

“Love Lifted Me Recovery” - April, 2022
Newsletter for January, February, March, 2022
Pastors/Chaplains Tom & Dottie Hooper
Web Site: www.Loveliftedmerecovery.com

Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith

Hebrews 12:1-2 “Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

I used to just think of this verse as speaking of **Jesus being the finish line** in the race we are running as Christians. It also gives the idea of Jesus as the “author” or beginning of our faith, and the “finisher” or end, such as saying from A to Z. In Revelation 1:8, 11 & 17-18, Jesus does say He is the Alpha and Omega (A and Z in the Greek alphabet), and the beginning and the end. Then, one day I heard an additional way to think of these verses, and they said Jesus is the “finisher” as in a “finish carpenter”. A finish carpenter goes around the house after the construction is done, and takes care of all the little details, checking for rough spots or blemishes, and smoothing them over. He also may put in the drawer pulls, knobs and other little embellishments to make everything perfect and useable. **This is what Jesus does in our lives, if we allow Him to take control. He smooths over the rough spots and removes character defects, and perfects His work in us by producing His fruit in our lives through the Holy Spirit.** All of this is only done AFTER we have received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and been born again (that’s the rough construction job). The “finishing” work may take the rest of our lives here on earth (the Bible also calls this process “sanctification”), but **it is to perfect us, make us USEFUL (see II Timothy 2:21) to Him here on earth, and make us ready to live in heaven with Him.**

Monthly Evangelistic Outreach to Venice Beach

Saturday, January 8, 2022 - It was a beautiful day, but a little chilly. Our ministry team consisted of Tom, me, Johnny, Sheldon, Felipe, Ricardo, and Jose, with Tom staying home to provide prayer cover for us. We had 174 lunches, lots of toiletry/hygiene packets, socks, used clothing (including knit hats, warm jackets, underwear, and shoes), and blankets for the homeless. Everyone was very thankful and grateful for the food, clothing and toiletries we gave out. Clean underwear is always welcome, and one woman had a great big smile on her face as I offered her a pair. Another woman was so happy to get a bra and underwear, a pair of stretch pants, a knit hat, and some other things. We saw one guy in the parking lot, and we weren’t sure if he was homeless or not. He was arranging a lot of stuff in his car, but it looked like a nice car. Sheldon approached him and offered him a lunch, and he took it. He said he was living out of his car, and he said, “I crashed it, because I drink too much.” A lot of the people who are homeless are there because of drug and alcohol problems. Not all, but quite a few. Jean, who is 86 years old and lives out of her van, gets Social Security, but it just isn’t enough for paying rent. We saw her today, gave her a lunch, a large print “Our Daily Bread”, and a crossword puzzle book. I had taped a pen to the book, and she said, “Oh, good! I was looking for a pen!” We still had lunches left over, as the homeless have been forced to move off of the Boardwalk for the most part. So, we drove down Rose Avenue and turned on a side street where there were lots of tents and homeless people there. They were all very happy to get some unexpected food. Felipe, Ricardo and Jose gave out lunches to the homeless under the freeway up by Sepulveda Blvd., as well as at the little park by the Venice Library

(about 30-40 tents were set up in that park). We handed out gospel tracts to people along the Boardwalk, and the homeless get a tract in each lunch. At the Phoenix House, I gave a stack of gospel tracts to the supervisor, and he said he would give them to the men living there. I asked if Francisco Hernandez was there that day, and he said he wasn't, but I got the address, and will send him some of our newsletters. Francisco is one of our former prison guys, and we met him there last month. He's been out of prison for several years and works there as one of the supervisors. All in all, we had a great time down at the Venice Boardwalk, ministering the gospel and the love of Christ to the people, and we give God all the glory!

