

Ministry Update - 2nd Quarter, 2005

Our weekly recovery meetings continue to be blessed, and we are seeing God bring new people, and seeing them grow and mature in the Lord. Jesus is still in the business of delivering and setting His people free! Hallelujah! April and May were big months for people doing their 4th Step inventory, and doing the 5th Step, which is reading the inventory to one trusted person (usually one of us). That means we've been busy having people come over to our house for the 5th Step, and that takes anywhere from three to six hours, depending on what and how much a person has written. We stop and do some counseling along the way, as well. Afterwards, we take the written inventory outside and burn it up. It's a very freeing and healing process! Step 4 is "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves" and Step 5 is "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

Here is an excerpt from Tom's introduction to Step Five: "Well, my beloved in Christ Jesus, good news! The 4th Step is done (this time). Bad news - now we must share our past (the good, the bad, and the ugly) with God and with another human being. Not easy! It's very humbling in some cases, but oh! how healthy, for it is essential for our healing and our walk with the Lord. Besides, God knows all about it anyway. My friend, in James 5:16, the Bible says to "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." We have put so much time, work and thought about our personal lives into the 4th Step, and have written it all down. The next thing in getting our affairs in order is to confess to God the wrongs we have done, and allow Him to forgive us and heal the pain, shame, and guilt that we see was contrary to His will for us. In I John 1:9, God says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Now, we can heal for real! And because God says He will cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness when we confess our sins, we now stand in the place of that "righteous man" of James 5:16, whose prayers are effective! In Proverbs 28:13 we read, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy." Look at all the benefits of confessing your sins in your 5th Step: healing - physical, mental and emotional; forgiveness from God; cleansing from all unrighteousness; having your prayers become truly effective, because those sins or unforgiveness towards others are no longer a hindrance to prayer; and mercy from God. Through completing this step, you will notice that a healing is taking place in your confidence and even in some of your relationships. The fact is, it is easier to move forward when you can leave the baggage behind. It was such an unnecessary load of weight, because, if it was guilt, shame, sin, or pain, then almost 2000 years ago that burden was put on Jesus, just so that you would not have to bear it. Praise the Lord, what a release!"

We received a phone call from Haydee in Miami, Florida, who thanked us again for our 12-Step materials available on our website. She has started a women's group at her church, and is using some of our materials. She also hopes to translate some of our materials and Bible study papers into Spanish. Phillip and Dave, from The Bible Tabernacle out in Canyon Country, came to observe how we do our meetings, as they are in the process of getting a 12-Step program going out there. They loved our meeting, and were able to come back several times.

Website:

If you click on to "Bible Studies" on our website, you will find that the Gospel of John study has finally been finished. We got sidetracked for a few years, doing all of our 12-Step materials and other papers, but it is finally finished. The entire Gospel of John is available for anyone who would like to print out the lessons. It is a fill-in-the-blanks type of study. Several other new papers are available under the category of "Themed Studies", and the Question and Answer category is now arranged with a topical index.

Prison Ministry:

The last few months have brought quite a few new requests from prisoners to receive our Bible studies and work our Twelve Step program by correspondence. The new prisons are: Avenal, Solano (Vacaville), and R.J. Donovan State Prison in San Diego. We also have several new guys writing to us from Soledad. Our guys from Mule Creek State Prison were all transferred to different prisons, due to a change at Mule Creek, and as they were dispersed and settled in new facilities, they have begun to give our name and address to new inmates in these prisons. Other inmates we've been writing to are getting out, and most of them have contacted us by mail or by phone to let us know where they have landed. Some that are getting out in the next few months are trying to go to the Bible Tabernacle in Canyon Country, if they can get their parole transferred.

Prison Letters

Inmates continue to share our materials with other Christians and with the unsaved. Here are excerpts from some letters: "Hello, my name is Johnnie O. Bennett and I was referred to you by Brandon Brown. I would really be interested in joining your faith-based 12 Step program. If you will allow me to join, then please let me know what you need for me to do. Thank you for your time. I will be eagerly awaiting your reply." God bless, Johnnie O. Bennett, Avenal State Prison

"I got the little books and read them. I pass them on to other inmates so some use and learning can help others and myself on the road to self understanding and looking toward the teachings of the word of God. I could use another Serenity Bible. I loaned mine out and never got it back. I did keep it almost two years. The guy I loaned it to is in here for life, and he still has it. Maybe it will help him. He's 63 and dying in here. I think he's afraid of dying and going to hell for his murders. He's not a believer at all - he's full of hate. His name is Floyd Keys. I'd give you his CDC number, but he would throw away any unknown mail. At least he has the Serenity Bible. Who knows, maybe it will help him? If you have more tracts, send them. I will pass them out after I read them." Your friend in Christ, Gerald Beldon, Pleasant Valley State Prison

