

Isaiah 61:1

June 2005

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*I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me;
I was in prison and you came to Me. Matthew 25:36*

The Men of MCJ were not Left Behind

Recently I worked it out with custody to bring out a larger than usual group of men for a special service. I wanted to show the movie *Left Behind*. The Watch Commander agreed to let two groups of men out and sent e-mails out to the staff to assure that we would have a good turn out.

When the first group was seated and I went up to introduce the movie and I was met with a surprise, a very hostile crowd. It turns out that in their desire to comply with the e-mail that the Watch Commander had sent, the deputies made it mandatory for the inmates to come out for the movie. They were not happy and did not want to be there.

I apologized and explained it was not my intention to have them forced to come and I had no control over that but asked them if they would just try and make the best of it. As I put it to them the Lord knew they were going to be coming and just might be He wanted them there.

The morning was full of surprises and they weren't over with yet. When I started to explain the movie to them I asked how many had heard of or seen the movie before. Only a few in the hundred or so men that

were there raised their hands saying they knew about the *Left Behind* series. I guess I just took it for granted that everyone knew about it.

I was a little nervous about the next surprise I had planned. They were not in a very good mood and when the lights were lowered and the movie started I became a little concerned on what was going to happen next.

Just as the opening scenes of Kirk Cameron filming in the fields of Israel, as the bombs were dropping all around him, I had the lights turned back on and the TV shut off. Like I said they were already in a bad mood and now their attitudes really took a turn for the worse.

But that quickly changed when they saw who was walking out the office area into the Chapel. It was Kirk Cameron, and when they realized who it was they started to applaud.



Kirk Cameron shared with the men on our need to be saved

Kirk was really a good sport about everything. He had never been to anything like this before and it was obvious that he was a little nervous about being in a jail. It couldn't have helped any for him to hear the men's displeasure at being forced to come. And then to walk out seeing the deputies in riot gear holding tear-gas guns.

Every bit the professional he took control of the moment breaking the ice by making a few jokes and then getting into sharing with the men. It wasn't long before he had their attention. I stand in front of groups like that all the time and its not always easy to get them to listen. They were listening to him and as I found out in the following weeks he also got through to some of them. Both the message he brought and just that fact that someone like him would take the interest and invest the time to even come meant a lot to the inmates.

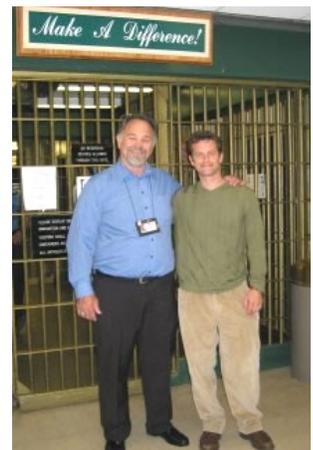
Kirk has just finished filming the *Left Behind III* movie and I am sure was very busy with post production work. It meant a lot to me that he would give of his time to come as he did.

I had already heard from others that Kirk really was a

man of faith and convictions. He showed it that day in all he did. He was very nice with everyone he meet, whether it was an inmate or staff; he was open and friendly to all.

I had the chance to show him around part of the jail. There wasn't time for a full tour. But one thing we were able to do was go over to where Kirk could meet with Monster, the man I have written about in the past who is down from death row. He told Kirk how he has come to know the Lord while being at our jail. Kirk would later send me an e-mail saying that it was the highlight of his day.

For the men at the Men's Central Jail it was the highlight of their day when they were not left behind by a man who care enough to come see them. *"I was in prison and you came to Me."* Matt 25:36



“He who started a work will be faithful”

Something I started in the last newsletter is having someone who comes in with the ministry tell you about their experiences of going into the prisons.

