

THE Connection

THE NEWSLETTER OF WE CARE PROGRAM

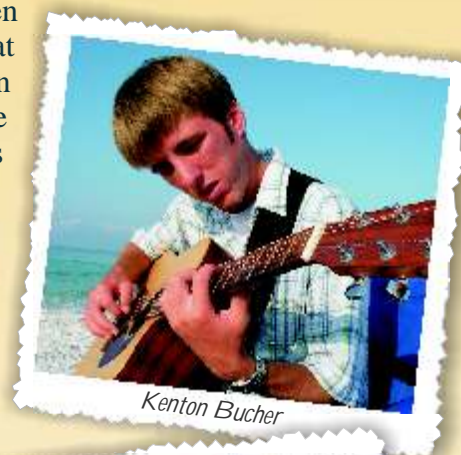
July 2007

The Heartbeat of We Care Program

by David Landis

Despite many changes throughout the 37-year history of this ministry, the heartbeat of its work has always been the team of compassionate men and women called by God to proclaim freedom to captives. I personally am humbled to work alongside such inspiring men and women of God who have sacrificed much to be a part of this team. As the heartbeat of this organization, they are living demonstrations of what we have been called to do. Not that those who are working in various support roles are not as valuable, but without our prison chaplaincy staff, support roles would not be needed.

I have asked some of our current full-time missionary chaplains to give feedback on their ministry with We Care in the hopes that you will gain a greater understanding of the day-to-day work of prison chaplaincy. In addition, I pray that the following information gives you reason to continue to support our mission through your prayers, finances, and encouragement. I also pray that you will be inspired to follow God's leading in your own life.



Kenton Bucher

The Call

The call to prison ministry was different for each one. For Marvin Bender, the call came gradually and grew more intense with time. First he was called to preach, then later to prison ministry. Irvin Martin first heard the call at a Gospel Express tent crusade. God confirmed that call with miraculous financial provision which has enabled him to serve as a full-time prison minister. Mike Strehlow's call grew out of a series of events: healing from cancer, empowerment for ministry at the Brownsville (FL) Revival, enrollment in and then service on staff at a Bible College, a friendship with prison minister Jim Britnell, followed by an introduction to We Care Program volunteers and finally a visit to Fountain Correctional Center. And it was while already volunteering at a local jail that Anna Miller sensed God instilling within her a strong desire to help those who are looked down on and considered to be underdogs. She also credits her involvement in We Care Crusades as a part of her growing interest in this type of work.



Mike Strehlow & friend

In this issue...

- Pg. 5...News of Note
- Pg. 6...From the field
- Pg. 8...Perspectives

Fulfilling the Great Commission in America's Prisons



www.wecareprogram.org

Preparation

God's preparation is also an important part of the journey to We Care. David Bucher, Ed Ranck, and Blaine Copenhaver all came from the world of dairy farming. Waiting for God to bring forth the increase out of his efforts on the farm taught David patience, which he also needs in prison ministry as he continually surrenders his efforts to God for spiritual increase. Ed states that "Years on the farm taught me that a lot of life is doing what you know you should be doing and doing it well even if you may not see spectacular results, and that change will come over time if you do what you know is right." Blaine

recalls his responsibilities of helping to deliver calves and then taking care of them until they were independent. He learned patience by watching the calves slowly grow to adulthood. The same is true in the process of discipleship.



Anna Miller

the freedom that she has found from past experiences.

Mike gained experience by working for a Bible college and now is dean of the Fountain of Life Bible College at Fountain Correctional Center. Marvin's childhood years did not include the presence of his father, and that helps him to empathize with many incarcerated men who also grew up without a father figure.

Responsibilities

The beauty of this type of ministry is that the overwhelming opportunities offer so many different possibilities for interaction, leaving a wide array of responsibilities available for persons with different gifts. Common to most of our staff is some form of teaching or preaching, visitation, mentoring, pastoring, fathering, counseling, and problem solving. Individually, each chaplain has certain areas of special interest. Mike, as previously mentioned, runs a Bible College. This includes obtaining or creating course material, recruiting teachers and inmate assistants, scheduling classes, keeping records, grading papers, and teaching. Blaine is responsible for follow up and discipleship of persons who have made decisions for Christ. David and Bob oversee the faith-based dormitories at their institutions. Anna's special responsibilities include checking all the religious mail, distributing Bibles and Bible study material, and serving as the librarian for the chapel library. Because the state does not provide a chaplain for Atmore Work Center, Ed has all the legal responsibilities of a state chaplain. Ed also feels strongly about being an encouragement to the Christian men in the camp whose influence there remains constant while Ed comes and goes. Each chaplain speaks of the constant daily interactions with those in prison, continually being available to individuals, whatever their needs might be.

