




# the connection

SPRING 2025



2025 EDITION

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# From Strangers to Family

By Don Metzler



ReNew Hope 2025 was a blessed time of folks coming together from all across the US and parts of Canada to blitz the prisons in Alabama and Northwest Florida with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sunday orientation took place at Prattville Christian Academy, where all 217 participants gathered for a full day of worship, inspiration, instructions, and of course, the necessary training. We were blessed by singing from various groups and challenged by powerful messages from Dr. David Earley and Chaplain Gary Wieborg. After the orientation, the volunteers spread out to the four base areas for the week.

With our newer format in recent years of having the teams enter the prisons earlier in the morning and scheduling chapel services in the afternoon at most facilities, group gatherings and meals are held in the evenings in each region. These daily wrap-up sessions were graciously hosted at local churches in Troy, Montgomery, and Birmingham, and at the We Care headquarters in Atmore. We are grateful for volunteers who facilitated the meals in each location.

The group in Troy met at Bush Memorial Baptist church the first two nights, but on the third night had to meet in a local restaurant due to evening services at the church. However, even in the restaurant they were able to enjoy a period of music and song followed by reflection and testimonies of what God had done in the prisons that day.

In Montgomery we used Hunter Hills Church, where

our own We Care chaplain Carl Carpenter attends and serves on the leadership team. The fellowship hall was a wonderful space for the 100+/- volunteers to congregate each evening. After the meal and some music, the area coordinator led in a time of sharing prison stories from the day. It's always encouraging to hear how God moved in the interactions between volunteers and inmates.

The Birmingham group was blessed again this year to have their evening meal and sharing time at Pastor JJ's church. Last year we were able to meet at Flint Hill Baptist Church for this purpose even though the congregation had no previous knowledge of or connection to We Care. What is really neat is how God used that week to open up ministry opportunities. Through our being there last year, Pastor JJ's heart was stirred to get involved in prison ministry. He visited Bibb Correctional Facility where We Care operates the Pathway to Freedom program and was encouraged by what he saw. Soon after that visit, he joined in the work as a teacher. Since then he has also influenced several other men in his congregation to get involved as teachers and mentors in the program. So this year when our group went to Pastor JJ's church each evening, we felt like we were being hosted by a We Care family member. It's so amazing how God works things out for our good and for His glory!

The Atmore group met as usual at the We Care headquarters to enjoy some wonderful meals, listen to special







music and hear what God was doing in the prisons and thrift stores. While we have been meeting like this for many years in Atmore, 2025 was only the second year for us to serve meals more than one night in the other three regions.

We Care is thankful to each of these churches for opening their doors to our volunteers. It is in the times when ReNew Hope participants can sit around and fellowship that former strangers begin to feel like family members. Of course, followers of Jesus are all part of the family of God, and that particular family connection is what makes this event so special. Those who are already in the family, whether residing outside prison or inside, band together to encourage one another and invite others into the family.

We are grateful not only to the individuals who came to serve but also to all those who made it possible for them to do so. We know that many families, businesses, and churches sacrifice to send volunteers to participate in ReNew Hope. To each one who in some way made it possible for someone else to come, we say a huge THANK YOU.

As you will see elsewhere in this newsletter, many lives—both volunteers and inmates—were touched, and God moved in some amazing ways once again. If you would like to be a part of this outreach event next year, please mark January 26-30, 2026, on your calendar and watch for the applications this fall. Hope you can join us.



## Freedom Rally

*By James Smoker*

We all love special events, occasions that are out of the ordinary, times when community is built and connections are made with other people, especially when those events include a spiritual impact. The same thing is true for incarcerated men and women. A change in the routine can make a big impact. When the occasion is Gospel-centered, it brings hope to hopelessness and light to the darkness. Inmate “Mike” says this concerning outreach events in prison, “It shows that people really care, and they demonstrate it by their acts of kindness.”

Recently We Care had the privilege of partnering with the Gospel Echoes Team Prison Ministry from Goshen, Indiana, for the annual Freedom Rally at Holman. This event consists of a meal served to all the inmates and staff and a program of music and message. The music, the spoken words, and the fellowship combined to make one of those special happenings that are out of the ordinary. Most of all, the Light of Jesus shone in the darkness.

