

“Free In Deed”

The newsletter of Central California Jail/Prison Ministry

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“I Can Only Imagine”

In the past 2 issues we showed pictures of a typical cell in Alcatraz and the cell that was thought to hold the disciples in Christ’s time on Earth.



Just as the disciples were often forgotten while locked up, today’s individuals often have no family or loved ones to contact them. As we look at the empty cells pictured, imagine the empty hearts and hopes of the men and women that occupy or have occupied these facilities. How often have each of us simply wanted someone to be there just to hear our cares and fears? Many of us have the convenience of contacting a shoulder to lean on by someone close by, or through an email, or even simply picking up a phone. These individuals don’t have those conveniences. They often send out letters to dead end address of no reply.

37 Cents and a little time

Most individuals value something as simple as a letter greatly. And this gives an even greater chance of outreach.

Intentions & Wishes

The intentions of this newsletter are to allow an understanding of jail & prison ministries. It is our intentions to get input from those incarcerated as well as those “free” to visit. Life experiences of the faith and fellowship from those locked up in the facilities are always desired to let others know of the value of “visitation”. I am certain that each of us have many stories of the miracles God has done in our lives.

Our wishes are that we would have a list of supportive churches that individuals might look forward to attending once released.

A list of services, such as housing, employment, and counseling services, as well as some individuals available for friendly fellowship are also much needed items.

God’s Word says if a man stumbles, how can he continue lest there be another to help him up. **Ecc. 4:10** “For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him [that is] alone when he falleth; for [he hath] not another to help him up.” **Proverbs 24:17** “Rejoice not when thy enemy falleth, and let not thy heart be glad when he stumbleth.” **John 11:10** “But if a man walketh in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.”

Please help us with input for this news letter as we strive to serve God. We appreciate any articles or input.

Letters that Express it All

These are actual quotes from some of the different incarcerated individuals. The names have been removed

A life Spared

“ . . I know without the Lord I probably wouldn't be alive right now. It is because of the great Lord that I have left the dope game. Because of God, I still have my loving family, and I have two years clean from drugs. I read my Bible every day, I study it, and now I'm not in the gang, my life is great, I've accepted Jesus in my life, and there is nothing better. Now I'm filled with joy and happiness all around me. Thank you Jesus – WOOOOO!!! . . ”

Rededication to the Lord

“If I would not have ended up here, I never would have rededicated my life back to the Lord. There is one person I appreciated a lot. He has wrote to me, and keeps telling me to pray. He attends your church regularly. He is only 12 years or so, but I believe God used him to reach me, the lost. My whole mental aspect is different. I stay in the word daily and in here you see a lot of people that want to make sense of things. There are a couple of us now that help people get through their struggles. I do believe that God never gives you more than you can handle and he puts people in your path for you to help. I never feel alone anymore.

Tuning in on Him

“ . . . I've been listening to your service on the radio about 2 or 3 months now. Every week I look so forward for it. Each week I take notes and do Bible studies on them, which are just so powerful to me. I have really grown in your studies and the Holy Spirit leading me. I now realize who I am in Christ and this world is just somewhere we are passing thru. That there is a bigger picture to everything, God's picture. Of course by now you know I'm currently in prison. But I would never change what God has allowed to happen. I put myself here but for God to allow this to happen, has turned to such a blessing. I now have salvation through Christ Jesus. I used to believe just being an OK person was good enough for God. But He desires so much more and gives so much more abundantly. I love God so much and God is so worthy to be praised”

As for me and my House . . .

I was richly blessed this Sunday Morning by your sermon, and I've decided it is time for me to give God my all. The good and the bad, the past and the future, relationships, job, friends, attitude, I mean all. I realize my all isn't much, a big mess, but I am confident that if I seek God first and his righteousness, I'll be OK. It is important for me where my family and I spend eternity. I choose God, in Jesus, in Heaven.

