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From Troublemaker to Peacemaker

by Lexi Aggen

Mona describes her childhood as rough. Her mother struggled with an addiction to drugs and alcohol, so Mona started participating in different sports, like boxing, softball, track, and gymnastics, just to get out of the house.

When she was 10, her father stepped in and took custody of her and her four younger sisters. But Mona was already angry and rebellious. In her early teen years, Mona started drinking, fighting, and getting high. Her dad tried unsuccessfully to keep her out of trouble. By age 15, she had her first child—a son she grew very close to.

Although Mona stayed sober during pregnancy, she returned to drinking after giving birth. Her dad once again



Photo by Shana Thompson

A teen mom who went on to have 12 children, Mona struggled with anger and addiction. But during her fourth time in prison, a shocking moment changed everything.

stepped in, this time taking custody of her son. Mona continued down her path of alcohol and fistfights, often going in and out of juvenile detention centers. She remembers not feeling scared the first time she was arrested.

"I wish I was scared," she says. "Maybe I would have stopped. But there wasn't much that scared me as a kid."

Mona's lifestyle as an adult didn't look much different. She was often arrested for DUIs, assault, and

forging checks. She then started selling drugs. Her rebellious behavior sometimes included unhealthy relationships with men. Over the years, she was pregnant quite often. She had 12 children total, and her relationships with the kids

and their fathers were often strained.

The charges that led to change

In 2017, Mona was arrested and facing her fourth time in prison. She was sentenced for forgery in two counties. She still had to face charges in one more county.

As she listened to the judge read the charges against her, something clicked.

"This isn't the first time I've ever heard these charges," she remembers. "But for whatever reason, it hit me differently hearing it all."

Mona found herself thinking of all the other things she had done that were not listed, and she started to feel remorseful, shameful, and empty.

When she returned to Nebraska Correctional Center for Women, she shared her feelings with

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7 Life Hacks for Repurposing Everyday Commissary Items

by Cherise Bopape

When money is tight, it can be hard to justify spending commissary funds on self-care. And sometimes the items you need aren't readily available for purchase. The good news: You may have alternative solutions and

resources within reach. Try looking at some of the things you already have with fresh eyes and an open mind. To help you do that, we've included seven practical tips and inexpensive shortcuts that will help you consider ways to navigate your life behind bars with greater efficiency and convenience.*

1. Stop the bleeding.

If you're fond of black or green tea, here's another reason to keep a few tea bags on hand: They contain a natural chemical that helps with blood clotting. Steep the tea bag for a few minutes and let it cool. Then wrap it in gauze (or

a thin, clean cloth) and press it against the bleeding area for five minutes—a great hack to use after tooth extractions!

2. Get pain relief.

If you've done more reps than usual during your workout, your muscles may feel a little sore the next day. Pain medication isn't your only option. Some people have

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LumenSt: Getty Images

Letters to the Editor

Melanie in Ohio

Just being able to express my heart today and how much [Inside Journal editions] have helped me grow and be open to talk about many things. Being in prison and having strong faith with God has opened many doors for me. Maintaining my strong relationship with God and knowing my faith with Him, He will always have my back. I'm no longer afraid of enemies. I have my faith in God. Just wanted to thank everyone for your inspiring testimonies.

Bridgette in Georgia

I am writing for a Bible course. "Cool Down" was the theme of this issue. I have wanted to write before and something

stopped me. Here I am now. Anything to draw me closer to the cross. Thank you for everything you do.

L. Johnson in Michigan

I've been here for 21 years with four left. I'm 60 years old and have anger issues real bad. I need help. I went to church this past Sunday and got the Inside Journal. I saw the article "Are You Hot-Tempered?" I wrote the prayer down and will carry it with me everywhere I go and read it when I feel myself getting angry. Do you have more for me to read?

Dear Melanie, Bridgette, and L.:

These letters are so inspiring—thank you for writing to us! If you would like a free Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible or accompanying



Ekely: Getty Images

workbook, which both deal with life's "hang-ups," see our ad below. If you'd like to see what other free resources we have available, have your facility's chaplain or religious coordinator visit prisonfellowship.org/storehouse.

Sincerely,
The Editorial Staff ■

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 gets 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.

Peacemaker

Continued from page 1

a woman named LoRay who was doing a life sentence. LoRay had often provided wisdom for her in her previous sentences. She trusted LoRay because, unlike the other women in the prison, LoRay didn't celebrate when Mona returned. Instead, she tried to guide Mona in a different direction.

