

“Free In Deed”

The newsletter of Central California Jail/Prison Ministry

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“I Can Only Imagine”

Imagine what it is like to be inside a concrete room that measures about 6' by 12'. At one end of the room there is a small window about 4" in width. The other end of the room consists of a large, thick steel door. Approximately 22 hours a day this door is locked shut with the inhabitants of this cell having only fellowship with each other.



Now imagine the joy that comes from a random stranger that visits these individuals. Imagine even more the joy that comes as these individuals come to know the Lord as Savior and dedicate their life to Him.

Most individuals love hearing stories of life experiences. Sharing our

experiences with each other (on both sides of the bars) tends to enrich each of our lives and helps to a better understanding of one another.

37 Cents and a little time

Being able to correspond through letters in the mail, gives an even greater chance of outreach. Most individuals value something as simple as a letter greatly.

Christ Called “ALL” Believers

The Great Commission stated to “**Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:**” . . . Christ never excluded any place or any individual from his “all”. The individuals behind the bars, walls and fences deserve to know the Lord Jesus Christ just the same as all He died for.

Intentions & Wishes

The intentions of this newsletter are to allow an understanding of jail & prison ministries. It is our intentions to get input from those incarcerated as well as those “free” to visit. Life experiences of the faith and fellowship from those locked up in the facilities are always desired to let others know of the value of “visitation”. I am certain that each of us have many stories of the miracles God has done in our lives.

Our wishes are that we would have a list of supportive churches that individuals might look forward to attending once released.

A list of services, such as housing, employment, and counseling services, as well as some individuals available for friendly fellowship are also much needed items.

God’s Word says if a man stumbles, how can he continue lest there be another to help him up. **Ecc. 4:10** “For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him [that is] alone when he falleth; for [he hath] not another to help him up.” **Proverbs 24:17** “Rejoice not when thy enemy falleth, and let not thy heart be glad when he stumbleth.” **John 11:10** “But if a man walketh in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.”

Addresses

For those of you with computer access, you can go to the following web site and get the addresses and names of the chaplains for prisons and jails in all 50 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico.

http://www.prison-chaplains.net/united_states.htm

Confessions of a Chaplain

When I first accepted Christ, I told Him that I accepted him as Lord and Savior. My only restrictions with Him were not to send me to some forsaken land like Africa, not to have me work with children, and not to expect me to be involved with inmates or jail ministry. As I went on in life, thinking I had cut the best deal I could with God, he started to reveal to me that he wanted me to release some of those things “I” was holding on to and fully submit my life to Him. This happened over an extended period of time and it seems God knew just the right timing and speed for me to grow (you might realize he is the creator/builder). As I released those fears I had and let God have control of those objects, there continually were burdens being lifted. Later in life, God revealed His progression pattern for me to follow;

1. Sin
2. Salvation
3. Separation
4. Sanctification
5. Soul Winning
6. Stewardship
7. Service

Many people try to separate from the temptations of the world before receiving salvation. Others try to receive all God’s blessings (sanctification) before they have separated from the sin of the world.

Read Ephesians 4 thru 6 and see if you can see this pattern revealed. Notice that 1 John displays the same progression, as does Colossians.

Ministry Statistics

The statistics as reported from the Good News Jail & Prison Ministry (unit J-57) for the year Aug. 2002 thru Aug 2003 are as follows;

- Bible Study groups 95
- Attended Bible Study ... 423
- Counseled 1,266
- Bible Lessons 1,880
- Professions of faith 53
- Recommitments 14
- Staff Ministered to 164

www.goodnewsjail.org

Letters that Express it All

These are actual quotes from some of the different incarcerated individuals. The names have been removed

Starting a Commitment

"... I have just recently accepted Jesus Christ into my heart (March 4). I am 20 years old and I am having a problem giving everything. I have been given back to my Father in Heaven. ---- has been helping me but I just can't let go and let God. I have a lot of fear a lot of anger and sadness bottled up inside of me. I know what I want and have to do but I'm scared..."

Start of returning to the Lord

"How goes it down there in your neck of the woods? I pray all is good with you and that you still spread'n that good seed! I know that you are cause you tossed a little my way while I was at Wileys. I really appreciate your kind and uplifting words to me. Thank you very much.

