

THE Connection

● THE NEWSLETTER OF WE CARE PROGRAM

● August 2009

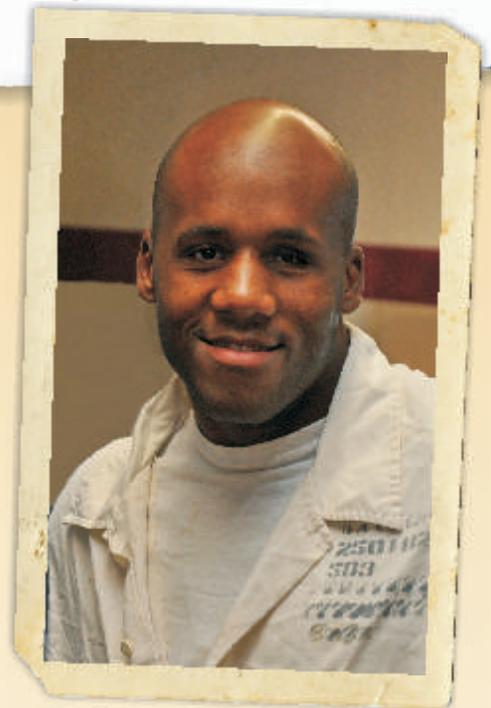
GROWING PAINS

Childhood for me was very memorable in many different ways, some positive and some negative. I was the third of five kids. My father was in the army. I remember being proud of him every time I saw him in his uniform. We were very privileged kids. My mother worked at a cafeteria, and my dad also worked at a local movie theater at night.

When I was 10, my father was incarcerated. And my mother had passed away. My perfect world crumbled. As I look back now, I realize that at that time I started dealing with feelings of abandonment.

My brother, sister, and I went to live with a relative. There I was mentally and physically abused. I felt like I was targeted because I would not fight back. Since I was upset with my mother for not being there for us (due to her death) and I was being abused by a female relative, I began to have a strong anger towards all females. During the four years I lived in that home, my older brother was sent to prison. To me he became another person who abandoned me.

One night my second oldest brother, my cousin, a friend, and I were out robbing people and stealing. I was shot in the face and back and lost my left eye as a result. I was only 14 years old. Because of the way my eye now looked, I began to have problems of self-esteem and depression that lasted for years.



Testimony by
Christopher
Watford

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Proclaiming Christ & Discipling Inmates



www.wecareprogram.org



Christopher listens intently to David Landis.

The state placed me in another foster home and locked up my brother because of what we did that caused me to get shot. His imprisonment affected me in ways that are hard to describe. He had become my rock, my best friend, my protector, and now another person who abandoned me. I became suicidal and even more depressed.

Time went by and I got out of the foster home. When I fathered a son, I thought the best thing I could do for my son was marry his mother and be there for him. I was 19 years old, a high school drop out, and I had no steady job or permanent place to live. My respect for females was very low, and I quickly became abusive to my wife. That was my way of making up for the lack of control I had when I was being abused in my foster home.

Some change came two years later when my wife gave birth to our daughter. My daughter's birth brought forth a different type of love in my heart. I started to see my wife differently. I still had a problem with being unfaithful and sometimes abusive, but not because of my anger towards females. At that t

time I was the way I was because I had simply become a poor excuse for a man. Within the next four years, my wife and I had two more children. When our youngest daughter died in her sleep, my wife really began to change. After seven years of marriage she finally got tired of my mess, and she started having an affair.

Of all the people who I felt abandoned me, I never thought my wife would be one of them. I couldn't take it. I had finally grown to love her and I couldn't see myself without her. I was still hurting inside from my daughter's death, and I already had self-esteem problems and depression and my feelings about being abandoned. I completely crashed out and attacked my wife and her lover. I was arrested and charged with two counts of attempted murder.

While in the county jail awaiting trial, I found out that my wife started using drugs and she and her lover ran off together and abandoned our kids. In my mind I began to see my kids go through what I went through growing up. Unable to handle those thoughts, I hit rock bottom. I started talking to God, just having little conversations with Him from time to time. I finally gave up and asked God to come into my life. Slowly I began to notice a difference in me. I gained weight, I started praying often, and instead of getting the two life sentences I was facing, I ended up with only 12 years.

Four and a half years have passed now, and today I can honestly say I'm saved by the grace of God. Even though I still have issues of feeling abandoned by certain friends and loved ones, I know that God never abandoned me. I see life differently. I fellowship with Christian brothers,

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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.