Addresses to contact our Ministry Volunteers

Rick
3737 S. Akers
Visalia, CA. 93277

Bob
P.O. Box 6667
Visalia, CA. 93290

Fellowship

We would like to keep a listing of locations for fellowship that welcomes previous incarcerated individuals. Please feel free to let us know of those available

CHAINBREAKERS

Every Thursday

Visalia First Assembly

3737 S. Akers

Visalia, CA.

Room 8 – 7:00 p.m.

733-9070 ext. 131

Calvary Chapel Visalia

11720 Avenue 264

Visalia, CA. 93277

687-0220

Visalia First Baptist

1100 S. Sowell

Visalia, CA. 93277

732-4787

Church of the Nazarene

3333 W. Caldwell Avenue

Visalia, CA 93277

734-1117

Praise Center Church

503 N. Floral St.

Visalia, CA. 93291

733-2744

If you would like your church added,
Please contact us.

Employment

A great source of locating jobs is the

Workforce Investment Dept. (WID)
Tulare County Employment Connection
4025 West Noble
Visalia, CA. 93277

A government program designed for the released inmate is **R.E.A.P.** The staff at Employment Connection can direct individuals toward money available in this program.

Survival in the World

There is a story that is often told to those incarcerated.

When we look at the environment and the situations, the incarcerated individual seems to be drowning in needs, troubles, and circumstances. Most often, the type of persons this individual draws to for comfort and support are others in the same circumstances. This can be compared to a person that is drowning and is surrounded by other individuals drowning. Each will tend to pull the other down while trying to save them self from drowning. What is recommended is showing the individual that he truly is drowning and to suggest that he surrounds himself with “lifeguards” instead of other drowning individuals.

Getting an individual to recognize his condition is hard and only done through the grace of God. Once recognizing our limits and weaknesses, we then need to decide to be surrounded by those that would help us instead of pull us down.

Recommended Reading

For the new Christian, or the individual desiring to know God, we would like to recommend the following reading.

The Gospel of John – This is a great introduction of Christ's walk on Earth.

The Book of Romans – This gives an introduction of many of the Bible stories shared and helps build familiarity of Christ's plan for our lives.

The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren – Will change your life in 40 days

Book of Proverbs – Read one chapter a day with the chapter read being the day of the month. This will allow the book to be read almost 12 times thru the year.

Ephesians 4 – 6 – This gives the pattern for life that we should live. All 7 S's are displayed in these 3 chapters. We are given the purpose of the gifts, changing our character, husband/wife/family relationships, and the type of life we are to live and display.

Men's Relational Toolbox – Another fine work by Gary Smalley with both of his sons adding to this book. This book avoids "male bashing" but rather teaches men to use and modify the inner tools they have to improve their relationships.

Needs after Release

Individuals being released from incarceration have the common needs of all individuals. There is a need of self-respect and self esteem. Many have a need of housing. Most are coming back looking for employment. Some are facing classes for AA, NA, or Domestic Violence. Some need to enroll in educational or vocational programs. Most would appreciate someone to just talk to or have a mentor. Fellowship with the right people is ALWAYS needed. For many these are totally new expectations and experiences.

One inmate expressed wonderfully the problem of being released. He stated that everything is slow to happen while incarcerated. It seems like an eternity as you wait for your next transfer or assignment. You feel like you are running at 5 miles per hour. Then, when released to the world, you are put into an environment that is running at 200 miles per hour. This drastic change of environments tends to overcome individuals and they have a hard time adapting. We hear of transitions from one area to another in each of our lives. Someone to just talk with about the feelings and changes the individuals are going thru is a great healer. The Bible says that each of us should be a "brother" to help the other one up when he falls. Other scripture talks about "sticking closer than a brother" we can often help with sharing life experiences or just listening to someone in need. We don't always have to solve the problems, but many times need to just "lend an ear" so that someone might share their needs or hurts with us. Many men have heard from their wives "I don't want you to fix it, just listen". We need to just listen.