Volume XXXIX, Number 3

Published six times a year, *The Connection* provides news and views of 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 chaplains assistants in prisons to provide friendship evangelism, teaching, peer counseling, and encouragement.

Direct all correspondence to:

We Care Program
3493 Highway 21
Atmore, AL 36502

Phone: 251-368-8818
Fax: 251-368-0932
E-mail: wecare@wecareprogram.org
Web site: www.wecareprogram.org

Board Chairman: LaVerne Eash
President: David R. Landis
Vice Pres./Business Mgr.: Don Metzler
Editor: David R. Landis
Asst. Editor: Noreen Horst
Layout & Design: Sheila Schrock
Circulation Manager: Noreen Horst

Keeping Balance

Those involved in prison ministry are well aware that prison and jails are not known to be very positive environments. In fact, negativity prevails, and in this setting one finds a great concentration of sinful and rebellious behavior. How does one maintain a positive outlook in such an environment? The disciplines of prayer and Bible reading are common to each of our chaplains, although some would admit that more of each would be beneficial to them. Other disciplines are also practiced. Marvin prays prior to grading lessons, asking the Holy Spirit to help him with appropriate comments as he mentors his students by writing and commenting on their questions and answers. Bob finds strength in relating to a “free-world” men’s accountability group. Anna tries to keep her calling in mind, remembering that God equips those He has called. Irvin meets weekly with his chapel staff for spiritual input. Blaine finds that journaling and days of solitude draw him closer to God and help him to see things through God’s eyes. Playing guitar and being involved in fun activities help to revitalize Kenton. Mike doesn’t permit himself to “crow” too loudly when things go really well so that he doesn’t have to “cry” too loudly when they don’t. He also understands the need to seek counsel as quickly as possible when something happens to get him down.

Gifts

Growing Christian workers are aware of their natural and spiritual gifts and are seeking to grow in those areas. Prison chaplaincy has a way of sharpening those skills and revealing a person’s strengths and weaknesses. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit empowers Kingdom workers with supernatural abilities and special gifts which, when surrendered to God’s will, can be used to grow the Kingdom and glorify God. Irvin is gifted in knowledge and discernment. Bob is gifted with people skills. Ed is humorous and fun-loving, which aids in relationship building. Kenton is a willing listener, a great asset when surrounded by hundreds of lonely men. Blaine finds many opportunities to be an encouragement through his spiritual gifts of mercy, exhortation, and

discernment. David has a special gift of remembering names, a tremendous asset when working in a facility with over 1500 inmates. Marvin and Mike have the gift of teaching, and Marvin’s humor and musical abilities aid in connecting to men as well.

Greatest Needs in Prison Ministry

When one thinks of the magnitude of issues associated with the men and women housed in correctional facilities, it is sometimes difficult to even know where to begin in trying to meet some of those needs. When asked “What do you consider to be some of the greatest needs that the incarcerated are experiencing that can be met by you and fellow prison volunteers,” our chaplains responded this way.



Ed Ranck

Marvin - The need to have a friend they can confide in, someone to pray for or with them. Helping inmates to understand God’s word and what He says about topics they’re struggling with. Inmates need someone who they know cares about him/her.

Bob - Encouragement, hope, friendship, authentic relationships, prayer.

David - One-on-one mentoring, listening, teaching, having someone to lead them by godly example.

Irvin - Father-type figures, mentoring, deliverance from past issues.

Blaine - There is a great need for discipleship. Men have been preached at for years. It is now time to walk alongside them and show them by action how to live a Christian life.

Ed - Many men feel like losers or that they are worthless. There is a need to show them that they are valuable in God’s eyes, to convince them that God can accept them and use them.