The following article was written by Christine Gonzales who is part of the team who goes into the women's prison CIW, every 1st and 3rd Fridays of the month. *Ed*

“He who started a work will be faithful to complete it in you.”
Philippians 1:6

Five years ago if you had told me I would be serving in prison ministry at the California Institute for Women I would have asked you what drugs you were taking. It all began one Sunday as I listened to Chaplin Ed Welsh speak to the body at our church about the prison ministry. As I sat there my narrow-minded, self-righteous heart responded in silence, “Prison ministry? You’ve got to be kidding, they are there because they got what they deserved.” Well, the word says in Isaiah 55:8-9, *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Not long after, while in the book of John we were studying the passages about the women who had been caught in the act of adultery. John 8:4 and following; *“they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?”* *“He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.”*

It was at that moment that the Lord brought prison ministry to my mind and he lovingly said, “shall I write your sin in the sand? The only difference between them and you is they were caught and you weren’t.” Talk

about a humbling revelation, I had forgotten many of the sins of my life prior to Christ that could have indeed landed me in prison. But time went on and I sat silent and resistant.

Many of you knew a wonderful sister in the Lord, Mary Ellen Baca. She was truly a Proverbs 31 woman, radiating the Lord's love to all. Mary Ellen worked at CIW for over 20 years. As you may know, in 2001 she was diagnosed with 4th stage cancer that progressed very rapidly, and in a short amount of time she was bedridden.

One evening, our husband's went out for the night so I jumped at the chance to stay with her in their absence. (Now, Mary Ellen had many people who could and would have stayed with her at any given moment, but unbeknownst to me the Lord had a work to complete and my time had come.) When we got there she was sleeping. When she woke up her husband Gil handed her a big manila envelope filled with hand made cards from the inmates at CIW. It's no coincidence that her co-worker delivered them earlier *that* very day. Being too weak to read them herself she asked me to read them to her.

I can't explain what happened in my heart as I read these cards to her. All I can do is compare it to the old holiday cartoon about the Grinch and how his heart grew 10 sizes as he recognized the true meaning of Christmas... well that is exactly what happened to me as I witnessed the Lord's love for the women of CIW emanate from Mary Ellen. As I read each card and told her whom it was from, she knew exactly of whom I spoke. She told me why and how long they had been there as well as when they would leave if they weren't "lifers". The love she had for them was blinding and as I realized that it wasn't her but the Lord within her that I was seeing, I broke down in tears. “Why are you crying baby?” she asked. I immediately confessed my sin and asked her to pray with me. “Forgive me Lord for the shameful, unloving heart I have had toward your daughters! Put Your love for them in my heart as you have in Mary Ellen,” I cried. The very next day I called Ed sharing with him what the Lord had done. “I want ‘in!’” I boldly proclaimed.

It was just a short time thereafter that Mary Ellen went home to be with her Savior. The warden of CIW attended her funeral and as a result the Lord opened the door for the ministry to go into CIW after battling five years of roadblocks that had kept it out. Sometime in 2002, I received a call from Ed. “We are having our first yard concert at CIW in October,” he said. “Do you still want to go in?” “Of course!” I practically shouted.

Just a few weeks later he called to tell me there was bad news. “I am really sorry,” he said, “We have a limited number of spaces approved and with the two worship teams that are going in, we just don't have a spot for you.” I remember hanging up the phone in disbelief! “This can't be happening Lord! Not after all you have done in my heart. PLEASE LORD, if there is any way that I can go, if it is your timing for me, open the doors,” I prayed. A few days later Ed called back, “Still want to go?” he asked, “I just talked to the Chaplin and we got a few more spaces approved!” A short time later, I walked through the locked doors of CIW for the very first time. It was an amazing day and I immediately fell in love with the inmates.

“Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand”
Jeremiah 18:6

Well, the seed had been deeply planted in my heart but He still had an enormous amount of work to do to prepare me for this ministry. In November 2002, He began an intense work in me that lasted over two years. As with anything worthwhile, it included a tremendous amount of loss, pain, sorrow and brokenness. *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain...If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant*

"He who started a work will be faithful" *continued*

will be also..." John 12:24. In 2003 the Lord allowed me to attend the next Jesus is the Key event at CIW and I was totally blessed to see the women again.

