HEBREWS 13:3
In a time with so much crime going on, especially against children, it is hard to understand what the Lord is telling us. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them? Is this instructional or directional?

We should try to keep in touch often with those we know or know of. One of the most difficult jobs you may face is dealing with someone when you find out the reason they are in prison. We can tell you first hand it is not easy.

One of the great mysteries of the Bible has to do with Paul and Silas, and prison. Also a very great mystery that few can answer. Read Acts 16 20 and try to see the problem. These men of God were arrested and beaten and thrown into prison. They were guilty of no crime. When the police said, “These men are Jews,” had they said, “We are Romans,” they never would have gone to prison.

First, they were beaten with rods, whiplike instruments with lashes at the end tipped with shards of stone and bone. Then they were thrown into stocks. Remember the old western movies where the town drunks had this done? But in Paul and Silas’ day, this was an instrument of torture. A leg was strapped into a notched board, Their other leg was stretched as far as possible and strapped into another notch. Arms were chained over their heads. Did they moan or groan? No, they sang praises to the Lord. They broke into prison to lead others to Christ!

Now, another miracle, an earthquake shakes the prison and sets the prisoners free. I can tell you that if this happened today, all the prisoners would flee. These stayed!

The jailer, ready to die for all this, is given salvation and the promise extended to his family! Wow! Is there a someone locked up somewhere the Lord can help you lead to HIM? You might never know unless you try. God’s word says, “Remember those in prison, not forgive those in prison. They can be saved from sin, not in sin.

THE GOOD NEWS
We must take the Gospel seriously. It will increase our capacity to love. Our learned appreciation of the miraculous causes us to accomplish great things. The Spirit of God that will possess us will make us want to feed the hungry, care for the stranger, give a drink to those who thirst, clothe the naked, and somehow visit those in prison.
Matthew 25 contains the most vivid parable ever spoken. Its lesson is clear. God will judge our reaction to the human needs of others.

Our help must be uncalculating. It must be generous, but purely selfless, help given just for the sake of giving. When we learn that the generosity of giving without calculation helps others in the simplest way, we know the joy of helping Jesus. God’s direction tells us all we must do something. Yvonne and I pray your choice might be Someone Cares.

MARK 8: 34,35 tells us to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Him. The nice thing — HE gave us the Owners Manual in HIS word. It is such a joy to be able to go into the Bible and find the answers to all our problems. Yes, all. HE starts by telling us we must search the scriptures.

It is sadly amusing to see some of the battles going on through letter writing. The job of all is to lead men and women to Christ. A friend of mine wrote an inmate who happened to be a Muslim. What a battle! I asked my friend if he knew anything of the Koran. He said “no.” I explained there was nothing wrong in telling him what he believed, but I preach and teach, and also listen. Someone Cares is about friendship, not spiritual warfare.

Often Black inmates in prison are drawn into Muslim beliefs — not because of religion, but protection. It is a shame that there are gangs in prison formed under religion. I ended up asking this inmate if I told his Grandma he was a Muslim would she be upset? This tough convict said he would get his hind end whipped!

We once worked in a prison that had five volunteer groups. Some inmates went to all the meetings and came away with massive confusion. When I first tried to grow in Christ, a who’s who of my church tried to tell me what not to do. “Don’t do this, don’t do that.”

Thanks to our precious Lord, he sent a worker who said I did not have to give up but give in. The simplicity of the Gospel is to be Christ-like to the very best of my ability. The By-Laws of our Ministry read, “Don’t let our doctrine be a barrier, but a bridge to Jesus.

JEAN AND MY WIFE

...let it be known that I had a birthday. I was amazed before the newsletter came out, with a lot of cards from inmates. I was asked about my favorite birthday — there are two, one a surprise party Yvonne had for me. The other, a surprise party given by inmates and staff at Soledad prison. The one I’m looking forward to: when we all get together in Heaven. I often pray that I can meet each of you who have been so vital a part of this ministry.

It has been a joy to see so many of our California friends and other friends on 3ABN. Every four years we have a General Conference and watching it has shown us many of you. Also a blessing is the work being done by our church, and many others, for Youth. I guess I am going to have to answer a couple of questions. Yvonne and I met in 1967 and have been married 30 years. Now you must know how old I am. I still play golf; no longer have a hook but a slice, I bowl in the high hundreds, play tennis and racquet ball, when we have time.

If I believed in wishes and candle blowing, I’d pray that some day I can take my bride on a
honeymoon, or a vacation, both of which have never happened yet.

PLEASE TAKE A WALK WITH US
This walk could be in almost any prison we have worked in over all these years. The drive to prison, before the walk, usually is long. The walk into the prison is never short either. Steel doors, metal detectors. Pat-downs are common. The chapels are usually small, if the prison has one.

Overcrowding has turned chapels into dorms. We don’t spend much time there, mostly our ministry takes us into lock-down units, Death Rows, or the Yards. We go where the population is, as the men and women there need a push toward the Chapel.