One of the highlights at this year’s rally was the service on the prison yard. Many more men participated who would not have attended otherwise, and many heard even if they didn’t put effort into it. We also got to take the music teams into the Death Row unit to sing while the meals were being distributed. Music drifted through the whole unit, three stories high, and everyone heard. It was amazing to experience the spirit of calm that settled over the unit.

Thank you to all who helped to make the rally a success—the Gospel Echoes teams who organized the event, those who cooked the food, and all the volunteers who assisted in some way. Christ’s love was demonstrated by your acts of kindness. Many men were touched and seeds were planted. We continue to pray for God to work in the hearts of the men who heard the songs and enjoyed the meal.





Birmingham Work Release Team



Easterling Team



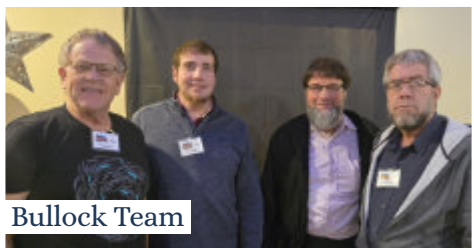
Fountain Team



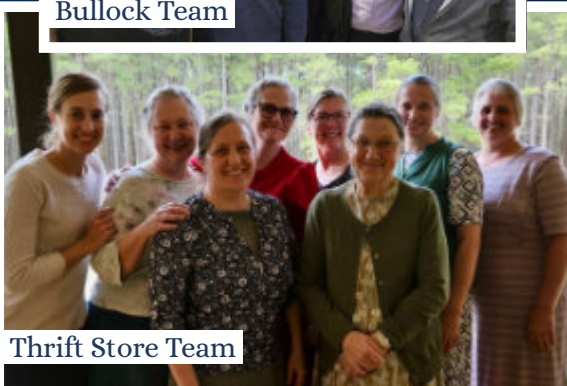
Holman Team



Donaldson Team



Bullock Team



Thrift Store Team

# ReNew Hope Reflections

I watched as God softened the heart of a specific inmate from day 1 to day 3. Day 1, she was very guarded with showing interest or emotion. Day 2, she showed a little interest; her guard was coming down. Day 3, she cried through most of the program and responded to the altar call. It was a beautiful thing to watch unfold.

- Carolyn Orendorf

I talked to far fewer inmates this year but in much greater depth.

- Steve Hershey

Several of us prayed for a guy that had demons afflicting him. We prayed for him, and he expressed his faith that Jesus can remove them. A smile came on his face and his headache left!

- Eric Miller

Lots of inmates were excited about the program, had questions about scripture, and requested prayer!

- Karen Zimmerman

I saw a number of men gain victory over unforgiveness.

- David Landis

We were praying for inmates to attend our afternoon service, and when we were done praying, there was a line of women out the door waiting to sign in.

- Julie Carter

I will never forget spending time with the ladies from death row in Tutwiler. It was such a blessing to minister to each other as sisters in Christ.

- Dawn Landis

In searching through Psalms, looking for a certain chapter, I came across a few verses in Psalm 27 that felt fitting for "Helen" so I shared them with her. The next day she showed me a new devotional book she had just picked up the afternoon before. The reading for the day was based on the same verses that I had shared with her! That afternoon in the chapel service, the songs and the spoken word confirmed what I had shared with her and another woman. They were both in attendance and told me afterwards that they could not believe when they started hearing the messages that went right along with what was shared earlier. That was only God! Thank You, Father!!

- Sharon Brubaker

The first day they brought 50 inmates out that normally don't get to come to the church. There were several that came to Christ or recommitted their lives to Christ.

- Ivan Stoll

I always am encouraged and challenged by the faith and hunger for the WORD by the Church Behind Bars.

- Karen Yoder

I'll never forget the look in one man's eyes as I prayed for him. I saw his appreciation for the love and compassion that we were showing him. I also believe I saw hope in his eyes as we prayed. There is nothing impossible with God.

- Tommy Williams

I met a man who was shaking like a leaf. He said his drug addiction was taking a toll on his body, and he wanted prayer. When I finished praying, he was calm and smiling.