Sometime during the summer of 2004 Ed called to say that it was time to start the clearance process so that I could begin going into CIW on a regular basis with a team of ladies in January 2005. At this point in my life, this was almost more than I could bear to consider. No matter where I went or what I did I felt "out of place." It was one of the times in our Christian lives where all we can do is hold on to the promises of God. *"The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."* Deuteronomy 31:8

Have you ever been there? You don't feel Him... you read the Word and you don't hear Him...you pray and it feels as though your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling? The doubts and questions raced through my heart as I questioned Him, who am I to go into that place and minister to them? "...Woe is me, for I am undone I am a (wo)man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips..." Isaiah 6:5

Lord, when I have been going through the fire for so long what do I have to offer? *"In this you should greatly rejoice, even though for a little while you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory..."* 1 Peter 1:6-8

How can they possibly see You in

me, when I'm not even sure that you are there anymore? *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."* Joshua 1:9.

All I can say is that as that "still small voice" continued to faithfully respond to my doubts, I knew in my heart that I had to move forward. I couldn't stop thinking about that evening with MaryEllen and how the Lord had transformed my heart as I cried out to Him in repentance. How could I doubt that this was something He wanted me to do? Reluctantly, I agreed to fill out my papers all the while in the back of my head thinking... I can always back out. Next came orientation, it took an entire Saturday. With each step of the process I thought, "I can always back out."

Come February 2005 it was time for our first night in the prison. Still uncertain, still feeling as though I was wandering in the desert, I could not come up with an excuse to get out of going so I *had* to follow through with my commitment, "at least for tonight" I thought to myself. All day long I had a battle raging inside me... "I'm not worthy. How could you possibly use me?" Again my doubt was addressed, *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty-you will succeed because of my Spirit, though you are few and weak."* Zechariah 4:6

As I drove home from work I continued to question the Lord, "Are you sure you want me to go?" I turned on the radio and listened in wonder as a Steven Curtis Chapman song "Free" the words enveloped me... "The sun was beating down inside, the walls of stone and razor wire, as we made our way across the prison yard.... The slamming doors of iron echoed through the halls..." I was so engrossed that had I not been running a little late, I would have pulled the car to the side of the road. Tears of amazement streamed down my face. I couldn't help but smile as I envisioned the Lord affectionately chuck-

le as He asked, "Well my beloved Thomasina, any more questions I can answer for you today?"

"And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." 1 Peter 5:10

So for the past several weeks we have been going into the women's prison every Friday night for a Bible study. At the request of the CIW Chaplain we are teaching The Purpose Driven Life. Each of us took a chapter to teach about and as I prayed for the Lord's direction about teaching on the "principle of service" He impressed upon my heart that we leaders were to wash the inmate's feet as an example of what He taught in John 13:14-15 about being a servant. *"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you."*

When we inquired about doing this, we were told that we couldn't because something bigger and very similar was in the works already and we needed special approval for all the things we needed. It was very disappointing as there was no doubt in my mind that this was something the Lord clearly wanted us to do. So, after talking to Ed about it he suggested that we wash the feet of the other volunteers instead. "That works for me," was my response *"...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..."* Matthew 20:28

Before we began washing the other volunteers inmates were told that "originally it was our heart to wash your feet but we did not receive

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"He who started a work will be faithful" *continued*

approval to do so in time." Several of them started to cry. Just the thought of our wanting and being willing to wash their feet was an overwhelming emotion for them.

With baby wipes for washing and a beautiful black velvet shawl for drying the foot-washing began. As the Holy Spirit filled the room the women were moved beyond anything we have ever witnessed there before. One of the ladies stood up. (She is about 6' tall.) She asked, "Since you can't wash our feet can we wash each other's feet?" Well, we weren't prepared for this but said "OK". To our amazement many more of the women stood up, took the baby wipes, their sweatshirts and went around the room as they ever so gently took off their fellow sister's shoes, socks and proceeded to wash their feet.

It was the most incredible thing to watch as we moved out of the way and let the Holy Spirit take over. They wept the entire time as they knelt down in front of one another washing and drying each other's feet. They laid hands on and prayed for each other and when finished they moved on to another women

until everyone was done.

All we could do was cry as we watched. As one of the "lifers" feet was being washed she wept and repeated, "Praise you Jesus, I love you Jesus" over and over. She started singing "Hallelujah" and as they finished we all joined in singing.