In every prison we have worked as Chaplains, the Chapels have been “All Faiths.” Join us going to “C” Section at San Quentin. The drive is long, the walk long, a massive amount of steel and concrete. We drop by for a moment in the Chapel to have prayer, and move out onto the yard. They are moving a Death Row inmate, yelling out the alert “Dead Man Walking” This really ticks Yvonne.

We finally reach “C” section. Inside the cell block to your left are 5 tiers, with 50 cells per tier. Across from each tier is a gun rail walk-way. Both Yvonne and I carry cases with writing paper, envelopes, greeting cards, reading material, magazines, and Bibles. We carry the case for awhile, and then push it. We now go cell to cell. These are hard-core inmates in single cells. Their toilet is in the cell. When they get a shower they are cuffed and walked to the shower.

In the summer it is hot, in winter it’s cold in the buildings. Yvonne learned eye contact is important. It did not take long for even these hard-core inmates to accept us. Then when we entered the block someone would yell, “Clean up, Get up, the God Squad is here!” We try to bring them some joy and lots of Agape. I have played chess and cribbage with many an inmate. I got in trouble with some, once or twice. An inmate said, “If you really care, bring me a Playboy!” I did. Inside I put a book called Steps to Christ. I got the Playboy back and the inmate found out about Jesus. We have been through several riots, seen inmates shot and stabbed. Also, suicide is not a stranger here.

Yvonne had chances to share her knitting skills. Thanks to a neat Warden, we were allowed to give death notices, family death, outside the cell in a special room. Anger builds up and it is common for inmates to plug up their toilets to make them run over. Often human waste is thrown on guards. You never get used to the stench.

It was in this hell-hole that the Pen Friend Program started, and flourished. Paper Sunshine changed the lives of many a really hardened man. Fatigue or an empty case ends the day. Through this part of our Ministry The Pen Friend Program exploded throughout the United States prison system; over a million inmates have completed some kind of Bible study. We lost track of the number of inmates we have matched. Fun? Yes; Easy? No.

Since more women are involved than men, Yvonne will take you on her “C” section walk. “I was in prison and YOU visited me!
WHY?

We are so often asked why we do what we do. Well, God called us to this ministry. In fact, amazement is a word that enters my mind. All the training we have received, all the massive amount of Bible I had to learn... Thank The Lord Yvonne was raised in the church! On an interview recently I was asked, “Who pays you?” Well, God does! We are a self-supporting, non-profit ministry. We have never been paid by anything but free will offerings, which are tax deductible. If Jesus tarries, I will make my last house payment when I’m 95. We don’t have a retirement plan here, just a neat one laid up in Heaven though. Savings? Well, not really, but we have the cattle on a thousand hills. Are we ever scared? No! Each month, faithfully, we meet all our bills.

Once in awhile there’s a little left over. The reporter asked why we don’t cut back here or there. Well, God planned this whole ministry, and the growth is HIS doing. Since HIS word says He promises to provide, we will have God’s kind of Faith to keep on keeping on. We pray each time we go on Voice Of Prophecy, (and now 3ABN) that someone will hear and be touched extra special, but if not, we will keep on keeping on. We are a step closer to finishing a video, and we are looking to do a bit of a radio show where we get a little more coverage. But as long as we have Him and you, we are ok.

YVONNE’S CORNER

I am aware that a lot of you have known me for a lot of years, since I was a child. When I was a young child my father was a Mortician. Before he became a Minister, we lived next door to the Mortuary; it did not bother me at all. But when we went to prison and they would be escorting a death row inmate to someplace in the prison, the Guards would yell “Dead man walking!” Now, that was just a little much.

The first time it happened I grabbed Don’s hand and asked what in the world they were talking about?” He explained and I gave a sigh of relief, but I never have been able to be all right with that statement. Don mentioned “C” section. Yes, that was a real eye opener! One day we signed in at the front of the cell block, but the officers asked us to wait before proceeding onto the tiers. The inmates were chasing a tiny little mouse with a broom (which none of them wanted to touch; in fact they were frightened by it). We stood and watched until the poor mouse died of exhaustion, then the inmates went back to their cells and we went on about the Lord’s work. I have never forgotten that because I am also scared of mice, so they are just normal people like you and me.

IF IT WERE EASY

The Pen Friend Program is a lot of work. With its massive growth we do make mistakes. When I return from the Post Office I separate the mail into two piles: Letters from the inmates are mailed off the day we receive them. Then the letters to Pen Friends are sorted. Then run labels on all and do them ASAP. Once in awhile the wrong letter goes to the wrong person.

Getting you all to put a name other than “Someone Cares” on the envelope is difficult. The letter
to the inmate should have your name or Pen Name and our address. “Someone Cares” should not appear on any mail to the inmate.

When we match you we send a blue form with vital information on you and your friend. You are asked to send this back. Most do, some don’t.

It would help if all mail to us had your real name + Pen Name so we can update our records. Many use Pen Names and forget to tell us. This causes a log-jam of delays.

We therefore have letters for the following: Please claim yours.

