

A TIME FOR GROWTH AND SERVICE

by PALMER COX

My name is Palmer Cox, and I'm presently incarcerated in Alabama Department of Corrections serving a 20-year sentence. Earlier in my life I was rebellious toward my parents because I felt as if they were keeping me from living, having fun, and making my own choices. Life went on and I developed an attitude of selfishness and pride. I thought drugs made me the center of attention. I stole, lied, cheated, and treated people just as hatefully as I could, and never had a second thought about it.

I've always had Christian influences in my life—my mother, sister, and wife—and they've all been faithful prayer warriors on my behalf. My wife helped me become a better man in principles because of her conduct and dislike toward my sinful actions. Still, I felt that I was being deprived of my fun life. I turned back to drugs and the lifestyle that comes with it and left my wife. Not long after choosing that path, it ended in my arrest.

I lost everything I had accumulated in my life. I hated my life and didn't want to live it any longer. I realized that I had no control over my life and those who did have control were mad and had no intentions of being fair with me. Before long I chose the Lord and started reading His Word. I couldn't understand any of it at first, but I told the Lord I would just keep on reading and when He wanted me to have understanding, He would bless me with it.

I was sent to Fountain Prison in Atmore, Alabama. That was somewhat of a tough camp as far as sin. All manner of sin was there. The greatest thing I noticed was a Faith Honor Dorm supported by the We Care Program. I got moved into it fairly quickly. There were a lot of new rules to get used to, but they were rules of respect and good morals, teaching awareness and responsibility of duties. It was like a place of refuge from all the things going on in other dorms. It was a place where I could do more studying and get closer to God, so I did.

After I had been there for a year, I met a young guy named Blaine Copenhaver (appointed by We Care Program as assistant chaplain at Fountain Correctional



Palmer Cox

(continued on next page)

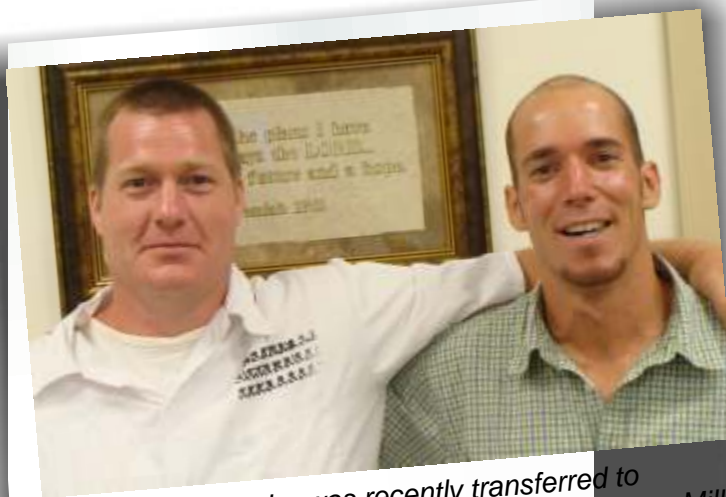
In this issue...

- Pg. 3...News of Note
- Pg. 6...From the Field
- Pg. 8...Perspectives

Fulfilling the Great Commission in America's Prisons



www.wecareprogram.org



Palmer, who was recently transferred to Atmore Work Center, with Assistant Chaplain Dean Miller

Facility under the institutional chaplain, Brian Eskelinen). Blaine was the minister of a class called the “New Believer’s Class,” and shortly after meeting him, he asked me and two others from

the camp if we would help teach the class (after considering our conduct and knowledge of God’s Word, of course). I accepted and helped teach for two years, in which time I learned that to serve the Lord meant to care for the spiritual well-being of others as much as your own. Doing this taught me how to love in a more perfect way. This, along with being in the Faith Dorm, helped me face problems in my life, making prison not so strenuous.

Being concerned with the welfare of others and watching them grow in the Lord and the encouragement I got from Blaine, Chaplain Eskelinen, Dave Landis, and a lot of other Christian brothers in the Faith Dorm have made a big impact on how I handle problems and the decisions I make when dealing with others. I have grown a lot stronger in my walk with Jesus through the We Care Program and the sheltered environment of the Faith Dorm. In a world (prison) so dark with sin, I want to thank We Care and all of those who support them, whether it be by prayer, time or finances, for being a light to those who are in need of the Lord, by sharing the following verses from Matthew 25:37-40.

“Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

On behalf of many other inmates and myself, with a heart of gratitude we thank you and pray the blessing of God on you for your labor of love. 🙏

Volume XL, 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 chaplain's 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

Final Reminder

The We Care Summer Read-A-Thon is about to get under way, and you can participate by soliciting sponsors and reading, reading, reading!

You can print a Read-A-Thon form online at www.wecareprogram.org.

News of Note

VOL. 40, NO. 3

Atmore, Alabama

July 2008

Open Doors at Thomasville LIFE Tech

Sensing that God was opening another door of opportunity, staff persons from We Care Program have begun a weekly class session at Thomasville LIFE Tech, a re-entry facility operated by Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles. LIFE Tech houses men who have made parole, but are required to complete a six-month program of counseling and vocational training before going home.

LIFE Tech Assistant Director David Martinie, a

former captain at Fountain CF in Atmore, had worked closely with then Faith Dorm Director David Landis. That connection led him to invite We Care staff persons to tour the recently opened facility in Thomasville, AL. After touring the facility and learning of the need for Christ-centered teaching, which was mostly non-existent, six We Care staff persons agreed to participate in a teaching rotation covering such topics as Marriage, Finances, Forgiveness, Employment,

Fatherhood, Sexual Issues, and Spiritual Formation.

The 10-week series, titled "Maximum Manhood," is generating interest in the facility and has been well attended. We are thankful for the opportunity to serve the needs of the men at Thomasville as they near the completion of their in-prison sentences and look forward to life in the free-world again. Pray with us that God will touch men's hearts as they are presented with practical help backed with Biblical truth.

Transition Home Approved

After an intensive process of careful preparation and discernment, final approval was given for the opening of a men's transition home in the Atmore area. The We Care Board of Directors gave this affirmation at their meeting on April 26. Plans are to invite a group of local men to serve on an advisory team, with the program targeted to begin by year-end.

★ ★ ★ ★ Staff Campout ★ ★ ★ ★



We Care prison ministry and administrative staff and their families gathered together for a summer camp out at Oak Mountain State Park in Birmingham, AL. Although activities were plentiful, many enjoyed simple things such as fellowship, rest, personal renewal, and strengthening acquaintances with fellow staff persons.



Economy Shops Serve Community While Blessing We Care



by Gary Mast, Economy Shop Director

“This is where I come for therapy!” “I just come in here to have someone to talk to.” “When I’m stressed, I come in here to unwind.” “The employees are so kind and caring.” These are the sort of comments I hear daily as I spend time at We Care Program’s two Economy Shops.

Recently I had a conversation with a customer who has just been diagnosed with cancer, has limited financial resources to deal with the crisis and has even less emotional support from friends and family. With tears in her eyes, she shared her fears and asked that I and the rest

of the Economy Shop employees remember her in prayer. I assured her we would. It is our privilege, as part of the ministry of We Care Program, to reach out in just such a way to the community in which we serve.

For over 18 years, We Care Program’s Economy Shops have thrived in South Alabama. The original store in Atmore is located at the busy intersection of the two main highways passing through town, while the Monroeville Economy Shop occupies a prominent place on the historic courthouse square.

The We Care Economy Shop was established in 1990 to bring financial aid to the ministry of We Care Program while providing a valuable service and outreach to the community. Though the retail climate in which we operate has changed through the years, the vision and purpose of the Economy Shops remain the same. The stores accept tax-deductible donations of good, gently-used items to resell at a reasonable price. Clothing for the family, footwear, jewelry, linens, toys, household items, books and much more abound in both stores. All profits from the stores go toward the general fund of We Care, providing approximately a fifth of the general contributions to the ministry. The stores also provide employment for 19 dedicated employees in Atmore and Monroeville.

A purchase from the Economy Shop Thrift Stores helps bring hope to men and women in prison by supporting the work of We Care Program. Every purchase is also good stewardship, helping to stretch hard-earned dollars and saving resources by recycling and reusing. Every employee or volunteer who contributes time and energy to an Economy Shop helps in We Care’s discipleship work in prisons and provides a valuable resource for their local community. Each donation prolongs the usefulness of quality used items, conserves the earth’s resources, and supports the mission and work of We Care Program.