These women inmates are from all over, all colors and in there for all kinds of reasons. Many are "lifers". But the bottom line is.... they all are daughters of the King. They love Him and want to serve Him.

"...to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think... to Him be the glory..."
Ephesians 3:20

So, this is the kind of work the Lord is doing at CIW and the reason for the enemy's intense opposition to this ministry. Make no mistake about it, prison is the devil's domain and he hates us moving in on his territory. As a result, a fierce spiritual and physical battle has been waged against us individually and as a team. We are enduring strokes, surgeries, increased martial stresses, car problems and backsliding children, family

deaths etc., etc. Though a nuisance, these things are not going to prevent us from being about "our Father's business," one attack however has the potential to do so. Right after our night of feet washing Ed learned from the Chaplain that competing secular programs might force a reduction in space availability for volunteer ministries. This means that we could lose our access to the prison temporarily, indefinitely and even possibly permanently. We refuse to accept this without waging a battle of our own, and that is where you come in. WE NEED YOUR FERVENT PRAYERS. We are the army of the Lord, so it is to this end that we ask for and covet your prayers in this battle. It can only be won marching on our knees and the more warriors, the stronger our defense.

"Thus says the LORD to you:' Do not be afraid nor dismayed... for the battle is not yours, but God's." 2 Chronicles 20:15

Recent Ministry Opportunities

There have been so many things happening within the ministry lately. It really has been a busy time.

Recently the denomination *The Assemblies of God* made the largest single donation to the ministry to buy Bibles for the jail. In the past we would have limited resources when it came to any kind of Christian materials. What a blessing to not have enough room in all four of the offices at the jail to put all the Bibles! To have enough Bibles for some time to come is like nothing I have experienced in all the time I've been a

Chaplain. It's the first time ever that I have had this many Spanish Bibles. What a blessing!

Now that we have a good supply of Bibles for awhile I am in hopes of us raising some more funds to obtain other kinds of Christian materials for the inmates to read. There is a lot of good material out there that would be very useful in disciplining the men.

I have asked in previous editions of these newsletters and there is a standing request on our web site but if you have any good used Christian

books and magazines that you would be willing to contribute, please consider putting them to good use.

Just a few weeks ago I was doing some spring cleaning of my own and decided that if there were any Christian books collecting dust around my house I needed to do the same thing. As it turned out I had a number of books that I now have on computer so they were the first to be packed up and then the books I bought at some time in the past that

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Recent Ministry Opportunities *continued*

I planned to read "sometime" were the next to go. By the time I was finished I had three boxes of books to take to my office to start handing them out. Now those books I was going to read someday are being read and hopefully pointing someone to Christ.

Another ministry opportunity that recently happened was being invited by *Prison Fellowship* to go back to the La Mesa prison in Mexico. I have written before of the terrible conditions there. I was amazed at what they have been doing to clean the place up.

They no longer have men and women housed in the same area of the prison. Every time I went down there is the past, I always felt so bad for the women. Just removing the women is a very big improvement in La Mesa.

Its so much cleaner there too. It no longer smells they way it did. They are rebuilding some of the cell blocks and there are plans to build a new chapel.

Four men went down there with me, two from the church I go to and two other guys from a local church (*The Bridge*) who have started to go into Adelanto prison with our ministry.

We were able to spend the day walking around the visiting yard talking to the inmates and their families while they were visiting. We worked in pairs and were able to share the Lord with many people. By the end of the day we had been able to pray with about 30 people who asked Jesus into their lives. As one of the guys in out team put it, "It don't get any better than this!"

Another trip I was able to go on a few weeks ago was to a state prison near Sacramento named Mule Creek. They were hosting a seminar on a 12 step program called *Criminals &*

Gangs Anonymous. It had been started by an inmate who is serving life there.

I am not usually supportive of 12 step programs with their use of "a higher power" rather than acknowledging God for who He is. I am not compromising my stance on this but I do feel the way they have set up this program it works and they are including God within what they are teaching these men.

They had about 30 men from the program come to present what they are doing. The outside guests attending were from all areas of the state; as far away as San Diego. There were clergy from many faiths represented, wardens, counselors and ministry groups who work in the prisons.