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and I'm a wiser, stronger man because of Christ in my life. My faith is constantly being tested, but it's during those moments that I remember that things happen for a reason and my godly character is being developed from my faith and trials and tribulations.

God has allowed me this year to get my eye corrected through a major surgery. That has helped my self-esteem. I'm starting to realize that my family and friends have lives too and they are only able to do what they can, not all that I wish they would do. I have desires to reach out to troubled kids, be a part of my kids' lives, and help get my wife off drugs and lead her to Christ. I have desires to be free, to live a Christlike life for the rest of my life. I want to feel the love that comes with being in godly relationships.

I don't care who you are or what you've done. Trust God and give Him a chance and watch how you'll grow mentally, physically, and spiritually. Hard times will come, but you'll never face them alone. God wants all of us to call on Him.

I'm very thankful for the chaplain and assistant chaplain here at Fountain Correctional Facility. They've both spent precious time with me. They've allowed me to share my testimony with others in the chapel, they've prayed for me, and they've shown me that not all people will abandon me. I live in the Faith Dorm, and through the Faith Dorm I've been able to meet many people from We Care who have spent countless hours helping us 240 men receive a healthy and encouraging environment to live in. I'm thankful for the classes We Care has put together. I'm thankful for the halfway house We Care has opened to help brothers learn about God and developing godly character.

I thank everyone who has given their time to help We Care, whether it be through money or prayers. Most importantly, I thank God for His love and patience in me. 🙏

(continued from Perspectives, page 8)

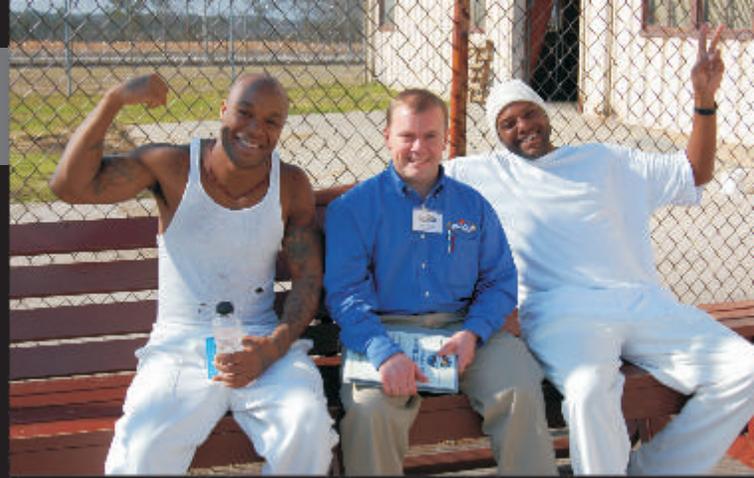
The following poem has helped me to visualize these concepts and understand the importance of keeping my "fire" burning.

"Fire" (by Judy Brown)

**What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water.
So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.
When we are able to build
open spaces
in the same way
we have learned
to pile on logs,
then we come to see how
it is fuel, and the absence of fuel
together, that makes the fire possible.
We only need to lay a log
lightly from time to time
A fire
grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings
in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn
can find its way.**

Maybe you are at a place in life where your "fire" is not burning as brightly as it once was. Your love for God and his Word have been replaced by other good or not-so-good things. Your passion for living a life that brings glory to God and blesses others has all but diminished. Your burden for the lost has been replaced by the cares of this world. If any of these are the case, then I challenge you with this question, "How much space are you leaving between the logs?" 🙏

Profile David Bucher



Assignment: Missionary Chaplain, Donaldson Correctional Facility, Birmingham, AL.

A Typical Day: The drive to prison is one of the few things that's the same each day. I spend that time meditating and praying. At the prison I spend at least two hours handling office issues. I usually meet with inmate leaders from the Faith/Character Based Dorms. About 11:00 AM I go to the chow hall and eat lunch with an inmate who I have not met in that setting. The rest of the day is spent doing one-on-one visiting. Once a month I teach a session in the re-entry program, and at least twice a month I share a message in the chapel service.

Rewards: Seeing men's faces light up when I greet them by name. Sharing with men on a personal level, helping them live victoriously through a life of surrender to the Lord. Helping men resolve conflicts. Seeing my inmate brothers reach out to fellow residents with the gospel and living their testimonies, not just speaking them.