It’s an honor to be a part of the Kingdom-work of We Care through the operations of the Economy Shops. Pray with us for the continued success of the stores – success in monetary contribution to the ministry of We Care and success in being a light and encouragement in the communities where God has called us. If you haven’t been to one of the stores recently, make a point to drop in to bring a donation, thank a team member for their hard work, and purchase a treasure or two for yourself. 🌟



Mary Salter (Atmore store) sorting donations



Becky Frye and Brooke Wiggins (Monroeville store) assisting a customer

Editor's Note: While browsing through our newsletter files, I came across this article in the December 1995 issue. If you are involved in ministry of any kind, I think you will realize why I thought this article deserved a second printing. Arlin Schrock completed his service with *We Care* in 1996.

John Drescher has written three books in which he reflects upon the lessons he has learned and the things he would change in relation to his family, marriage, and ministry if he were given the opportunity to begin again. I would like to use that same approach in looking back over the past sixteen-plus years of ministry to prison inmates.

If I were starting over in prison ministry, *I would emphasize being over doing*. It took me far too long to effectively dispute the belief so pervasive in our culture that a person's worth is measured in terms of performance. I was slow to differentiate character and action. In other words, I tended to see my shortcomings as proof that I "came up short" as a person; because I *made* mistakes, therefore I *was* a mistake! What a sucker I was for that lie! Today, although Satan still likes to dangle that one in my face, I can better stand my ground, armed with the truth that who I *am* in Christ is neither diminished by my failures nor improved by my successes. It is worth reminding ourselves frequently that God has made us human *beings*, not human *doings*.

Second, if I were starting over in prison ministry, *I would concentrate less on breadth and more on depth in my study of the Bible*. It is far better to eat a little and chew it well than to wolf down a whole meal. When I started teaching in the prison setting in 1974, I studied the Bible extensively and almost compulsively. After reading the text, I re-read it, underlined it, highlighted it, cross-referenced it, reorganized it, and taught it. If time permitted, I did word studies, contextual studies, and historical studies. I admit that there is a time and place for doing all those things. But, alas, notice again how *doing* so easily gets ahead of *being*! I would sometimes get so "caught up" in what I was doing to the Scriptures that the Spirit had little chance to do something in me. God has since graciously opened my eyes to a basic principle of ministry: The two-edged sword of God's Word must first find its mark in our *hearts* if it is to be effectively wielded in our *hands*.

Third, if I were starting over in prison ministry, *I would be more aggressive in sharing the bad news*. I hasten to say that I am as committed as ever to getting out the good news. I believe that people need to know that Jesus loves and Jesus saves. But telling people *only* that Jesus loves them may give sinners the impression that sin is less than serious, that "no matter what I do, Jesus is there

for me!" And telling people that Jesus saves is mostly counterproductive unless the hearers are also informed as to what Jesus saves *from*—the wrath of a holy God. See how Paul begins his gospel to the Romans, addressing man's great need of righteousness before revealing God's provision of righteousness through faith in Christ. The gospel without the bad news is not gospel at all. Knowing that a local cardiologist performs surgeries will make little impact on me personally unless I know that I have a diseased heart.

Fourth, if I were starting over, *I would be more careful not to carry UB with me into the prison*. UB stands for Unfinished Business. Left unresolved, UB can seriously erode one's ability to minister. My first business of the day is quiet time with God. I have learned through painful experience the truth expressed so well in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*: "to insure the accuracy of the dart, the harpooners in this world must start to their feet out of idleness rather than toil." When we are too busy to drink from the Fountain, we are soon too dry to refresh men's souls.

Fritz Perls, founder of Gestalt therapy, believed that resentment is the worse kind of UB. I can tell you, it dissipates one's motivation and strength. Yes, I've left home in the morning with anger smoldering in my chest, thus hindering the flow of God's love and power through me. Better to be late to prison than to leave the house with an unforgiving spirit. Have you been wronged? Release it. Let it go. Have you hurt someone? Spoken harsh words? Disciplined in anger? Allow the finger of God to press your responsibility home. Confess your wrong and throw out your car keys. You can fly!