There is Change

I like the story of ‘**Blue**’ (his last name) and his conversion. Seems Dwayne **Blue** was in construction and lived in a 1950’s vintage bus conversion. He had a 3-wheel motorcycle and two big dogs. He grew both his hair and his beard down to his waist. One of his co-workers asked him to come home with him for a nice Thanksgiving dinner and to meet his sister, Iris. **Blue** asked, “why would I want to meet your sister?” The co-worker answered, “Because she used to be just like your life. She was into drugs, prostitution, and could drink most men under the table. But now she is changed.” **Blue** planned to embarrass Iris and just use all they had to offer. **Blue** figured that this would be a good time with great food, a nice bed to sleep in and a place to shower. Then he would leave and forget the people.

When they got to the house and **Blue** was introduced to Iris, he started telling about what he had heard about her life and all the bad things she had done. Iris said that it was all true and even told of some more things that she had done. This surprised **Blue** because he was used to people either denying or showing shame. Iris said that those things were with the old Iris, but she was a new woman because Christ had forgiven her.

After **Blue**’s stay, Iris told him that anytime he needed to call her, he could call her collect. One night while drunk, he decided to call her and talked for a long time. He continued to call her and ran her bill up to about \$300 the first month. Iris invited **Blue** to church, which he accepted and made sure his beard and hair were frizzed to the max. Upon entering, a little lady said to **Blue**, “Welcome, we have heard so much

about you and been expecting you. Please sit right up here.” **Blue** did not know how to take all the kindness and love.

As time went on, **Blue** found himself becoming more involved with Iris, her church, and Christ that had forgiven Iris’ sins.

One day, Iris asked **Blue** what he thought about marriage. **Blue** expressed “are you kidding lady, and have some woman telling me what to do?” As time went on **Blue** began to think that that might be a nice situation – to be married.

One day **Blue** and Iris were talking and the subject of marriage came up. Iris again asked what **Blue** thought about the two of them being married. But before he could respond, Iris continued on, “I would be there to take care of you when you came home. I would do your clothes, and have dinner ready for you when you got home.”

Blue was thinking that this would be pretty nice. Iris continued, “I would be there to love you every day and night. I would sooth you when we went to bed. Then when you fell asleep, I would go down the street and sleep with the neighbor man. But when you wake up in the mornings, I’ll be there to help you get up, fix you breakfast, and take care of things for you.” **Blue** interrupted, “woman do you think I am nuts? I would not want some woman that treats me good and then later sneaks off to be with another person.” Iris explained, “Isn’t that actually what you do with the Lord? You act like you are serving Him, but then sneak off to live in sin. But the next day you are back acting like you are serving Him.” **Blue** realized what commitment actually meant. At that

point **Blue** totally accepted Christ as Lord and Savior over his life.

When **Blue** went back home and went by the bar he previously visited, his previous friends said they had not seen much of him and wondered where he was. **Blue** said that he did not get drunk any more. **Blue** stated that **Blue** did not live in the bus any more, there was a new man living there. And **Blue** did not ride the motorcycle any more, there was a new man ridding his motorcycle. And those two dogs, they were being cared for by a new man. In fact **Blue** said that the old **Blue** had died and a new man had taken over his body. Yes **Blue** explained he had given his life to Christ and the old **Blue** was gone.

Soon Iris and **Blue** were married, and they both now serve the Lord and minister to everyone they come in contact with.

Sharing Your Testimony

There are 4 parts to an individual's testimony;

1. What my life was like before I met Jesus
2. How I realized I needed Jesus
3. How I committed my life to Jesus
4. The difference Jesus has made in my life.

But in reality, those who believe in Jesus have the testimony of God in them;

1. Your testimony;
2. Your life lessons
3. Your godly passions
4. the Good News

Each of us needs to periodically share our testimony with others. The importance is not what you have done, but what God is doing.

