

# The Connection

THE NEWSLETTER OF WE CARE PROGRAM

AUGUST 2004

## Staying Free

*Joseph Watson is a hard worker and well respected by those who know him. He is active in his church and testifies to a growing, vital relationship with Jesus Christ. It was not always this way. A brief testimony in his own words is followed by questions and answers from an interview We Care Program conducted with Joseph to learn more about what brought about the positive changes in his life.*



*Joe on the job at Escofab*

**W**hile in the county jail, I had decided that the only way to make right the harm I had done to others was to harm myself. It didn't change anything though. While I was in the emergency room, a nurse recognized me from when I took my victim to the hospital. She told me that no matter what I had done God still loved me. Soon after that I gave my life to Christ. One of the first things I began to realize was that the past cannot be changed. The only way good could come from my life was to become a better man. I have found that can only be done through Christ.

I spent 10½ years in prison and was released in July 2001. I am currently employed at Escofab, Inc., a metal fabrication shop in Atmore. I also attend Living Stones Fellowship.

### **Looking back, what helped you the most in your prison experience as you prepared for release?**

The thing that helped me most was other Christians. They gave me counsel when I needed it. They corrected me when I was wrong, and they supported me in my struggles. God worked greatly for me through these fellow believers, free man and convict alike.

### **What were your initial impressions/feelings/fears/hopes when leaving prison?**

My biggest fear was that the parole board might change their mind and I would have to go back to prison. I was overwhelmed at the amount of support I received from the Christian community.

### **What were the hardest things to get used to after release?**

The hardest thing for me to get used to is being alone. It's still a tremendous struggle for me.

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***Fulfilling the Great Commission in America's Prisons***



*Howard has been serving with We Care Program for seven years, longer than any other current chaplain. He is presently working as an assistant chaplain at Allendale Correctional Institution in Allendale, SC. Howard and Terie live in Port Wentworth, GA.*

# School of Suffering by Howard Reed

Several months ago, I fell asleep at the wheel while traveling to the prison. My car spun around a few times and came to rest against an earth embankment, sustaining extensive damage. A bump on the side of my head was my only injury. Recently, my daughter Nancy, who has lived with chronic pain off and on for much of her life, was finally diagnosed with Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy. It tears me up to watch her have to take morphine just to make it through the day, but that's the only way she can tolerate the pain. Her whole life is ahead of her, and I pray every day, many times a day, for her healing. In addition, my wife Terie and I have been through another life shattering experience which I won't go into except to say that God's grace is sufficient.

Sometimes I wonder where God is during times like I've just described. All I know for sure is that God provides me with the strength to keep going. I also know that I am not alone; many people who love Jesus are going through trials and heartaches. In II Corinthians, Paul tells of many hardships he endured in order to get the gospel message to the world, and in chapter 1, verses 3 and 4, he describes our Lord as "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles."

What I have learned through all of this is that suffering is relative. Victor Frankl, in his classic book *Man's Search for Meaning*, gives the following analogy: "A man's suffering is similar to the behavior of gas. If a certain quantity of gas is pumped into an empty chamber, it will fill the chamber completely and evenly, no matter how big the chamber. Thus suffering completely fills the human soul and conscious mind, no matter whether the suffering is great or little. Therefore the size of human suffering is absolutely relative." Frankl endured years of unspeakable horror in Nazi death camps during WWII. Though written from a totally humanistic view, he can certainly address the subject of human suffering from an experiential standpoint.

There are many men in prison who are suffering due to the choices they have made in life. They are suffering the consequences of their selfish actions. We as the church of Jesus Christ are called, not to judge, not to point our self-righteous finger at them, but to say, there but for the grace of God go I. I know from experience that just the fact that people care enough to go into prison and visit them speaks volumes.\*

What are some of the positive benefits which have resulted from my experiences with pain? First of all, my preaching has gone from futile (in my opinion) to incredibly "anointed," if you will. Being a student in the Lord's "School of Suffering" has done more for me than all of my Bible College classroom study combined. Besides that, James 1:2-4 tells me that God is at work in my life, in the sense that no matter what happens He will use these trials to develop perseverance and maturity in me.

In conclusion, even though our lives are chaotic at times, filled with trials and occasional tragedy, God uses all of it to bring us closer to Himself and to bring maturity in our lives. It is when we become mature in our spiritual lives that we can be the most effective for the kingdom of God and His purposes.

