DO WE WALK IN THE GARDEN ALONE?

In the world we live in, do we Christians “somehow” find time throughout the day to spend with the Lord? Are we spending time with Him, or are we walking alone? Do we claim all the promises that the Lord has given us in HIS Word?

God answers our prayers, and prayer alone has kept this Ministry going. Spend time with God, and He’ll walk with you. Speak to Him, and He will listen.

…He hears the prayer of the righteous. Proverbs 15:29b

CONTINUED GROWTH

Each and every day more requests for Pen Friends come in, and we thank God because Paper Sunshine offers a chance for those in prison to know or grow in Jesus. It troubles us when we are forced to forward mail to you unread, but unfortunately it has to be done due to the volume of mail we are dealing with, with not enough workers on this end. We pray that if we miss a bad letter you will be understanding, not get mad, or quit writing. If you receive any letters that alarm you, please call, email, or return the letter by mail and we will deal with it and the person.

IN THE BEGINNING

We had no idea in the beginning that over 35 years later we would still be doing this. Had we of known! When one inmate asked for clothes to be released with we said, “Sure!” and the Dress Out Program was born.

If we had it to do over again we would have worked hard to get the Dress Out Program established nation wide. Since released inmates are provided with virtually nothing, a few good used clothes at the very least is helpful to get them started. If I were younger I would get the Red Cross, Salvation Army and all the churches possible to start centers to provide good quality used clothes for inmates and their families.

“I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.” Matthew 25:36
A Christian Is … Colleen

I received a letter back from my inmate as undeliverable with no clear reason why. I have a little money for gas to last through the month, I hope! It may be March before I write him again. I do not know how I’m going to pay my bills.

(We sent her stamps and called the prison to find out why the inmate’s letter was returned. With all she’s going through, Colleen’s main worry was her Pen Friend! How many pastors are aware of the condition of their flock in these terrible times? Please pray for Colleen. God will deal with our prayers for her.)

Missing You Two

I pray you get out to Walla Walla some day. The times we got together to do “dress-outs” (providing free clothes to released inmates), also the fun program we put together where the boys tried to out do each other. Think of you lots. Those boys were at Paso Robles Boys School, a prison for kids. Elayne

God Bless You

May God bless you in the important work you do. One day you both will be able to walk and talk with those your lives have changed. May you receive His blessings, health and wisdom, financially and spiritually. I have followed Don’s career since I heard him years ago in San Antonio, and I was impressed. I cannot help you now but would like your bookkeeper to take $10.00 a month from my credit card each month. Ruth

(Thank you, Ruth! Credit card donations can be made on our website through Pay Pal, which is totally risk free. Click on “Donations” on the home page.)

Please Come Back

Writing this is very hard. I last saw the two of you 18 years ago when I was released from Soledad. Never have two people done so much for me, and it turned my life around. About a year ago I was invited to a party and went with my wife. I had not drank or done drugs in over 22 years. I had a couple of glasses of “punch” and got a bit light headed. I told my wife I did not feel well and we started home. I woke up in a hospital with a broken shoulder and many bruises. I was sentenced to 15 years for killing someone while driving.

(His wife contacted us, and if the Lord wants us back there to visit, then we will see him.)

Prison cell, dark place, cement and steel and very small, the size of an average older bathroom. It is not a place where you would want to spend your days and nights, and most of the time there are two people to a cell. Often locked down for days, no shower, and the toilet against the wall. Thin or no mattress, clean sheets sometimes. Maybe a radio, maybe a TV. To shower they are cuffed before the door is opened. As a point of rebellion inmates will overflow all the toilets.

As we pray for the Pen Friends, we also pray for the prisoner, as God looks on the heart and is not willing that any should perish.

“What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” Matthew 18:12-15
What You Need to Know
Statistics show that 80% OF THOSE IN PRISON COMMITED A CRIME! Out of those, 75% are institutionalized, and 80% of those will get out some day. Of the street wise or gang-related inmates, once they are put in prison one of the very first things they do is get a shank (prison made knife). Many hook up with one of a massive amount of gangs.

There are over 2.4 million inmates in prisons throughout the United States. This costs taxpayers well over $60 billion a year. Many of these inmates have families on welfare, adding much more burden to taxpayers. These people are sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment. With the country doing nothing to help these men and women, soon we will have a massive geriatric population in the prison system. This will add a 30% increase to the cost for each older inmate.

