

Ministry Update - 1st Quarter, 2004

Weekly Recovery Meetings: Our Monday and Wednesday meetings have been good, and we're trying to get them to both be on the same Step at the same time. We're almost there, as we are on Step 4 in both meetings now (finishing it in the Wednesday group, starting it in the Monday group), and we've been going over the papers called, "Using Your Spiritual Authority - Parts 1 & 2" and "How to Be Set Free". We teach on spiritual warfare (how to deal with the devil) during Step 4, because when people are digging into their past as they write their Step 4 inventory, sometimes things come up from the past that cause nightmares, condemnation and guilt, and other temptations. The devil really likes to take that stuff from our past and wave it around in front of us to get us distracted or depressed, so we need to know how to combat all of his lies and tricks.

Deliverance and Counseling Ministry: We continue to have people come over to our house for one-on-one counseling and for deliverance prayer. We don't claim any power in ourselves to do anything for anyone, but we are just "instruments" or "vessels" of the Lord to minister His healing and power to His children who are too weak and struggling to just claim it for themselves. One person asked recently why she couldn't just do for herself what we had prayed for her. We told her she could have, as all Christians have that authority given to us from Jesus (Luke 10:19, James 4:7), but she was so beaten up emotionally, and had listened to the lies of the devil for so long, that she just needed help. I guess that is our part in "bearing one another's burdens" in the Body of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

Testimony from our Recovery Meetings: Testimony of Amelia Olmos - "Dear brothers and sisters who are thinking and walking with Jesus daily, My name is Amelia. I've been coming to recovery group over a year. And believe it or not, since the first week in the group, a lot of things have been happening in my life. I remember during the two years since I accepted Jesus to come into my life, I had not really surrendered everything to Him, and I never asked Him to heal me of my past. I covered and I hid my past for a year, but after the first week of recovery, something started to move inside of me. I remember that the first week of recovery the topic was on forgiveness, and I knew after a few weeks that it was the Holy Spirit that was moving in my heart. He guided me into prayer and I prayed and gave Jesus all my past, all my hurts, and all my sufferings. After that, I felt that something was going on in my life. Because most of the time at church at worship, I used to cry a lot. But after I surrendered and gave my past to Jesus, the crying got less and less. For all the healing and beautiful work that Jesus did, I dedicated and gave my life to Him as my Savior, and got baptized in August, 2002.

My life before I became a Christian was completely in the world, and in the darkness. I used to be full of resentment, bitterness, anger, and unforgiveness. I was empty, materialistic, impatient, and I never read the Bible. I never had time for my family. I used to drink, smoke and party, and I never had time for Jesus. I used to please people and cry every time I remembered my past. I never talked about my past. I couldn't hug the people who had hurt me. I had a lot of stress and worry. I used to be complaining, worrying, be late to work, and I didn't have a good relationship with my mother. I was dishonest. All this trash Jesus cleansed me of with His blood, and He restored my heart and renewed my mind with good things in my life. He built new spiritual muscles and habits, and here are some of them: I spend more time with Jesus, and I read the Bible. I pray, I talk to my Mom once a week, I spend time with my family, and I don't worry any more. I have more patience, and I am honest. The bitterness, anger and resentment are not in my heart any more. I forgave the people who hurt me, and now I hug and talk to the people who hurt me. I don't party, drink or smoke. I don't have stress, and I have good relationships with brothers and sisters at church. God has provided for all my financial needs. I don't cry when I talk about my past. Now I understand, but before I just cried all the time. I know it's because He healed me and put peace and joy in my heart. I thank God for guiding me and bringing me to Love Lifted Me Recovery group. Now that I'm healed, God has put a desire in my heart to reach out and be a missionary."