*\*If you wonder whether you are qualified to minister to inmates, wonder no more. The main qualification is a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Go with someone who is seasoned and can "show you the ropes," but go! Everyone in the body of Christ should go into a jail or prison at least once. Lay aside what Hollywood has shown you and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you.*

## Volume XXXV, Number 5

Published eight times a year, *The Connection* provides news and views to friends of We Care Program. We Care Program is a non-profit, interdenominational organization consisting of Christian men and women who share a burden for and commitment to helping incarcerated men and women. We are accomplishing our mission by recruiting, funding, training, placing, and administering missionary chaplains and chaplain's assistants in prisons to provide friendship evangelism, teaching, peer counseling, and encouragement.

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# News of Note

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## Moving On

After four years of service under We Care Program, **LeOla Postlethwait** has resigned from her position on staff in order to devote more time to her husband David and his challenges with Parkinson's Disease. The ladies at Tutwiler Prison will continue to be blessed by her gifts and her heart of compassion as she ministers from time to time as a volunteer. We miss you, LeOla, as a part of our team, but wish you God's richest blessings as you follow His leading in your life.

## Pennsylvania Auction

**Support for Prison Ministries** will again be hosting a benefit auction for various prison ministry, chaplaincy, and aftercare programs, including We Care Program. The event will be held at the Farmersville Auction Grounds, located southwest of Ephrata, PA, on Friday and Saturday, October 22 & 23. A chicken barbeque meal will be available on Friday from 4-7 p.m. with auction at 5:30 p.m. Saturday will include a delicious pancake and sausage breakfast beginning at 6 a.m. and auction beginning at 8:30 a.m. A large variety of quilts will be auctioned at 1:00 p.m. For more information, or to donate merchandise, call Nelson Martin at 717-626-6301.

## Still Looking for Young Adults

A six-month assignment is being planned for a **young adult team** to work alongside our staff chaplains. Emphasis will be placed on personal spiritual growth through the development of inter-personal relationships with those who do not know Christ, discipleship of new believers, and fellowship with the Body of Christ within prison walls.

The internship program is open to young adults ages 20 and older. Participants will serve from October 2004 through March 2005. Applications must be submitted by August 31. For more information, please contact David Landis at [dave@wecareprogram.org](mailto:dave@wecareprogram.org) or 251-368-8818.

### Attention, Readers!

Thank you to all who participated in the **Read-A-Thon** during the month of July. Don't forget to collect your sponsorships and then mail your Read-A-Thon form and pledges to We Care Program. To qualify for the prizes, entries must be received by **August 31**.

# Service Opportunities

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## MONTGOMERY, AL

### Tutwiler Prison for Women

- Chaplain's assistant(s) needed to work with State Chaplain

### Staton Correctional

- Chaplain's assistant(s) needed to work with State Chaplain and We Care asst. chaplain Carl Carpenter

### Draper Correctional

- State Chaplain is requesting assistance with chaplaincy work

## TROY, AL

### Easterling Correctional

- State Chaplain is requesting someone to take leadership of Faith Dorm program

### Ventress Correctional

- State Chaplain is requesting assistance with chaplaincy work

## ATMORE, AL

### J.O. Davis Correctional

- Chaplain's assistant(s) needed to work with We Care Chaplain

## BIRMINGHAM, AL

### Donaldson Correctional

- Chaplain's assistant needed to work with State Chaplain and We Care assistant chaplain David Bucher

## ANYTOWN, USA

Maybe God is birthing a vision in you to begin chaplaincy work in a state that we are not currently working in. If so, or for information on opportunities listed, contact: David R. Landis

[dave@wecareprogram.org](mailto:dave@wecareprogram.org)

*"I was in prison and you came to visit me." - Jesus  
from Matthew 25:36*

# Staying Free

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(Continued from page 1)

## **Looking back to your time in prison, what factor(s) contributed the most to successful re-entry into the free world?**

I think what has contributed the most to my success in re-entry were the things I learned—honesty, loyalty, dedication, and patience. Though I haven't mastered these traits, I have improved on them greatly. In addition, I had a great support team, people willing to take time to work with me and help me along.

## **What part did each play in re-entry—job, church, friends, We Care Program?**

My job gave me a steady paycheck and the ability to make ends meet. I work for a Christian man who was and is very generous and patient with me. I didn't know anything about the work when I started. Today there isn't much in the shop I can't do. My church is always loving and supportive. My friends are caring and compassionate. We Care gave me an apartment at a very reasonable rate so I could get a good start.

The thing I am most grateful for in all of these cases is that none of them just gave me handouts. Instead, they all gave me opportunities. It was up to me as to what to do with that.