The founder of CGA was also one of the ones who was there in the beginnings of the *Mexican Mafia*. And now was trying to give back, to make amends for his past. One of the founding principals is to admit to your past wrongs (confess) and other principals like ask for forgiveness where possible (restoration) and to share this message with others who are still doing the same things (evangelize).

I do not endorse 12 step programs but I do believe in this one. Something like this is so needed. The killing has to stop! Everything about the gang mindset and culture is so destructive, we have to do whatever it takes to combat this evil in our society.

Nearly every man in the CGA program that spoke that day were ones who have no hope of ever getting out of prison. Their motivations for being a part of this program were not about getting out. They finally got it, maybe too late for themselves but they want others to get it before its too late.

There were many powerful things talked about that day but one that really sticks out in my mind is when a war-

den from one of the state prison got up and commended the men for their stand they were making. He said it took a lot of courage to stand up now for what is right and to admit their wrongs. And he went on to admit that the prison system had been wrong in its approach in building more and more prisons, locking more and more people up without doing more programs like this one to help do something to change the way things are. It was very powerful to hear something like that coming from someone who has made a career in prisons.

I came back home from this seminar convinced that we need a program like that in Men's Central Jail. The gangs do their first recruiting in the LA jail system before they ever get to the prisons. And the LA area sends up to 2/3 of the ones who go on to get into the prison gangs. There needs to be an intervention at the root of where it starts. I have gone to the Sheriff's Department and asked if we can get a program like this at our jail. They are looking into it and will be getting back to me on it. Please keep this in prayer.

I want to take it further than that. It needs to go out to the streets. The real intervention needs to start there. I have been in contact with some ex-gang members who are now Christian and we will try getting them working with some churches in the inner city. It has got to start somewhere and not just talk about it or sit there ringing our hands either. I am sure of its need and I think this could make a real difference. What it may be lacking because it's 12 step program I am sure my God is big enough to add whatever is needed along the way.

Upon Every Remembrance

A number of months ago I had a young man come into my office and introduce himself as the new "Chapel Trustee". For the sake of his privacy I will change his name and call him Ned.

A Chapel trustee is an inmate assigned to work in the jail's chapel. I have had the opportunity to get to know many of them more closely than most of the inmates I see and because of that the relationships have become much deeper and more meaningful.

In that initial conversation with Ned I quickly realized there was something different about him. There seemed to be a shyness about him, he wouldn't look me in the eye as he talked to me. It would end up taking a long time for me to come to understand what I only dimly sensed that first day. I can't really explain it but as I sat there talking with him, my first impression of him was that he didn't belong in here.

There is a misconception about Chaplains in general and me in particular, when it comes to how we view the people we are there to try to help. Many people believe that we are a bunch of bleeding hearts who feel sorry for them and believe that none of them belong in jail. I don't look at them as victims although many of them have been victimized in their past. And every once in awhile I think there are some who are unjustly accused. But for the most part they are law breakers and there are consequences to sin. *"for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap"* Galatians 6:7 The Word tells us that we are all law breakers *"There is none righteous, no, not one"* Romans 3:10 There are many of them I am glad are in there, the public needs to be protected from the danger that is very real. But even with the most dangerous reprobate that has ever been in any jail anywhere, I want them to still know about the forgiveness of God in

their lives. *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."*

1 John 1:8-10

The reason I say Ned shouldn't be in jail is not because I think him not guilty of what he was accused of, I have no way of judging that and don't want to anyway. I felt Ned shouldn't be there because he didn't fit in with the rest of the men. He definitely was naïve when it came to the jail life style. It was that naïve innocence that came from him that set him apart.

In that first meeting he asked me to help him to understand God's will in him being in there and why all this had happened to him. You see Ned had not been raised to one day become a criminal. Many are raised for a life of crime just because where they grew up or because of the things that happened to them in their lives.

But Ned came from a good, a Godly home. Raised on the right side of the tracks. In fact he came from a family background with generations of pastors and evangelists. Also Ned had recently graduated from a well known Christian University and had graduated with honors. Ned was planning to follow in the footsteps of many of the others in his family where he was planning to go into full time ministry. But because of what has happened Ned was now facing a very uncertain future, a future that could possibly mean a number of years in prison.

