

The Connection

THE NEWSLETTER OF WE CARE PROGRAM

NOVEMBER 2004

Slave of Sin to Servant of Christ

*One man's story of
finding life's purpose
behind bars*



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I am 45 years old and am serving a 25-year sentence. I am an only child, and when I was just an infant, the state took me away from my mother and my father. They said that my parents argued and fought a lot but mainly due to their drinking. I was placed with my grandparents, and as a young child, I thought they were my mother and father. I remember going to church with my grandmother, but when I was eight years old, the Lord called her home. The state took me away again. They said my grandfather couldn't take care of me and work at the same time. I was put in one foster home after another, but no one wanted me. They said I was too much trouble.

At age 10, I was placed in the county jail, and the judge ordered me to go to a school for boys. Because I kept running away, I was moved to another boys school. I stayed in trouble there and ran away a few times, so I was transferred to a detention center, where two other boys and I assaulted a coach, breaking his arm. We escaped, and shortly afterwards were caught and put in jail. After 18 months, I went to court and the judge gave me 18 months time served for the assault and escape. I was declared an adult and was released.

An aunt took me in and got me back in school. Before long I got into a fight with another student, and I stabbed him in the leg. I was kicked out of school, began using drugs and drinking, and started my prison life. I've been to prison five times in Alabama, two times in Florida, and have been to several federal prisons.

At one point, drugs and drinking led me to the hospital. I had been stabbed seven times and had my jugular vein cut. The hospital called my folks and told them I wasn't going to make it. When I came to, my room was filled with people praying for me. God had let me live. There were several other times I should have died, but didn't.

While I was serving time in the Florida prison system, I met the love of my life. In 1997 I was released on parole, and we were married in March 1998. I loved her and our son with all my heart. Then one day when I reported to my parole officer, he gave me a drug test, and the test came back dirty. Once again my drinking and drugs messed up my life, but this time was the biggest disaster of my life. My wife and son were everything I ever wanted in this life, but because of my stupidity with drinking and drugs, I just threw away the only happiness that I ever had.

I took flight to Alabama, leaving pieces of my heart along the way. I took

*...it took 25 years in
prison to bring me to
the place I needed to be
to get right with God.*

(Continued on page 3)

Fulfilling the Great Commission in America's Prisons

www.wecareprogram.org

News of Note

Did you know...

If recent incarceration rates remain unchanged, an estimated 1 of every 15 persons (6.6%) will serve time in a prison during their lifetime.

-Bureau of Justice Statistics

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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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Bible School to Begin

Bible teaching has always been a priority of We Care Program as shown by the historical record and evidences of changed lives as a result of the "original" prison Bible School started by Martin Weber in 1970. It is still a high priority for We Care Program to offer solid Biblical teaching in the prison setting. Most prison ministers would agree that a consistent, organized, and practical teaching program with a strong Biblical foundation is generally under-emphasized while evangelistic outreach is over-emphasized, and understandably so. Although it is always a special highlight to witness conversions, the fact remains that after men and women have come to faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, discipleship and teaching are equally vital for the spiritual health and on-going transformation that needs to happen in a new believer.

The Faith Dorms have been an excellent approach to prison ministry that welcome all faiths and provide the opportunity to touch people of all religions and denominations who are at different places in their spiritual journey, but for the spiritually young and growing Christian inmate, even more is needed.

Within the past year, Chaplain Brian Eskelinen from Fountain Correctional Center in Atmore, Alabama has been talking about the idea of starting a Bible College in his facility, and he has been asking us if we would like to be a part of it. An informational trip to Bullock Correctional Center was planned to see what could be learned from Chaplain Walker and the Bible School program he has had in operation for 14 years. Not only were we impressed by what we saw and learned, but statistics revealed that almost 90% of men who had graduated from the Bible College at Bullock and had been released were still free men. This is approximately a 10% recidivism rate, compared to the national average of 60-70%. After further consideration, it was decided that We Care Program should pursue this kind of arrangement for Fountain.