What Do Prisoners Get?
When we send an inmate an application, one of the questions asked is, what does the prison provide? Years ago the answer was, “three hots (meals) and a cot (bed).” These days, however, few get three meals a day, let alone hot meals. During lock downs often they get one hot meal and two sack lunches all at once. We hear of many inmates begging for money in order to buy food. If they ask and you cannot afford to help them financially, be honest and tell them, or let us do it.

Listening to the news, you would think prisons are full of violent people, but the fact is 77% are in for non-violent crimes. The system crams them into prison, and many prisons provide them with nothing to do. Programs to help educate inmates would be very helpful, such as mission field volunteers going into prisons to help inmates get their G.E.D. if they haven’t graduated from high school.

So often we get letters, emails and phone calls from Pen Friends asking us what type of re-entry assistance is available for inmates. Each prison has all that information, and the inmate needs to start preparing six months before their release.

It’s Hard to Believe
A person goes to prison for ten years and serves their time. During that time most family members desert them. Many are not able to work in prison, so they have no money. With nothing, often including clothes, they are released. No job, no place to live, no money. Jobs these days are hard to come by, but if you are an uneducated inmate and ex-convict, it’s almost impossible.

Recidivism is as high as 70% in some states, meaning the released inmate turns back to crime and is returned to prison. Or, they join the hundreds of thousands of street people trying to make it one day at a time. Now, if it costs $60,000 a year to keep EACH INMATE in prison, wouldn’t it make sense to provide inmates with some money upon their release, say $12,000 to help them get on their feet and keep them from returning to prison? This would save the taxpayer a quite a lot.

I was told, but have not verified, that 50% of those going to trial with a public defender would not spend a day in prison if they had money for an attorney. We also have been told over the years that often, in order to gain political points, some court systems play the numbers games by sending many to prison. If all the blood stored could be tested, how many would be set free? While many in prison are indeed guilty, many innocent people are serving sentences they do not deserve.
ASKED, BUT NEVER BEFORE ANSWERED

What do we personally think of the death penalty? The Bible favors it, but in our society we have seen it misused. The majority of the victim’s family members want it. But life in prison is a much harder sentence. It also costs twice as much to execute someone as it does to keep them in prison.

From working at San Quentin we have many friends who are on death row. The most hardened criminals can change, as we have seen with our own eyes. We have seen three terrible criminals, all now dead for killing, who did more for Jesus in their years in prison than I have done in a lifetime. I am also sure that in Heaven we will see men and women who were guilty of serious crimes here on earth, but who repented and gave their lives to Jesus.

So many on death row are there because of abuse, alcohol, drugs, or mental conditions. While that is certainly not an excuse for the terrible things they have done, sometimes they just need to have their eyes opened to the fact that Someone Cares – that “Someone” being God. When that miracle takes place, lives are changed.

We also often pray for the victims of these crimes, that they will find peace through our Heavenly Father.

IS IT WORTH IT?

Do you wonder if these programs are worthwhile, or if they do any good? I could write a zillion pages about the lives changed by Paper Sunshine. Over a million inmates have completed Bible Studies, many learned remedial reading skills using Laubach and the Bible, and Yvonne taught reading using the Bible. Hard core convicts wanted to learn to read and write, and as a result they met Jesus. So, YES, these programs are worth it!

So many programs are needed – how about you, can you help?

THANK YOU, JESUS

Writing a newsletter every month is difficult. God chose us for a difficult Ministry and has blessed that Ministry. We have walked hundreds of miles in prisons all over the place. We have faced some of the worst criminals in these prisons. All this with your help has changed the lives of people both free and in bonds. It has been a seven day a week job for a long time and with the Lord’s blessing some day we will turn this over to someone else.

As long as we remain in good health we will always be a part of this Ministry, as we know how very difficult it is to deal with Satan’s work. But because of “You” someone does and will care until HE returns.

God Bless,
Don & Yvonne

WHY ME, LORD?

I often roll back the years and reflect on the course Jesus set me on. Growing up a street smart young hood with a “live fast, die young and have a good looking corpse” motto, I was in and out of trouble and as far away from Christ and the Church as I could possibly be. Then, finding Christ, I changed and had a whole new lifestyle. Picking up a Bible with the intention of learning it, but not living it. Meeting Yvonne and forming a perfect union, although many tried to stop that. Leaving a very secure job to claim “the cattle on a thousand hills.” (Psalm 50:10 ) Being supported by others, and loving complete strangers. Every day in every way getting better and better. My proudest moment was seeing my mom, who for years after I ran away did not know where I was or if I was preaching a sermon. Sharing in her last day the love of Jesus and the assurance that we would be together once again.

Being a friend to a stranger in prison and sharing the Lord with them may not always be easy, but the rewards are out of this world.