



# the connection

JULY 2011



## DISCOVER PROGRAM

The Discover interns, along with Host Richard Heatwole and Director Blaine Copenhaver, enjoy a camping trip at Cheaha State Park in northern Alabama.

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# Discover

with We Care Program

## 2010-2011 Team Highlights

by: Blaine Copenhaver, Discover Director

At the beginning of this past year's Discover term, I prayed that God would bring together a team whose gifts and personality would mesh well with the prisons where we placed them to serve. God answered my prayer better than I could imagine and sent us Ben Cline, Sheldon Hstand, and Jonathan Zook.

Ben has a bold and vivacious personality that worked great at Holman. He spent the majority of his day in one-on-one theological conversations with the rougher men in prison who would never be caught in church.

We assigned Sheldon to J. O. Davis, a prison that is known for being laid back. He fit in extremely well as he built friendships with men through playing dominos and spending hours giving a listening ear.

Jonathan had an automatic connection to Fountain because his father Donovan had served as an assistant chaplain there seventeen years earlier. Jonathan was quick to offer his gifts by playing drums for the praise team and teaching Bible studies in the Faith Dorm. From the very outset he felt God calling him to stay at We Care longer than just the internship term. He's a great fit for the team at Fountain.

One of our goals for the interns was to help them discover and put to use the gifts God has given them. As I met with them weekly, I was impressed with their resolve to be willing vessels for His use. God has blessed each of these young men with many gifts, and I can't wait to see how He is going to use them to further His kingdom.

So how about you, young person? Do you know who God has called you to be? Are you willing to reach out and serve the brokenhearted? The Discover program can give you the opportunity to do both. **I am currently looking for six young men and two young ladies to join our 2011-2012 team. The term begins September 19 and ends May 19. If God is calling you, contact us for an application. We ask that all applications are completed no later than July 31, 2011.**



*The Discover interns meet weekly for personal and spiritual growth.*

### → Service Description

**Ben Cline:** Basically walking up to guys and saying, "How's it going?" and seeing where it went from there. Sharing the gospel every chance I got.

**Jonathan Zook:** Building friendships with the guys and trying to help them grow in their walk or find Jesus for the first time. I would spend time in the chapel office answering the phone and helping inmates when they came in with a need or problem.

**Sheldon Hstand:** Teaching classes, a lot of one-on-one sharing and talking. Walking the yard and getting to know new people.

**"Go for it. It will open your eyes to a world that most people forget about."  
-Jonathan Zook**



*Carrying the cross.*



*Jonathan Zook, Sarasota, FL, develops friendships in the faith dorm.*

## → Growth Experiences

**Jonathan Zook:** It did take me out of my comfort zone, but it's in those times when you don't feel confident that God is able to shine through you.

**Sheldon Histan:** I learned how to better share my faith and stand up for what I believe is right.

**Ben Cline:** In sharing my faith day in and day out, it really caused me to examine it closely and see if what I was saying was true in my own life.

## → Ministry Challenges

**Sheldon Histan:** Reaching out to complete strangers and starting conversations with them. Learning how to begin building relationships.

**Ben Cline:** Going into the prison for the first time and wondering if I have much to offer.



*Enjoying an afternoon canoe trip.*



*Visiting the USS Alabama battleship.*

## → Summary

**Ben Cline:** Awesome.

**Sheldon Histan:** Intense growth. Challenging, stretching, and will strengthen your faith and beliefs.

**Jonathan Zook:** Not for someone who doesn't want to grow.

"Do it and brace yourself for some serious challenge. It's a growing and stretching experience that will teach as much as a year in Bible college."

-Ben Cline



*Ben Cline, Bridgewater, VA, discusses theology with a friend.*

## → Memorable Moments

**Ben Cline:** Sharing the most basic Bible stories with several people who never heard them.

**Jonathan Zook:** The most memorable moment for me had to be when my friend Eric walked out of the prison a free man. Being able to spend that first day with him was definitely an eye opener. Then trying to help him get established in an ever changing world.