Beginning in January, 2005, men at Fountain will be able to enroll in this school to 1) work through a certificate level program dealing with heart and inner transformation issues and 2) move into a college level Bible study program complete with degrees. The teaching will be delivered to the students via live lectures, audio recordings, and video classes.

We believe the combination of Faith Dorm and Bible College will double up to become a very effective means of reaching men with the Truth, discipling them over the long term, and teaching them practical life skills. A person has just been selected to lead this venture. Additional personnel and finances will be needed as the program progresses. Your prayers would be appreciated as we prepare to begin a new chapter in the history of We Care Program. Look for more information and occasional updates in our up-coming newsletters.

Dear friends,
Praise God! At last my dream has come true: a school of the Bible right in prison.. something unheard of in Alabama. As chaplain, in the last five years I have seen a great need for this. There are alot of men reading their Bibles and yet continue living in sin, largely because they don't understand what they read. It makes me think of the Ethiopian eunuch who couldn't understand the Scriptures until Philip interpreted them. This is what our Bible School is doing -- bringing the men face to face with God's Word. This brings conviction. Several have accepted Christ and more are under conviction. Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous, but the sick." He died for men behind bars. Jesus has not forgotten them. Have you?
Martin Weber

Note written by We Care founder Martin Weber in the Atmore Prison Bible Ministry Newsletter, April, 1970

my drinking and drugs to another level, trying to mend my broken heart, but nothing took my pain away, so I did the only thing left to do, I tried to kill myself. I even failed at that. The only thing I did was get 25 more years to go with the 24 years I've already spent in prison. I was put on medication by my mental health doctor in Kilby prison, and sent to Atmore prison, where I did drugs and made whiskey until I got caught and went to lockup.

One day I heard about a revival starting at the chapel, so I thought I'd check it out. Maybe I might luck up and find a reason for my messed up life. I went not expecting any answers but just maybe I could find out why God put me in this miserable world and wouldn't let me leave it. Something weird came over me during the altar call. I was warm all over and my legs were moving toward the altar, and I didn't even remember getting up.

The Holy Ghost came upon me that night, and I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior on January 23, 2004. I found new meaning in my life since that wonderful day. God has really blessed my life. He has opened my eyes to my true purpose in life. I am a servant to my Heavenly Father. Since the night the Holy Ghost came upon me, I haven't needed any medicine for my mental health, no drugs, nor drink. I'm "high on my God." I got the real high now, not Satan's fake high that leads to destruction. The Lord has healed me mentally, physically, and spiritually. I've learned 124 Bible verses since then, and completed every Bible course that we have here. I go to a "School for Christ" class here, and it is my hope and dream to start Bible college soon (*see page 2 - Ed.*), which our wonderful Chaplain Brian Eskelinen is trying to do for us brothers here at Fountain prison who are hungry for Christ.

I'm also a chapel worker and an usher here at the chapel. I'm very blessed to be surrounded by my brothers in Christ. The past is behind me now, and I have found victory in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit lives within my heart and will lead me into all truth.

I must be bold for my Lord and Savior and do what He called me to do. It's not about me, it's all about Jesus. I will keep passing out tracts and telling other inmates about Jesus. I will not look back no matter what the cost. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Victory is mine. Satan has lost. I'm covered with the blood of Christ, and no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.

I should have been dead many times already and

burning in hell. But God loved me and had mercy on me. Oh, hallelujah, our God is an awesome God. He has taken the hate out of my heart and filled me with a peace and love I've never known before. My prayer for the sinner is that each one would come to know the Lord as Savior and not have to suffer the way I have. Today is the day for salvation; tomorrow may be too late. Please call upon the Lord today and ask Him into your heart. He will give you a new heart, a new spirit, and a sound mind. My friend, it took 25 years in prison to bring me to the place I needed to be to get right with God. But I thank God for those 25 years, because that's nothing compared to everlasting life with Jesus Christ.

Praise be to God. I give Him all the praise and glory. It's not about me; it's all about Jesus.

