




the connection

JUNE 2012

THE ONE JESUS ADDED

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THE ONE JESUS ADDED

by Mike Strehlow

In a world that cries out for salvation, mercy, and prayer, is there something that sets prison ministry apart from all other ministries? If so, what is it?

The answer might seem obvious. Anyone might guess that prison ministry is different because inmates are such hard soil to plow. Take someone who did something so wrong his fellow citizens were legally entitled to put him behind bars for years, for decades, or forever. Sit him on his bunk, and as the years pass and his kids grow up and his wife moves on and his parents die and his friends get on with their lives and his own hair and beard get gray, he's still sitting there. Give him almost no privacy and no choice over what he eats and wears or where he sleeps. Throw in deep feelings of having been treated unfairly by the legal system and life in general. Mix well and let stand until terribly bitter. This is the man we go into prison to tell about the love of Christ.

Let's make it even tougher. Make it almost impossible for a chaplain do anything to help any individual inmate. We tell inmates of God's generosity when we can't so much as give them a penny or even discuss their case. You could say all these things and you'd be right. But there's something else that sets prison ministry apart.

The portion of Scripture that speaks of prison ministry is Matthew 25:31-46, the parable of the sheep and the goats. Spoken right at the end of Jesus' discourse on the last days, this is a judgment parable on the subject of who will enter the kingdom and who will not. When talking of separating the sheep and the goats, Jesus recited the same ministry list four times: "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'" (Matthew 25:34-36)

As you can see, prison ministry is grouped with other benevolence ministries. It even comes at the end of the list. What makes it special though, compared to the other good deeds, is that it's the

one Jesus added. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, showing hospitality to strangers, and visiting the sick were benevolent acts well known to and praised by the Jewish people of Jesus' day, and the disciples would have been well acquainted with them. However, no place in the Old Testament or in the rabbinical oral or written expositions of the Old Testament is visiting prison inmates mentioned as a righteous act. Visiting prisoners is the one ministry the disciples would never have heard of until that day. That's the one which would have surprised them and made them think.

When all is said, prison inmates are forgotten. We lock them up and don't think about them because we don't have to. Nevertheless we cannot forget about prison inmates because Jesus reminds us of them four times in this last great parable. Prison ministry stands out because **PRISON MINISTRY IS THE GOOD DEED THAT JESUS ADDED.**

While this is more than enough to Biblically justify prison ministry, it is still a hard sell. Who wouldn't rather volunteer with or send money to an organization serving needy, starving children in a third-world country than to a ministry to inmates who live in confinement so the rest of us can sleep in peace? On top of that, does prison ministry really "work"?

To answer that, let me tell you a story of something that happened earlier this year. I teach Bible college classes and oversee a G. E. D. program at Fountain Correctional Facility in Atmore, Alabama. About three months ago we were all set to have a graduation ceremony. Because of the paperwork required to get permission to do something like this in prison, it had taken almost six months to get everything lined up.

The men had worked hard, so we were going to do this right. There were three A.A. degrees to award, certificates and diplomas to hand out, and about ten G. E. D. recipients to recognize. We had arranged for a special speaker and a singer and had planned an after-graduation party where we'd serve soda, chips, cookies, and about seventy pounds of sub sandwiches. (If that doesn't sound like a special meal to you, imagine eating three meals a day for years and never once getting up from the table thinking, "That was good." That's what it is to eat in prison.) Half a dozen chaplains in jackets and ties were waiting in the chapel office, and fifty inmates, men we'd been teaching and mentoring for

(continued on page 5)



July 2012

Make a difference in the lives of prisoners

1

Fill out Read-a-Thon info/sponsor form.

2

READ, READ, READ!

(31 consecutive days between June 1 and July 31)

3

Collect pledges and send to We Care Program.

Prizes will be awarded to readers raising the most funds in their age division!

Readers collecting over \$150 in pledges will receive a free T-shirt from We Care Program.

Eligibility requires fulfilled pledges to be postmarked by August 31.



2011 Read-a-thon participants from Bittinger, MD

Everything you need to participate at www.wecareprogram.org



Have you felt God speaking to your heart about the "least of these" in your community? Have you felt compelled to do something, but don't know where to start?

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2012
8:30 AM – 4:00 PM**

**ACTS COVENANT FELLOWSHIP
LANCASTER, PA**

For more info follow updates at www.wecareprogram.org or contact Steve Martin at 610-909-9285 or steve@wecareprogram.org.

The purpose of this conference is to equip the church for the work of the ministry in their local communities. Along with general session speakers, representatives from ministries that serve the "least of these" will be available to present and discuss opportunities for service in a variety of breakout sessions. Find out how you can make a difference through prison, aftercare, homeless, youth, crisis pregnancy, HIV and other ministries.