## **What have been the biggest challenges/struggles for you since release?**

Being single and remaining abstinent has without a doubt been my biggest struggle. Knowing that if you go to the right places at the right time, you have a good chance of finding someone who will have sex with you. I have actually found myself driving around at night seriously considering it.

Then no one is watching you out here. No one seems to ask about those things. No one really wants to say anything if they see you doing something you shouldn't.

## **In the area of dealing with temptations and standing up for the Lord, what major differences did you find between being in prison and being out of prison?**

As far as dealing with temptation, it's the same wherever you are. There are just more out here. The same is true for standing up for the Lord.

## **What advice would you give to those in prison looking forward to a release date?**

Have a plan. If you do not plan to succeed, you plan to fail. Live your life now as if you were already on the

streets. You will have a full-time job as well as other responsibilities. It won't just be church and Bible study. Most congregations only meet twice a week. Find other positive things to get involved in. You will need to when you get out. If you're not ready for that, it will cause you problems.

## **What advice would you give to free world volunteers who are ministering to men and women in prison?**

Don't try to have all the answers. Listen to the people you are trying to reach. They don't need someone to tell them what wretched sinners they are. That's the Holy Spirit's job. Besides, most already know it. They don't need to hear about the fruits of the Spirit. They need to see them in you. Be patient and understanding, yet firm and unmoving, with those who claim to be Christians. Hold them to their word.

## **What advice would you give to free world volunteers in helping men or women who have been released from prison?**

The same things are true for dealing with those who have already been released. The only difference is that they will need a lot more of your support once they are out, especially after a really long stay in prison.

## **How have you grown in your walk with the Lord since release?**

I once read a sign that said, "Half of being smart is knowing what you're dumb at." I think I can safely say that right now I should probably be a genius because I've found a lot of things I'm dumb at. This whole experience has been a huge learning experience for me in areas such as relationships, finances, the issues of sexual do's and don'ts, and overall life skills. Learning to make good decisions has been hard. I've never done this before. But I have made progress.

## **Any other comments?**

I know I haven't mentioned God a whole lot, but I figure what is understood need not be said. Just in case you don't understand, the scriptures say that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (*Phil. 4:13*) For me, the opposite is also true. Without Christ nothing is possible.

*Ed. note: Why not take a moment right now to pray for Joseph, Don's friend (see Don's article on pg. 5), and any former inmates you know. Ask God to give them strength and victory in their walk with Him and in the challenges they face.*

# From the Field

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## Atmore, AL

### Fountain Correctional Facility

A young child planting seeds might get discouraged when he sees no results the next day. He has to learn that the seeds need to stay buried for a short season before they sprout. As a child of God, I am learning that spiritual seeds do not sprout instantly either, but take time to grow.

In the world of prison ministry, the planting ground is rough, the soil is hardened, the weeds and thorns are growing everywhere, and the rocks stick out all over. We pray that by showing the love of Jesus, the soil will be broken up, the rocks removed, and the thorns and weeds burned up, allowing more spiritual seeds to take root and grow. So often, we get discouraged when seeds of unrighteousness sprout up repeatedly, but God did not call us to save people. He called us to be obedient.

Daily we look to God for refreshment and strength to return to the fields. It is your prayers and encouragement that God uses to refresh us, and we are so thankful to each of you who spend time in prayer for us and who send notes of encouragement. It is our prayer that God will bless each of you for your part in bringing the Gospel to the incarcerated. I trust that you will continue to be obedient to the work that God has called you to or is leading you to. *-Randy Bruckhart*

### Fountain Correctional Facility

On Saturday, July 24, 2004, I lost one of my best friends from Fountain Correctional Facility. I first met this friend in the spring of 2000 when he was a student in a Practical Money Management class I taught at Fountain. It was not until August of that same year, when we were paired together in a mentoring program, that we became good friends. In fact, from the very first two-hour session that we spent together, it was obvious that the Lord had brought us together.

Over the next three years, during

those bi-weekly sessions together, we shared our lives with each other like only good friends would do. My family and I even had the privilege of meeting his family and sharing our lives with them too. It was really neat to see how God directed the events that played out during the course of those three years and how God used our friendship to help each of us grow in our relationship with Him.