Needed!

Volunteers & Intercessors

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January 9-13, 2005

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call our office or visit our web-site.

www.wecareprogram.org

**APPLICATION
DEADLINE - DEC. 6**

(Following Hurricane Ivan, We Care Program "loaned" Sherwin Wenger to Mennonite Disaster Service for the months of October and November to lead disaster relief teams in the Atmore, Alabama and Century, Florida area. Following are some of his thoughts relating to this assignment. - Ed.)

Just a mere 12 hours after one of the most destructive storms of the Gulf Coast region's history, I found myself, with others, on top of a house roof, covering it with a tarp. It would be the first of many. From the roof, we took several moments to enjoy the panoramic view of the passing storm clouds and a beautiful sunset. I was reminded that the sun does shine after storms. The day that had started in darkness with the force of the unmerciful storm had ended in such a beautiful way. The nights that followed were brilliantly starlit, as the distraction of manmade lights failed to infiltrate the night sky. God's natural lights lit up the heavens, and many of us enjoyed this simple gift in the midst of chaos. With the passing of the storm came the realization of the amount of work that would follow in the coming weeks and months.

In the following weeks I saw firsthand the destruction that Ivan caused, as I had the opportunity to assist in the removal of many fallen trees from houses, and to temporarily cover with tarps the many houses whose roofs were open and vulnerable to the elements. I watched many people from vastly different backgrounds come together to show the love of God to others in the midst of loss.

Regardless if I believe that God brings on storms or not, we can all agree that storms will come and their disruptive paths will be evident. Ivan tore off house roofs, uprooted trees, knocked down power lines, and destroyed many buildings.

Following are some of the things I have observed during the storm cleanup that can be paralleled in the spiritual realm. First, many trees that we cut off houses had little or no tap root. The tap root is the main root that goes straight down, deep into the soil. Many of these trees had impressive root systems, but were growing shallowly beneath the surface and away from the main trunk. Are we growing shallowly just beneath the surface, or do we have our tap root growing deep into the springs of living water of the word of God and of the Holy Spirit?

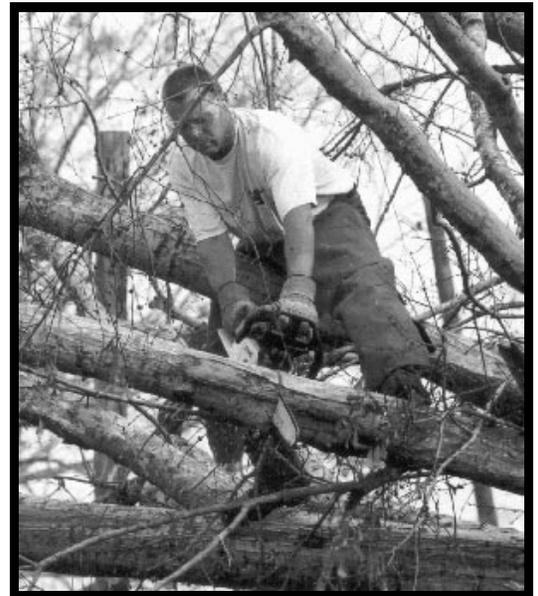
Second, many pine trees went down during Ivan. In fact, just across the road from the We Care headquarters, more than half of the pine trees in that plantation were snapped. The first few rows of trees survived, but the inside of the forest was virtually destroyed. The outer trees had the privilege to be stretched during less trying storms, and developed strength and flexibility. I am sure

that if we could have seen them during the storm, their trunks would have been bent and very close to the ground, in danger of being broken. But they stood the test. Those of us who avoid conflict and the winds of change may never develop strength and flexibility to endure the storms we cannot avoid.

Third, storms have a way of destroying manmade power and the lights that light our path and force us to look at the greatest power and light of all. The light of the world is Jesus. People went to great lengths to obtain electricity from generators. Utility trucks from 23 states were brought in to restore power. The questions I would ask are: Will we be there when people find themselves in the dark spiritually? Will we go to such great effort and money to supply them with light and power to live abundantly in Christ?