LABORERS TOGETHER

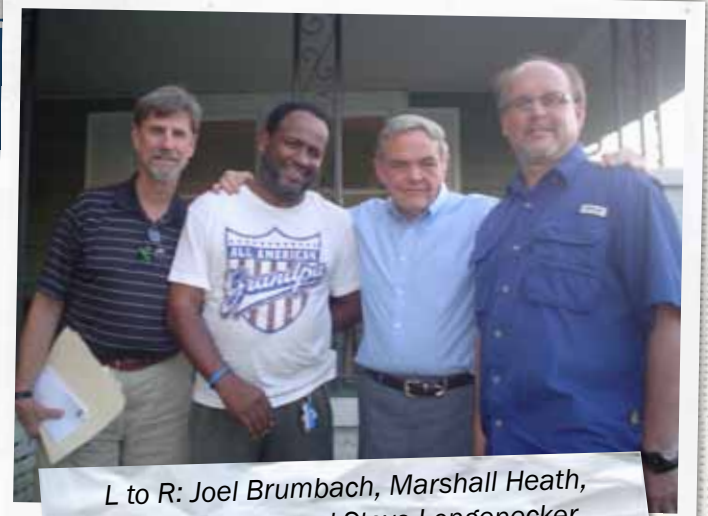
by Allen Screws, Asst Chaplain, Frank Lee Work Release

When Marshall Heath arrived at Frank Lee in 1987 for a drug-related charge, many of his family members had already been incarcerated with drug charges. In addition, his mother was living in another state where she later died before Marshall completed his 18-month sentence.

Recently, I met Marshall again at a ministry banquet. "I didn't receive any family support while I was locked up. Y'all were my family at Frank Lee, Chap," Marshall told me. "I received the love y'all gave me. (He was referring to the ministry volunteers, close Christian inmate brothers, along with myself, We Care Chaplain at the time.) It gave me the strength I needed to begin my walk with Jesus Christ. Even though I was locked up, this made me feel free." As a result of Marshall's walk with Jesus, he became a faithful chapel attendee, was involved in Bible studies, and boldly testified of what Jesus Christ had done for him.

Upon Marshall's release in March 1989, I had the privilege of making arrangements for Steve Longenecker (a former We Care Chaplain) to drive Marshall to the Birmingham bus station. I felt strongly impressed by God that this potential mentor relationship could be a positive move for Marshall, and it turned out to be a divine connection. During the ride to Birmingham, Marshall shared his life story along with his fears of returning home to the same environment he had left. Marshall states, "Steve gave me an open invitation to call him for counsel and support anytime."

Within a couple of months, financial pressures arose. "That man on my shoulder begin to tempt me in making some fast money according to the ways of my old lifestyle." Marshall had already been taking advantage of the invitation Steve had offered for counsel and support, so Marshall gave Steve another call. Soon Steve had made arrangements for Marshall to move into Shepherd's Fold (a Christ-centered home for men re-entering society following prison) where he stayed in the program for two years. Shortly after Marshall arrived at Shepherd's Fold, Joel Brumbach,



L to R: Joel Brumbach, Marshall Heath, Allen Screws, and Steve Longenecker

another former We Care volunteer, became the Director of "The Fold" and another valuable God-sent mentor who assisted Marshall in becoming the successful ex-offender he is today.

On Sundays Steve and his wife Lenora would pick up Marshall for church and then afterwards take him to their home for lunch. He greatly enjoyed the delicious meals prepared by Lenora as well as the fun time with the family. "The feeling of a family setting really built me up. It was another major part of strengthening my walk with Christ," says Marshall, who still faithfully attends Grace & Truth, the church that Steve pastors.

Marshall recently celebrated his 23rd year since being released from prison! He and his wife love spending time with their children and grandchildren. Marshall contributes his success to the love of Jesus he received while incarcerated at Frank Lee many years ago and to the many faithful servants who had a part in his transition back into the free world.

"We each carried out our servant assignment, I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plants, but God made you grow." (1 Cor. 3:6, *The Message*)

Note: Marshall is currently serving as a part-time cook at Shepherd's Fold preparing the evening meal four days a week. He still gets to spend time with his mentors and friends Joel Brumbach, current staff member, and Steve Longenecker, who recently became the Executive Director.

WANTED: YOUNG ADULTS

We Care Program is accepting applications for its eight-month Discover Program (September - May).

Discover
with We Care Program

Find out more at
www.wecareprogram.org.

Applications due by July 31.

JOIN US!

Stewardship Corner

by Steve Martin, Development Director



As the Development Director, I want to thank all those who financially support We Care Program. Without the sacrificial giving of many of you, we would not be able to fulfill our call to minister to the “least of these” in prison. Our prayer for you is that God will richly bless you for your faithful support.