Challenges: Seeing my Christian brothers give up on fellow inmates, thinking they are hopeless, unreachable. Feeling that same way about some guys every now and then. Seeing men content in spiritual bondage. Maintaining a heart of compassion when I find out the devious games the men play.

Just for fun: Family outings and time at home with my wife and children. Playing sports on rare occasions. Traveling. If money or time were not issues, I would drive all over the country visiting other places, or fly all over the world.

Support for Prison Ministries Annual Benefit Auction

October 23 & 24, 2009 at Farmersville (PA) Auction Grounds

Friday, Oct. 23, 2009

Chicken BBQ 4:00-7:00 PM
Auction 5:00 PM

Saturday, Oct. 24, 2009

Pancake Breakfast 6:00 AM
Auction 8:30 AM
Quilts 1:30 PM

Donations of quality merchandise and gift certificates are needed. Volunteers are needed to help prepare for and work on Auction Day. For more information, call Nelson Martin (717) 625-0232 or visit www.supportforprisonministries.org.

We Care Program receives a portion of the proceeds from this auction.

A Call to Sexual Integrity

BY DEL YODER

A few years back, this newsletter carried an interview with Joseph Watson, a former inmate who came to commitment to Jesus Christ while in jail, was mentored by the We Care Program in prison, and who had been successfully “walking-the-walk” since his release. The biggest challenge he faced in adjusting to the “free world,” he said, went something like this: “Being single and remaining (sexually) abstinent.”

His forthrightness helped confirm my growing belief that sexual immorality is likely the greatest obstacle preventing men and women in jails and prisons from experiencing the transforming life in Christ—yes, even greater than drugs and alcohol, anger, and the many psychological and sociological maladies usually cited. Over twenty years of watching inmates “crash and burn” on this common sin convinces me it is so.

Almost without exception, offenders have lived highly immoral sexual lifestyles, often since adolescence. Many also have been victims of sexual molestation and abuse as children. Despite what the world says, Christians believe promiscuous sexual behavior has very negative spiritual consequences.

The Bible teaches that we are designed to have only one sexual partner, and that of the opposite gender (Gen. 2:21-24). This one-ness implies a bondedness, a spiritual connection of the two selves not readily reversible, if possible at all.

In I Corinthians 6:13-20, the Apostle Paul revisits this principle for the benefit of a church struggling to survive, just as we are, in a highly sexualized pagan culture. As I understand this passage, Paul expands on Genesis 2 and the related teachings of Jesus, deducing that in sexual intercourse some crucial elements of one’s non-physical being, or soul, pass to the other. And vice versa.

In a committed, healthy, monogamous marriage, as the years pass, this interchange binds and intensifies the relationship. The two become true “soul-mates.”

However, for those involved in multiple sexual encounters, the interchanges are diverse and remain incomplete. The person’s sexuality, and hence, ability to love, tends to become more and more divided and diffuse, rather than achieving the harmonious one-ness humans are designed for.

The result is a person deeply, but unknowingly, influenced by Satan; in other words, bound by sin. Such “strongholds” (II Cor. 10:4) usually are not eradicated by the initial commitment to Christ as Lord and cannot be by the victim’s own efforts. Strongholds almost always require special deliverance through the ministry of the Word, powerful prayer, and the care of a loving body of believers.

Joseph Watson viewed his “free world” church as highly supportive of him, but lacking in ability, of perhaps overestimating his spiritual maturity and under-estimating Satan’s hold on his life through past experiences, the culture of prison, and our everyday intensely sexualized environment. His felt-needs included more companionship (in prison he was not accustomed to being alone), more fellowship (as with most congregations, his only met two or three times a week), and more accountability (Christians tend not to talk seriously, let alone call each other into account, about such “taboo” issues as sex and sexuality).

If we Christians are to help our brothers and sisters coming out of prison survive and prosper spiritually in our hyper-sexual culture, it is clear to me we must 1) become as wise as serpents about the break-down of sexual morality in our nation and world; 2) become fully versed in and conversant with what the Bible teaches concerning human sexuality and morality; and 3) commit ourselves to making the necessary changes and adjustments to meet the real needs of those brothers and sisters. And in so doing, we just may learn how to better pass on the true values of sexual morality to our own children and grandchildren. 🙏



Del Yoder
regularly visits inmates
in prison through his
correspondence ministry
and through his
devotional writings.