- Paul High

None of our services or music groups/speakers were cancelled or postponed. ALL glory to God, because nothing is ever routine in prison and flexibility is key!  
- Wendy Seabrook

At Easterling, when we were singing, we could see the joy and freedom in the face and disposition of a particular inmate. It made an impression on me. He truly seemed free in Christ and was giving genuine, meaningful expression of it.  
- Kent Fraser

I ate lunch with a man who was sitting alone at a table. As I shared with him that the Lord loved him and knew what he was going through, tears started running down his cheeks. I still don't know what all his emotions conveyed, but it was personal and I think the Lord ministered encouragement to him.  
- Marvin Bender

On Thursday I took a bit more time to talk with one of the ladies at the store, and I'm really grateful I did that.  
- Marlene Reimer

We walked into the empty and dark chapel. No one was there. We anticipated going to the dorms before the service. The answer was "no." But then a "mistaken" call for chapel service, and men started showing up. One of the chapel workers suggested we share why we were there and a testimony. The volunteers shared a few things followed by a few songs sung by two inmates, a father and son. Another song by someone else, and a few more testimonies. This wasn't "planned," was it? Thank you, God, for the unplanned because it was so special to see Your hand move!  
- Fred Orendorf

While visiting in the dorms the first day, one man said, "You just don't know what it means to us guys in this place to see you walk in and share the love of Jesus."  
- Jim Nolt

Etched in my memory is the picture of the dorm at Holman with about 150 inmates - just to see how they live day after day and year after year. God filled my heart with love and compassion for their dear souls.  
- Mark Miller

I spoke with a middle-aged man who has a son around my age who he was worried about because of the bad environment he was in. He also shared a very tough but touching testimony, and I prayed for him and his son. I expressed my gratitude for his testimony and how it inspired me, and he couldn't believe that someone would find his story interesting or inspirational. He prayed for me as well and said he was very inspired now to share with other inmates what God had done in his life.  
- Dalton Wagler

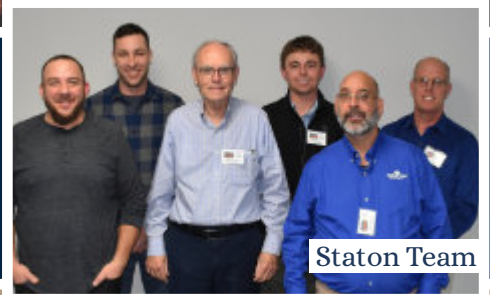
I shared with a prisoner about the necessity to give up his free will to know the will of the Father. He said two days earlier he had told God he would be willing to give up his free will if that was necessary.  
- Scott Blunier

Am touched when I see God minister to the men. They say our coming is like a breath of fresh air compared to the regular monotony.  
- Dennis Nolt

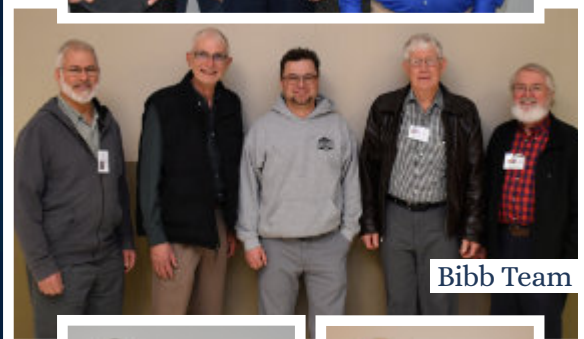
Mark your calendar for January 25-30  
and plan to join us for ReNew Hope 2026!