So how is ---- doing? Heres where I'm at for a little bit if he would like to drop me a line or two. Ya know --, God put me and ---- together for a reason. He ended up being the best cellie I had there. Plus it got me back into reading my Bible and saying prayer again. Thanks a lot ---- and I still pray for you as well!!

Pastor --- I'm really trying to change my life. I've tried the party life, the life of crime, that side ya know and it hasn't worked. I know God is real. I just have questions, and have anger but I am seeking help and change.

Has my whole life been made on bad decision after another? We each make our own path in this world, and we choose what's right and what's wrong based on our beliefs. The good news is that everyday gives me a brand new start in my life and another chance to make the right decisions. I do thank God I didn't get life in prison. I'm just having a hard time excepting this 8 years. But if you ask ----, I do try to keep a smile on my face and those around me. . ."

Planning on Serving Him

"... Guess what I preached at the chapel for the first time. It was such a great success thanks to the Holy Spirit who took control once I yielded and gave Him control. I spoke on Active Faith..."

Addresses to contact our Chaplains

Chaplain Rick
3737 S. Akers
Visalia, CA. 93277

Chaplain Bob
P.O. Box 6667
Visalia, CA. 93290

Needs after Release

Individuals being released from incarceration have the common needs of all individuals. There is a need of self-respect and self esteem. Many have a need of housing. Most are coming back looking for employment. Some are facing classes for AA, NA, or Domestic Violence. Some need to enroll in educational or vocational programs. Most would appreciate someone to just talk to or have a mentor. Fellowship with the right people is ALWAYS needed. For many these are totally new expectations and experiences.

One inmate expressed wonderfully the problem of being released. He stated that everything is slow to happen while incarcerated. It seems like an eternity as you wait for your next transfer or assignment. You feel like you are running at 5 miles per hour. Then, when released to the world, you are put into an environment that is running at 200 miles per hour. This drastic change of environments tends to overcome individuals and they have a hard time adapting. We hear of transitions from one area to another in each of our lives. Someone to just talk with about the feelings and changes the individuals are going thru is a great healer. The Bible says that each of us should be a "brother" to help the other one up when he falls. Other scripture talks about "sticking closer than a brother" we can often help with sharing life experiences or just listening to someone in need. We don't always have to solve the problems, but many times need to just "lend an ear" so that someone might share their needs or hurts with us. Many men have heard from their wives "I don't want you to fix it, just listen". We need to just listen.

Fellowship

We would like to keep a listing of locations for fellowship that welcomes previous incarcerated individuals. Please feel free to let us know of those available

CHAINBREAKERS

Every Thursday

Visalia First Assembly

3737 S. Akers
Visalia, CA.
Room 8 – 7:00 p.m.
733-9070 ext. 131

Calvary Chapel Visalia

11720 Avenue 264
Visalia, CA. 93277
687-0220

Visalia First Baptist

1100 S. Sowell
Visalia, CA. 93277
732-4787

Church of the Nazarene

3333 W. Caldwell Avenue
Visalia, CA 93277
734-1117

Praise Center Church

503 N. Floral St.
Visalia, CA. 93291
733-2744

Employment

A great source of locating jobs is the

Workforce Investment Dept. (WID)
Tulare County Employment Connection
4025 West Noble
Visalia, CA. 93277

A government program designed for the released inmate is **R.E.A.P.** The staff at Employment Connection can direct individuals toward money available in this program.

Survival in the World

There is a story that is often told to those incarcerated.

When we look at the environment and the situations, the incarcerated individual seems to be drowning in needs, troubles, and circumstances. Most often, the type of persons this individual drawn to for comfort and support are others in the same circumstances. This can be compared to a person that is drowning and is surrounded by other individuals drowning. Each will tend to pull the other down while trying to save themselves from drowning. What is recommended is showing the individual that he truly is drowning and to suggest that he surrounds himself with “lifeguards” instead of other drowning individuals.

Getting an individual to recognize his condition is hard and only done through the grace of God. Once recognizing our limits and weaknesses, we then need to decide to be surrounded by those that would help us instead of pull us down.

There is Change

I like to share the story of Ron that he shares in churches as he ministers. After his conversion, Ron had dealt with my brother when my brother was a heron user. It seems that Ron had been a drug dealer and drug user.