*Sheldon Histan, Harrisonburg, VA, shares a smile with new friends.*

"Be prepared to be challenged, stretched and changed, because this will change your life."

-Sheldon Histan

# STAFF CAMPOUT

APRIL 27-29, 2011

We've been here at We Care for only a little bit over a year, but we feel like the We Care staff is family. We as a family love our staff days and eagerly anticipate time with these special people. It was with this same excitement that we looked forward to our campout in April. Our kids were so excited to play with the other We Care kids, and they also eagerly anticipated sleeping in a tent. It proved to be a fun two days! There was, however, a bit of a cloud over our time together as some of our northern staff were either unable to come or had to go home early due to the tornadoes in their area.

Our days together included a lot of fun activities planned and organized for us to enjoy: volleyball, corn hole, board games, an organized hike, a scavenger hunt (it was great to see the creativity people used in this game), two bounce houses for the kids, and lots of good food! A snow cone machine was popular with kids and adults alike.

There were two favorite activities that we as a family especially enjoyed. The first was the outdoor movie night with popcorn, blankets and a good movie, all outdoors under a beautiful starlit sky. The other special time for us was the time of singing and praying together on the morning before everyone headed home. Our hearts were heavy for the We Care families and tornado victims suffering only several hours from us. It was comforting to gather in prayer and lift our burdens to God who is in control of all things.

*-Mary Landis*



## SOFTBALL 2011 OUTREACH



What do you get when you take about 10 men who don't know each other very well, put them in a van to drive 17 hours to play over 50 innings of softball in two days, and then have them turn around and drive 17 hours back home? You get the We Care Softball Outreach experience in its truest form. On June 10 and 11 We Care was blessed to have 40 men come join some of our chaplains in playing softball with inmates at seven different prisons in Alabama. With three teams on the first day and four on the second day, we played 35 games of softball. Those games included 364 runs scored by the free world teams in 204 innings. It was a privilege to share the love of Jesus with men who might not ever come to a chapel service but are willing to play ball. Please pray for growth of the seeds that were sown during this event.



# NEWS

## TORNADOES

The tornado outbreak in northern Alabama on April 27 affected two of our chaplain families significantly (Dave Buchers and James Smokers). While their own homes were mostly untouched, the communities they live in experienced major devastation. A number of staff persons have given some time assisting with storm cleanup.



## TIMOTHY HOUSE

A decision was made at the April meeting of the Board of Directors to discontinue the Timothy House program. While there are mixed feelings, we do feel that God used the experience to clarify our purpose as an organization and to help inform our ministry approach in regards to re-entry. We extend a special "Thank You!" to those of you who encouraged and supported us in the Timothy House experience. A note on former TH staff persons: Marvin Bender is serving at Fountain Correctional, Joe Kolb at the Mobile Metro Jail, and Dean Miller continues his weekly visits to Death Row at Holman Correctional.

## WELCOME

We are pleased to welcome Jeremy and Andrea Miller and children to the We Care family. Since their recent move from Wilmot, Ohio, to Center Point, Alabama, Jeremy is assisting John Kurtz with chaplaincy ministry at St. Clair Correctional Facility. The Millers are members of Living Hope Outreach in Millersburg, Ohio.



**“I am jealous of those of you who can quote scripture and commit to memory the verses that they read. I want to be like you and live a life that has meaning and be a godly example of Christ.”**

“I want to grow deeper in my faith and give back what so many have given me since I’ve been in prison.”

“I’ve been living for Jesus for years and know that I cannot compromise or I will not be able to be His truth and light to my family. My relationship with Jesus must come first.”



*Anna Miller*  
**Montgomery Work Release  
Montgomery, AL**

These statements come from sisters in prison. Because of long years of drug use, one cannot retain the scriptures that she would love to memorize. Another has experienced growth through the influence of volunteers who come into the prison and desires to be a volunteer when she is finally free. The third has walked with God for many years and knows God intimately. She has been forgiven much and is now a powerful witness for Christ.