Fifth, if I were starting over again in prison work, *I would make love my goal (1 Cor. 14:1), not getting men saved*. Saving people is God's business. My job is to love them. If I could turn time backward, I would be less self-accusing when a potential convert does not respond to my witness. I would not be so introspective when I was unable to lead a man to Christ and wonder what I should have said or what I should have left unsaid. Here's why. I've come to understand that people are like banks that accept deposits of love. God may have used hundreds of deposits to influence this person for Christ before my interaction with him; He may use hundreds after me. Today I may add a dime, tomorrow you may add a quarter. But God alone in His wisdom and foreknowledge knows and determines the day and the hour when sufficient accumulated "weight" may tip the scales and bend the heart to Christ. Every now and then, God allows it to happen before my very eyes, and let me tell you, I know no thrill its equal. 🌈



Arlin Schrock ('08)

From the Field

Atmore, AL

Holman Correctional Facility

What is prayer? Is there a proper way to pray? Are short prayers meaningless? Are long prayers more spiritual? Is prayer pleading to God to get what we want, or is it seeking God's will for our lives? Is it to quietly hear God speak to us?

Prayer is something we as Christians must do to maintain a close walk with Jesus. How else does one become close to God and hear Him without that daily visit? There is no other way!

One Sunday morning as I opened the door to the chapel at Holman, I heard a loud and energetic prayer of an inmate, combined with loud choruses of "Amen," "Yes, Jesus," "Thank You, Jesus," and "Yes." This was obviously something I wasn't accustomed to as I grew up. The experience gave me something to ponder about my prayer life. Sometimes my prayer life seems to plateau, though it should be exciting and vibrant. Jesus died for my sins. Jesus has answered my prayers. Jesus has been there for me through difficult times. How could my prayer life get "dry"? These men are in prison for years or for the rest of their lives, but their praise and prayers are not dry. Lord, help me to have a vibrant prayer life, like these men who are behind bars!

-Anthony Bricker

J. O. Davis Correctional Facility

Feelings. Everybody has them. So many decisions are made based upon a feeling we have at the moment. I may feel like having a cup of coffee. Maybe I feel like having a coke. "I'm hungry for a hamburger and fries" is sometimes a misinterpreted feeling of stress, and stress is often misinterpreted as tiredness. Yet we think it will all be conquered by eating that hamburger. Then after we eat we feel more stressed and tired. Does this ever happen to anyone besides me? Now that cup of coffee in the morning really does remove the stress, or does it? The addiction to caffeine is also stress related and relative to the junk food we crave.

Recently after returning to prison chaplaincy from almost a week's vacation, I had the feeling FINE symptoms (Failure to Identify Numerous Emotions). That morning I had a lot of catching up to do with paperwork and other situations that needed my attention, and since I'd been gone for a few days, many of the inmates either wanted or needed my attention as well. The feeling I had was *stress!* Have you ever felt like telling the person you're trying to minister to, to shut up and get out? Later that morning I finally took a little time away from my office and felt renewed.

It was amazing to me to define all the different feelings shown by the men who came to my office the rest of the day. The reason they came and the way they talked to me were based upon the way they felt. That day in my office, men expressed feelings of anger, bitterness, coldness, harshness, sadness, happiness, excitement, joy, peace, and much more. I guess that's why I have a few more cups of coffee on some days.

Sometime during the afternoon a young man whom I was not acquainted with came to see me. As he closed the door behind him, he said, "I need to talk with you." He went on to tell me that at one time he was close to the Lord and was actually involved in an outreach ministry, where he met his wife. They were married, and later something went wrong that caused him to be bitter at God and his wife angry at him. While we talked, some deep rooted pain surfaced from his childhood years. Connected strongly to these memories were feelings of hatred, anger, and bitterness towards his father. As I sat there listening to him spill out his hurt to me, I marveled at the love I felt towards this young man. When he first came to my office, I felt like it was an inconvenient time for me to talk with anyone. Now as I put my arm around him and prayed with him, God brought healing, to *both* of us. Thank You, Lord. -Irvin Martin

Birmingham, AL

Donaldson Correctional Facility

It happened nearly six months ago, but the event impacted me for the rest of my life.

It was early December and Chaplain Lindsey was about to celebrate his 72nd birthday. I had been contemplating in previous days what I could do to help make his day special. After all, every year after 70 (and before) is worth celebrating! In earlier years of our working together, I had brought a light birthday lunch into the chapel for the two of us to eat together with our inmate workers.

Every time I do this, I am required to notify our warden, requesting permission to bring the food into the prison. So I approached him one day, asking if

I could bring in one of Chap's favorite meals: hot dogs, sauerkraut, chips, drinks, salad, and cake. The warden said "yes" to my request, *on one condition*, "I want to come and help celebrate as well." I responded, "Sure, you can come!" I told him what day and when we would be ready, and he made plans to be there.