LoRay reminded Mona that she was a good person, even though she had made some mistakes. But Mona needed more—she wanted answers for why she was the way she was. So LoRay told her to read the Bible.

Mona agreed, but only if it was the Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible. The two women went to the prison library and searched for a copy of this Bible but couldn't find one, even after removing and replacing everything from the shelves. Mona was about to give up hope, but she looked one more time. There, sitting on the top of the bookshelf, was an Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible. It wasn't there before. She remembers being in shock and LoRay saying, "That's God."

Finding a new path

Mona began studying

her Bible. She appreciated how this particular recovery Bible helped her walk through her addiction and relate to her faith. A month later, she heard about the Prison Fellowship Academy® and applied. The Academy is a yearlong program that takes participants through a targeted curriculum under the guidance of compassionate coaches.

When she was accepted, she felt both excitement and fear. She knew the program would force her to look in the mirror and examine how she had been living.

"Just thinking about changing, that was scary," she says.

Mona noticed everyone in the program participated rather than sitting back and watching. She learned how to be intentional in her behavior and how to live with integrity. She was proud of the changes she was making.

Still, there were days when she considered leaving the program. She didn't like thinking about who she had been or the ways she had behaved. When she told the Academy manager Danielle that she might want to drop out, Danielle and the warden sat her down and told her she was a blessing to the program—and it was just the encouragement

Mona needed to stay the course.

During her time in the Academy, Mona's relationships with her 12 children slowly began to heal. Her kids noticed the change that was taking place in her—that her words and actions were lining up. They started to trust her again.

Mona graduated from the Academy with 12 other women. She then became a mentor around the prison. Whenever people needed to calm a situation, they would go to Mona. Instead of starting fights, Mona was stopping them.

In 2022, Mona was released. She found housing through her son's landlord, who rented her a two-bedroom apartment. She also found work through a production company packaging medicine.

Today, she's thriving in her community and living a healthy lifestyle. Her relationship with all her children has been restored. "I don't want to do anything to jeopardize the relationship I have with my children ever again," she says.

When reflecting on who she was then versus who she is now, Mona says, "I truly believe that God performed a miracle on me. He turned me into the woman I am [meant] to be." ■

Good Grief: Finding Hope Amid Loss

by A.R. Quinn

In 2015, an incarcerated dad named Charlie received a visit from his wife and child. Hours after the visit, a state trooper came to the prison to tell Charlie that his family had been killed in a car crash on their way home.

When the shock passed, guilt overwhelmed Charlie, as this thought crept into his head: *If you weren't in prison, they wouldn't have been driving. They would still be alive.* Charlie attended their funeral—in handcuffs and leg chains. When he was released soon after, it was hard for him to go on living.

When someone dies, the grief can be extremely painful. People can also grieve the separation from an estranged child or loved one who is still alive but disconnected.

There is a unique sting to grief in prison. Perhaps you were imagining sharing your life with a certain loved one after your release, but they became terminally ill and won't be around for your next chapter. Perhaps you thought you would have time to mend your relationship with someone, but that person moved away and can't be reached. Or maybe the last person to wish you a happy birthday or send you mail—the one person who connected you to memories of a happier time—has passed away.

With grief comes not just sadness, but guilt, despair, rage, loneliness, and fear.

Go easy on yourself

Losing someone you love—even if you haven't spoken for years—is one of life's most stressful experiences. It can trigger grief over past losses. You might feel

abandoned, depressed, or anxious. You might be unable to cry or unable to stop crying. All these things are normal, so be patient with yourself. There is no "right" way to grieve, and grief doesn't move in a straight line. One day might be OK, and the next might be awful. Focus on one day at a time, one moment at a time. Sleep. Drink water. Move around. Avoid alcohol or drugs; they won't give you the help you need.

When my dad died, I was 3,000 miles away. I heard the news over the phone. I never saw his body. I never sat beside him and said the things you say at the end. The weight of those unsaid words sat heavy on my shoulders. A counselor suggested I sit down and write my dad a letter, so I did. I poured it onto the paper—all the regret, love, hurt, and forgiveness. Then I tore it up. Although my dad never read it, the process of writing it was healing. I felt lighter.

If there are things you never got to say, consider writing them in a journal or a letter you won't mail. Just expressing unspoken feelings can provide some relief.

We are never alone

God promises that He is "close to the brokenhearted; He rescues those whose spirits are crushed" (Psalm 34:18). Praying can help bring comfort. Prayer has been known to calm anxiety even in people who are not yet sure if they fully believe in or understand God.