Anna - To be a living example of how to live a life for Christ, teaching them how Christ can break bondages and set them free.

Kenton - One-on-one mentors to disciple men to follow after God; small, pointed Bible studies that help them grow in Christianity.

Mike - These men get plenty of preaching. They need to SEE Christian love in action. They need to be ministered to by men who care for them. Changed lives change lives, not just preaching.

Passion

What is it that ignites the passion of a missionary chaplain? Seeing men being transformed from the inside out, seeing Christians grow in their walk with God, seeing a man latch on to godly, Biblical principles and living them out among his peers while in prison, seeing people delivered from their past, seeing the light go on in someone's eyes during a Bible study. The possibility of changed lives stirs the missionary chaplain to continue proclaiming the message of the gospel. A statement Ed made is, I believe, a firm conviction of each of our missionary chaplains. "I believe God's Word stands true and solid and permanent. I believe I have something to offer that will change and give meaning to their life. I believe I have something to offer that can bring healing to the hurts and brokenness they experience, that Christ can truly make them free."

David Bucher



Frustrations

Prison chaplaincy work is not without its share of frustrations. Respondents to our survey shared some of those feelings. Blaine is greatly disappointed when he hears men make light remarks of eternity or sees men act so careless about the state of their souls. Irvin tires of those who are constantly seeking favors. Seeing men make commitments to Christ and then not always following through with those commitments brings frustration to Kenton. He likens it to "almost playing with God." For Ed, trying to figure out where kindness stops and being used begins is an ongoing challenge, especially when those trying to "get things" will often have nothing to do with the chaplain or the chapel program. Bob is frustrated by those who refuse to take responsibility for their failures and mistakes, always blaming someone else. Others expressed concern and disappointment over the attitudes of some of the correctional staff persons, especially those who are verbally abusive and those who are not interested in positive programming and ministry.

In conclusion, several of the chaplains shared

personal insights from their labor in the harvest field of prison ministry. David wrote "This ministry is a marathon event. There is often no noticeable fruit from our labors, but we know it is there. We will continue to persevere." Bob noted, "Realizing how difficult it is to change things in my own life can help give me patience when working with the inmates and change doesn't happen as quickly as I'd like." Ed is learning that the "grace of God is way bigger than I can think or imagine." Like the father of the prodigal son, God is patiently waiting for men to return to Him. Blaine feels like God has given him a heart transplant. He stated that "working in the prison has given me a new perspective on life. God's grace is truly amazing."

Opportunities for Service...

Perhaps your reading of this article has ignited a spark within you, giving you reason to think more seriously about becoming a part of our missionary chaplaincy staff. God has and is providing a wonderful team of workers at We Care Program who are passionate about bringing the Gospel to men and women behind bars. But as is often the case in ministry organizations, opportunities exceed available personnel.

There are a number of positions that we are aware of that would be open to interested persons. In most of these instances, relationships with Alabama Department of Corrections personnel have already opened doors of opportunity, but until candidates are found for these specific positions, there is not much that we can offer to these particular institutions as far as full or part time assistant chaplains.

The following institutions have indicated that they would be receptive to We Care personnel. In the Atmore area, Holman and Fountain are open to additional We Care workers. Positions are also available at Bullock, Ventress, and Easterling in the Troy area. Montgomery possibilities include Staton, Draper, Kilby, and Montgomery Work Release. Several Birmingham prisons may also be possibilities for persons to work alongside present We Care chaplains.

Of course, We Care Program is not limited to prisons in Alabama. Currently, staff persons are also ministering in prisons in Georgia and Ohio. We want to be open to leadings God may be birthing within you in other states or locations as well. Should you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you to begin looking into the possibility of becoming a part of the We Care team, contact David Landis at dave@wecareprogram.org or 251-368-8818. 🙌

Bob Depew & friend



News of Note

VOL. 39, NO. 3

Atmore, Alabama

July 2007

Chapel Project Begins

ATMORE – As you may remember, over two years ago we sent out an appeal giving you the opportunity to donate toward a new chapel for the Atmore Community Work Center (ACWC). At that time, over \$70,000 was raised for the project. What we did not realize at that time were the various steps that we would need to take to gain final approval from the Alabama Department of Corrections. Now, over two years later, final approval has been granted at last.