The whole party went off without a hitch. The warden, Chap, our six inmate chapel workers, and I sat down and had a wonderful meal together. After we finished eating, we took turns telling Chap and each other what a blessing he has been to us. One worker told of how Chap's birthday was the same day as his own father's and how Chap had really become like a father to him. The others shared of how he had imparted spiritual insights into their lives and had helped them grow as Christian men. Chap had also offered words of helpful, constructive criticism to them over the years.

Finally, one of our inmate workers said something that really took the cake (not the birthday cake in this case). He told of how in his nearly 25 years of incarceration, he had never once had the distinct honor of sitting down at the same table with the chaplain and the warden to eat a meal together. He was deeply moved by this, and the other workers echoed his sentiments,

expressing their appreciation that their association with Chaplain Lindsey had allowed them to eat with and in the presence of kings (the warden).

I thought to myself then and many times since, do I relish and cherish my relationship with Jesus and the privilege I have of entering into the throne room of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords because of this relationship? Sadly, I have not cherished this enough, but as I think about what happened that day, I will continue to cherish my Lord and my relationship with Him more and more. How about you?
- Dave Bucher

Camden, AL

Camden Comm. Based Facility

Special things seem to happen on Easter! When we arrived at Camden CBF on March 23, 2008, the officer informed us that the chapel was closed due to electrical problems and the worship service would be held in the dining hall. We began to be concerned that the men would think the service was cancelled and that all the traffic through the dining hall would disrupt the worship time. We even expressed doubts that the regular attendees would show up and even if they did, wouldn't participate and worship in full view of the entire camp.

As the volunteers sat down

together prior to the service, with nothing but doubts and speculation, we realized there was only one thing to do, pray! What we saw through human eyes and thoughts as obstacles to ministry and worship became a testimony to the power of prayer to turn the spirit of the world and human wisdom into spiritual thoughts and words taught by the Holy Spirit. (*1 Corinthians 2:11-13*)

When "church call" was given, twenty-five men sat side by side at those concrete tables, bringing songs of praise and giving personal testimonies and then receiving the Word of God, unashamed and unafraid, proclaiming their faith in God! This Resurrection Sunday service was special in another way as well. Within the sight and hearing of guys in their bunks, guys who would not have come to a service in the chapel, men stood and gave glory to God for the new life and freedom He had given them through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (*Matthew 10:32-33*)

The next time I stood before these men, I confessed the doubts I had felt that day and asked them to forgive me. I told them how thankful I was for their faithfulness, how they had encouraged me, and what a privilege and honor it was to serve with them in the church at Camden CBF!
- Sid Chapman

WANTED: YOUNG ADULT MEN

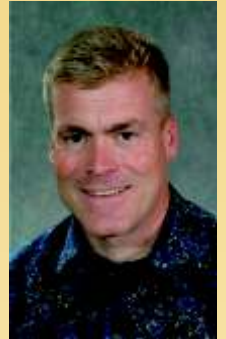
We Care Program is still accepting applications for its seven-month Young Adult Internship (October - April). An informational packet can be downloaded on-line at www.wecareprogram.org.

Applications are due by August 31, 2008.

PERSPECTIVES

with David R. Landis
President

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



During a recent time of extended reflection, I spent some time reviewing personal journals from the last six years. I was especially interested in the way that God was answering our prayers as an organization. As I began to write down specific answers to the requests that had been entered years ago, I was humbled and amazed at the way God was revealing His faithfulness to me and to this organization.


Requests revealed the basic needs of any ministry organization: positions to fill; new opportunities for involvement and growth; health concerns for staff and family members; difficult situations to work through; financial concerns; and of course, specific requests for the salvation or Christian maturity of those whom we have been connecting with.

What brought me deep joy, though, was the list

of names that became answers to our prayers for laborers over this time period. We pray continually for God to draw persons to this ministry who share our vision for proclaiming Christ and discipling inmates. ***Since 2002, forty-five individuals have answered that call!*** Some have moved on, others remain, and even now another four are making plans to join our team.

Sometimes in the busyness of our lives we forget to acknowledge the way that God is moving on our behalf. If you have not done so lately, I encourage you to follow the advice of the old hymn:

*Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings see what God hath done!
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

-Johnson Oatman, Jr., 1897 



3493 Highway 21
Atmore, AL 36502-4669
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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