There are also books on grief and grieving, like *A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis, which he wrote after his wife died. It also helps to talk to someone you trust—perhaps a chaplain, ministry volunteer, or good friend. You might be surprised by the way others' journeys can help you realize you're not alone.

The Bible says Jesus was "a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief" (Isaiah 53:3). Even Jesus' mother can relate to what it's like to suffer a great loss. She watched Him be cruelly tortured and mocked before enduring a slow and painful death on the cross. It's hard to imagine the anguish she must have felt.

Mary eventually experienced the hope greater than any grief: the reunion of loved ones in heaven. At Easter, we celebrate Jesus' victory over sin and death. Whoever puts their hope

in Him will share in His victory. In fact, Jesus promises that He has gone ahead to prepare a place where we can be with Him always (John 14). Through His resurrection, we have hope that death itself cannot destroy.

If you have suffered a loss, allow yourself to remember good times

with the person you lost. Perhaps honor them by doing something they enjoyed, making a donation in their name, or organizing a service project in their memory. Grief can feel like an endless sea, but these actions become rafts, helping us find purpose when circumstances are beyond our control. ■



Gerasimov174; Getty Images

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

Tomorrow is not guaranteed. So if there's something you want to say to someone, what better day than today? And if you haven't surrendered your heart to Jesus, what better day than today for that too?

God wants you to find hope in Him before you leave this earth. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord isn't really being slow about His promise, as some people think. No, He is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent." And 1 Thessalonians 4:13b–14 says, "We want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died, so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with Him the believers who have died."

Loss, as painful as it is, can humble and inspire us to focus on things that matter. Relationships matter. Love matters. Salvation in Jesus matters. Don't wait for tomorrow to connect with your loved ones—or with Jesus.

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

"Dear Jesus: Help me to cherish my loved ones every day. Help me to heal and find hope in You. I surrender my life to You, confess my sins, and ask Your forgiveness. 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: "GOOD GRIEF," c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. For a free Bible or accompanying study guide, see our ad on page 2.

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!



Eoneren: Getty Images

Problems Are Opportunities for Joy

Submitted by Lakesha in Georgia

JAMES 1:2-4:

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

I love this specific verse in the Bible. I was sentenced to 10 years. At first I felt like the Lord had turned His back on me. I continued to cry out to the Lord and He heard my cry. I had to take my focus off how big my problems were at the time and realize how big my God is all the time! God didn't bring this punishment on me; I brought it on myself. Instead of throwing a pity party for myself and using excuses as a crutch, I began to repent and lament to the Lord. Many are called, but few are chosen! The Lord made it clear to me that my situation was not about me and what I wanted but instead this was a much-needed journey, and I was the chosen vessel set to deliver God's Word effectively through song! My praise and worship caused other believers and even some nonbelievers to realize God never leaves nor forsakes us.

“Father God, I come to You, thanking You for all that I have been through, but mostly I thank You for choosing me to bring souls to Your kingdom. My focus is on You and Your promises. You get all the glory, and I bless Your holy name. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.” ■

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: Please note that by submitting your work, you are authorizing Prison Fellowship to publish in full or part anything you send. 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.

RECOVERY CORNER

Relapse Quiz

What is the average number of times a person will relapse before reaching sobriety?

A) 1
B) 3
C) 5
D) 8

ANSWER: C) 5. According to an extensive 2019 study on alcohol and drug relapses, the average number of recovery attempts for an addict is 5.35, with women averaging 4.18 and men averaging 6.12. Multiple recovery attempts are usually needed for remission. Dr. Timothy Walsh, CEO of a renowned addiction treatment and mental health counseling program in Minnesota, told Inside Journal that withdrawal and relapse are most likely during the first few months of recovery, but at 18 months without a relapse, two-thirds of people will stay clean. The success rate is even higher after three years. “Recovery is an ongoing process,” says Walsh, “and every single time you relapse, you learn something, your motivation gets greater, and your emotions get stronger.” So don't give up. ■

READER RECIPES

TWO SIMPLE WAYS TO USE PEANUT BUTTER

PB&J Crunch-Wich

Submitted by CBG in Nevada

- INGREDIENTS:
- 1 serving of peanut butter
 - 1 serving of jelly
 - 1 package ramen noodles (any flavor)

DIRECTIONS:

Split ramen noodles into two halves (seasoning packet won't be used). Either moisten the noodles until they're slightly softened or leave raw. Then cover each half with peanut butter and jelly. That's it—nothing more to it! A crunchy change from regular bread.