Saturday, February 5, 2022 - Praise the Lord! We had a small group, but mighty in God, and those who went out with us were: Felipe, Jose, Sheldon, Kaela, and Michael. Because the L. A. County Sheriffs have moved many of the homeless off of the Boardwalk in Venice, we are also going out into the streets where homeless people are camped out. Felipe and Jose gave out lunches to the homeless at the little park by the Venice Library, where about thirty or more tents were set up, and under the freeway up by Sepulveda Blvd. Sheldon, Kaela, Michael and I went down to the Boardwalk, and Tom stayed home to cover us in prayer. We had 167 lunches, lots of socks, toiletry/hygiene packets, used clothing and blankets for the homeless. We also had knit hats sent to us by my friend Debbie in Phoenix. It's still quite cold outdoors, so these knit hats are much appreciated. Kaela and Sheldon found a man named Dino, who had really bad back pain, so Sheldon prayed for him. He told Sheldon that he had a surgery on his back recently, and had trouble understanding his prescriptions, so they read them to him and explained what the pills were for. Sheldon said he would continue to pray for Dino during the week. They gave away all the lunches, but because they had so much ground to cover, they frequently separated. Kaela gave away all the clothing in her bag, but while she was distracted, someone took the reusable bag as well. That's okay, as we have plenty, and obviously someone needed it. Michael and I gave away all our lunches, clothing and toiletries, and then continued to give out gospel tracts in both English and Spanish. Everyone was very grateful and happy to get what we had to give them. One young man named Jonathan got a knit hat, a jacket, a shirt, socks, some toiletries and a lunch. I said to him, "Wow! You got a whole new wardrobe!" We gave a red coat to a woman, and it looked like it would fit her. She's a lady we see quite often down there. She saw the coat and asked if she could have it, and she was so happy. Michael had brought some little New Testaments (with Psalms and Proverbs), and we gave away four or five of them. One man saw them in Michael's bag and asked if he could have a Bible, and then several other people asked for them, also. Praise the Lord! We found Jean's van, but knocked on the windows, and she wasn't there. Later, I saw her walking in the parking lot, and I called her name. It took a few times before she heard me, but then she came over, and we visited with her for a while and gave her a lunch. She had been talking to a man who said he would wash her van for her, and later, we saw the man, and gave him a gospel tract in Spanish. After we had given out as many lunches as we could on the Boardwalk, Michael and I drove over to a side street off of Rose Ave. and gave out the last twenty or so lunches there. We also gave a gospel tract to the guy in charge of the parking lot where I had parked. The street had been closed off where I usually go down to park, so I had to find another lot, but the Lord orchestrates everything, so maybe it was so that we could give this young man a tract. We may see him in heaven some day.

Saturday, March 5, 2022 - Today was a beautiful day, although quite windy, for our monthly outreach to Venice Beach. Those who came to help Tom and me were: Johnny, Kaela, Felipe, Ricardo C., and another friend of Felipe's, Ricardo R. Johnny and Kaela went down to the south end of the Boardwalk, but when I tried to get to the north end of the Boardwalk, all the streets were blocked off, and even the alley, so I couldn't get to the parking lot at all. I couldn't even go down the alley and get to another parking lot, as I did last month. We found out later it was for a "Safe Place for Kids" marathon, but unlike city-run marathons, they had not put up any signs ahead of time to give any warning about which streets would be blocked off. I came home and got Tom, and we went over to the little park by the Venice

Library, and we handed out lunches there. We only gave out about half of what we normally give out, so we will give out the remainder during the next few weeks, to any homeless people we see on the streets. The people in the park were very happy to get lunches and some nice jackets, sweatshirts, T-shirts, and blankets. There were about 40 to 50 small tents in this little park, but some of them were empty (the people had already wandered off to do whatever they do during the day). The ones who were “at home” were very friendly and grateful, and we decided maybe the Lord wanted us to reach this group of people today instead of the ones down at the beach. Alfred and Curtis were in folding chairs outside their tent, and they got lunches, a warm jacket and sweatshirt, and we talked to them for bit. They both said they were believers in Jesus. Every lunch we give out contains a gospel tract, so those who are not believers have an opportunity to become one. We give them the information they need to come to Christ, and God the Father “draws them to Jesus” and opens their hearts to believe (John 6:44, Acts 16:14).

Prison Ministry

God has blessed us with a prison ministry that reaches men and women in every state prison in California, some federal prisons around the country, and prisons and jails in Oregon, Arizona, Missouri, Texas, Oklahoma, Michigan and Colorado. We have well over 400 people doing our Bible studies and 12-Step program by correspondence. Most of them have found the Lord in prison, some have made rededications since coming to prison, and some have come to know Christ through our ministry. They are growing in their faith, because God’s word does not return void, but will accomplish His plan and purpose. Most of the programs in the prisons are still shut down because of Covid 19, because there have been many more outbreaks, so they have lots of time to do our program and Bible study lessons in their cells. Here are a few portions of letters we’ve received from inmates:

James Murphy, Avenal State Prison, Avenal, CA - “Thank you so much for this awesome program! And thank you so much for the Serenity Bible, such a perfect companion for the Twelve Steps. I’ve always had trouble with NA and AA, because they hint around about God, but in all honesty leave Him out. I am now able to dig into the real meat of the spiritual principles the Twelve Steps are actually based on. I’ve been clean and sober since May 8, 2015, and it was the power of Jesus Christ that ended my destructive behavior, and I needed a program that is Christ-centered, as yours is. Your personal letters brought a tear to my eye and joy to my heart, because my mom used to write me letters sharing her days with me, the things she did during the day, and it really helped me stay connected to life other than prison. I lost my dad four years ago, and my mom shortly after, so your letters remind me of my mom’s letters. Respectfully, James”