**He lives with his wife
Marjorie in Cherrylog, GA.**

From the Field

Montgomery Work Release Montgomery, AL



Donna Wyatt

Often I have wondered if anything I do in prison ministry is meaningful or has lasting spiritual significance. Once in a while a blessing comes along which is such an encouragement and lets me know that our Lord is hard at work bringing about the increase as I plant and water seeds. I would like to share a letter from an inmate at Montgomery Work Release

where Anna Miller and I teach classes for the "Pathway to Freedom" program.

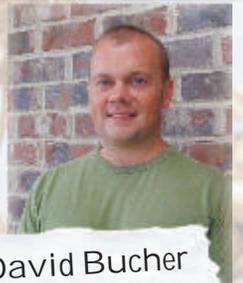
My name is Rochelle and I have been incarcerated for 17½ years now. I made unfortunate decisions that led to my incarceration. Perhaps if I had been able to talk about things and deal with issues that grew inside of me because of a painful event in my childhood, then maybe my life would have taken a different direction.

Since my incarceration I have taken various classes, but I can honestly say most of those classes did nothing for my spiritual growth. Classes conducted by "Pathway to Freedom" have been like a drink of cold water in a dry desert. Years ago I found myself at a point in my life where I finally dealt with the hurt child that still lived inside of me. Thanks to "Pathway to Freedom" I have an outlet to continue healing and growing in inner strength. My belief in godly support systems has been renewed although I carry hurts from church families that did not live as the Bible says they should. I know others like me feel comfortable sharing with the team members of "Pathway to Freedom" and this continues to contribute to our spiritual growth. It is never about one particular religion, but more about love and being allowed to be who we are.

I feel fortunate to have been chosen to participate in "Pathway to Freedom," and I hope this program will continue in the future. Other classes may offer preparation for getting jobs, medical advice, etc., but these classes help us deal with our inner being which will help prepare us for real life decisions that could mean the difference between being a productive citizen or a statistical failure that returns to prison.

I thank the Lord for the gifts He gives us. Rochelle is one of those gifts.

Donaldson Correctional Facility Birmingham, AL



David Bucher

"What is this prison coming to?! Now they have the chaplain eating this [blank, blank] food!" This remark came from an inmate as he moved through the chow line carrying his tray brimming with a meal he was NOT looking forward to. He sat down at a table next to where I sat eating my tray of the very same food. "Chaplain Dave, either you are broke, or you are really hungry! Which one is it, and why are you eating this food?!"

"Well," I said, "It's really neither of those reasons. I just wanted to come down here and eat with you guys today."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," he muttered. He ate a few bites and then left.

Since the beginning of 2009, it has become quite common to see me in line in the chow hall with the residents of Donaldson. Choosing someone different to eat with each time, it presents an opportunity to have a short conversation over a meal, which sometimes is actually pretty good, though the inmates would be pained to admit this. The above response is just one of many I have heard. "You're eating this garbage?!" "Is the economy that bad?!" "Your wife must have packed a really bad lunch for you today!" "Here, you can have my tray and yours!"

The Lord has laid on my heart to engage in this activity. It helps me to identify with those to whom I am called to minister. Didn't Jesus do the very same thing when He came to earth? Most other staff persons in the prison think I am crazy. Most of the inmates think so, too. Sometimes I even wonder myself, but I will carry on until Jesus tells me otherwise.

Another inmate told me as we got acquainted at mealtime on another day, "Chaplain Dave, we really do appreciate the hands-on approach you take as you work with us here. I have never seen anyone on staff do this. Thanks for having lunch with me."

One day I asked one of my Christian inmate brothers, "If Jesus walked down the hall here at Donaldson, do you think He would come in the chow hall and eat with you?"

"Yes," he said. "I guess He would. But I also believe when Jesus came in here to eat with me, He would touch the food and make it the best meal I've ever eaten, not that 'whatever you call it' we eat around here!"

May God give us all wisdom and the ability to touch people's lives as He would have us to!



Bob Depew

Holman Correctional Facility Atmore, AL

The last few weeks have been a time of both sadness and joy as my mother passed away and went to be with her loving Lord. In this time of loss and in the weeks prior to her death, I was so blessed to have the love and support of those I work with. The men in prison frequently asked how it was going and how they could pray for me. They gave cards with so many signatures that the pages were full. The men often had tears in their eyes when asking how Mom was doing. One inmate said, "If it's your mom, then it's my mom, too."