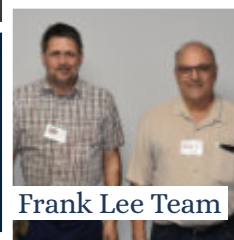
Tutwiler Team



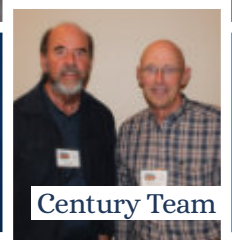
Staton Team



Bibb Team



Frank Lee Team



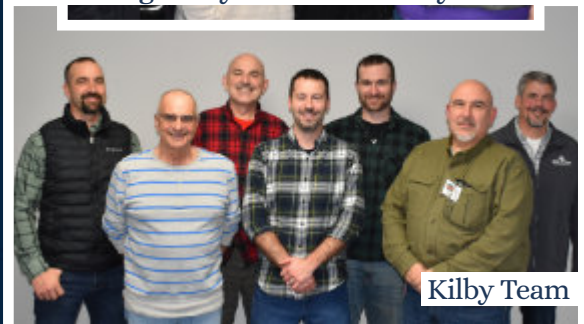
Century Team



Santa Rosa Team



Montgomery Women's Facility Team



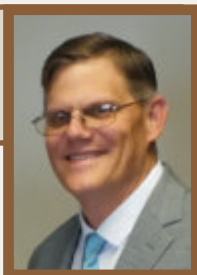
Kilby Team



# From the Field

## J. J. Stanbridge

Bibb Correctional Facility  
Brent, AL



**M**y first exposure to We Care Program was through an opportunity to provide space at our church for a fellowship meal during the January outreach in 2024. During those evenings together I had the honor to meet so many servants of the Lord. David Bucher encouraged me to come and see what the Lord is doing at Bibb County Correctional Facility. In May of 2024, I made my first visit to Bibb.

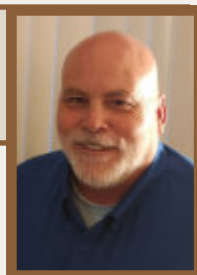
During that visit, David shared the need for a teacher on Thursday mornings. I remember that moment like it was yesterday. Two things went through my mind at that moment. The first was the words of Jesus in Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.” The second was the words of Henry Blackaby in his work, “Experiencing God.” “See where the Lord is at work and join Him in it.”

On that day in that little closet office, I accepted the opportunity to teach on Thursday mornings at Bibb in the B3 dorm. I have had the honor of teaching “Cat and Dog Theology” and the book of Ephesians. Currently, we are working through “The Fundamentals of the Faith.” My hope is that these men will come to Jesus. My prayer for them is Matthew 11:28-29, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

There are men at Bibb who love the Lord and are passionately following Jesus. However, many others have yet to discover the truth of these scriptures. Their eyes are filled with pain and suffering. They are burdened by past failures and sin. They have yet to discover the pathway to freedom in Jesus. Pray with me that these men will choose to come to the Lord Jesus and choose by faith to be yoked with Him. Pray that these men will experience the absolute joy of resting in Jesus their Lord and Savior.

## Carl Carpenter

Frank Lee Work Center  
Deatsville, AL



**2** Corinthians 5:14-19 was the scripture he had chosen. I saw him paging through his Bible to find it as we were singing the last song. That Sunday morning service consisted of Bible study, worship with a combination of singing hymns and songs by our inmate worship team, communion, a sermon, two baptisms and prayer.

One of the baptisms was especially emotional. Joseph is in his 70's and has been studying the Bible for the last year, for the very first time. He has been carrying around a lot of guilt and shame from many rebellious years. He has (in his own words) “earned an ungodly reputation on the streets and in the prison system.” He shared concerns with Jason, an inmate pastor, and I that the church may not accept his conversion and him because of his past.

So, Joseph was baptized, we sang “I’ll Fly Away,” Jason paged through his Bible. The song ended, and before Jason led in prayer, he read 2 Corinthians 5:14-19, “14 For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”

Do you see it? Because we are a new creation in Christ (vs. 17), it is important to view each other as that new creation not as our worldly past (vs.16). What a great reminder for us all!

## THRIFT STORE UPDATE

After too long of a delay, the concrete slab was finally poured for our new Thrift Store in March. As this newsletter goes to press, the steel building is being erected. Based on the current progress, we are predicting the need for skilled volunteers as listed below.



<b>General Construction</b> – Assist with any part of the building process . . . . .	<b>Mid-April – August</b>
<b>Carpentry</b> – Interior wall framing, building workspaces such as tables and workbenches. . . . .	<b>May – June</b>
<b>Electrical</b> – All aspects of the electrical process. . . . .	<b>End of April – May</b>
<b>Plumbing</b> – All aspects of the plumbing, post-rough-in . . . . .	<b>May</b>
<b>Drywall</b> – Hang and finish drywall on interior framing . . . . .	<b>July</b>

If you are interested in helping with any of these needs, please contact Nathan Kennell at the We Care office, 251-368-8818.