"Dear Brother & Sister in Christ, My neighbor, William Buce, gave me your address and I'm writing to thank you and wish you God's blessings. William has significant challenges with social skills, as do many of us who land in prison. I felt burdened to pray for and minister to William especially while he was in the very next bunk beside me. I noticed how deeply touched he was by the sweet cards you sent him (especially the bunny rabbits one). William angered the wrong man here and got quickly moved to another building, so I don't see him much any more, but I ran across your address today and thought I would try to let you know that you DO make a difference in peoples' lives, even ones like me who you don't even suspect might get blessed by the ripple effect you start. Keep up the good fight of faith! In Christ's love, Gary Kagel, Corcoran State Prison

"I received your studies from a man down the tier from me. I'm writing to you to let you know that my spirit is bearing witness with your spirit - that I feel that the Holy Spirit is using you in a mighty way. God is currently in the process of teaching me about obedience, but mostly about repentance. I must say your studies have helped me a lot. I recently received two of your study papers and it was just more exact confirmation of what the Holy Spirit has been teaching me through His word - your studies are exactly what God has been teaching me. Some might call it a "trip" or a coincidence, but I know it's God doing what He does. Confirmation happens to me a lot - God gets on a subject and He repeats it over and over to me. The more I abide in Christ, the more He manifests Himself to me. Praise God! Ya know - for years I've cried out to God in my addiction, "God help me! Lord, why ain't I changing?" I had received the free gift of God's salvation by faith - born again - but I was not changing, in the flesh, that is. It wasn't until recently that I was totally embarrassed over my sin on drugs. All that time past I had cried out to God in the midst of my sin - I was saved, born again, but I was still doing these same things. I continued to cry out to God, "Lord, why ain't I changing?" He answered saying, "You haven't changed, because you haven't repented." I was

confused....my initial repentance was me turning towards Christ, realizing I was lost and needed a Savior, and I asked for forgiveness and asked Jesus to come into my heart. All that was His doing, by His grace it was a free gift by faith. But I see another form of repentance, not for salvation, but for sanctification - a daily repentance of daily sin. This part was and is up to me! It is up to me to sanctify myself in the flesh, that is God's will for me, even my sanctification, my reasonable service, my putting on the new man, my laying aside certain sins, so that Christ can be manifest in and through me. I have a choice - a responsibility to cleanse my vessel, sanctifying myself - it's up to me. Yes, it's only by His Spirit and His power that I'm able to do these works. It is up to me - my responsibility to sanctify myself (being set apart, made holy), making myself "meet for the Master's use" (II Tim. 2:21). I choose to walk in God's blessings or in God's cursings. I choose to store my treasures in heaven or on earth. I choose to win crowns for Christ or to forfeit my crown. I choose to win souls for Christ or not. I choose to pick up my cross daily or not. I choose to let my light shine before men or not. God completes the work He started - He loses none - nothing separates us from His love - no one or nothing is able to snatch us out of His hand. But I see I play a big part in working out what God has worked in me. No wonder I kept crashing into walls, no wonder I never changed! I never repented so that I can live in the liberty Christ bought for me. It is up to me to put on Christ. It is up to me to put on the full armor of God. If I live for God with all my heart, all my mind, all my soul, God will bless me above and beyond all I could ever ask or think. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Praise God!" Your brother in Christ, Mike Carrillo, Soledad Prison

Evangelistic Outreach:

Saturday, April 16, 2005

Our April outreach to Venice beach was on a beautiful sunny day. At first, we were afraid we had come out too late, and all the homeless had scattered to other parts of town, but eventually we found some, and were able to give out all 30 lunches. Most of the people were very grateful, but a few seemed as if they expected someone to feed them - as if it were owed to them. We were told by Dwayna that the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) comes down to the Venice Boardwalk quite often and gives out lunches of some kind to the homeless (probably hoping to earn "good karma" by it - ha!). That's okay. God will deal with them, and He will deal with whoever took one of our lunches with a wrong attitude. Again, most of the people were very thankful, said, "God bless you," and you could just see it in their faces that they appreciated it. As for the passing out of tracts to the tourists and beach-goers, there was a general attitude of acceptance by most people. God's word tells us not to cast our pearls before swine, so we didn't force a tract on anyone who didn't want one, but most people took them. I saw some obvious tourists who looked European, and I asked them what language they spoke besides English. The woman said, "Polish," but with a look on her face that indicated she doubted I would have one in Polish. Well, was she ever surprised when I pulled a Chick tract in Polish out of my bag! I did the same thing to several touristy-looking people that I thought might be Japanese, and I was right. Four gospel tracts in Japanese were given out to some very amazed Japanese-speaking tourists. Vince and Denise ran into a man who refused a tract, saying he was a Muslim. Denise rummaged in her bag for a tract called "For My Muslim Friend" and the man took it joyfully. All in all, we handed out around 300 or more tracts, many in Spanish. Much prayer was made before we ever went down there, asking God to send us to the people He wanted us to minister to, and asking Him to arrange who would be down at the beach, etc. We asked the Holy Spirit to prepare peoples' hearts, and to shine the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ into their hearts, and give them understanding of the gospel message as they read the tracts. Thank you all for your prayers for our ministry also. We are planting the seed of the word of God, and He will cause the growth and increase. Hallelujah!

