



the connection

Fall 2023

"What Are
You Doing
Here?"



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"What Are You Doing Here?"

By Evan Jenkins (EJ)

We Care Program was blessed this summer to have an intern serving with us. Following is a report EJ has written about some of his experiences. We appreciate EJ giving up all the things he could have done these past three months to instead minister to men in the prisons of Alabama. EJ was an encouragement and a blessing to all of us. We pray a blessing on him as he moves on to the next chapter of his life of serving God. If you are interested in serving as a We Care intern, please contact us for additional details. – Don Metzler



"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ." (Philippians 1:27) In the Death Row unit at Holman, a man asked me from within his cell, "Man, you are 20 years old; what are you doing here? Why have you come to see us?" He was not asking in a way that implied he wanted me to leave. Instead it was as if he could not comprehend my being there with him. He was genuinely curious why I was there, because to him "living" would be to go far away from prison and enjoy the things he loved, such as fishing and the open sea. He questioned my motives for coming into Death Row at such a time and such an age. I could have quickly responded with a pat answer, but the way he asked threw me off guard for a minute.

When I began my second year at Rosedale Bible College, little did I know what I would be doing during the upcoming summer. Early in the school year Dave S. Landis and Daniel Earley came to Rosedale for Missions Week. I realized the Holy Spirit was leading me and stirring up my spirit to go and talk with them. I found myself talking to them for hours of great conversation in the guys' dorm. Many months later I came for what I signed up for.

This term of three months has been very fruitful and has changed my life. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener...No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you

bear fruit unless you remain in me." (John 15:1, 4) This is one of the many lessons the Lord has consistently shown me during my time here. Apart from Him, I can do absolutely nothing; being fruitful without Him is not possible. Towards the end of Philippians 1, Paul exhorted the Philippian church to bear the right fruit, which immediately makes me think of Psalm 1. This psalm is a great comparison and contrast between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous are trees full of life, rooted within the ground, very fruitful and whose leaves will never wither, being planted by the streams of water. The wicked are the chaff, the dead weeds, lacking root and life, which the wind blows away.

I was with Dave S. Landis at his house one Sunday afternoon, and something he told me really struck me. He said that prison will show and reveal my gifts, more specifically those of teaching, pastoring, and evangelism. I have seen how this time at We Care has challenged and pushed me in a

really good way. This is what I wanted when I came, to be taken out of my comfort zone and challenged. This has happened regularly during my time here.

Many things regarding the Lord are a mystery to me, especially why He allows and does certain things. I was born into (somewhat) abnormal circumstances. My mom and dad were not married, and my mom was stuck on doing drugs, consuming and dealing them, along with her entire family. She was also involved in drinking and partying. (Praise the Lord she is now saved.) Being around such things as a young boy was somewhat traumatic, to say the least. I believe I am now living out a prayer I prayed a while ago. I had realized that I had many wounds from my past that I had not properly released, wounds from my mom and dad. The Lord heard my cry, and from when I arrived here until now, He has been

bringing up to the surface many things from my past; many things I had buried deep. The last couple seasons of my life have prepared me for such a time, and with what I know now and the Lord's help, I have been able to properly process such things and lay them down at the cross, letting go of many weights.

Another big lesson I've learned from the Lord and the We Care chaplains is about servanthood, specifically the mind/mindset of Christ. "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6-8) The key theme of this hymn of Christ is servanthood and



what that truly looks like through Christ our example. Just verses before, Paul attacked the Philippians' problem of their selfish and individualistic mindsets. Their problem was not putting God first, or else Paul would have said so, but that they were not living as servants in relation to each other. Paul exhorted them to disregard themselves and to put themselves off to the side, rather esteeming one another above themselves, just as Christ did. Imitation of Christ is what we are called to.

I have learned many things from being with the

chaplains (James, Ben, Tracy, Daniel, Dave) at Fountain Annex, Fountain, and Holman, even just by watching and listening. Thank you to each one and the rest of the staff and We Care as an entire organization for allowing me to spend this summer with you in the South, for showing me such love and gratitude for my presence. I have seen Christ through you. Therefore, I give praise to the Lord our God who reigns upon His throne, for He has done great things. "From the rising of the sun, unto the going down of the same, the name of the Lord is worthy of praise." (Psalm 113:3)

SHORT TERM SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

From one week to six months and anything in between

- Mentors for inmates and former inmates
- ReFOCUS (those in or near retirement)
- Discover, January – April (young adults)
- Chaplaincy Interns
- Chaplains
- Teachers for Pathway to Freedom classes
- Work projects at the headquarters
- Thrift Store help

For more information on any of these opportunities, please contact:

Recruitment Director James Smoker

james@wecareprogram.org or 251-368-8818





Pathway To Freedom

By David Bucher

In early 2022 news came of extensive changes at Bibb Correctional with transition to a total teaching facility. On May 4 a decision was made for We Care and Pathway to Freedom to be responsible for B-3 Dorm. Three weeks later all 80 beds were filled.