## Daniel Earley

Santa Rosa Correctional Institution  
Milton, FL



**E**xcited! I had just been approved to be a Spiritual Advisor and was on my way to meet the first guy I would be mentoring. I walked into D-dorm looking for inmate Jones.

“Hey Jones, you have a visitor here to see you,” an inmate yelled across the dorm. I could barely see Jones slouched against the wall due to the pack of inmates wandering around. Some had on their blue uniforms, but most were shirtless. One man was rapping loudly, a few were at a table playing cards, and several hollered trying to get my attention.

Then I heard a loud voice shout back, “No I don’t. I don’t get visitors.” Later Jones would tell me that I am the only person from the free world who has ever come to see him in prison.

Florida Department of Corrections has a little-known

role available called “Spiritual Advisor.” In this position, I mentor and disciple men like Jones in a one-on-one setting, on a consistent basis, and for a significant period. This has been a wonderful way to connect with the men and provide personalized spiritual support.

Even though inmates are usually lonely in prison, they lack privacy. People and chaos are everywhere. Thankfully, as a spiritual advisor, I can secure a private setting where an inmate can relax and open his heart. Here, men have shared with me traumatic experiences they survived such as abusive childhoods, frustrations in foster care, suicide attempts, loss of loved ones, massive betrayal, and more. They have opened their broken hearts concerning pain surrounding crimes they committed, issues that led them to the streets, sadness about joining gangs as children, and what they try to escape from when getting high. Together, we’ve cried, laughed, prayed, and studied God’s word.

The Lord has been good to bless my activity as a spiritual advisor and answer your prayers on my behalf. In fact, two of the guys I’ve been meeting with got baptized recently.

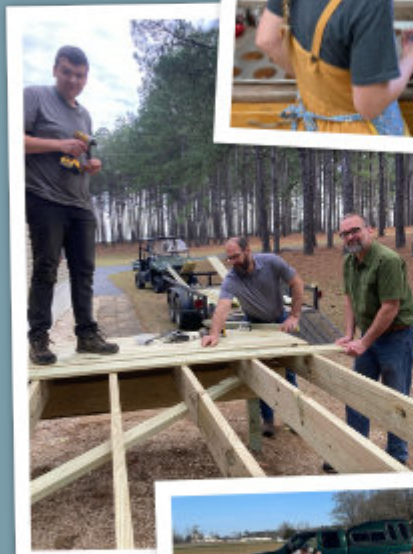
## Blessed by Volunteers

By Steve Petersheim

In our role as hosts, one thing Sara and I particularly enjoy is meeting new people, inviting them into our space, and making them feel welcome. We recognize this is a God-given gift, which we praise Him for. In January and February, the Friesen family was here for seven weeks, volunteering in a variety of ways around the headquarters and Thrift Stores. During ReNew Hope week Susan and the girls helped with the food, and David served on a prison team. At the end of February, the Zacharias family came for a week, and in mid-February, the Giesbrecht family arrived and stayed for four weeks.

All three of these families helped in many different ways. Some of the jobs they did were sorting and bagging donated toys to get them ready to sell, installing plumbing for the new thrift store, building a new patio and walkway for the double-wide trailer, sanding and painting railing, and cutting down and removing dead trees on the property. On numerous occasions, the ladies could be found in the kitchen making meals or baking cookies or whoopie pies.

We are very grateful to these families for their service, and the assistance they provided is an example of the various opportunities available for volunteers in our FOCUS program. Is God calling you to volunteer?



**Read & Win!**

# Read-A-Thon

We Care Program

*Make a difference in the lives of prisoners.*

**Summer 2025**

*Forms available at  
[www.wecareprogram.org](http://www.wecareprogram.org)  
 or watch for info coming  
 soon to your mailbox!*

**2025 Softball Outreach**

**MAY 8 - 10**

Share Christ's love with men in prison while enjoying the game of softball

Applications available at  
[www.wecareprogram.org](http://www.wecareprogram.org)  
 (Deadline April 18)

Email - [kevin@wecareprogram.org](mailto:kevin@wecareprogram.org)

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

3493 Highway 21  
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 Phone: 251-368-8818  
 Email: [wecare@wecareprogram.org](mailto:wecare@wecareprogram.org)