Saturday, May 14, 2005

We went a little earlier in the day, getting down there by about 9:45, but it was still hot. Summer is coming up, so I guess we'll just have to get used to it. Again, our estimate is that we handed out around 300 or so gospel tracts, and we had 30 lunch bags for the homeless. Amelia spoke to many people in Spanish, and we all passed out quite a few Spanish tracts. I offered a tract to a couple sitting on a bench, and they refused. I detected an accent in their speech, so I asked what other language they spoke. The man said, "Français." I told him we had Français, and I quickly found two tracts in French, which they took. Having tracts in a person's native language opens doors that might otherwise be closed. Whether they refused the tracts at first out of lack of interest, or because they couldn't read English, is not important. The important thing is that having it in their language opened the door for them to be receptive. We also gave out a tract in Chinese, and one in Korean, to two of the vendors there. Angela and Youbert gave out one of the "For My Muslim Friend" tracts, and Angela said the woman's face brightened up when she saw that it was for Muslims. One young man refused the Chick tract I offered him, but as we traveled up and down the "Boardwalk", I kept seeing this young man. He was alone, not with a group of people, and at about the fourth or fifth time I saw him, I asked if he would like a different tract. It was one of the new tracts we just got from Stephen Bennett Ministries, called "You Are Truly Precious in God's Eyes," and he took that one. Praise the Lord! We saw a group of men and boys walking towards us, and I offered them tracts. One man said, "We saw two guys handing these out, and they gave them to everybody but us! And I'm one who would read it!" I told him we were sorry they got overlooked, but that's why we were following up behind - to catch anyone they missed. Later, we saw them again, and Denise and Vince were giving them more tracts in different titles. The teenage boys seemed to want more, especially. Which reminds me, all along, we gave many to children and teenagers, and the tracts were well-received. As we walked up and down, we would see people reading the tracts that one of our group had already given out. That was encouraging, too.

Saturday, June 18th

We didn't get down to the beach until 9:45, because we stopped along the way and gave lunches to some homeless people camped out by the public library. After we left there, Vince and Youbert didn't want to pay the \$12.00 for beach parking, so they stopped and prayed for a free parking space. They had to go around the block a few times, but finally found a perfect one, two blocks away from the beach. When they got out of the car, they saw a homeless man, and offered him a lunch bag. Later, when coming back to the car, the same man saw them and thanked them for the food, and he was reading the tract. They said, "Jesus loves you." The man said, "I really believe that, because of you guys." Then, they gave him an extra Bible they had in the car, and he was very glad to get it, and promised to read it. They felt the Lord had led them to that exact parking spot just for that man. At the beach, we found several pockets of homeless people alongside the Boardwalk, on the grass, and we gave out a total of 39 lunches this time. Many of them took extra tracts. In one group, we said "We're giving these in the name of Jesus", and one young guy (a lot of them seem so young!) said they had just finished praying, so they knew God had sent us. We passed out mostly tracts from Chick Publications, but also had some new ones from American Tract Society, one of which is called "Everyone is Pierced". It talks about how we are all pierced with sin, and how Jesus was pierced for our transgressions. Those were well-received by the younger people, and Vince and Youbert also gave them to people in the tattoo and body piercing shops. One woman turned it over and read the prayer to receive Christ on the back, and she said, "I got tricked into this one, didn't I?" We pray she will read it and receive Christ, and then the devil will be the only one who is tricked and deprived of one more of his captives. Of the foreign language tracts, we gave out one in Russian, one in Tagalog, two in Chinese, and lots in Spanish. Altogether, several hundred gospel tracts, or "seeds", were planted. Now it's up to the Lord to cause people to come to faith as they read the good news of Jesus Christ. "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one; and every man shall receive his own reward according to his labor. For we are laborers together with God...." I Corinthians 3:6-9