When Satan reminds you of your past, remind him of his future.

Worship is God's antidote for hypocrisy.

It is better to spend Sunday with the hypocrites, than to spend eternity with them.

1 John 3:2 – Beloved we are now children of God.

- Behold, old things are passed away, all things become new.

God works through those who follow him

How do we know if we are following after the wrong things?

Thoughts to Remember

"They have wandered off the right road and followed the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved to earn money by doing wrong."

2 Peter 2:15 NLT

If you find yourself compromising your values in order to please those who don't know God, then you are following after the wrong things.

How do we know if we are following after the wrong things?

". . . Choose today whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua 24:15 NLT

Following should not be just blind obedience. It should involve a choice, a definite decision to go in a certain direction. What is the direction you have chosen?

God has mercy on those who suffer

"Come back to the place of safety, all you prisoners, for there is yet hope! I promise this very day that I will repay you two mercies for each of your woes!"

Zechariah 9:12 NLT

About this week's promise

Have you every thought you were suffering badly—from whatever cause—and then looked around and realized how much greater was the pain and grief and suffering of others. For those who have seen "The Passion of the Christ," you have seen the reality of his suffering in a powerful way. It makes our own suffering seem trivial in comparison. Yet, through it all, God was merciful and victorious. God's mercy gives us comfort . . . and perspective.

Testimonies

(Following is from an inmate recently released from Avenal State Prison)

My name is -----, 28 years old. I live in Long Beach. Once a member of a gang/organization and drug dealer & drug addict. I was raised in church but kept running. Then I found myself in Jail once again Jan 16, 2003. I still held the hard exterior, but on April 10, 2003 I felt that everything up to that point was in vain. I had just had a brand new little girl to add to my already gang of kids I had. I was tired. I found God right there on my rack. I knew He was real even though once before when I was in the penn I was convinced He didn't exist. My mind had changed. So I told God I needed him and I asked Him to help me change. I didn't ask Him to get me out of trouble. I did ask Him for a favor though. I asked Him to show me He was really concerned about helping me, and I told Him if He could help me do Gospel rap lyrics, I would know He was really helping me out. It started right there. For almost the first 2 weeks I wrote a song a day. Since then I was sent to the penn. I now minister, I've preached at two services. My everyday walk & talk is to do the will of the Father. I rap in the chapel every Saturday and sometimes on Friday. God is using me, and I know why, because I surrendered. I know people laugh and say why do you come to jail and start reading the Bible? I say "hey you wasn't working out on the street". The same way you want to see some physical change. I want to see some physical change. I want to see some spiritual, emotional change. I am seeing results. Hallelujah!

(Following is from an inmate that was at Delano State Prison)

I was in church when the preacher asked if there was anyone who wished to give a testimony of what Jesus had done for them?

I sat there and listened to brothers telling how Jesus had touched their lives. I even thought about standing myself to tell what Jesus' love meant to me.

But then Satan whispered in my ear "You can't do this yet. You are still in prison. You can't say you don't do drugs anymore. You can't say you don't steal anymore. You can't say you won't commit adultery anymore or any other sins of sexual immorality. Because your faith hasn't even been tested yet.

So I never stood up and I never said a word. But then God said to me "Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 for all of these things we once were."

Satan is a liar and the father of lies. The world will tell you "You are a drug addict; for once an addict, always an addict." Right? NO! Wrong. "The world says once a thief, always a thief." Right? NO! Wrong again.

For the Word says I will put your sins as far from me as the East is from the West. The Word says that your sins were washed away by the blood of Christ.

The Word says your drug addiction was washed away by the blood of Christ. The Word says your sexual immorality was washed away by the blood of Christ. The Word says your lies were washed away by the blood of Christ. Jesus Christ said "I am the Word." So ask yourself, is the world lying or is the Word lying?

Thank You Lord for the Word.