

Ministry Update - 1st Quarter, 2009

Weekly Twelve Step Meetings

In January, we began again in Step One in our 12-Step recovery meetings. Here is what Step One says: "We admitted we were powerless over our dependencies—that our lives had become unmanageable." Here is some of the teaching that we do in Steps One, Two and Three:

Admitting we are Powerless - The journey to recovery begins with admitting we are POWERLESS to MANAGE whatever it is that has become UNMANAGEABLE (an addiction, a loved one's addiction or behavior, depression, or some other compulsive behavior) in our lives. This journey must take us from RELIANCE ON OUR OWN POWER to ADMITTING WE ARE POWERLESS, and it can be for many of us a long, hard road. Some of us have had to "hit bottom" before we could admit that we cannot HANDLE IT OURSELVES - that we are not strong enough, or clever enough, or intelligent enough, or entirely self-sufficient and able to CONTROL every aspect of our lives. Things that stand in the way of admitting we are powerless are: BLAMING OTHERS - ("life, circumstances, and other people have not treated me the way I think I should be treated," "I drink or use drugs to relax, or because I've had a bad day", etc.); REBELLION - knowing what is right, but refusing to do it; MAKING EXCUSES - ("I act this way because I was abused, or my parents didn't want me", etc.); PRIDE - ("I don't need anyone's help"); FEAR - ("I'm afraid to appear vulnerable").

Dealing with Denial - DENIAL is either refusing to admit we have a problem, or stubbornly continuing to believe we can handle it in our own strength. We have spent a long time in denial, in trying to hide our addictions, and in all the ways and methods we have tried to quit, which have NOT worked. Sometimes it takes a painful crisis for us to realize we need help. If you have reached this point, just ADMIT IT - "I am powerless, I cannot handle this problem on my own." If you are addicted to alcohol, drugs, food or sex, admit that you are POWERLESS over it. If you are depressed or suffering from what others have done to you, admit you are powerless to change circumstances or other people's behavior. If you have a problem with co-dependency, admit you are powerless to FIX that other person, especially a loved one. In summary - Stop denying the pain, start admitting your life has become unmanageable, stop playing God, start admitting your powerlessness.

Step Two says: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

A Power greater than ourselves - Now that we have admitted that WE are powerless, is there any HOPE that someone, somewhere DOES have the POWER to save us and restore our chaotic lives to order? Secular 12-Step groups would have you believe that ANYTHING can be your Higher Power, even the 12-Step group itself. We believe that only God Himself, as He reveals Himself in the Bible, has the power to change and restore our lives.

Restore us to sanity - What is the AA definition is INSANITY? "Doing the same thing over and over, and expecting different results." If we have tried to quit drinking or using drugs, or worse yet, tried to keep drinking or using while thinking we could keep it under control, we are guilty of this kind of INSANITY. If we have tried over and over to change a loved one's behavior, believing their promises to change while continuing to suffer abuse, we are guilty of this kind of INSANITY. If we have tried over and over again to change our own compulsive behavior patterns in our own strength, we are guilty of this kind of INSANITY. Step 2 offers us HOPE that Someone - a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to normalcy and sanity, and lift us up out of the horrible pit we are in (see Psalm 40:2-3).

Step Three says: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God." The AA Third Step finishes with "God as we understood Him." Secular AA groups even more often just refer to a "Higher Power", and don't even call Him God. We believe that the only "Higher

Power" that can truly heal us and rid us of our addictions and destructive behaviors is the God of the Bible, the True and Living God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Most of those who come to our meetings are Christians, which means we have already turned our lives and wills over to God and Jesus Christ for salvation and eternal life. However, we may not have completely turned our wills over to Him in regards to our addictions, compulsions, destructive behaviors, anger and bitterness, etc. When we hold onto these things, or RESERVE certain areas of our lives to ourselves, we have NOT made Jesus Lord of our life. He needs to be LORD of your entire life, and you must SURRENDER to Him and give Him permission to TAKE CONTROL of every area of your life.

Monthly Evangelistic Outreach to Venice Beach

January, 2009 - We did not have an outreach in January, because Tom was still in the hospital. This was the first time in four years that we've had to cancel our monthly outreach.

