

Ministry Update - 1st Quarter, 2010

Twelve Step Recovery & Counseling Ministry

Weekly Recovery Meetings – Our Monday meetings continue to be well-attended, with some new people, and we are seeing growth and fruit in the lives of those who have made a commitment to actually work the Twelve Steps. Also, several people have told us that they saw a real change in their lives, and major changes in their thinking, after just a few weeks of hearing the word of God presented in such a practical way to help them overcome their problems. We continue to see people experiencing freedom from bondage, dysfunctional behavior patterns, and wrong thinking from the past. One person shared that it is now easier to take his thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:3-5), and easier to do God's will in his life.

Counseling & Prayer Ministry - Our 24-hour prayer line rings at all times of the night and day. Some call for prayer, and others need to talk and get counseling and guidance from the word of God. Our evenings other than Monday night are open for one-on-one counseling in our home, or for prayer for healing and deliverance (James 5:14-15). We also go out occasionally to someone's house, if they don't have transportation. "Have anointing oil, will travel!" Tom continues to counsel and pray for people during the day, many times for hours with each individual, and most of them express their thanks that he is there to call when they're in trouble, or just for support and prayer. Obviously, it's God that we are supposed to call on when we're in trouble, but it also helps to have a real live person on the other end of the line, maybe to just confirm that you're doing the right thing, or to help you figure out what to do. God's word always has the answer.

Twelve Step Meditation

By Alfred Johnson, Pleasant Valley State Prison, Coalinga

Beloved Seekers of the Way, as I step back to examine myself, to focus on the Maintenance Steps at the top of the mountain of this journey we call recovery, I'm reminded of what God told the prophet Haggai once the Jews had returned from exile in Babylon. It is written, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'Consider your ways. Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified', says the Lord (Haggai 1:7-8). How fitting it is for many of us to liken our recovery from drug addiction, and the new lives we live, to a rebuilding of the temple. The foundation was laid down in our acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And since then, the Spirit has been fitting us together like blocks to a building to be a holy temple for God to dwell in by His Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:10-11 & 16). The Lord assured that "'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former' 'and in this place I will give peace', says the Lord" (Haggai 2:9). What a beautiful and promising illustration of what Jesus is to all of us today! Our peace, His Spirit, our Comforter. That same Spirit of peace can be found comforting and giving courage for those of us today who dare to "consider our ways" - who continue to take personal inventories, and admit when we're wrong. The Tenth Step is revealing to me that this is the "wood" God is requiring we search for on the mountain. Planks of honesty about still clinging to old strongholds. Two-by-fours of truth nailed together by open confession of my errors, and not hiding them. To be "holy, and acceptable to God" I can see that He desires for pillars of truth to be positioned on our new foundation, the Rock. I can see that just as every rising building under construction has scaffolding around it, the Twelve Steps is mine. Supervised by our beloved Hoopers, ensuring that every platform that arises is made firm by God's word, the framework of our sobriety, the architect of our serenity. I look forward to discovering you all at the top of this mountain, Beloved, seeking God in prayer and meditation, improving our conscious contact with Him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us, and the power to carry it out. To god be the glory!

A bondservant of Christ the Lord, Alfred Johnson

Monthly Evangelistic Outreach to Venice Beach

Saturday, January 11, 2010 - The morning of the outreach, we had a good group show up. There was Tom, me, Alycia, Kent, Catharine, Shami, Daniel, Gordon, Gerald, Mary and Hazel. It was the first time for Gerald, Mary and Hazel, and they all said they enjoyed it. We had the usual ninety lunches, plus many, many socks, and quite a good supply of little shampoos, toothpaste and tooth brushes, soaps, and so forth. Also, a few people brought knit hats, mufflers, and T-shirts. Everything went fast, and it seemed like there were more homeless people down at the Venice Boardwalk than usual. The weather was nice during the day, but it still gets really cold at night, but we still saw a lot of young people "camping out" on blankets on the grass on the edge of the beach. Everyone was very grateful to receive the food and other items. Gordon said he gave a pair of socks to a man who was barefooted, and after he gave him the socks, another homeless man came up and offered the man some shoes. Daniel said a man named Mike asked for ongoing prayer for his situation. Once the lunches, toiletries and clothing items were gone, we continued to pass out gospel tracts, and gave out several hundred in English, many in Spanish, and one in Turkish, one in Norwegian, and two in French. The Norwegian tract was one that I had "just happened" to find, and had added to my bag just that morning. The family that received it was astonished that I even had one in their language, but then I told them that the Lord must have wanted them to have it, because I had just found it that morning. The French tracts went to a group of young people, and one young woman asked me what it was about. I told her it was about Jesus, and she sort of made a face. I made a face back at her and said, "Don't make a face - just read it!" She laughed, but I pray she will read it. Everything else was about the same as our other outreaches, and we always feel that the Holy Spirit has gone before us and prepared the hearts of the ones He wants to receive the tracts. Tom and I always pray before and during the outreach for the Holy Spirit to be doing His work, and for the Father to be opening their hearts and drawing people to Jesus.