It was upon his release from Fountain that I lost my friend that I had grown to appreciate. However, it was also upon his release from Fountain that Saturday morning that I gained the best friend in the world — only this time there is no fence between us! *-Don Metzler*

### Holman Correctional Facility

My weekly visits to Holman's death row are both rewarding and draining. In recent weeks I visited with a man who said he hears voices speaking to him. I believed they were evil spirits, but they didn't leave when I prayed. I told him I would fast and pray and visit again the next week. While following through with that, I felt the Lord showed me that he wasn't possessed by demons but rather just strongly influenced by them. He seemed surprised by that suggestion, but expressed a desire to be free from them.

In confessing his sins and asking God to forgive him and save him, he had great difficulty concentrating. Over and over he said, "I can't do it, Chaplain." When I asked why not, he replied that he heard the voices and they didn't want him to pray. I told him that he didn't have to obey those voices. He would start again, pray a little, and stop, saying, "I can't do it." I would ask, "Do you want to be free?" and he would respond, "Yes." I encouraged him and told him that he can do it, he *is* doing it. There is no doubt that there was a lot of demonic influence present. He still hears voices, but praise the Lord, he is prevailing against them, attending church services on death row, and reading the Word of God.

God is changing him. I don't understand why it didn't happen quickly, but I also know that our society "programs" us to expect everything instantly. Sometimes God decides to take time to heal a person. Maybe then we will learn some valuable lessons and be less likely to succumb to pride. One thing is sure, we cannot change a person. Only God can do that.

*-Marvin Bender*

## Birmingham, AL

### Donaldson Correctional Facility

Inmates often express the fear of becoming ill. Many become sick from natural causes, especially if they are older. Others become ill as a consequence from a former immoral lifestyle or from a lifestyle they are living in prison, and still others contract something just because they are living in this environment where disease is prevalent.

We as prison chapel staff are aware of the dangers to our own health. We daily surrender our lives into God's hands for His purposes, and we can go in and minister in this environment without fear. We covet your prayers for our protection.

In the last number of weeks, I have been ministering to an inmate who has been suffering from a liver disease for several years now. For the past 1½ years, he has been in and out of the infirmary and has been very close to death numerous times. We have become good friends as I have ministered to him in the infirmary. As I write this, he is very weak, and just a few days ago, he barely pulled through a very low time.

He told me several weeks ago that he realizes that God spared his life in all of those low times in the past, because he was not ready to die. His desire was to "get right" with the Lord. Now, a few weeks later, he consistently testifies of the peace he has with Jesus and of his readiness for whatever God has planned for him. **He is ready to be healed on earth, or in heaven! Praise the Lord!**

*-David Bucher*

# Perspectives

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David R. Landis  
President

Recently, my awareness has been raised about the issue of men and women being released from prison. This has come because several men whom I have built relationships with have been or will be released this summer or in the near future.

In America, 600,000 inmates will be released from a prison or jail this year. (That's 1,600 per day.) Most of these men and women will receive one set of clothing, enough money for several days of meals, and a bus ticket home. Most will have spent years in an overcrowded prison, exposed to all forms of immorality and violence, isolated from family and friends, having little or no opportunity to make simple everyday decisions. Often their days were filled with despair and idle time, and they received little or no educational or vocational training. Unfortunately, most inmates are enrolled in a post graduate course on crime rather than being transformed into law-abiding citizens. It is no surprise that within the first three years of release, two out of three are back in prison again.

Fortunately, there is hope—stories of men and women who, with God's help, were able to turn their lives around while incarcerated. They are building a new life and becoming productive members of society. One such example is Joseph Watson, featured on the cover of this issue. He is a former inmate and also a friend and brother in Christ.

All who are interested in ministering to men and women "in" prison should also seriously consider what part they might play in regards to post release issues. Obviously, the current "corrections" system is not producing positive results. History has shown, though, that the effects of a one-on-one mentoring relationship (both in and out of prison) and a welcoming church body (upon an inmate's release) far exceed whatever results even the best of programs can provide.

I'd love to hear from you.  
Contact me at  
dave@wecareprogram.org

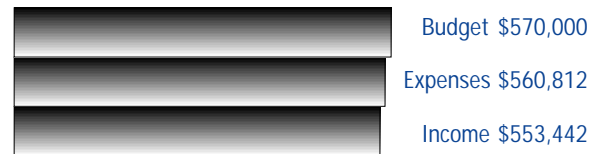
# The Bottom Line

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As you can see, income for the fiscal year (July 1, 2003 - June 30, 2004) was \$17,000 under budget, but fortunately, expenses were \$9,500 under budget, leaving us with a modest shortfall of \$7,500.

Although we would have liked to end the year in the black, we are encouraged by the continuing provision God displays through His people. Your prayer and financial partnership is greatly appreciated.

12 months ending June 30



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