Saturday, February 7, 2009 - We had a great group of dedicated people who came out in spite of the rain for this month's outreach. We had Tom, me, Daniel, Yvonne, Catharine, Shami, Alycia, Youbert, Tom T. and his son Nick. It was raining hard for several days, and raining lightly Saturday morning, but we prayed that the rain would let up by the time we had to go down to the Boardwalk. Sure enough, even on the way to the Rose Ave. parking lot, the rain was coming down, and we couldn't hold umbrellas while hauling all the lunches or passing out tracts, so we cried out to God to stop the rain. The rain stopped exactly by the time we parked in the parking lot. There seemed to be more homeless people at the Boardwalk than usual, and we ran out of lunches, but were able to give them out to most of the homeless people. There were a lot of young people, what you might call today's "Hippies", as they had long, dread-locked hair, face piercings, and tattoos. Everyone, young and old, was very thankful to get a lunch and the other items we were giving out. We also had toothbrushes, toothpaste, small shampoos, razors, soap, and socks, which also were very much appreciated by those who received them. The "99 Cent Store" is a good place to get a lot of that stuff, and some people have also donated the small shampoos and soaps they get at hotels and motels. Because of the weather, the tourists, dog-walkers and Saturday morning "Lookie-Loos" were more scarce, but we still managed to hand out a lot of gospel tracts. We gave out the usual tracts in English, lots in Spanish, and a few in Chinese. We are just thankful that we were obedient to the Great Commission in giving out the gospel of Jesus Christ, and even if fewer people were down at the Boardwalk, God's word says that even one person getting saved is worth the effort. "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." "Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:7 & 10)

Saturday, March 7, 2009 - Praise God! We had our faithful regulars turn up for the outreach today: Tom, me, Daniel, Yvonne, Catharine, Shami, Alycia, and Youbert. The weather was beautiful, and we had a very successful outreach. Yvonne and I started up at Rose Ave. and came down the Boardwalk, and the others started at Venice Blvd. and went up to Rose and back. With the first group of homeless people that we met, they gladly took lunches and toiletries and socks, and one man asked us, "Who are you affiliated with?" I said, "The Lord Jesus Christ!" They were all happy to hear that. We also put in a plug for our local church, Sonrise Westside Community Church, and our Love Lifted Me Recovery ministry, but first and foremost, we are just there for the Lord's sake. We had 94 lunches, some jackets, T-shirts, lots of socks, and lots of toiletries. Alycia also brought two cases of bottled water. We were blessed to have enough lunches for everyone that we met, and didn't have to turn anyone down, saying that we had run out of lunches. Yvonne saved out three lunches for on the way back up to Rose Ave., and when a man came up to her and asked if she had any food, she was so happy to be able to say she had one left, and he could have her last one. We found one lady sleeping in a blanket on the hard concrete, and we asked her if she wanted a lunch. She said, "Yes", and also took two pair of shoes and some socks. The reason we gave her two pair of shoes was because they were small sizes, and she looked like a person that might have small enough feet for them. When it came to just handing out the gospel tracts, we offered some to two young women sitting on a bench, and they said, "Oh! We're already Believers!"

Then they said that they were so happy to find real Christians giving out the gospel and helping the homeless. They were only here for a few days' vacation from Australia, and they had noticed how many homeless people were there at the Boardwalk. Later, we offered a tract to one man, and we couldn't tell if he was homeless or not. He took the tract, but then asked if we had any food. I gave him the last lunch I had, and he said, "Thanks be to Almighty God!" Then, I asked him if he needed any socks, and he said, "Praise the Lord! Yes, I need socks." Then, I asked him if he needed a toothbrush, toothpaste, a razor and soap, and he said, "Yes! God is good!" We asked him his name, and he said his name is Michael. As we left, he was shouting, "God is good, all the time!" In giving out the tracts, I gave two in Chinese to a couple that looked like they might be tourists, and one in Tagalog to a man working in one of the shops. We gave tracts to a lot of the people setting up tables to sell things, and those working in the shops, and one woman said she spoke Russian. I told her I had one in Russian, and when she actually saw it, she smiled a big smile. People are always happily surprised to find that we have tracts in their native language.