Saturday, February 13, 2010 - Today, we were expecting a big group, but something happened. Because of all the rain, we had canceled last week, and told everyone it would be this Saturday instead. Maybe some people just forgot, or they had other things planned..... I don't know. As it was, only four people other than Tom and myself showed up. We had Tom, me, Alycia, Gerald, Shami and Catharine. Praise God for the faithful ones! We packed as many lunches as possible in two cars, but were not able to take all of them. Just too few people to carry them all. Tom and I thought we would take the ones leftover and try to pass them out during the coming weeks to homeless people we find on the streets. Also, Alycia and Gerald took a few with them, to pass out on their way home, as they take the bus. There are always homeless people somewhere along our way as we do errands and go places during the week. As for the outreach, it was great, and we seemed to have enough lunches for the many homeless people who were down at Venice Beach. Maybe there were just fewer homeless people out, because of it being winter (also, we heard the police are cracking down on the overnight "camping" on the beach, which is against the law). We also had some toiletry items, lots of socks, and a few T-shirts and sweatshirts and other clothing items. Everything was received with thankfulness and gratefulness by the homeless people we met. After giving out all the food and clothing items, we just handed out gospel tracts, and had a blessed time doing that. Along with English and Spanish, I also gave out one in Russian, and two in French. There are always tourists down at the Boardwalk, and I love being able to give them a gospel booklet in their own language. All of us thought it was a good outreach, even though we had a small group. Many of the people we met asked for extra tracts. They would say, "Oh, I've already read this one!" But when we offered a different one, they took it. In other words, it wasn't an excuse for not taking a tract, but a real desire to read a different one. Several people said, "I really like these little booklets." Also, there were a lot of young people who took the tracts, and we would see them reading them as they walked along. Praise God!

Saturday, March 6, 2010 - There was more rain forecast for today, but this time, we prayed that the rain would pass over us and rain on someone else, or else that the Lord would hold it back until after the outreach. The Lord has control over the wind and the rain, and He knows what He wants to do and who He needs to reach on any given day, so we trusted Him to take

care of it. We had Tom, me, Alycia, Daniel, Shami and Catharine, but somehow we managed to take all the ninety lunches we had made plus about twelve lunches left from last time, and we gave out over one hundred lunches to the homeless. We also had socks, sweatshirts, underwear (it was a hit!), toiletries and other clothing items donated from Sunrise Church and others. When we left to go down to the beach, the rain hadn't started yet, so there were a lot of homeless people down there. Catharine, Shami and Daniel even handed out three lunches to some homeless people as they stopped for a red light on the way down there. We gave out every single lunch, bottle of water, item of clothing, and hygiene item (toothpaste, tooth brushes, small soaps, shampoos, and lotions - the kind you get when you go to a hotel or motel). Alycia had brought some mittens, and knitted scarves (mufflers?), and these were much appreciated, as the weather is still pretty cold. She also had some sunblock cream, and prayed for the right person to give it to. She found one woman whose face was very red and sunburnt, and offered her the sunblock, for which she was very thankful. We all thought the homeless people seemed more grateful than usual (if that's possible), and maybe that was because they didn't expect anyone to care enough to come out in the rain to give them something in the name of Jesus. When I first got down there at the Rose Ave. parking lot, I saw some people way out on the beach, but on a concrete area that had a path going to it. I wasn't sure they were homeless, but they had a certain look of being huddled up against the cold, so I went ahead and walked clear out to them to offer them some food. They were so surprised that I would come all the way out there to them, and one man said, "If we'd known you were bringing this to us, we would have come to you!" Another man said, "You're a real woman of God to come all the way out here to us." They were happy to get socks and toiletries, also. Later, I saw another couple walking along, and I wasn't sure if they were homeless, but as they got closer, I saw they had a somewhat bedraggled look about them, so I offered them a lunch. They were so happy, and expressed that they had just been wondering what if anything they would have to eat. They took two of the sweatshirts I had, and some socks. The man immediately put the sweatshirt over the light jacket he was wearing. We don't always get everyone's name, but I asked the names of two guys I've seen down there before, and they are Jerry and Vinnie. Catharine prayed with a homeless woman named Carrie. As for giving out the gospel tracts, there weren't as many people down at the Boardwalk as usual, because of the weather, but those we saw were very open to receiving them. A man who goes by the nickname of "Swami" and sells Indian charms and things, was open to taking some tracts this time. His helper came up to Daniel and asked for more tracts, and he gave him four or five different ones. One man I met asked for extra tracts, too. He said he always gave them to his friend, and his friend would give them to his children, so I gave him some Chick tracts that are good for children. So what about the rain? It started really raining hard right as I was giving out my last few lunches, so I headed back to my car up at Rose Ave. The others who had started down at Venice Blvd. found shelter until the rain stopped, and continued on giving out their lunches and stuff. I got back to the house a little earlier than usual, but we still thought this was an excellent outreach, and that we had done what the Lord wanted us to do. Praise the Lord!