During the time that Ned was at Men's Central we talked nearly every day. He would ask questions he had and share with me about his struggles. Other times he would open up and we would talk about his fears. The guilt he carried was very strong, he was very ashamed at the pain he had caused

his family and his girl friend. But it went much deeper than that, he also felt a deep sense of remorse over feeling that he had failed God.

Over months of time it was a joy to watch as God did a work in Ned, a work of him realizing what God's grace really means. *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials"* James 1:2 and *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."* 2 Corinthians 12:9 Ned started to trust more and more not on his own understanding but to look to the Lord. He openly shared his faith with all who would listen. And there are many who listened to him. I told him many times that the Lord would use him in a powerful way. If he would get out of his trouble with the law, then the Lord would use this experience to His glory somehow in future ministry. If God allowed him to go to prison then the Lord would use him in there as well.

Normally Ned is just the kind of person who would be taken advantage of in jail. He displays a meekness that usually would be exploited. He is not tuff in any way, if anything he is soft and vulnerable. And yet Ned earns the respect of everyone he comes in contact with. I really have enjoyed being a spectator on the sideline as I have seen the Lord do amazing things in and through him. He shares his faith freely and he has the education behind him to intelligently explain what it is that he believes. I have watched as he has gained the respect of inmate and deputy alike.

I believe that the true character of a man comes out on how they deal with the hard things in life. I watched as Ned's character was being shaped by God for what is in store for him over the next number of years. He has so far handled everything that has come his way with integrity and Godliness.

Upon Every Remembrance *continued*

I know that was certainly true when his case recently came to a conclusion. The day before he was to go to court and hear his sentence, we spent some time together both just talking and spending some time in prayer.

As I sat there listening to him talk I really was amazed at the transformation I had seen come over him in the time we had gotten to know each other. He was no longer the frightened little boy in a man's body who was really afraid of what the future held for him. He still wasn't looking forward to having to go to prison but he was no longer frightened by it, he knew that God was with him and he believed that all things were going to work out for the good. He really was trusting in the Lord and not on his own understanding.

I remember him saying to me, "if I get a lot of time tomorrow then that means I use this time for God to do His work in me." He was convinced that this was somehow going to be how God would equip him for whatever ministry He was calling him to. That day as we sat there together talking and praying, I knew Ned was going to do alright no matter what happen the next day in court.

There was some optimism going into court the following day. His family had hired a good attorney and he had no previous record. They were all hopping that he would get a light sentence and probation at the worst and if things went really well, just probation. Well it didn't go at all like that for Ned. Instead Ned received the maximum allowable sentence for his charge. Ned was sentenced to seven years!

When I got to work the next day I was really saddened to hear what had happened in court. When you get personally involved with these guys you can't help but hope the best for

them. I had hoped that he would have been given some mercy and grace with his sentence but that wasn't meant to be the case.

When I saw him, I knew he was upset but what I also saw within him was a strength and faith that reassured me he was going to do just fine in whatever comes his way.

Until he left to go on to state prison, which was a number of weeks between the time of his sentencing and when he actually left on the bus for prison, he kept doing what he had been doing all along being a servant to others, making himself available to help when it was needed and always ready to share his faith.

I got a letter from Ned not long ago and he wanted to let me know he is doing alright. He was still in the guidance center and didn't know yet where they would send him to do his time. I had to laugh when he told me about his new cell mate. It turned out he is sharing his cell with a gang member and you may have already guessed, they are doing Bible studies together.

I have gotten to know his mother during these many months. I often get calls from inmate's family members and it's another part of the ministry to try and comfort and encourage them when I can. I have prayed with many of them and usually encourage them to get with a local church if they don't have one already.

Ned's family has been standing firmly beside him in all of this and it has all taken a great toll on them. It takes a toll on any family but in circumstances like this where nothing like this had ever happened to them, never would have dreamed anything like this would ever happen, it was just that much more devastating for them.