Sonny11: Getty Images

No-Bake Brownies

Submitted by Anika in Texas

- INGREDIENTS:
- 1 serving of peanut butter
 - 1 serving of hazelnut spread
 - 1 serving of energizer trail mix

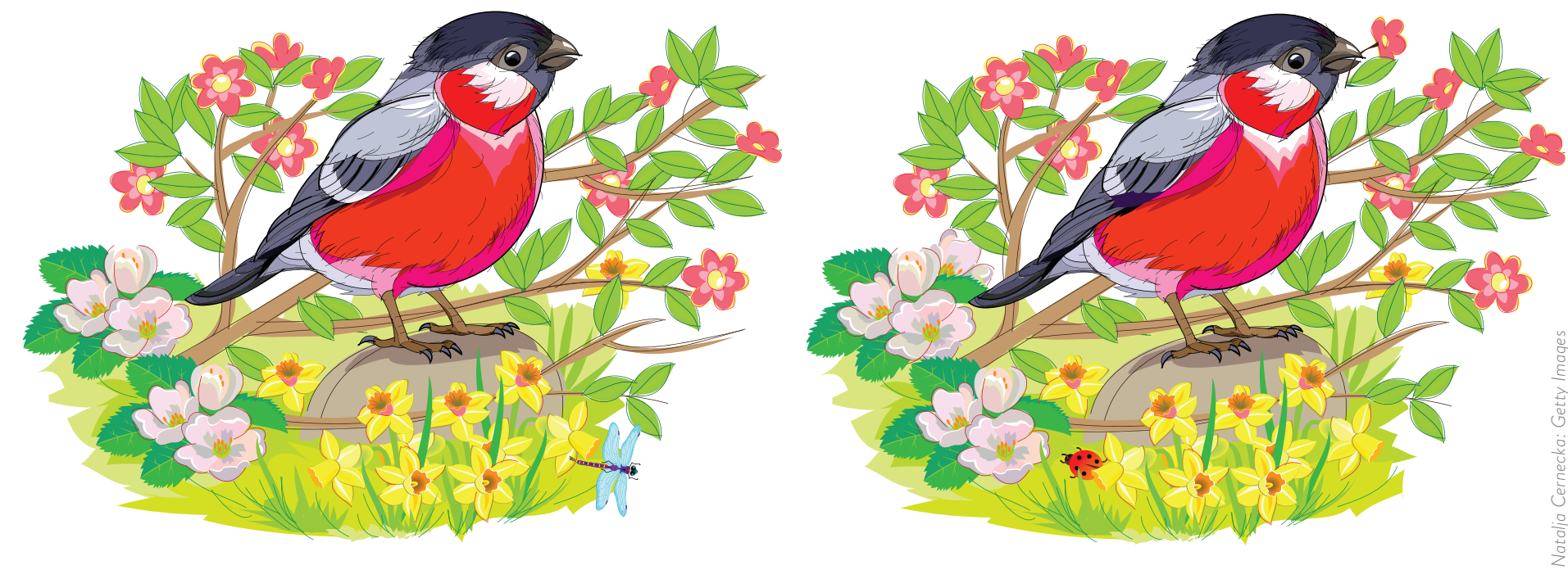
DIRECTIONS:

Combine all ingredients, mold into a brownie shape, and allow to set.

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

ACTIVITY: FIND THE DIFFERENCES

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



Natalja Cernecka: Getty Images

INSPIRING QUOTES

“Let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love.” –Mother Teresa

"You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have." –Corrie Ten Boom

FROM THE INSIDE OUT: A Voice for Change

by Stacia Ray

Joy was in and out of jails and prison, feeling lost and hopeless. One day, Joy decided that this time behind bars was different, and she was ready to be present and available for her two wonderful children. After her final release, she started a nonprofit, Walter’s Way: Regaining Your Life Foundation, which helps returning citizens and their families. She also joined the Prison Fellowship Justice