Website Update: Keep checking our website for latest updates, including testimonies. Here's a testimony about the website: "As part of my personal Bible study today, I downloaded/printed 2 of your lessons: "Choose to Walk in the Fear of the Lord" and "God's Protection for Your Family". God bless you and Tom for your website!" - Shay, in Hilo, Hawaii

Evangelistic Outreach: We went to hand out bagels to the homeless and pass out tracts on the Venice Boardwalk, again, helping Dwayna of "Lighting the Way International" in her work of feeding the homeless and giving out the word of God to all who will receive it. We used Chick tracts and the fliers we had made up with our church and ministry times and locations on them (the fliers have the gospel and a prayer to receive Christ). Most of the people selling their wares and trinkets down there are selling occult things, giving psychic readings and fortune-telling, selling UFO and alien junk, sexually-oriented pictures, etc. The devil has a hold on that territory, but we were able to go in and spread the "glorious light of the gospel of Jesus Christ" down there. We had Chick tracts in Spanish, and they were well-received by people just hanging around, and by employees setting up in some of the shops. One man said he spoke Tagalog (Philippines), and I had a tract in Tagalog, which he took. There are several types of people there between 8:00 and 9:30 Saturday morning: the homeless, who took most of the bagels, the joggers and walkers, the ones just having coffee and reading the paper, etc., and the vendors setting up their shops or tables. Dwayna usually has her table set up down there, and she is the only Christian ministry in that area. We are rejoicing in the Lord's goodness in allowing us to spread the word and plant the seed of the gospel, and we pray that it has fallen on good ground, and that He will produce His harvest through it.

International Prison Outreach: We sent out 34 packages to Nigeria, to a list of 34 names we were given by a Prison Fellowship of Nigeria that wrote to us requesting help. First packet sent to each prisoner: "How to be Saved", "Salvation by Faith Alone or By Our Works?", "Why Is There Evil in the World?", "Lessons from the Thief on the Cross", Chick booklets "Going Home", "Somebody Loves Me", and "Creator or Liar?" We are not sure whether some of these Nigerian prisoners are already Christians or not, so there was a combination of materials. The reason we chose these particular things to send them is because their conditions were described as being quite horrible, with some prisoners even dying of starvation and untreated diseases, and pictures of some chained and shackled to their beds.

U.S. Prison Ministry: We sent one of our fliers to Matthew in Mule Creek Prison, and he wrote to tell us that he prayed the prayer to receive Christ. He had been struggling with doubts, and not being able to believe the Bible, but then he told us he had never really prayed to receive Jesus as his Savior before, so no wonder! He said, "I guess that means I'm born again now?" We mailed out "Serenity" Bibles to a number of new inmates who wrote to us from Susanville Prison, High Desert Prison, and other prisons in California. We were already corresponding with Daniel in Susanville, and when he got his "Serenity" Bible, he passed around our address in his N.A. and A.A. meetings there. We wrote to each prisoner, and sent a "beginner's packet" of lessons 1 and 2 of Step One, and a paper titled "Forgiveness, a Bible Study for 12-Step Recovery", Tom's testimony, and our Chick booklet with our ministry information. In the letter from one of the new guys, Eric, he said something that brought tears to my eyes. He said he had just recently made Jesus His Lord and Savior, and when he read the letter that was passed around offering a "Serenity" Bible and Bible-based 12-Step recovery materials, he said he "jumped at the chance to combine Jesus and his recovery all in one." Isn't that great?

Visiting in Prison: February 12, 2004, we went up north on a little vacation, but also to see Joseph, our "missionary on the inside" at Soledad Prison. By the time we found the right parking lot (there are two prisons up there), and checked in, they told us it would be 5:30 before we could see him, because they had to have their "count" before the dinner hour, or whatever. We ended up not getting to see Joseph until 6:30, because they couldn't get the count right, and visiting hours were over at 8:30, but we had a great visit with what time we had. We encouraged him, and he encouraged us with all the things he is doing in ministry there in the prison. We were allowed to bring a Bible in with us, so we shared some things with Joe, and also just talked about what's going on with him there. He told us he was

accepted into a group called "The Prayer Warriors" and this is a group of Christians of all the races, which is unheard of in most prison situations. There is usually a rigid segregation between "whites", Hispanics, and blacks, but the cross of Christ has made these men able to pray together. Joe also said he is the one that the men come to among the "whites" when there is any kind of problem. Joe marvels at why it is they trust him, but we know it is because they see the Lord working in his life, see his integrity and honesty, and we also believe the Lord is training Joseph for leadership and ministry situations when he gets out in a year and a half.