The warden of ACWC has given approval for the majority of construction labor to be supplied by the men in the camp, but We Care Program will give leadership to the project by handling the purchase of materials and

providing an overseer. Work will begin immediately.

Dean Miller, from Arthur, Illinois, who first came to We Care in the fall of 2006 to help with the headquarters building project, returned this winter to assist with the completion of that facility and will be continuing his assignment with us as the project coordinator for the ACWC Chapel. We feel extremely blessed to have benefitted from Dean's workmanship and are grateful for his willingness to assist and give leadership to the chapel construction.

Since our original estimates are now two years old, we are anticipating that there will be a need for additional finances to



Groundbreaking was held on June 12, 2007, for the new chapel to be built at Atmore Community Work Center. Pictured are: Ed Ranck, Chaplain; Dean Miller, Project Coordinator; and Warden Sylvester Folks of ACWC.

complete the project due to increased materials costs and unforeseen building code

issues. We will keep you posted as the project progresses.

Headquarters Completed

ATMORE – Moving into our new headquarters facility gives us much to be thankful for. Our surroundings are a constant reminder of the sacrificial labors and generosity of so many different individuals. It has been evident to us throughout the project that God's hand was upon it, as so many times He provided who and what



was needed at just the right time. We also sense that our being able to move into the new facility over one month ahead of our projected move-in date is a result of the favor that God bestowed on us. Not to be underestimated is the

diligent leadership that Don Metzler, Vice President and Business Manager of We Care Program, gave to the project. Great job, Don! We are all looking forward to settling in and re-focusing our attention to the mandate we

have been entrusted with: Go...make disciples... baptize, and teach them "to observe all things I have commanded you." Matthew 28:19-20

An open house and dedication will be held on Sunday, July 29, 2007. The open house will take place from 2:00-5:00 PM with the dedication service taking place at 3:00 PM. Everyone is welcome to attend. RSVP is preferred, but not required: noreen@wecareprogram.org or 251-368-8818.

A Special Thank You

Although quite a number of different individuals assisted with the headquarters building project, only one was there from beginning to end.

We want to express our appreciation to Mike Enright, who served as a general laborer from September 2006 through May 2007. May God richly bless you, Mike, as you continue to seek God's direction for your future.

Read-A-Thon Reminder

Don't forget! Now is the time for the annual We Care Program read-a-thon! Forms (with instructions) may be downloaded from our

website. Read your chosen books during July, and then in August collect and mail pledges to the We Care office, along with your read-a-thon form. Pledges received by August 31 qualify reader to be eligible for prizes.



From the field

Atmore, AL

J. O. Davis Correctional Facility

There are so many broken relationships. I find that most people who come for counsel are seeking healing for the hurt they are experiencing as the result of a broken relationship. Someone did them wrong or their expectations weren't met, and they can't forget about it. The lie that most of us believe is that if revenge were bestowed, the problems would be solved and the hurt would go away. The truth is two wrongs have never made a right. In order to experience healing, we need to see the Doctor, and in the case of broken relationships, the Doctor (Jesus) offers forgiveness.

Most relational breakdowns occur within the battle of two wills, often the unwillingness to give in one's own will to the will of God in one's life. The self will rises up with a bad attitude saying, I don't deserve all this, or I deserve much better than this. In truth, the problems may be the very tools God is using to break down a strong self will and leave one at the mercy of a loving Creator who has a divine will and plan for his life.

Instead of seeking healing that comes through forgiveness, many people carry grudges around for years, becoming angry, bitter people who heap injury upon insult to friends and family members, resulting in more offenses and broken relationships. What I see as the painful underlying truth in relationships is that hurting people hurt people. Praise the Lord, Jesus heals all who are willing to submit to Him.

I asked an inmate friend to share how he has experienced healing and restoration in relationships as a result of giving Jesus his pain and troubled life. He will tell us how Jesus changed him from what he used to be into who he is now in Christ.

Growing up in a dysfunctional family, I was often left in the care of my sister, and we became very close. By the time I was nine years old, she was married and had moved across the country, leaving me emotionally devastated and to fend for myself against the world, or so it seemed. In time my parents' marriage ended in divorce. This seemed to be the turning point in my life. By the age of

eleven, I was running the streets. At twelve, I had my first brush with the law, and my mother sent me to live with my father. It did not take me long to figure out how to get what I wanted from my parents. When one said no, I would go to live with the other one. I spent the next several years rebelling against all authority.