In the conversations I have had with his mother, I find more times than not she is the one trying to encourage me

instead of the other way around. I feel sure that no matter how difficult it may be in the time ahead, this family with its foundation firmly on Jesus they will make it through this and be the stronger for it on the other end.

Ned has been gone a few months already and I find myself missing our conversations we used to have. I didn't realize it then but Ned was also an encouragement to me. As long as there are some like Ned who come into the jail now and then I know that being there, doing what I am trying to do hopefully makes some kind of difference.

Ones like Ned will go on to continue doing it themselves, making a difference one person at a time. I am convinced that God will use him in a very powerful way and because of it more will come to know God's love and forgiveness.

I want to ask all who read this to pray for Ned and his family. The Lord knows what Ned's real name is and it won't make a difference that you are praying for a factitious name. Ned and his family are real and their needs are real, seven years is a long time and many things can happen. Pray that all of them remain strong and that God puts His hedge of protection around them all. Pray that the Lord uses Ned in a powerful way to share his faith with all he comes in contact with.

Now when I think of Ned this scripture comes to mind...Phil 1:3-6

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

A Purpose for everything

In the middle of March I received a letter from one of the leaders of the LA Billy Graham crusade, thanking me for my participation in the prison outreaches. I was honored that this man who I know is a very busy pastor would take the time to have a letter written to me. So I wanted to be sure and take the time to reply.

When I did get ready to write there was something of national attention going on that I had been following. It was the escape of an accused rapist Brian Nichols from an Atlanta Georgia court house. Brian Nichols is accused of overpowering a female Sheriff's Deputy, taking her gun, shooting her in the face and then going on to kill four other people.

People were outraged as well they should be. Certainly at least in the Atlanta Georgia area it was a 9/11 kind of an occurrence for them.

As is almost always the case when something like this happens, the news was full of nothing else but endless coverage of the man hunt and finally three days later, the capture of this man.

What was kind of amazing to me was what got so little coverage was how and why Brian Nichols gave himself up. That is because if God has anything at all to do with it the secular media will never give that any validity. You see there was this woman by the

name of Ashley Smith who was held hostage for a number of hours by this man. Now this is a man who the media had depicted as very violent and dangerous. A desperate man who was without hope.

I am sure he was all of those things and yet an very amazing thing happened. As it turns out Ashley Smith is a Christian woman who trusts in the Lord or at least that is what she did throughout her ordeal.

What she did was to share her faith with this desperate man with no hope. As the story goes, she read things to him from her Bible and from the book *Purpose Driven Life*. What Ashley did was give Brian Nichols a message of hope, he would later be quoted as calling Ashley an angel sent to him by God.

As I sat answering the letter I mentioned at the start of this article, I told the pastor that I had been really blessed to be a part of the crusade outreaches to the prisons and jails. And to think there had been more outreaches than had ever been done before, with relatively few people being a part of it.

I lamented that out of the 1,500 churches who had been involved with the crusade only about 30 churches got involved with the jail and prison outreaches. I said to this pastor that all these prisoners need to hear the gospel. I posed the question to him what if Brian Nichols had received that message

of hope before he went to court that day in March instead of after? Could it be that those four people would still be alive? Of course we will never know the answer to that but one thing I do know there are many, many more people out there like Brian Nichols and so few willing to be the messenger.

The battle goes on in many fronts. As was mentioned in an earlier article in this newsletter, we are having attacks to our ministry going into the women's prison. We are having even more trouble at the men's prison in Chino where our group will not be allowed to go in for at least a short while simply because of bureaucratic red tape and maybe covertly because the administration really doesn't want to be bothered with programs like ours. That prison has been under grave attack ever since the guard was killed there a few months ago. If they would only realize we are there to help, not to cause more problems for them. But that is where the worldly thinking and secular reasoning come into play. With the enemy in the middle of it all.

I have to keep reminding myself that this is the Lord's battle and it is He who is in control and there is a purpose in everything. But I would still ask you all to intercede in prayer for this ministry in particular and all prison ministry in general.

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 :

Phone: (909) 519-2216

 Email: ed@prisonkey.org
 or
 ejwelsh@lasd.org

 Web Site: www.prisonkey.org



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