

Created For Freedom: The transformative power of creative arts in prison fellowship

In Norco, part of Riverside County, California, the prison known as “Hotel California” is home to about 3,400 male inmates. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation houses inmates, while programs like those led by Prison Fellowship work to transform their lives.

The Salvation Army [Creative Arts Ensemble](#) partnered with Prison Fellowship to hold a series of worship and dramatic arts workshops which allow inmates to process their life experiences in new and impactful ways.

The following is a look into the lives of the men who participated in this Creative Arts weekend and serves as a testament to the power of Christ to bring light and life to even the most unlikely of places.

Below is a transcript of the video edited for readability.

Speaker 1: I've been down since 1995. I was 18 years old. Now I'm 42. When you're in the hole being vulnerable by yourself there's only thing in there is a Bible and I just started, you know, reading little things, you know, and I said “God you know what dear lord I think if I hang in this, you give me out through this, I'm gonna be a soldier for you now. With his guidance, I think everything is possible and [I can't wait until that release date](#). If I'm anxious just to go wet my feet in the beach.

Speaker 2: Coming in prison it was a very scary, feeling I lost everything. Ten years I'm facing. No hope, no dreams, everything just came crashing down. So I get to prison and prison is supposed to be a place where you get Better. So you leave a better person but when you get to prison it turns you into a worst person than you already are. Now I'm a racist. Now I'm doing things for people I don't even know. I have to fight for a soup. We can't show any sign of weakness. You don't show any love.

Speaker 3: You always have to have this sort of demeanor where you're a tough guy and you can't show emotion. So you are constantly on your guard and you're constantly kind of looking over your shoulder but in creative arts that all disappears. We are all brothers, were supporting one another, we pray for one another.

Vickie Grays, Community Resources Manager: When they're out there on the yard, they have to put on this mask, because it's part of prison politics. So the survival of being in prison but when they get into that to that room with like-minded individuals other men who are wanting to change their lives, the mask is left at the door and the true person comes out. You see men crying, you see men opening themselves up to scrutiny and just really exposing themselves in a way that is indescribable.

Lt. Colonel Tim Foley, The Salvation Army Creative Arts Ensemble: Well every person that we're encountering here has a story and we've been peeling back some layers of that story in this very safe space. It's very sacred space for us we're allowing them to express themselves in ways of with movement, with music, with written word and with acting and it's a beautiful thing.

Speaker 2: When these programs come to this facility, I can be that loving and caring person. I love others, I don't have to hate people. I don't have to do anything negative. I can be myself, the way I was before I came to prison and good me when I was a child, the innocence, and that's what they give you they give you that freedom I'm locked up but I feel, this is as free I ever been in my life. I'm free.

Vickie Grays, Community Resources Manager: We had the Salvation Army creative arts ensemble came up, we had a one-day event and I'm telling you when the gentlemen were reading their stories that they wrote there wasn't a dry eye in the place. I mean some of the stories that they told of how they have been redeemed and overcome these addictions and these [sexual abuse](#) as children and just different things it touched your heart because to see where they came from where they are now it's just really inspiring.

Speaker 4: Thank you Lord Jesus having your angels encamped around me, saving me from drowning in my sorrows with the consumption of alcohol and drugs.

Speaker 5: Leaving the ample time to fall into the pub of the [bad habits, drinking, drugs](#) and not listening.

Speaker 6: I've seen real close people murdered before my eyes and with the things that I never understood.

Speaker 7: The storm was extreme at times I trusted the Lord and thought the Spirit guiding me through and through the darkness.

Speaker 8: I found Christ and accepted him as my Lord and Savior I thank you so much for saving the sinner for bringing life to this dead man sincerely your son Carlos.

Vickie Grays, Community Resources Manager: Through this transformational process and giving their lives over to Christ you see a different individual and it becomes infectious because as they're talking to other men on the yard they're changing they're witnessing. Their change in life begins to spread and you start to see the yard is a lot calmer and there's less incidences of violence.

Speaker 9: I know it's a sometimes it might sound crazy for a person to say in here but a lot of times, we along with other men, will say that thank God for prison, thank God for this place in, this time, thank God for giving me another opportunity, thank God that he hasn't taken his hand away from me or thank God that his grace and his love is still there for me. So I praise God for that and how I can leave from here and I can be that person and we can serve God for the rest of you you know my life.

Speaker 10: I didn't quite believe in God that that much when I came to prison I said you know if you're real show me a sign show me a sign that you know you're out there that you care about me actually love me. And he sent the Salvation Army and they came to me and said "we believe I believe in you, we love you you're gonna make it out there" and that was God telling me that sign I was looking for.

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, his prisoner. He has saved us and called us to a holy life. Not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace (2 Tim. 1:8-9).

Produced in association with Prison Fellowship.

Do Good:

- See more videos like this in our [video feed](#).
- Are you a Do Gooder, someone who cares about bringing goodness into the life of your family and community? Subscribe to [The Do Gooders Podcast](#) to be inspired by those doing good and find tangible tips for simple actions you can take today.
- Did you know The Salvation Army served more than 23 million Americans last year fighting hunger, homelessness, substance abuse and more—all in a fight for good? Where can you help? [Take our quiz](#) to find your cause and learn how you can join in today.

[su_button url="https://caringmagazine.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/106-Prison-Ministry-Download.mp4? target="self" style="default" background="#000000? color="#FFFFFF" size="4? wide="no" center="no" radius="0? icon="icon: arrow-circle-down" icon_color="#FFFFFF" text_shadow="none" download="Created For Freedom"]DOWNLOAD VIDEO[/su_button]