One day Ron was involved in a bad deal and had a fear that the other individual was going to cause him “great harm”. Ron fearing the worse pulled his gun and placed it against the man’s temple and pulled the trigger. The gun did not fire. Ron pulled the trigger a second time and again the gun did not fire. Fearing for his life now, Ron ran from the scene. Checking the gun later, everything worked perfect.

Although having never been caught or arrested, Ron decided to turn away from this lifestyle and totally give his life to Christ.

Years later he was sharing his testimony with members in a church as a guest speaker. After the message a little elderly woman came up to Ron and said “Mr. -----, I know you are a changed man.” Ron replied, “how do you know that madam, just by hearing my message?” She replied, “because it was my grandson you tried to kill that time.” Yes God had really changed Ron’s life and it showed to others enough to make a difference in their lives.

Recommended Reading

For the new Christian, or the individual desiring to know God, we would like to recommend the following reading.

The Gospel of John – This is a great introduction of Christ's walk on Earth.

The Book of Romans – This gives an introduction of many of the Bible stories shared and helps build familiarity of Christ's plan for our lives.

The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren – Will change your life in 40 days

Book of Proverbs – Read one chapter a day with the chapter read being the day of the month. This will allow the book to be read almost 12 times thru the year.

Ephesians 4 – 6 – This gives the pattern for life that we should live. All 7 S's are displayed in these 3 chapters. We are given the purpose of the gifts, changing our character, husband/wife/family relationships, and the type of life we are to live and display.

Sharing Your Testimony

There are 4 parts to an individual's testimony;

1. What my life was like before I met Jesus
2. How I realized I needed Jesus
3. How I committed my life to Jesus
4. The difference Jesus has made in my life.

But in reality, those who believe in Jesus have the testimony of God in them;

1. Your testimony;
2. Your life lessons
3. Your godly passions
4. the Good News

Each of us needs to periodically share our testimony with others. The importance is not what you have done, but what God is doing.

Testimonies

(Following is from Freddie, an inmate recently released from Avenal State Prison)

My name is Fred -----, 28 years old. I live in Long Beach. Once a member of a gang/organization and drug dealer & drug addict. I was raised in church but kept running. Then I found myself in Jail once again Jan 16, 2003. I still held the hard exterior, but on April 10, 2003 I felt that everything up to that point was in vain. I had just had a brand new little girl to add to my already gang of kids I had. I was tired. I found God right there on my rack. I knew He was real even though once before when I was in the penn I was convinced He didn't exist. My mind had changed. So I told God I needed him and I asked Him to help me change. I didn't ask Him to get me out of trouble. I did ask Him for a favor though. I asked Him to show me He was really concerned about helping me, and I told Him if He could help me do Gospel rap lyrics, I would know He was really helping me out. It started right there. For almost the first 2 weeks I wrote a song a day. Since then I was sent to the penn. I now minister, I've preached at two services. My everyday walk & talk is to do the will of the Father. I rap in the chapel every Saturday and sometimes on Friday. God is using me, and I know why, because I surrendered. I know people laugh and say why do you come to jail and start reading the Bible? I say "hey you wasn't working out on the street". The same way you want to see some physical change. I want to see some physical change. I want to see some spiritual, emotional change. I am seeing results. Hallelujah!

(Following is from David, an inmate that was at Delano State Prison)

I was in church when the preacher asked if there was anyone who wished to give a testimony of what Jesus had done for them?

I sat there and listened to brothers telling how Jesus had touched their lives. I even thought about standing myself to tell what Jesus' love meant to me.

But then Satan whispered in my ear "You can't do this yet. You are still in prison. You can't say you don't do drugs anymore. You can't say you don't steal anymore. You can't say you won't commit adultery anymore or any other sins of sexual immorality. Because your faith hasn't even been tested yet.

So I never stood up and I never said a word. But then God said to me "Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 for all of these things we once were."

Satan is a liar and the father of lies. The world will tell you "You are a drug addict; for once an addict, always an addict." Right? NO! Wrong. "The world says once a thief, always a thief." Right? NO! Wrong again.

For the Word says I will put your sins as far from me as the East is from the West. The Word says that your sins were washed away by the blood of Christ.

The Word says your drug addiction was washed away by the blood of Christ. The Word says your sexual immorality was washed away by the blood of Christ. The Word says your lies were washed away by the blood of Christ. Jesus Christ said "I am the Word." So ask yourself, is the world lying or is the Word lying?

Thank You Lord for the Word.