Ambassador program. Through the Justice Ambassador program, Christians are inspired to advocate for meaningful policy change on both the federal and state levels. Currently, there are 364 Justice Ambassadors that participate in the program. The Justice Ambassador program also has a cohort training that aims to equip formerly incarcerated Ambassadors to use their voice and story to advocate for justice that restores. Over the course of several weeks, this

specialized cohort training program teaches Ambassadors to share their own stories and skillfully persuade a variety of audiences (from churches to lawmakers) to embrace second chances and criminal justice reform. These Ambassadors learn how to tell their stories in a way that builds empathy and highlights the need for second chances. After graduating from this program, these Ambassadors can participate in a

variety of activities, including meeting with lawmakers to discuss important laws, hosting community events, and raising awareness about the importance of second chances. Joy is one of these graduates. She joined the Justice Ambassador cohort program, and after graduating, she was able to share her story of reentry, homelessness, and overcoming with a group of lawmakers. These lawmakers were inspired by her, and they are considering policy

changes that will help formerly incarcerated individuals in Oklahoma find and secure safe, long-term housing. Prison Fellowship believes that formerly incarcerated men and women have a unique opportunity to share their stories for justice reform. If you are being released soon, consider becoming an advocate as a Justice Ambassador. If you are not being released soon, your families can advocate on your behalf. Visit prisonfellowship.org/action to learn more. ■

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT: PAST EDITIONS OF INSIDE JOURNAL NOW AVAILABLE!

Did you miss the inspiring article on animal programs in prison? Or our full-year calendar? Those were two of the many great features in our Winter 2024 edition of Inside Journal. If your chaplain ran out of copies or never received this edition, back orders can now be ordered FOR FREE by visiting prisonfellowship.org/storehouse.

NOTE: Individual copies are not available. Free bulk orders will be shipped to requesting **chaplains or facility staff only**.

Reentry: Resume Tips

by Stacia Ray

Many of you will eventually be released, which often means dealing with job searches and interviews. You'll need a resume. But how do you write a resume if your recent months/years were spent behind bars?

The easiest way to create a resume is to go to Microsoft Word on a computer, click the pull-down menu that says "File," and open a new document under "New from Template." Then on the templates page, type "resume" in the search bar on the top right to see the different ready-made resumes. These templates allow you to type your information in the fields that show the sample information.

If you don't have access to Word, try your local library or use a free alternative

(such as "OpenOffice"). Type your name on top in a large font size, followed by your phone number and email address. Then create sections for Education, Experience, and Special Skills, whether formal (Certified Welder; Tutor) or informal (therapy dog trainer, peer counselor). If you speak or read other languages or have specific computer skills, that might be good to include. And if you're involved in volunteer work, charities, or professional organizations, you may want to list those as well. But it's best to cater the resume to the field of work and keep it specific to whatever the job description is asking for. You don't need to list all your cooking and baking skills if you're applying for a graphic design job.

Short bullet points are better than long sentences. And be clean and consistent

in appearance. For example, dashes between date ranges should be the same length (2007–2009; 2010–2012) and bullet points should have short verb phrases ("Tutored peers in math; helped organize GED classes; cleaned cafeteria after every breakfast," NOT "I tutored peers; Sometimes I even helped organize things like GED classes; the cafeteria was clean because of me"). The goal is to make a visually pleasing one-page summary of your best traits. You can always go into more detail after you land the in-person interview.

Because of your incarceration, you may have gaps in your employment history. You may also have skills you learned, degrees you earned, or jobs you held while incarcerated. Do not lie about having a criminal record or falsify information, titles, dates,

supervisor names, etc. Always be honest in your resume.

You can explain in an interview how the obstacles you overcame behind bars make you ideal for the position. You could even list "County of ____" or "State of ____" as your employer in the "Experience" section, and then reveal your incarceration during an interview. But again, do not lie on your resume or in your interview.

Make sure you spell-check everything carefully. Have a friend or mentor read over your resume for mistakes. When your resume is complete, save a digital copy and print several hard copies.

EMAIL TIP: There are many free web-based email providers out there, so if you don't have an email address yet, go to Gmail or Yahoo or similar and create one, keeping it as simple and easy to remember as possible for the sake of potential employers. *RileySmithHome@mailprovider* might be a better choice than *RySmitty_3895@mailprovider*.

Some of the information in this article was adapted from the U.S. Department of Labor's "Employment Information Handbook for Ex-Offenders." Be sure to follow all your parole requirements and release rules. ■

Mykyta Dolmatov: Getty Images



7 Life Hacks

Continued from page 1

found relief from homemade rubs made by combining shea butter, coconut oil, or lotion with a small amount of ground cayenne pepper. But make sure you keep the rub away from open wounds and sensitive areas like your eyes and nose, and wash your hands thoroughly after use.

3. Try threading.

Gather a couple of pieces of dental floss or remove loose threads from a garment (but don't deliberately damage clothing). Loop them together and tightly pull the strands back and forth across your face to pluck unwanted facial hair without razors or tweezers!