Though I am called to minister to men behind bars, so often I am also ministered to by brothers in prison who love the Lord. We must never forget that God will use whoever is willing to be His hands, feet, mouth. Some of these men truly love the Lord and really want to make a difference in the lives of others. And I know they did in mine.

Ventress Correctional Facility Clayton, AL



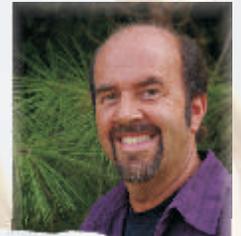
Richard Heatwole

Prison is a "world" all of its own. It is not unlike the "real" world in which we live. A formidable fence separates the two. Inside that fence men and women live and die. They go to the store, doctor, dentist, and hospital. They shop for groceries, drugs, clothing, and other personal needs. There are police, crime and prison, yes, prison within the prison. Inmates go to church, jobs, school, and industry. I marvel at the things they invent. The things they make out of nothing. The way they express their creativity and use their gifts. Every situation we face on the outside also seems to be inside the fence; it just may have a different face.

Not long ago a man was killed at Ventress. No, it was not a stabbing or any other violence. He did not have a death sentence. The man was playing softball. He was the pitcher. A ball was hit that he could not defend and it hit him in the head. He died not long thereafter. The challenges that I faced and the questions asked me as a chaplain were much like those asked outside the fence. Why? If God is love, then...? Why do bad things happen? These and other similar questions were raised. Every person must face the question of eternity. Like outside the fence, this accident provided a real opportunity to share the gospel with many.

Chaplains minister to real people. Inmates have the same needs, fears and challenges as you and I. Please pray that we can model and teach a relationship with God and a confession of Christ that becomes real to these men and women.

J.O. Davis Corr. Facility Atmore, AL



Irvin Martin

"In a moment my life was changed forever. I was angry, I admit that, and I'm so sorry. I am very sorry. But no matter how sorry I am and how many times I have asked to be forgiven, it doesn't bring her back. I killed her, Chaplain, and I can't live with it any longer. I still love that woman. Why did she have to cheat on me? I have nightmares about it all the time. If only I wouldn't have got that gun. If only I had not pulled the trigger. Chaplain, when will these nightmares end? I can't take it any more. I just can't forgive myself for what I did to my wife. I just want to get out of prison and live a normal life. Can you help me? Can you give me any hope?"

"Carl, how have you learned to cope with the reality of what you've done and your surroundings in prison from day to day?"

"I come to you, Chap. You give me hope. Your smile and the cup of coffee I get here every day enable me to keep on going. And we talk about a lot of things. Most of all, the Word of God gives me hope. I like when you give me encouragement from God's Word."

Recently Carl, much happier than usual, came to my office. "Chap," he said, "I took your advice, and I gave it all to Christ and asked Him to be my Savior. I feel so much better, and everything is going to be okay. Thank you, Chap. Thank you for giving me a hope to live for! Jesus is now my hope!"



PERSPECTIVES

with David R. Landis
President

I will always remember the day when I was officially approved as President of We Care Program by the Board of Directors. Immediately following that session, (then) Chairman Dale Mast pulled me aside and said, "Remember that your family is more important than ministry."

Of course I believed those words, and I appreciated his word of caution. However, since then it seemed that over time the demands, challenges, and excitement of ministry had a way of pushing my family back to second place - maybe not all of the time, but some of the time - and that bothered me. Even more importantly, there have been seasons when intimacy with God was replaced by passion for ministry. This was harder to detect, because "doing" for God seems so worthy of effort.

A recent 12-week sabbatical, graciously granted to me by the Board of Directors, has given me time to reflect on some of these realities. At the start of the sabbatical, I had expectations of hearing from God

in fresh ways concerning vision and ministry with We Care Program. Instead, my eyes were opened in greater ways to the extreme importance of cultivating a continual, growing walk with Jesus and the effect it would have - first, on the discipleship of my own family, and then, giving leadership to this organization.



Disciplines like silence and solitude are becoming much more important to me as I learn to be with God. I am learning that the demands of spiritual leadership are such that regular "sabbath" practices are absolutely necessary - daily, weekly, monthly, and annually. Otherwise the pace of life, degree of commitments, and level of responsibility become unsustainable over the long haul.

(continued on page 3)

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