Fourth, disaster relief agencies were given 20x100 ft. tarps from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) to cover damaged roofs. Many times the storms of life leave us uncovered and in need of immediate response. We did many quick fixes to roofs by putting on tarps, roofs which will all need repair or replacement in the weeks and months to come. Many of us are quick to respond to people in a storm, to give them a quick fix. Are we also willing to stay to repair and rebuild for the long haul?

Like FEMA, God has given us a covering, the blood of Jesus, which we can offer people during and right after a storm. However, they still need long-term relief workers to help in the rebuilding of their lives. Look at the good Samaritan. Not only was he concerned about an immediate need, but he also covered the expense of the longer care. Inmates being released from prison need us to be there not only during the storms of their lives, but as the sun comes out and they find salvation in Jesus. They need us to stand beside them for the long haul and be involved in the painstaking task of cleanup and rebuilding.



From the Field

Birmingham, AL

Donaldson Correctional Center

Recently, I have been facilitating a class called “The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership” in the Faith dorm. I receive much for my own learning as I teach.

Law number seventeen is the **Law of Priorities**. This one hits home with me. One main point in this law states that **a lot of activity is not necessarily accomplishment**. I can be very busy doing a lot of different things, but it does not mean I am really getting a lot done. I am just busy.

In the prison ministry, there is so much to be done, so many needs to be ministered to, so many words to be shared, so many sorrowful hearts that need lifting, so much teaching and discipling to be done, and then there are many of the same important needs at home with our family. **This is why priorities are so important**. Are we all doing the most important things first in every situation?

By God’s power, I need to prioritize my personal life in all areas, before I can prioritize my family and ministerial/work life. It takes daily prayer and seeking the Lord for wisdom and strength, which He promises to give. *- Dave Bucher*

Atmore, AL

Headquarters

First Lyndon, then Eric, Josh, Jason, Marvin, Abe, and now Albert, Ernie, Tony and Glendon. Just who are these guys? They are the ten single young men that over the past three years I have been, or am, house mom to. Some have come for a few weeks, others for months, and one for a year to assist our full-time staff with chaplaincy duties. They’ve come from all over, and it’s been quite an experience getting acquainted with them and helping them get acquainted with me and my family - my husband Sherwin and my boys Colin and Anthony. Right now in this household it’s 7 to 1- I’m very outnumbered!

Just what does a house mom do? I’ve taught some of these guys how to clean -

bedrooms and bathrooms. I’m working on teaching some more how to cook - that’s a real treat! I’ve had some really good meals from guys that wouldn’t have admitted to ever working in a kitchen. I’ve taught some how to use a vacuum and what a mop is for. I’ve been a tour guide to Pensacola and Mobile, and given directions to Walmart more times than I can count. I’ve done mending, patched jeans, counseled about parent relationships and girlfriends, cooked, cleaned, bandaged wounds, taken trips to the hospital, medicated, and at times, have just been a friend.

I have a few more gray hairs than when I came, a lot more patience and wisdom, and plenty of admiration for the other house moms that came before me. And I will have just as much admiration for the one who comes behind me to fill these shoes. It’s been an experience that I will treasure always; one that I wouldn’t trade for the world. Who will be next?

- Carol Wenger

Fountain Correctional Center

Mountaintop experiences are great, but the joy and peace that comes only from God brings true contentment. When the world would throw up their hands in defeat, God’s people persevere with a peace that man cannot understand.

Joy does not depend on what is happening around us, but on the confident assurance of God’s love for us. Peace is not found calm seas, but in Jesus, our Rock and Salvation. As the waves come crashing in, we can have the peace in knowing that God is in control.

The men in prison watch Christians closely, and it is the peace and joy that stands out. When a Christian inmate finds peace, joy and contentment in Jesus, the others take notice. It is the light that pierces the darkness.