4. Take care of your skin.

Some government-issued soaps can dry out your skin—especially the delicate skin on your face. If your facility also has hard water, that can be especially drying. Consider using an old (but clean) toothbrush to exfoliate your skin. Gently rub it in circles on your face to remove dead or dried skin. And if you've used that same drying soap as a substitute for shaving cream, you may experience razor burn. Some incarcerated men and women say that applying deodorant after shaving can reduce the discomfort, but the effects aren't immediate. In the meantime, place a cool rag on your skin

(or even the cooled tea bag from #1).

5. Ease belly troubles.

Prison meals often consist of starchy carbohydrates and fatty foods. For some people, this type of diet can cause heartburn or stomachache. To calm heartburn, some prisoners swear by swallowing two teaspoons of mustard with a small glass of water. For an upset stomach, clear sodas such as Sprite or Ginger Ale can help, but be sure to avoid caffeine, which could make your stomach feel worse.

6. Dress to impress.

Whether you're appearing before the parole board or preparing for a

family member's visit, sometimes you want to stand out, look good, and feel extra special. You could start by creating your own hair gel: Soak a Jolly Rancher in a small amount of hot water until the water is a bit sticky; mix with a dab of lotion and run a small amount through your hair. You could also practice folding your clothes neatly and smoothing them out with your hands to minimize wrinkles. And if hair straighteners are allowed in your facility, determine whether you can use one to "iron" small sections of your clothing.

7. Trap bugs.

Place bottle lids upside down under furniture legs and then fill them with a small amount of

water. This can trap insects and keep them from climbing up the furniture legs and onto other surfaces. Some prisoners claim this helps stop ants, bedbugs, roaches, and other unwanted pests from invading their space.

A little creativity can help you save money, time, and energy. It can also give you a sense of accomplishment and independence simply by being resourceful. Use your life hacks and thrive.

**Be sure to follow your facility's regulations. Do not alter or misuse prison property or violate rules/privileges. The tips in this article are for informational purposes only and not meant to replace medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek a medical professional for any questions regarding a health condition or treatment. ■*

Q&A With Prison Fellowship’s New President and CEO

by J.R. Breault

In late 2023, Inside Journal’s parent organization, Prison Fellowship, announced a new president and CEO, Heather Rice-Minus. Prior CEO James Ackerman prayerfully passed the leadership role over to Heather, a longtime employee of Prison Fellowship. We sat down to talk with Heather about her dreams for Prison Fellowship—and the faith that guides all she does.

Prison Fellowship: What is your favorite part of your new role so far?

Heather Rice-Minus: My favorite part of my new role is having more opportunity to be [connected] to the participants in our intensive prison programs. Having spent more than a decade focused on what we [at Prison Fellowship] do in the community, from justice reform to mobilizing churches to serve families, it’s refreshing to spend time seeing the transformation of incarcerated men and women. I’m also always so struck by how believers inside lead focused lives of purpose. It deepens my own faith.

PF: Describe a moment in your life that deepened your faith in Jesus.

HRM: Watching my dad fight cancer has deepened my [faith]. He’s endured so much in the past 12 years, but he was always so positive and focused on Jesus. He never questioned God. He was always taking care to learn the names of the children of his nurses and to ask how they were doing each time he saw them. I learned so much from watching how he focused on letting other people know they are seen even when he could have been wallowing in his situation. ... Watching him convicted me to be focused on loving my neighbors and on that which has eternal significance.

PF: We know you studied law. What was the best thing about law school?

HRM: The best thing was how you learn to think and analyze information to make a case. A highlight was being part of [a practice trial] team where we prepared oral arguments for both ... sides of a case. It taught me to look at both sides of an argument from an objective perspective and see holes and strengths

in each side. That experience has come in handy in my work as a lobbyist for justice.

PF: What’s your favorite TV series or movie?

HRM: [My husband] and I enjoyed watching the Parenthood series together, which follows the lives of a family who live relatively close together—the grandparents, four adult children, and their families. There are so many issues that come up in the lives of the characters—raising a child with autism, fighting cancer, building a family through adoption, and starting a family business. It has both humor and drama, but it’s not over the top—you can see yourself in the characters.

PF: Who in your life has had the greatest impact on your faith?

HRM: Watching my parents live out their faith was [very influential]. They were missionaries in the Middle East when I was born and always modeled spiritual disciplines and loving God and neighbor. I have also had incredible mentors in life, including a woman named Christin who was on staff with



Photo by Shana Thompson

[a nearby international ministry] while I was attending [college]. She disciplined me for several years and challenged me to do the same for other women on campus. I was also impacted by [Christian author] Rachel Jones’ prayer life and commitment to Christ; we worked alongside each other in the horn of Africa when I taught English there for a year. She spent decades there living out her faith and raising her kids in a vastly different culture.