As in any prison dorm, challenges are ever present. While daily living in community, interpersonal conflicts arise. It is our goal to help residents live by godly principles and work through conflicts in a Christlike manner with reconciliation and patient responses to issues rather than violent reaction. A realization of just how much Jesus has forgiven us and where He brought us from helps the men to keep from judging and/or discounting another's struggle or failings.

Classes began on July 20, 2023, two sessions

per day, four mornings a week. All of the residents participate. Current classes are "Who is Jesus?", "Prayer, the Great Adventure," "The Essential Commandment," and "Fundamentals of the Faith." Our four free-world instructors include two former inmates and two engineers.

I hear comments like "Chaplain Dave, I have been in prison nearly 20 years and have never been in any classes. I don't read well, but I am thankful to be here, and my friend Don is helping me with my homework!" "Chap, I have been in other faith-based dorms, but y'all got something special here...the patience you show and encouraging community that is being nurtured. It is unique and very uplifting! I am thankful to have an opportunity to live in this dorm!"

As the dorm leader, I feel honored to be part of this venture. It is wonderful to watch and listen to the godly teachers facilitate discussions in the class sessions. It's exciting to see the men getting up each morning, attending classes faithfully and studying together and individually between sessions. Spiritual warfare continues. Pray for growth in Christ in the residents of the PTF Dorm!!



January 21 – 25, 2024

Volunteers needed

Applications available online or contact our office for more information

www.wecareprogram.org or 251-368-8818

From the Field

Tracy Benner

Fountain Annex
Atmore, AL



In prison we see men who are shut out from society, sick with sin, and hungry for the Gospel. When I was able to go back into Fountain Annex after COVID subsided, chapel attendance was very sporadic and slim, but there were a few faithful attendees. Then one of the men had an idea. Why not give our church a name? Thus the name “Redemption Church” came to be. Since then attendance has slowly grown. We have added a deacon and two inmate pastors, along with three chapel workers. Just recently eight men were added to the church through baptism.

God is giving men, who are sound in doctrine, a conviction to be missionaries inside the dorm, and He is moving here at the Annex. Our numbers have increased from five to around 15-20 men. To God be the glory, great things He hath done and is continuing to do.

Fawn Jacobs

Montg. Women’s Facility
Montgomery, AL



Wow, what an exciting day at Montgomery Women’s Facility! Twenty-five ladies were baptized, having committed their lives to Jesus Christ. Cheers went up as each one walked into the shift office to prepare. It was a privilege for them to change out of prison garb into regular clothes for the occasion. We sang, “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.” A baptismal pool was waiting outside on a hot Alabama day. After we all gathered around the pool, an inmate led us in singing “Amazing Grace.” One by one the ladies stepped into the water. It was truly a blessing to watch as each went under and then to be able to pray for them when they came out.

I had been praying for and ministering to one particular lady for years. She was a tough one! What a joy it is to see the radical change in her life as she now pursues others for the cause of Christ with her leadership skills, boldness and powerful testimony. If God can change a Saul into a Paul, He can change any broken, willing, surrendered soul into a powerful chosen vessel fit for His use.

Likewise, recently, ten women were baptized at Tutwiler. Oh, the joy of seeing their radiant smiling faces as they walked forward to declare their new life in Christ. God is raising up an army. Some inmates are leading Bible studies in the dorms with other inmates.

Please pray for these women to stand true to their call. Temptations will come, but “greater is He who is in us than he that is in the world!” We all need to stay armed in battle with the armor of God!

Tommy Williams

Mobile Metro Jail
Mobile, AL



One day not long ago, the chapel office administrator, Ms. T, answered the phone. The poor lady on the line started pouring out her burdens and concerns for her two sons who were incarcerated in the jail. Ms. T listened patiently as this mother talked for a long time unloading her burdens. She also told the truth about her sons’ spiritual conditions—not good. She asked if someone could check on her sons and make sure they were all right. Ms. T asked me if I would go talk to them, pray with them, and give them a Bible.

Wait! It was late in the afternoon. I felt like I had fulfilled my ministries that day (and it had been a good day), and I was ready to go home! Right? God Almighty didn’t listen to my pity party! I knew in my heart that it was God’s will that I do what I was asked to do for those two men. So I went back and talked to each of the sons individually. I prayed with them and gave them each a Bible. I have to admit, I didn’t feel like any positive influence had taken place. In fact, they seemed resistant to my input. “But God!”

For two weeks I didn’t think much about this situation. Then I again visited that area of the jail. Another inmate joyfully told me the older one had given his life to Christ! He had seemed to me to be the most unlikely one to get saved. Yet when I talked to him, I could clearly see a great difference—his demeanor, his words, his attitude, his desire to study God’s Word. Hallelujah, what a Savior! Since the younger son found out about his brother’s change, I have also seen a change in him. Both of them will soon be going to different Christian rehab centers.