Prison Ministry

You may remember, last year one of the prisons, Solano State Prison in Vacaville, has given one of the inmates, Rev. Eric K. Brown, permission to hold "Love Lifted Me Recovery" group meetings, as well as the inmates doing our lessons by correspondence. Below is an update that he wrote to us, regarding the times and schedule of the meetings so far:

Rev. Eric K. Brown, Solano State Prison, Vacaville - "Here are the meeting times of our LLMR groups in Solano: Mondays, 8:30 - 9:30 am, 9:30 -10:30 am, and 6:30 - 7:30 pm. Tuesdays, 9:00 - 10:00 am, and Saturdays, 10:00 - 11:00 am, and 11:30 am - 12:30 pm. I have been copying a step for each group based on whoever receives it first from you in our mail system. Ron and I did instruct the guys not to mail their lessons until everybody is ready as a group, but you have probably received some individually from a few eager beavers, because a few of the guys did not want to wait."

Andru Hardy, Lancaster State Prison - "I just wanted to thank the two of you for everything you're doing for me. Your kindness and concern is greatly needed and appreciated. I look forward to meeting the two of you upon my release or shortly after. Through your program I've been able to have a peace of mind and I've found something again that I buried long ago... faith! I'm a believer again, and I owe it all to you. To me, you two are not pastors, but God's most precious angels here on earth! Yours truly, Andru Hardy"

Vartan Balbouchakian, Avenal State Prison - "I did my Steps 8 and 9, which is one of my important priorities in life, that I make amends to everyone that my actions caused harm. I am ready for the Steps 10, 11 and 12, we call it "Maintenance Steps." I can truly say that I'm ready to put all this knowledge and wisdom to work that I gain by completing these Steps. I am well aware that it does not mean anything if I don't share my knowledge with other addicts or with anyone in need of help, and I promise that I will continually practice these principles in all my affairs. Mr. Tom and Mrs. Dottie, I am very impressed about the Venice Beach outreach, and my goal and desire is that someday I'll be a contributing member of that outreach, so I can start repaying my debt to society. In closing, my prayers are always with you guys. Thank you for contributing and making me a better person. Thank you for all of your support, and most important, thank you for your constant prayers and awesome letters. God bless you all. Love, Vartan"

Joseph Rodriguez, Solano State Prison, Vacaville - "Thank you for the testimonies. I enjoyed reading them. How funny that, in one way or another, we are all the same. If it ain't a drinking problem, it's drugs, or we're one bad apple who thinks he knows everything, and doesn't need anyone or God! But we all need God, and sooner or later we discover just how much we need Him, especially when we hit bottom and we see there ain't anyone there for us - no homies, or anyone. We're empty and scared, and then we realize that we aren't alone, and then we begin to see things a little different - we need God to take over our life! And we need to listen to Him!

I can already see that this 12-Step program is going to be a hard one to do, but if I can be a bad - ____, and play with my life with drugs and alcohol and armed robberies with a gun, then let's do this. I need to do your 12-Steps, I need to get real with myself and with God. My brother Billy Counts gave me your hook-up, and the rest was up to me! I'm tired of this circle of crime, always locked up, tired of shooting drugs, tired of hurting my family and loved ones, and tired of being a loser. I can hardly wait to get your "Serenity" Bible. I'm one for short-cuts, but a Christian way of living, there is no short-cuts. God bless you and protect you. Always, Joseph"