PF: What is something that has surprised you while working in the prison ministry space?

HRM: The Church inside. It’s alive and well. Christians behind bars often have a profound understanding of grace and have completely surrendered to Jesus. The tightknit community I see in our Academy programs is incredible—the transparency and affirmation among the members is something that is very hard to find outside the walls.

PF: What is one of your greatest hopes for Prison

Fellowship as you look to the future?

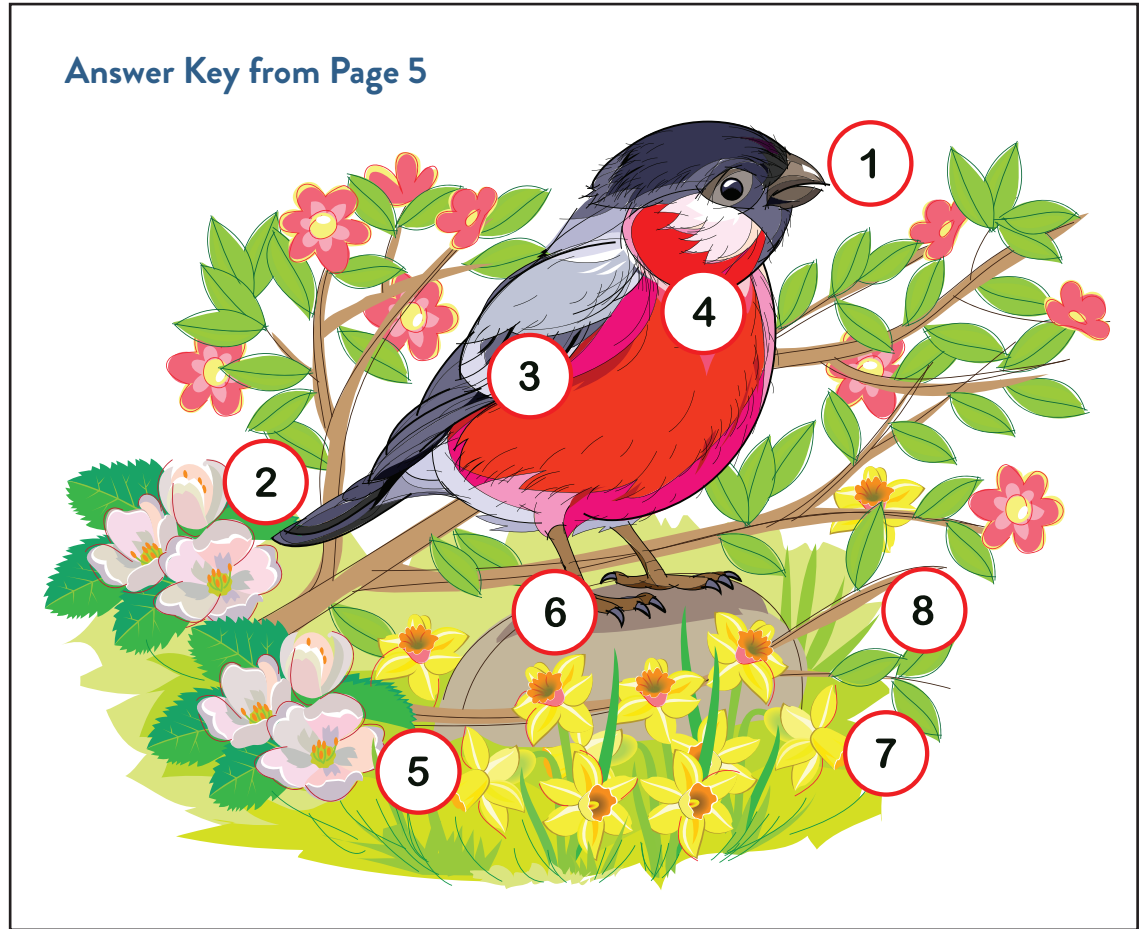
HRM: That the Church inside would inspire revival of the local church, and as a result, we would see renewal of justice, mercy, and hope in our culture.

PF: Which Scripture is especially helpful or inspiring to you right now and why?

HRM: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). I try to meditate on “apart from Me you can do nothing.” It’s easy to feel like I need to have all the answers in this role, but in fact, I need to abide in God and submit this work to Him. When I do, He is so faithful.

PF: How can we pray for you in your new role?