While all three of these women have been students in my Bible classes or sought advice from me, each has also challenged me to depend more on the Spirit’s leading, to be transparent, and to be a better representative of Jesus. I give all praise and glory to God that they can see God’s light in me. At the same time I pray to be a bolder ambassador with a deeper compassion for those who do not know how much God loves them. May my life be a link to point them to Jesus.



*James Smoker*  
**Donaldson Corr. Facility  
Birmingham, AL**

**Not long ago God saw fit to rearrange our schedules and our own agenda. When He does that, He teaches us to trust and uses the most unexpected people to bless us.**

On April 27 a tornado devastated our community. Neighbors, friends, and church families lost their homes, and many others had considerable damage. Our home was spared, thank God, but instantly there was a need around us far greater than our minds could comprehend. It took a while to reconcile what our eyes saw with

the thoughts that ran through our minds. When we began to grasp the reality of what happened, we realized our “normal” would forever be changed.

As part of my work in the prison, for the past few months I have been facilitating a 12-member discipleship group which meets once a week. A scheduled class period came one week after the tornado hit. Up to that point I had not yet been back in prison, but I had a strong desire to meet with this group of men. The lesson for that day was on “Who to know” as we deal with hard times in our lives and whether it is possible to have joy in such times. Hosea 6:3 says, “Oh that we might know the Lord! Let us press on to know Him.” (NLT) We had a special time as the men shared, encouraged me, and prayed for the situation in our community. That spiritual refreshment was something I needed. I am learning that God is using incarcerated men, the ones society often calls outcasts, to minister to me, a chaplain.

The tornado seemed to destroy what we called normal, our community, our schedules, our lives, but as we press on to know God, we trust Him, and through that we can have joy in difficult circumstances.

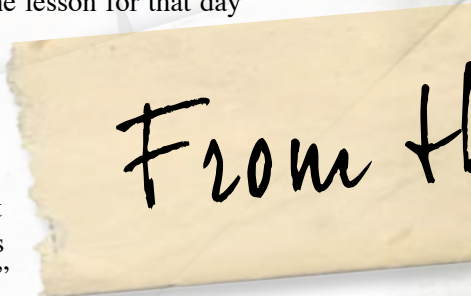


*Steve Stoltzfus*  
**Frank Lee Work Release  
Montgomery, AL**

**“You have a message,” my phone screen informed me.**

Don Metzler, vice president of We Care, had left a message simply stating to get back to him. Since I knew that Don was in Birmingham helping with storm cleanup, I wondered what could be so important that I needed to call him back at this time. With a few misgivings and slightly puzzled, I returned the call.

“Hey, Steve, you want to come to Birmingham to help with the tornado cleanup this week.” Wondering why that particular week could be so important, I started making excuses as to why it simply would not work. Don then informed me that people from my home community in New York were working on the cleanup in the area that he was in. All day I wrestled



with whether or not to go. Going would mean a complete change of plans for the next day and would make an already hectic week worse. The next morning as I traveled north, I was still second guessing my decision.

All my misgivings fled as I walked onto the job site and saw former neighbors, friends, and business acquaintances. What an enjoyable day we spent working and sharing together!

Later I realized how easily this blessing could have been missed. Don could simply have told me after the fact. But because he heeded the Holy Spirit's prompting and made a short phone call, the blessing of

that obedience flowed over to me at a time when I really needed it, and my acquaintances from the North were also blessed.

This entire situation challenged me. How many times have others missed a blessing because I was not open to a quiet prompting from the Holy Spirit? Thanks, Don. You may have opened a floodgate of blessing as others may act upon a gentle nudge from the Spirit.

the Field

**Mentoring, like everything else, has it highs and lows. Many times we may be unaware of the impact our life of consistency and perseverance is having on those we are mentoring. And then the day comes when we are encouraged to see how God is bringing about change in our friend's life.**

When I first met "Pete" approximately a year and a half ago, he was struggling deeply with guilt and self-forgiveness. Our friendship and trust grew quickly, and he soon felt comfortable in sharing with me

about his offense and his desire for inner peace and freedom. Through prayer, Bible study, and some topical resources, God did an amazing work in his life.