Over the next few months, I plan to write about various methods of charitable giving. This month’s topic is: ***Leaving a Legacy at Your Death.***

When making a will or living trust, you might want to consider making your favorite charities—in addition to your family members—part of your estate plan. You can do this by simply indicating in your will that a portion of your assets should be left as a bequest to We Care Program or other charities. Upon your death, the executor of your estate will transfer your bequest to the charities you have chosen.



Another option for large bequests is to ask a financial organization like Mennonite Foundation to hold the funds, invest them for a certain period, and then distribute only the net income to the charitable causes you’d like to support with your bequest. This multiplies the effect of the gift over a period of time. A bequest plan can help you express your faith values even after your death and may help you to reduce estate and inheritance taxes.

For more information regarding bequests, contact me directly at 610-909-9285 or steve@wecareprogram.org or call Mennonite Foundation and speak with a charitable services representative at 717-653-6662.

“The One Jesus Added” continued from page 2

years, were waiting in the sanctuary for the speaker to arrive so the program could start.

Then the chaplain’s phone rang, and we were told that a security problem had come up, a bad one, and the camp was to be locked down. The graduation ceremony was cancelled! Our speaker had already been turned away at the front gate, and officers were on their way to the chapel to take the inmates back to their dorms. As we waited in the chapel office (our instructions were to shut the door; we weren’t even allowed to address the students and say what happened), our ties feeling tight around our necks and our eyes stinging, suddenly we heard music in the chapel.

Yes, we could hear the men singing. Without being told, they knew something was wrong. And those fifty inmates, our students, my students, were singing “His Eye Is on the Sparrow.” When the officers marched them out, they left singing “Our



Graduates pose at re-scheduled ceremony

God Is a Good God”...walking right past the best meal most of them would have had in years.

I felt so bad for them, and yet I was so proud of them. I still am. In one disappointing, gracious moment they validated everything we’d been doing for years. They validated Jesus’ wisdom in adding prison ministry to a list of very important good deeds. If you had been there that night, you would never again wonder whether “The One Jesus Added” was worth it!



Stan Schrock
Century Corr. Institution
Century, FL

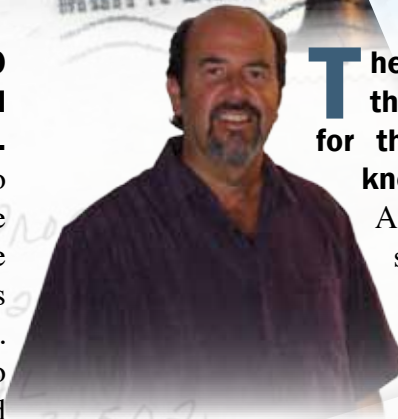
Meet Tat. Over the past 20 years he has been in and out of prison three times.

Tat's friend signed him up to come to the chapel because they heard volunteers were handing out free cookies and a What-a-burger. But there was a catch to getting the food – he had to endure four days of Christian teaching! Tat and his friend were sure they were strong enough to hold out.

This is Tat's testimony, "During the second day something happened. I felt this pressure come over me. I felt hot. I kept getting up and going to the bathroom to get away from it. Every time I came back and the volunteers talked to me, I couldn't keep from crying. One volunteer told of his son currently serving a long prison sentence in Texas and how he as a father was dealing with it. I began to see and feel the pain I caused my dad. I had never cared about that before. Finally, on the third day I told a volunteer I needed to talk with him. I am not really sure what happened. I am not sure if I am a Christian. All I know is God did something in my life and I am trying to figure out what He did! I am giving up the gang and my hustle because I know God wants me to. But I don't know how I will survive."

I know what happened to Tat. He found Jesus. The next time I went into the prison there was a note on my desk from Tat. It said, "Chaplain Schrock, I have decided to follow God, but I don't know how. There are no Christians in the dorm where I live that I know of. I have been reading the book of Matthew like the volunteer told me to, but I need someone to explain it. Can you help?"

Many men like Tat are seeking to follow God, and there are not enough volunteers to fill the need. Pray for Tat and the volunteers who minister to men like him.



Jovin Martin
Fountain/Atmore WC
Atmore, AL

The minute I walked into the chapel that evening for the scheduled service, I knew something was amiss.

A group of men having a Bible study were winding down, but I was immediately aware of an evil presence. Hostile glances were being exchanged by some, while others pretended that all was well and began making attempts to lead in worship. Yet the worship team leader was absent, nowhere to be found. I assumed they probably had a difference of opinion concerning a scripture in their Bible study. That happens from time to time.

As the guy at the keyboard continued to play, another young man began walking around the room lifting up his voice very loudly, casting out devils. I stopped them and asked, "Where is John, the worship leader?" It was by now much past the scheduled time for the service to begin. I was told there had been a confrontation before my arrival, but that John would soon be there.