HRM: You can pray for discernment: that the Lord would show me the next right thing to lead the ministry into this next era and that His glory would manifest in ways that make it clear that it must be God at work. ■



NEWS + NOTES

Soccer Match Inspires Participants

This past fall, Mule Creek State Prison (MCSP) in Lone, California, hosted an unforgettable soccer match. With the support of Warden Patrick Covello, MCSP welcomed visitors from Prison Fellowship for a soccer game against the men from D and E yard.

The teams played an intense, fast-paced soccer match. In the end, MCSP prisoners defeated the volunteers with a score of 5-3.

Prison Fellowship staff and volunteers also held Christian worship services that day. The uplifting events were well-received by many grateful men at MCSP.

Bystanders noted the positive demonstration of sportsmanship, skill, and unity as the incarcerated men came together as a team and conducted themselves with poise and respect.

Top College's Prison Program Has First Graduation

For the first time, incarcerated students earned bachelor's

degrees from a top-10 school in U.S. News and World Report's rankings. Northwestern University near Chicago is ranked ninth best (tied with Johns Hopkins University) out of nearly 500 national universities.

Incarcerated students wore their caps and gowns and walked across the graduation stage on Nov. 15, 2023. They fulfilled all their coursework while in prison.

The founding director of Northwestern Prison Education Program, Jennifer Lackey, told Axios.com that this program is "quite literally a lifeline" for some students.

This class of first-ever incarcerated graduates studied during the COVID-19 pandemic, when remote learning became more common. However, with limited access to technology behind bars, students would handwrite assignments and exams that Northwestern staff members had printed.

This program helped inspire participants during the pandemic. One student named Broderick was learning thermodynamics through

Northwestern's program while trying to recover from a serious case of COVID-19.

"Your mind can get into a dark, deep depression. Your mind is what's imprisoned," Broderick told Axios. He said putting the brain to work is "the best exercise you could have in prison."

Students who are released before graduating can continue joining classes outside of prison. Darryl, who was incarcerated for 27 years, started classes shortly before being released, which he continued remotely after his release. Sometimes he joins video calls where professors are teaching in prisons.

Second Chance Month Is Approaching

April is Second Chance Month®, a nationwide celebration of the dignity and potential of people with a criminal record. Since launching the first Second Chance Month in 2017, Prison Fellowship has led the effort to raise awareness of the barriers faced by returning citizens. In the past, thousands of

organizations, churches, government leaders, and businesses have officially supported Second Chance Month.

As we approach Prison Fellowship's eighth year observing April as Second Chance Month, we invite you to celebrate right where you are. Past in-prison events have included 5K walks around the yard, prayer services, fundraising events, and more (all with permission from and partnership with prison staff). If you end up participating in Second Chance Month, write to us and let us know how you celebrated!

Pell Grants Help Despite Roadblocks

After a nearly 27-year ban, Pell Grant* eligibility was restored in the summer of 2023. This allowed nearly 760,000 incarcerated people to become eligible for federal student aid.

But there are many roadblocks to accessing this financial assistance. First, Pell-eligible education programs aren't offered in all prisons. Second, if a student is enrolled in a college program and is then transferred to another prison, there's a chance the new facility

may not offer the same program required for that student to continue receiving Pell funding. Third, if the student does not complete the education program, they might need to repay the Pell Grant money. Fourth, limited internet access means students would need access to printed materials. And finally, the most aid money an incarcerated student could receive during the 2024 school year is \$7,395. Despite all that, Pell Grants are expected to help thousands of incarcerated men and women afford a college degree.

According to EdSource, to be Pell-eligible, the applicant must demonstrate exceptional financial need, be a U.S. citizen or an "eligible noncitizen," pursue a degree or certificate in an approved program, and not yet have earned a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree.

**To learn more about Pell Grants, see page 8 of our Fall 2023 edition of Inside Journal. If you missed it and need a copy, see "In Case You Missed It" on page 5. ■*

Lay Your Burdens on the Cross

Easter is Sunday, March 31, 2024. But Easter isn't just here one day and gone the next. Matthew 28:6 says: *He is risen from the dead.* (NLT) Notice the verb there. Not "was" but "is." That means it's something that is currently happening, not just something that happened once in the past tense. Christ is risen, today and every day.

Inside the cross on the right, write out the struggles and weaknesses Jesus forgave you for when He died on that cross. Write your burdens inside this cross and remember that Jesus took all of those burdens away when He died for your sins.

He IS risen, for everyone who chooses to believe in Him, including YOU.

He is risen

Mariya Nikonova: Getty Images



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