"It's simple," one Braille program participant shares. "The program offers a life-changing experience. It provides a career and a means to contribute to a community less fortunate." SEE SIDEBAR FOR BRAILLE ALPHABET.

Prison Fellowship: New Year, New CEO

After seven years of leadership, Prison Fellowship President and CEO James J. Ackerman is saying goodbye. Heather Rice-Minus became the organization's new

president in October and will officially be the new CEO on January 1, 2024.

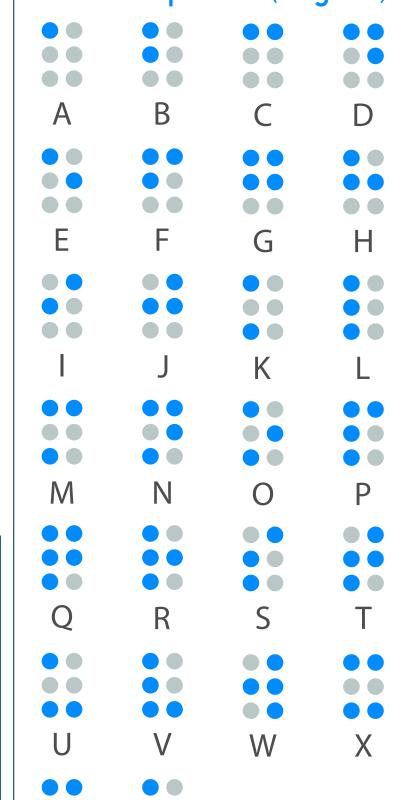
Since joining the staff of Prison Fellowship in 2013, Heather has been a key advocate on criminal justice issues, often meeting leaders on Capitol Hill to create a better criminal justice system.

"The board is grateful for James Ackerman's prayerful consideration as he felt called to pass the baton to a new leader," says Carl Dill, board chairman for Prison Fellowship. "The guidance and support he has already given to Heather is invaluable to our ministry and future. We thank James

for his wisdom and visionary leadership of the ministry."

Heather is honored and excited to step into this new role. "I am deeply humbled to be entrusted to lead Prison Fellowship into its next season of ministry, effecting restorative culture change for individuals, families, and communities impacted by incarceration," she says. "I fully believe that tomorrow's leaders are sitting in prison cells today—and I believe we will see revival in the Church in America. Christians 'outside' have so much to learn from the worship and humility displayed by our brothers and sisters in Christ behind bars." ■

Braille Alphabet (English)





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Editorial Manager: J.R. Breault

Editor in Chief: S.L. Ray

Writers:
L.C. Aggen,
E.G. Andrews,
L. Haviland,
S.L. Ray,
Dillon Shaw

Designer: **A. Raquel**

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NEW YEAR TO GET CLOSER TO GOD

90-Day Journal Challenge: Keep a prayer and gratitude journal, writing something (even a few short words) every morning or evening and listing the things God has done for you or things you're grateful for.

90-Day Bible Challenge: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have 89 chapters. By reading one chapter a day, with one grace day, you can read all the Gospels before the next Inside Journal newspaper arrives (for an added challenge, also read two chapters a day from Acts to Revelation, for a total of three chapters a day, to read the entire New Testament in 90 days).

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