I married at the age of twenty-four, and my wife and I had two daughters. After seven years of marriage, I had successfully destroyed my family through my involvement in drugs and criminal activity. Since then I have been in and out of prison many times.

Since being incarcerated this time, I have come to know Christ like never before, and my life has changed in many ways. Christ has completely taken away my desire for drugs and alcohol, along with the anger and hatred I carried in my heart for so many years. He has given me a new heart and a new mind. I recently learned that both my daughters have also accepted Christ into their lives. God has made it possible for my daughters and me to restore our relationship.

I truly hope that through these words, someone will see what God can and will do for those who seek His face. God is good!

- Irvin Martin



Fountain Correctional Facility

What would cause you to serve someone? To lay down your agenda to help someone and expect nothing in return? Love. Love is what caused Jesus to wash His disciples' feet. It is because of love that our sins are forgiven. Jesus went to the cross knowing that no one could repay Him for the sacrifice He was about to give. The examples of love and service that Jesus left for us are steep, but still vital and essential for every believer.

This is the message that Chaplain Eskelinen and I are trying to portray to the inmates at Fountain. We invited about twenty men that we felt had outstanding Christian character to join us for a meeting where we would talk about the vision God has placed on our hearts. That morning was extra busy for both the chaplain and me, and we were both late to the meeting. As we entered the room, the men were already seated and singing, "Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary." I could tell from that moment

that this meeting was not just Chap and me trying to accomplish our plans, but instead God was about to do a work in all our hearts.

Chaplain opened with a prayer and then shared from John 13 about the example Jesus set for us when He washed His disciples' feet. Chap asked the men to remove their shoes. He and I each took a mop bucket and began to wash their feet. We could hear snuffles as grown men held back the tears. For some, this was the first time anyone had ever washed their feet.

After Chap and I finished, two of the inmates washed our feet. Tears of joy ran down my face as my feet were washed by my Christian brother. Although he committed a crime that led him to prison, we were still bought for the same price that only Christ's love could pay. I felt honored to serve and be served by my brothers in white. For a moment I was lost in thought. I realized this was taking place only because of love, the love of a Father who gave His Son for us, giving us the ability to love and serve each other like He did.

As I walked out of prison that night, I couldn't help but think, "What could happen if Christians started to love each other as Christ loves us? If we looked for ways to serve our neighbors and government officials?" I pray that Christ will continue to fill me with His love so that I can love others just as He does.

- Blaine Copenhaver

Atmore Work Center

The percentage of men who return to prison after their sentences are finished is discouraging. Jerrill was the quiet type, did his work well and without a lot of fuss, attended services, and walked his faith in the dorm. I liked to stop by and talk with him and often came away encouraged in my faith. His sentence ended last fall, and though I wrote to him, I was somewhat disappointed when he didn't reply. I did not push the issue, since often men want to forget their prison experience and leave it behind as they move on. Imagine my surprise when recently I received a letter from Jerrill. He said my address had fallen out of his Bible one Sunday at church and he wanted to update me on his life after prison. He had reconciled with and remarried his wife, gotten a job within a week of his release from prison and had received two promotions to a very responsible position, and was active in a local church. He was scheduled to speak to their youth group and was nervous about it but was eager to share his testimony with them. He felt his time in prison had been valuable for him because it had slowed him down enough for God to have a chance to speak to him and work in his life. Jerrill has taken seriously his crime, his time and the things God taught him through it and is walking on with the Lord. I believe he's one of the minority; he won't be back.

- Ed Ranck

Camden, AL

Camden Comm. Based Facility

May 7, 2007, marked the first anniversary of We Care's involvement in bringing Christian ministry to approximately 150 inmates and officers at Camden CBF. Every other Sunday several volunteers visit with the men in the dorms and then lead worship in the chapel.