Testimony from a letter from Gerald, Feb., 2004: "I was really down in the dumps wondering how this could happen to me, because being locked up does that to a person. Just then, the Correction Officer walks by passing out mail, and in a time of need, there was a letter from you, Dottie and Tom, words of inspiration from the Bible quotes that you sent me that have helped me know that I am not alone, and I do know I'm not alone. Sometimes it is a way a person can be put in a position that is a test in life to see what will be the outcome." Gerald is in Pleasant Valley State Prison, and we are also writing to his cell mate Michael, whose testimony is below. As you read Michael's testimony, notice how new he is in the Lord. The ministry that the Lord used to get him saved is the ministry of Chaplain Ray (who is now home with the Lord), for all you Old Timers who remember Chaplain Ray's Prison Ministry. We thank the Lord for entrusting another one of his little lambs, a baby Christian, to us in order to help disciple him. Gerald also asked us to write to his mother again, and we sent her a card a tract, and a little book by Max Lucado called, "Give It all to Him." She's not saved yet, as far as we know, and her son, Gerald, just accepted Christ in jail this past year, and he's concerned about his mother not being saved.

Testimony from Prison Ministry: - Michael Speck, Jr. - "I got your address from my cell-mate Gerald Beldon, here in Pleasant Valley State Prison. He said you would send me a Bible and Bible study materials. Here's a brief history about my life. My name is Michael Speck, Jr. I've just turned 25 on Dec. 18th and I'm from Hemet, Calif., but was born in Texas. I've lived in Hemet since I was 7 years old. I grew up in a drug-addicted family where my step-father beat my mother and where my mother beat me, both physically and mentally. At the age of 11, I started smoking cigarettes and pot, and by 13 I was using speed. By 17, I was using a needle. My whole life has been drugs, crime, gangs, and this is my second time in prison. I first came to prison in 2000 for first degree burglary for 2 ½ years. I paroled Dec. 23, 2002, and I tried to do right. I got a job, met a great woman with 3 boys. Life was going okay. From when I first got out of prison, I mean as soon as I got in to town at my parents' place, I had people trying to get me to sell drugs and do crimes for them. I turned them all down and said I was going straight. Life was going alright for about 2 months, then I just couldn't take not having enough money for bills and the kind of lifestyle that I was used to. Well, by the middle of March, I lost my girlfriend, job and was right back to my old ways. On April 1st I got busted for a weapon, a whole new charge, and sentenced to 32 months at 80%. As soon as I got to prison, I ran into some buddies from the street, and before I knew it, I'm in trouble, went from level 2 to 3, and from 32 months at 80% to 32 flat, sitting in a cell all by myself for starting a riot. Now here's the best part...I got some mail one day from this place called International Prison Ministry. It was a Bible. Now, I've been to a few churches in my life, but none ever said I was going to hell. Well, this place said I was if I didn't give my life to Christ. I'd never really thought about hell before until then. Well, I started reading that Bible, and before I knew it I felt somebody in that cell with me. Next thing I knew I was on my knees praying to the Lord to forgive me of my sins. All of a sudden that void I'd had was full...full of a peace I've never had before. I was so happy, even happy that I was in prison, in a cell all by myself. Later on I came to find out that it's the Holy Spirit who is with me wherever I go. So, on Dec. 23, 2003, I accepted Christ Jesus as my Lord and Savior. All I do now is read my Bible. I have two different Bible courses I do now. I haven't gone to yard at this new prison, because we're on lockdown, so I don't know how things are going to turn out, because I'm a new person with new ways. I've seen and been a part of some things in prison that have given me a reputation that I don't want anymore, so I don't know how things are going to turn out. But no matter what, I know I'm not alone, and I can't wait to step into that chapel and be among fellow Christians and give my testimony."