Robert James Webb, California Correctional Institution, Tehachapi, CA - “Wow! I can’t remember if I told you, but I got unassigned from being the chapel clerk. The Native American inmates attacked me in the chapel, because I am a Native American, however, I am a Christian. So, I am not a member of their so-called “spiritual circle” where they practice their Native American religion, and they do not like me being the clerk. I believe that it was also a spiritual attack, because Satan is doing his best, but failing. I will never forsake the Lord, and that’s the truth. Just wanted you to know that I wouldn’t be where I am in my faith today if it wasn’t for your 12-Step program and Bible study courses. Also, sharing your life with all you do for people, not just out there, but in here, too. I can’t imagine where I would be today if I had never started doing your Bible lessons, but I know it wouldn’t be good. I owe you a big “thank you.” Love, and prayers, Robert”

Ryan Chavez, Calif. Health Care Facility, Stockton, CA - “Thank you so much for helping me recover from all the sins I’ve committed, and help me see the bigger picture. I appreciate you going out of your way to help other people like myself who are incarcerated and are trying to change ourselves for the

better. You have truly made a difference in my life. I do your Bible lessons when I don't work. I work 6 out of 7 days, 13-14 hour shifts, and make 13 cents an hour. I don't work for the 13 cents an hour, but I work because I love to work, and also God hasn't given up on me, so I won't give up on God or our Lord Jesus Christ. You both are angels to me, and have helped me to come out of darkness into Christ's light.
With joy, Ryan Chavez"

Ernest Alarcon, California Correctional Institution, Tehachapi, CA - "You don't know how grateful I am to you, Tom and Dottie, for your Bible lessons and for the Serenity Bible. Before you offered me the direction towards God, I was a Buddhist. I went to Buddhist services and practiced meditation, and read their literature, but I never worshiped or talked to their gods. Now, I speak to God every day, and He speaks to me as I read His word, the Bible. I also like the notes about the Steps in the Serenity book, and I have things highlighted and underlined for all kinds of concepts and coping mechanisms. I grew up in an abusive home where I was beaten by an alcoholic parent, and when I ran away, I either lived on the streets or was in juvenile facilities, so I never knew love. A few days ago, I read in my Serenity book on page 152, for Step 8, and it said "our source of love is God's love." It blew my mind! I now feel I am getting love from the Source! Love, Ernie"

Cheryl Thomas, California Institution for Women, Corona, CA - "I feel like I just received a miracle from the Lord. I was found suitable for parole at my parole hearing. I could feel the Lord's presence. He was there speaking to me through the Holy Spirit, and helping me to heal and bless others with my words. By God's grace, I can go home to my son and grandson. I want you to know that your ministry kept me rooted in God's word, and the 12-Steps are a very important part of my life forever. Your letters you shared were a blessing to me, and your ministry has blessed so many people. God bless you.
Truly, Cheryl Thomas"

Charles Langsdon, CSATF State Prison, Corcoran, CA - "Thank you so much for accepting me back into the program after such a prolonged absence. I got lost, confused and felt extreme guilt due to my sins. I felt extreme shame, and I've known I needed to get back into the things of God. The lessons you sent me were exactly what I needed and where I need to be. Thank you also for sending me "Knowing who You are in Christ, Using Your Spiritual Authority" and the armor of God card. The card will be put where I see it every day to remind me to put on the whole armor of God. Sincerely, Charles"

Anthony Sanchez, Richard J. Donovan State Prison, San Diego, CA - "I want to thank you both for your love and kindness to all of us here in prison. For without your love, and showing us God's love, we who turned our lives around would be still stuck on the dark side. I love your Bible studies, because they help me to grow in our Lord's word. Your brother in Christ, Anthony"

Stephen Prichard, Avenal State Prison, Avenal, CA - "Thank you for the great Bible study on Ephesians. I spent hours looking up all the verses plus more. One verse always leads me to another when I look in my study Bible. I always find time to study God's word, and my life is in His hands. Thank you for your letter, too. It's nice to get mail from someone outside these walls. Love, Stephen"

Joseph M. Castro, California Correctional Institution, Tehachapi, CA - "Thank you for the certificate for completing your 12-Step recovery program. I wanted to ask if I could please start the Romans Bible study course now. It is my goal to complete each of the Bible studies you provide by the time I'm released. I am edified after each lesson, and I know the Lord has blessed your ministry. I can't wait until the time I can participate in your beach outreach. Even more exciting is when the Lord returns, we will all be in His kingdom, worshiping Him whose Name is above all names. Thank You, Jesus! My love and prayers, your brother in Christ, Joseph Michael