To: Jillian
    Natalie Jean from N Thomas
    Betty Grace from C Edmerson
    Precious Diamond From A Knox
    Betty Brown from VB Valdez
    Nancy Hiller
    Jeanette Burch From White
    D Breed from D Wallen
    Brian from G Williams
    C Brown from R Jackson
    N Brown from S Clark
    Coreen from A Santiago
    Karen Fokkens
    Ann Goodard from J Gaskins
    Karen Green from L Murphy
    Murier & Amy from D Bays
    H Ham from J Jansing.
Then for: Margaret Hardy, Effie Ivers Brenda Jackson, Marcie Jan, Mimi Jones, Joni Larsen, Lesa Lewis, Sister Lori, Patti, Lynn I Marsh, Carol Maylor, Larry Noel.
    Paul from L Smith
    Auntie Princess
    Rachel From L Barker
    M & H Sanders
    Tony Sasso
    Tonie Stam
    Rita Stann
    M Starr
    Pat Surrrells
    Suzy Q,
    Michell Thomas,
    We will have to write each inmate and try to figure out what, when, why!

JESUS WILL GET A PRICELESS GEM
Over the years we have had many folks connected with this ministry who have died. Lynae Beardsley has joined them. This lady has been connected with us for a very long time. Her cheery notes, her wit, her prayers, were a monthly or more often blessing. Every month for a
long time we would receive a donation, always cash, and always WITH A REAL PUSH TO USING IT For God's Glory. We know she will be missed by many, both people and animals, whom she loved.

All of you are special to us and we ask your prayers for those she left behind: Tiffany, Jersey and her dogs and animals. I pray we all get together - Soon and Very Soon

[At a funeral I attended some time ago, the minister spoke of the lady who had died as one of God’s jewels that He would gather when He comes to get us. How beautiful!]

DONATIONS NOT TAX DEDUCTIBLE:
Avocados and artichokes. They are expensive here and not very good. Deductible: a used car if you have one lying around.

JEAN'S JOTTINGS
Wow, Yvonne! You like avocados? Maybe being spoiled with truly ripe fresh ones in sunny California would change my mind, and I know they’re just stuffed full of beneficial nutrients, but I’ve tried them sliced, diced, minced—and winced—as guacamole, and still haven’t learned to like them.

Summer at a prison amazes me. Shirley and I get to see the veggie gardens pop up and produce as if there was an “ON” button pushed and the plants just magically emerge full grown, producing fruit. The potted flower gardens thrive along the walks, with a row of lavender making the humid air heady with perfume.

One day we thought the inmates had played a trick on us. In one of the flower beds was a section of what appeared to be tiny cobs of yellow corn, ready to be picked, buttered and grilled. Normally one can’t go off the walk and on the grass, but we asked a guard, who gave us permission. Close up, the flowers more closely resembled little ears of bright yellow corn flakes and we still haven’t discovered their name.

If God can make such unique plant life, how much more must He cherish the inmates who have made mistakes and learned not to like confinement? He has given us hearts full of compassion for these people, who look forward to having church service with us. We try to bring them hope and joy in serving Jesus, to instill in them a sense of the missionary service they can perform among their neighbors behind bars. We certainly enjoy praise time when they report their successes. Sometimes it’s our job to lift a spirit in distress. God gets all the credit for victories won. We only have access to the chapel, and are forbidden to invite the inmates we meet on our way. So we just return their greetings and it’s up to those of our own faith to do the inviting.

If your minister shrinks at the thought of prison ministry, that it’s wasted on inmates, ask him if he then believes that his parishioners are a waste of time as prisoners of sin!

Jesus was very specific and positive about prison ministry! He knew what it meant to leave all the glory and beauty of Heaven behind, and risk it all to save the humanity He’d created and loved so passionately. I’ve keyed in stories for this news-letter that bring me a mix of anger and sorrow for the clergy, or “undershepherds,” who neglect our Savior’s mandate to Love One
Another.” They need a lot of prayer and forgiveness, because not everyone is given the gift of ministry.

I appreciate Don and Yvonne so much. They’re closely tuned to God’s bidding, and minister to inmates where reality dwells – “where the rubber meets the road.”

I like that expression. You can put a car up on blocks, start the engine, put it in gear, and the wheels will go ‘round and ‘round, but you won’t get to work unless the rubber meets the road!

One way to help an inmate is with encouragement to meet the goals and dreams they have, if they’re feasible. How can that person plan for the future and be ready to become part of the community? Does it require education? Money? A helpful church family to act as a mentor while they learn to succeed?

I’ve watched some inmates who were determined to make it, succeed by dedicating their time to study in their field of interest while doing their time. By the time they were out, while job prospects were slim to none, started their own businesses and are doing well. They have settled into home-based offices.

Not everyone can do this without a mentor, but the jobs that are offered to people coming out of prison are really minimum wage, and the administrative offices often aren’t run in a business-like manner.

If you, as a Pen Friend, are able to advise your Paper Sunshine partners, you’re a gem. There is so much hidden talent tucked away in prisons. Just polish the jewels. Rewards come later.

Someone Cares Home Page