Prison Ministry

C. Edward Smith, R. J. Donovan Prison, San Diego - "Love, joy and peace be multiplied to you. I thank God for you two and I keep you in my prayers. As soon as I started to read and seen tom was in the hospital, I started to pray for the both of you. And I'm glad to see god answers prayer. Praise God! I just want to thank you both for your ministry. I have two verses for you and Tom, and God's word commands to write them on the tablets of our heart. We have to know that God has a plan and a purpose for our life and whatever trial or tribulation we go through is a test of our faith for the purpose of standing firm. When you cry, I cry, but know this, Nehemiah 8:10 "The joy of the Lord is your strength!" And Samuel 16:7, "For the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Thank you again. I know God is not through with us yet. I love you both, Edward"

Marlene Miller, Valley State Prison for Women, Chowchilla - "These studies on Steps 6 and 7 were very informative and helpful. Thank you so much. God bless you!"

Alfred Johnson, Pleasant Valley State Prison, Coalinga - "Hello my friends and beloved brethren! I'm very excited to say the least to be able to begin this journey with you down the Narrow road God has called us down. The Bible you sent me is a treasure in itself, because of all the various references to recovery. Jesus truly is the physician that never has lost a case, and the only way for people to officially lay their burdens down for good. Be encouraged that your work is not in vain. Be always found abounding in the work of the Lord! Peace be unto you, In His love, Alfred Johnson"

Louis Oliverez, Corcoran State Prison - "Thanks for all your support in the way of lessons being sent and the form letters. They are of tremendous help and I truly appreciate the effort you put in your ministry. The Bible Tabernacle wrote me and accepted me into their recovery program. Thanks for the referral! Now I'll have something to show the parole board. Please know that my prayers are with you both, and especially Tom right now for a good recovery process. God bless! Respectfully, Louis Oliverez, Jr."

Ralph Clark, Soledad State Prison - "I'm writing to thank you for the "Serenity" Bible. It's beautiful! I'm impressed! The Holy Spirit like no other sure knows the heart of man. Last night, I was called to R/R to pick up my book, and was touched by your labor of love in the 12-Step Recovery Ministries. Thank you. I liked on page 28, where it talks about "housecleaning". This is so true. We are given the choice and warning, to do the spiritual housecleaning ourselves, or if we have to wait until the Lord does it out of love for us, it's painful and it hurts. This book goes deeper than the shallow knowledge about addictions that I have. Much respect and love in His love, Brother Ralph"

Louis Reed, Tallahatchie County Correctional Facility, Mississippi - "My reason for writing this letter is to encourage you and Tom for your ministry. I truly appreciate the love and comfort and encouragement your ministry that the Lord has blessed you with gives to us behind these walls. I truly thank you, Tom and Dottie, for sharing your testimonies and life problems we as

Christians experience. I really enjoy the fellowship with your ministry. I have finished the Second Step and can't wait for the Third Step lessons. God bless! Brother Louis Reed"

Robert Gould, CMF Vacaville - "Please extend my love and best wishes to Tom. He is in my prayers! I also put him up at our prayer group! Every Tuesday evening at 8:50 about 25 to 30 men pray for Tom's recovery. I am an elder in the Kairos Fellowship. I very much enjoyed this Third Step lesson. It has confirmed the fact that I am free. I especially loved the handout study on "What is Joy?". I will be doing a Bible study with it at our prayer and share group. I truly thank you for all your efforts. With love and respect, Your Brother, Rusto"

Steve Warsop, Lancaster State Prison- "This Scripture in my last lesson really stood out to me: "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:15-17). Also, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for just bringing some joy and peace through the Good Book. Honestly, I was kinda lost as of late, but tonight since I have hours off, what would be known as time to reflect. Honestly, this is the first time in a long time that I got so much out of reading Scripture. Big love and respect, Steve"

Tony Delmont, Avenal State Prison - "Greetings from behind bars. Incarcerated, yes, yet free in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior! I want to thank you for the birthday card and your letters. Nobody writes other than my one best friend and brother in Christ, besides you. I must tell you that the way you have shared your lives, your hurts, your joys, the trials as you also shared your strong faith in our Lord, with a steadfast love, has been a momentous inspiration in my life! You make me feel unjudged and truly accepted as a fellow child of our Heavenly Father, to whom you have shared the love of Jesus. You are in my prayers. To you, my brother Tom, I want you to know I believe our Jehovah Rapha, the Lord our Healer, the Great Physician, will bring you healing after He uses your suffering to minister to others as it has to me..... just remember how that all worked out for Job in God's time."