How are you at revealing the joy and peace in your life? This is what people are longing for. Are you willing to share it with them? *- Randy Bruckhart*

Marysville, OH

Ohio Reformatory for Women

Lately at the prison, I keep hearing “I know God has forgiven me - but I just can’t forgive myself.”

Whether it comes from...
- the tear-stained, petite 19-year-old blond who hid her pregnancy and her new-born son (who died), “He would have been one year old in July. I feel like I’m the most horrible person ever.”

- the white-haired, 50-ish, extremely intelligent lady recovering from a complete mental breakdown, “I accidentally shot my brother. The state agrees that it was accidental. But he was my father’s only son. God has forgiven me and so has my father. But I just can’t forgive myself.”

- the medicated, emotionless, 19-year-old ex-Satan worshipper, now Christian, who says, “I feel I deserve to go to hell.”

- the 50-something ex-accountant, computer software professional with the saddest face I think I have ever seen in prison. “I sacrificed the rest of my family for the sake of my crack addicted daughter. My two adopted sons refuse to have anything to do with me anymore. My husband and adopted daughter stand by me, but nobody else wants anything to do with me. I never hear from any of my clients, not even my best friend. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to forgive myself.”

My heart hurts for anyone feeling the shame, burden, and guilt of their sins. Oh, have I been there! The more that I realize how much I have been forgiven, the more my heart cries for those who feel they can never forgive themselves. None of us is above anyone else in this category of needing forgiveness. How much more of Jesus’ blood did it take to wash their sins away than it took to wash my sins away? Not one drop more. It took every bit as much to clean me up as it took to clean them up. We are in this equally. God **never** wastes an experience; He **never** wastes a hurt. We all need Him! *- Wilma Mullet*

Perspectives



Shortly after our arrival here in the summer of '99, Darla Joy was born into our family. It soon became evident that things would be different with Darla than with our first three children. At six months, Darla began having seizures and recurring urinary tract infections. In the next

two years, Darla was admitted to the hospital over 25 times, and taken to the emergency room many more. Doctors, therapists, tests, treatments, and medicine became a normal part of our lives.

Thankfully, her bouts with infection have greatly improved, although her seizure disorder is something we deal with daily. At this point, she does not walk, talk, or feed herself. It is hard to imagine what the future will hold, as her mental and physical condition slowly deteriorates.

We are increasingly at peace with the "special" gift God has blessed us with. We recognize our role

as stewards of not only Darla, but Darren, David, and Diana as well. Our journey over the last five years has taken us through a roller coaster of emotions ranging from fear, uncertainty, and borderline bitterness to acceptance, gratefulness, and peace, but we have always found God to be faithful.

I know that many of you are aware of Darla's condition and have lifted her as well as our family up to our heavenly Father in your personal and corporate prayer times. It means a lot to me as a ministry leader and also to us as a family and is no doubt the reason why we have been able to handle our circumstances with a reasonable amount of stability. Praise God!, He is answering your prayers according to His perfect will. Although there are difficult moments, He has blessed our family with unity, compassion, joy, and a new appreciation for the Family of God, who have stood with us in ways too numerous to mention. You are part of that family, so from our home to yours...Thanks so much!

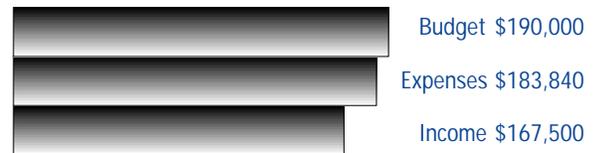
Along with the Board of Directors and staff of We Care Program, Deb and I pray that during this holiday season you will experience a fresh encounter with Jesus, the only reason for our hope in troubled times.

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

The Bottom Line

Expenses have exceeded income by just over \$16,000 for the first four months of the fiscal year. Anticipated proceeds from the SFPM auction will offset this deficit considerably, but on-going ministry expenses and several additional staff persons mean that your year-end gifts and regular support would be greatly appreciated.

4 months ending October 31



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