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.” (Galatians 6:9) Lord, help us not to quit!!



DIRECTOR'S CORNER

James Smoker, Recruitment Director

In prison ministry it's not always easy to see if we are impacting people or making a real difference. Recently I was reminded how important our role is and how "visiting those in prison" touches lives beyond

what we sometimes see.

Two men I had connected with in prison passed away recently within two weeks of each other. Chuck died unexpectedly and Jimmy died by execution. In both of these men's lives, it was clear that "free world" support was important to them while they "did time."

Chuck spent 35 years in prison. In those years he had many interactions with religious volunteers and chaplains. He always enjoyed the ReNew Hope week and looked forward to the music groups and evangelists. These were moments of being encouraged and finding hope in the midst of difficulty. After Chuck passed, his family requested my assistance at the funeral. On the day of the funeral, I ended up being the only one present to officiate the service. It was an honor to be able to support his family and loved ones in that way.

Jimmy was on Death Row 20+ years and interacted with many religious volunteers over that time. The day he

received his execution date, he did not lose hope. His faith remained strong to the very end, which was evident in how he encouraged those of us who visited with him in his final week. I saw the value in his life of all the volunteers over the years that visited him, sang and prayed with him, and even supported him to the final hour. He was smiling as he left the room, and hours later he passed away.

Both of these men surrendered their lives to Christ early in their incarceration. When I think of all the years they spent behind bars and all the volunteers and chaplains that were part of their spiritual journeys, I see how important it is to "visit" those in prison. Many men and women in prison need discipleship, encouraging, mentoring, and reminding that God has not forgotten them. Whose duty is it to reach them? Are we to be concerned or even is God concerned about the "least of these"?

If we have read the Scriptures, we should know the answers to those questions. Jesus' life showed that He had compassion on the marginalized of society, and He even mentioned those in prison. The need is great and the "fields are ripe for harvest." Could it be that God is calling you to prison ministry? Here in Alabama and Florida the doors are open for chaplains and volunteers to serve in different ways. We would love to talk with you about these opportunities. Please contact us if you have any questions!

Daniel Earley

Fountain Annex
Atmore, AL



I walked into the chapel at Fountain Annex excited to preach. It was packed, standing room only! But the guys looked angry. I considered, "Maybe a fight is going to break out?"

An inmate nudged me, "Commissary's closed, Chap." This meant the inmates had gone without tobacco for over two weeks. It also explained their angry looks and willingness to give the chapel a try.

"Maybe God will bring revival?" I considered. I entered the pulpit full of faith. I introduced the evangelistic message and prayed with expectation that God was going to work mightily. As soon as I said, "Amen," I heard a security officer open the chapel door. "Commissary's open," he announced. A herd of tobacco-deprived chain

smokers rushed for the door pushing to be first in line at the store—while I stood dumbfounded.

Only two men remained in the chapel. Both wore scowls and carried a dark countenance. They stared at me, and I stared at them. "What now, Lord?" I prayed. Without delay I felt impressed to preach the entire evangelistic message to these two men who, as far as I knew, had never been to the Annex Chapel.

So I began. Twenty minutes later both were in tears. Forty minutes later the man in back interrupted desperately, "What can I possibly do to get saved?"

The man sitting up front added with alarm, "How can I get saved?" Their questions anticipated the final point of my message.

As I concluded, God saved both of those two remaining men in dramatic fashion. Mark was on his knees begging God to have mercy upon his soul, while Dennis was on his face at the altar, calling upon Christ for salvation. Hallelujah! Furthermore, both attended chapel services every day until their release.



A FOCUS ON DISCIPLESHIP

A MESSAGE FROM DON METZLER, PRESIDENT

don@wecareprogram.org

I Corinthians 12:12-14 says, “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” In the same way that the body of Christ is made up of many parts, prison ministry takes on many different forms. As long as Jesus Christ is the focal point, I don’t believe the exact style is a matter of right or wrong. Different methods are more effective for accomplishing different purposes.

Just recently, for the second time this year, I had the privilege to join with another prison ministry in a one-day event with an evangelistic thrust. It was a blessing

to join forces with other volunteers entering a prison for several hours to proclaim the gospel and interact with inmates. Evangelistic outreaches are certainly necessary, and We Care has some of those, but God has called We Care to focus more on discipleship. To fulfill our purpose of “Proclaiming Christ and Discipling Inmates,” our primary method of ministry is placing chaplains inside prisons to daily walk alongside the men and women they meet behind iron bars. I believe it is regular interactions, weekly classes, one-on-one conversations, and relationships built over time that really help a person grow and mature as a believer. The Pathway to Freedom dorm at Bibb is just one example of how we are doing that. (See article on page 5.)

May we all continue to do what God has called us to do so that His Kingdom is enlarged and He gets all the glory!

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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