A recent article in "The Connection" stated that the greatest compliment one inmate could give another was to say, "he's real." What do you think is the greatest compliment an inmate could give a Christian volunteer? For the inmates at Camden CBF, most of the "free world" men they have seen come and go, never came back. All men at some point are "prisoners" of something, and inmates, officers and even volunteers desperately need something solid, consistent and "real" to bring freedom into their lives. The greatest privilege we have as volunteers is the opportunity to fellowship and worship with other "prisoners." The greatest encouragement as we go through the camp is to hear, "Hey, Pastor," "What's up, Rev?" or "Could you pray for my family or my parole hearing?" The greatest compliment we receive from inmates and officers at Camden CBF is simply, "Thank you, guys, for coming," and "We'll see you in two weeks." Some are glad we came and they know we'll be back, because they've seen us come back every two weeks for a year and they know why we keep coming back. Not because we are "real," but because Jesus is real in us and He desires to become real in them!

"But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I'm going to bring disaster on all flesh, declares the Lord, but I will give your life to you as booty in all the places where you may go," (Jeremiah 45:5). If we seek results, recognition, or rewards, we will find disaster. If we seek to let God continue to use the life we have gained, He will give that same life as a prize to others "in all the places where [we] may go."
- Sid Chapman

Cherrylog, GA

Fannin County Jail

We sit at one of the hard, metal tables in the common room. Rick* is a new Christian and we cover the usual topics of how he is growing spiritually. Then I move the conversation to a topic generally avoided, sex, approaching indirectly. "Have you ever been married?" "Do you have children?" The reply is "No" to both. "But you have had sexual relationships?" He indicates yes. "Many, I suppose." "Well, not really," he says, "Certainly no more than this," holding up his hands with the fingers spread, which I

conclude means ten. So like almost everyone in this day and age, he's got some serious baggage which he will need to deal with, as well as change his behavior so as not to accumulate more, if he is to become a victorious follower of Jesus. Maybe next week, by God's grace, we'll go deeper.

In the next dorm, Robert* is waiting for me. He has had four failed marriages plus no doubt dozens of other "hook-ups." We've known each other most of the seven years I've been coming here, but I haven't seen him for a year or two. He's always been a tough guy, but tonight he seems different. I try one of my little "proverbs" on him, "You know, alcohol and dope are very bad and wreck the lives of folks like you, but what I've come to be convinced is even worse is sexual immorality."

Robert blinks several times, then—amazingly—agrees. He speaks softly of how his inability to control his sexuality has brought ruin to his life, as well as messed up the lives of so many others. It's obvious that he has a lot more baggage than Rick. "O Lord," I pray, "how can I help him get on with the business of getting right with you? I mean, really right, Lord!"

In my compassion for Robert, I use one of my old stand-bys—I say, "My prayer for you is that twenty years from now, your life will have changed so radically that, if any of your grandchildren should hear that you were often in jail, that they would say, 'Not my grandfather. You must be mistaken. He could never have lived the way you say he did.'"

"You know," Robert declared, "many years ago back over in the old jail, you prayed that same prayer for me. Keep praying it. I want to be that kind of grandfather."

Thank you, Lord. Get me ready for next week. Let me live long enough that I might see your saving grace triumphant in Rick and Robert and all those other men and women you love so much and died to set free from sin. Amen.
- Del Yoder

Birmingham, AL

Donaldson Correctional Facility

Comfort zones are nice. They are comfortable, predictable, and suitable. Comfort zones, though filled with "all good" activities, are dangerous to our spiritual life and growth, and if we stay settled into our "zone," it will inhibit us from being all God had planned for us.

One of my closest inmate friends left Donaldson a few months ago. He is greatly missed by me and many inmates in the Honor Dorm where he lived before his transfer. He had a great zeal for the Lord and an incredible witness and testimony, and God used him wonderfully as he ministered to me and his fellow residents in the dorm. He was one who did not have a comfort zone mentality.

I got a letter from him after he was gone

from Donaldson about a month. He told me of opportunities God was giving him to witness and minister to others. Upon his arrival at that institution, he applied to enter their Faith Dorm so he could be in a comfortable, spiritual environment. It seemed highly probable that he would be accepted. However, before he was moved into that dorm, God convicted him that he should rather stay living in the unstructured, "ghetto" area of the prison so he could be used of the Lord as a light for Christ and be a missionary to his fellow inmates. After feeling this conviction, he withdrew and tore up his application. He met another godly inmate who testified that he'd been praying for God to send someone there to help evangelize that area of the prison. My heart leapt for joy when I read his letter. He had taken another step of faith and had allowed God to remove him from his own comfort zone into God's comfort zone even though it would cause him personal discomfort in many ways.