I then began to walk around praying and casting out devils. One by one men began to trickle in, including John, until there were 12 men present and the service began. During the worship time a very hostile, angry spirit manifested in two of the men, and I immediately stood up and spoke out, "BE STILL," and they were. Then I prayed fervently over them, asking God to remove every spirit from the room that was not of Him. In a few minutes the peace of God settled upon us all as the men in the room went to one another, embraced, and spoke kind words of blessing, love, and forgiveness to each other.

In my experience this type of scenario happens occasionally, and I'm very grateful for the respect shown to me as a chaplain.

From the

Some people want to live within the sound of chapel bells, but I want to run a mission a yard from the gates of hell."

Those are the first two lines in "Run to the Battle" by Steve Camp. I first heard that song many years ago. A few weeks ago, I once again heard it on the local Christian radio station, and I realized that serving as a prison chaplain was



Sharon Bruckhart
**Mont. Women's Facility
Montgomery, AL**

sort of like "running a mission a yard from the gates of hell."

As chaplains, we feel the heat that results from people turning away from God and living their

lives only to please themselves. We hear the cries of those who have made the bad choices that result in prison. We see the tears in the eyes of those who regret their choices and wish they had done differently. We hear the pain in the voices of those who are no longer able to tell their loved ones what they wish they would've told them before it was too late.

But, unlike hell, we are able to give them words of comfort from God's Word. They are able, with God's help, to turn their lives around and begin to live a life pleasing to God even while still in prison. When we hear those cries, we are able to pray with them and show them in God's Word the hope that He gives and the forgiveness that He extends. Physical thirst is quenched with a drink of water, but we can help to quench spiritual thirst by sharing God's Living Water.

All things are possible with God, even running a mission a yard from the gates of hell. God has called each of us to be His servants. I give you a challenge that was given to me, "What are you willing to do to be God's heart, hands and voice?"

the Field

Peaceful Atmosphere Blesses SHOPPER

by Gary Mast, Economy Shop Director

Three Economy Shops operated by We Care Program play a vital role in providing funds for our in-prison ministry efforts. The thrift stores also give opportunity to encourage and serve the needs of our community through our interactions with donors, customers, volunteers and employees. Volunteer cashier, Marj Heatwole, recently shared an encouraging encounter she had with a customer at our Atmore thrift store.

"I was working my regular Tuesday morning shift at the register in the We Care Economy Shop. Praise and worship music was playing in the background as usual and customers were browsing. One lady took a complete set of clothes to try on in the dressing room and came to the register in her new outfit to pay. As I put her old clothes in a bag and snipped the colored tags off her jeans, shirt and jacket, we made small talk. She asked me how long I'd lived in Atmore and if I liked living here. She told me she was a long-distance truck driver and she'd stopped in Atmore several months ago. That time she had also come into the Economy Shop. She said she was a new Christian and was so needy for fellowship. Now she was back to tell me how the peace that she felt in our store and the music that was playing so blessed and ministered to her heart. She'd asked the lady at the register if that CD was for sale. The clerk said it was and got it for her. In the weeks since then she'd been listening to that CD in her truck, continuing to be blessed and remembering how the Lord ministered peace and refreshed her spirit in the Atmore Economy Shop. We Care may be a prison ministry, but praise God, ministry happens in the thrift store as well."

Pray with us that the Economy Shops would continue to increase in both monetary contributions to the ministry as well as positive, Christ-honoring influence in the communities in which we serve.

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BECOMING LIKE THE LEAST OF THESE

A MESSAGE FROM DAVID R. LANDIS, PRESIDENT

dave@wecareprogram.org

One of the greatest dangers faced by those of us serving in “least of these” ministries is getting to a place where we put ourselves in a category above those we are serving. This is unfortunate—and damaging—and yet if we are not careful, over a period of time we can tend to develop an “us” versus “them” mentality. Perhaps that is why some of us struggle with besetting sins, or go through seasons of drought, or carry heavy burdens allowed by our Father. In these darker moments we are more prone to acknowledge our need for grace and are more likely to extend it to others.

My own journey includes caring for our twelve-year-old daughter who has been having seizures since she was six months old, is profoundly disabled as a result, and requires constant care for her special needs. There have been many days when I questioned God’s wisdom in allowing all of this, but I can say with assurance that our experience with Darla has given me greater ability to identify with the “least

of these.” Countless times in these last twelve years God has used my “Darla story” to help me connect with and minister to men in prison. For this I am thankful.

Whatever your story, I encourage you take these verses to heart. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5) The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

As we journey along, it does all of us well to remember that before we can effectively minister to the least of these, we have to become, in a sense, like the least of these.



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