Upon Pete's release several months ago, his parents picked him up at the prison and brought him to our home for a country-style breakfast. After several hours of food and fellowship, he and his parents, also Christians, left. Pete and I continue to stay in contact. Pete still needs encouragement

and long-distance mentoring, especially since he doesn't have a job yet or many Christian friends.

Recently I was reminded again how important and valuable post-prison friendships and contacts can be. I stopped at a local business to see a guy whom I had helped to find a job there after having served time in prison. He appears to be adjusting well to job, church life, and the community and was glad for my visit.

I remind myself that although it doesn't look like much is happening at times, it is still true that "one soul is worth more than the whole world," and so I continue on.

**My son played little league baseball this spring on a team that had only mediocre results. He struggled through the season and lost his confidence. What was missing? One factor was that the coaches did not have the knowledge of the game or the ability to teach the boys to do better. My boy wanted more but was unable to get the help he needed.**

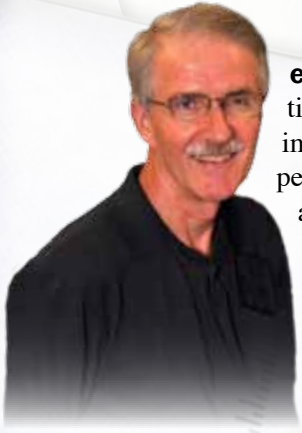
Now my son has a new set of coaches on an all-star team. These men do have the knowledge and wisdom to take the boys to a new level. While working with each child and correcting his bad habits, the coaches speak life into the boys by encouraging them when they follow instructions. The men watch for "coachableness," which in essence is the main characteristic of a good son. They provide clear expectations and consequences for missing the mark. They brag about the boys and talk them up. They show love to the boys.

God demonstrated perfectly His father-son relationship with Jesus. God is full of knowledge and knows how to share it with us. God takes "time" with us if we are willing to study His Word and meditate and pray. He corrects us when we need it. He speaks life into our hearts by His Spirit. God desires that we listen carefully and obey. God's Word defines His expectations for us, and He lavishes His love on us.

A good father helps his son to be successful in life. Many men in prison did not have a positive relationship with a loving father or even a good coach. Hence, it may be difficult for them to relate to God. Chaplaincy provides an opportunity to be a good coach and to call the inmates to become sons of God. Is God calling you to chaplaincy?



*John Kurtz*  
**St. Clair Corr. Facility  
Springville, AL**



*Lester Huber*  
**Fountain Corr. Facility  
Atmore, AL**

Direct all correspondence to:  
We Care Program  
3493 Hwy 21  
Atmore, AL 36502

TELEPHONE: 251-368-8818  
FAX: 251-368-0932  
E-MAIL: [wecare@wecareprogram.org](mailto:wecare@wecareprogram.org)  
WEBSITE: [www.wecareprogram.org](http://www.wecareprogram.org)

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# Learning from Willie

A MESSAGE FROM DAVID R. LANDIS, PRESIDENT



Twelve years ago our family moved to Atmore, AL, so that I could serve as an assistant chaplain at J. O. Davis Correctional Facility. It was there that I met Willie Thomas, an inmate chapel worker. In the course of that first year God used Willie to teach me about the realities of prison life, persevering through hardships, prayer, God's Word as the answer to every situation in life, and a little bit about playing horseshoes. A deep friendship was established that continues to this day. Six years ago Willie was released from prison after serving 30 years.

On Sunday, June 5, my wife and I drove to Meridian, MS. We wanted to support Willie as he preached his first sermon at Mt. Valley Baptist Church and was licensed as a minister of the Gospel. Again, God used Willie to teach me about the realities of life in general, persevering through hardships, prayer, God's Word as the answer to every situation in life, and a little bit about preaching without notes. (Willie has a degenerative eye disease that prevents him from being able to read.)



While it's true that We Care Program exists to "Proclaim Christ and Disciple Inmates," I want you to know that there are also some dear brothers and sisters in prison that God is preparing for future Kingdom assignments. And it does us well to learn from them, because "... the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen... that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Cor. 1:28-29 NKJV) 🔦

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