Are you living in a comfort zone? Are you willing to step out of it into the unknown waters of God's comfort zone for you?

- Dave Bucher

Marysville, OH

Ohio Reformatory for Women

She found herself in prison at the age of thirty-seven because of her addictions to drugs, partying and men. Her assignment, before our next appointment, was to try to pinpoint what need she was trying to meet when she turned to her addictions. If that core need within was not met, then all the treatment programs were only band-aids covering her wounds.

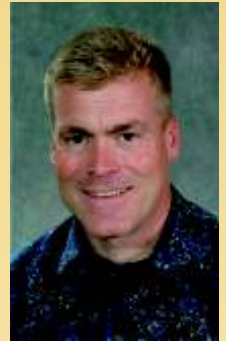
She was ready for me. "I've always been a people pleaser, selfish. My parents told me from little on up that I was perfect; I knew I wasn't. But there was no way I was going to let them know that. I became determined to show them I was still their 'perfect little girl.' The drugs relieved the pressure of trying to measure up—at least temporarily. As the addiction grew stronger, I started losing more and more control. I turned to partying and men to get the recognition I was craving. I hid my addictions so I could appear smarter than, stronger than, better than... I was a dressed up garbage can, crushed inside, but determined to make myself look good. Every year I'd lose something else: my car... It had to be obvious to everybody because I was falling apart. And all the while I kept looking for approval, kept trying to attain the perfection my mom and dad told me I had. I had to come to prison..."

And now we have the joy of watching God reveal to her the value He puts on her, imperfect though she is.
- Wilma Mullet

PERSPECTIVES

with David R. Landis
President

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




Recently, while preparing for an evening service at one of the local prisons, a Christian inmate came to us with a slip of paper. On that slip were written about a dozen names of men who had made “decisions” for Christ at a weekend revival led by another “free-world” ministry. (It is customary, and encouraged, at this particular institution, for outside ministries to provide names of those who have made decisions in their services so that the chaplaincy staff can make contact with them.)

My heart was warmed, as it always is when I witness the excitement on another believer’s face as he shares this kind of news with us. But I am also sobered to some extent, because although some on this list will submit fully to the Lordship of Christ, many others will want nothing to do with Jesus Christ in the weeks, months, or years ahead, as is so accurately portrayed in the Parable of the Sower. (Matthew 13)

What does seem to increase the probability of a continuing walk with Christ is to direct men and women who have made these kinds of decisions into a discipleship structure where they can become connected to other believers who will surround them with loving care and support during the early stages of their journey. It gives me particular gratitude that at this institution (Fountain Correctional, Atmore, AL) there is a discipleship program in place to attend to the spiritual needs of these and others who are deciding to follow Jesus. (One of our own, Blaine Copenhaver, is

overseeing this program.)

I think you will find in the reading of this issue that discipleship is really what We Care Program is all about. Sure, our staff persons preach and teach from time to time. But more importantly, I think, is that their primary calling is to walk alongside men and women in prison, helping them to understand the decisions they are making in regards to their spiritual state, and for those who are choosing to follow Christ, to show them by daily example what it means to be an apprentice of Jesus Christ. What then is even more encouraging is that, over time, the same men and women whom we have invested our lives in are growing to the point where they, also, are making disciples.

As Dallas Willard states in his book, *The Great Omission*, “Jesus told us explicitly what to do...He told us, as disciples, to make disciples. Not converts to Christianity, nor some particular ‘faith and practice.’ He did not tell us to arrange for people to ‘get in’ or ‘make the cut’ after they die, nor to eliminate the various brutal forms of injustice, nor to produce and maintain ‘successful’ churches. These are all good things, and he had something to say about all of them. They will certainly happen if - but only if - we are (his constant apprentices) and do (make constant apprentices) what he told us to be and do. If we just do this, it will little matter what else we do or do not do.” (Page xii) 



3493 Highway 21
Atmore, AL 36502-4669

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Atmore, AL 36502
Permit No. 99