

The Connection

THE NEWSLETTER OF WE CARE PROGRAM

NOVEMBER 2005

No Longer Empty

Search to fill inner void ends with salvation through Jesus Christ



My name is Gregory Lett. I was born on March 30, 1967. My grandfather died before I was able to know him. I had an uncle who was like a father, a brother, and a friend to me. He and his wife had all girls, and therefore, I was his favorite because I was a boy. At the age of twenty-seven, he died in his sleep. This was a devastating blow to me, and it seemed a part of me was taken away when he died. Even five years later I was looking for my uncle to return because I did not understand death. But as I got older, I realized he wasn't going to return.

I have five sisters, and Mom provided well for us. We always had plenty to eat and a place to call home. She taught us to always have something in life and get a good education, but she never mentioned the Lord to us. During my childhood and youth I did not know my father, but when I got older my mom revealed to me that it was not my father's fault for him not being there. I wasn't forced to go to church as a child, but I did go several times, and as a teen I went here and there. I went to one revival when I was about eighteen years old because my aunt invited me to go. A Christian schoolmate also invited me to church and so I went, but not for the right reasons. It was because she was cute and I liked her. But I can recall the night of the revival at the end of the service when the evangelist pointed at me and said "God has some things in store for you!" I did not understand what he meant by that because I had never been exposed to the gift of prophecy.

After high school I noticed that I began to feel empty and lonely. I said to myself I need to go back to school or do something. I had a girlfriend at this time also, but that emptiness drove me to seek multiple relationships in an attempt to fill that void. I went to clubs and did all the things that the flesh does, drinking beer and such, but I was afraid of drugs, even though I did try marijuana a few times. So I went to technical college and thought that this would be the answer. But I was still empty. While at college I took the test to enter the military. I passed the test and after the first semester of college, I joined the military. I was trying to find something to fill that emptiness and void on the inside. After my stint in the military, an evangelist named Michael Brown witnessed to me on a regular basis, telling me about the Lord. He invited me to hear him preach, and at that time I desired what he had, but the struggle with my flesh was an obstacle for me. On the inside I knew that this was what I needed and that the Lord was calling me, but it was like a voice was telling me that I was young and could do this later. So I tried to bargain with the Lord and said, "Wait until I am 29 or 30 years old, and I'll let all these women go. I'll just have one and then I'll come to You." Even though I did drink a little, I knew my stronghold was not alcohol, but women and sex.

After I was arrested and sentenced to prison the first night in the county jail,

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Fulfilling the Great Commission in America's Prisons

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everything came back to me about what the evangelist had been telling me about the Lord. I remember saying to myself, I guess I'll see what this is all about. I also remember what one of those pastors said about how to be saved. At that time a voice came to me and said I had to put away smoking, masturbating, and cussing. So I repented of my sins that night and asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart and save me. I knew at that time that the emptiness and the void in my life had been filled.

I couldn't explain it but I knew something had happened and that I had found what I had been looking for. I now know that it was the Spirit of the Living God who was residing in me that had filled that void in my life. However, because I was locked up, I did not know how God could use me. But God sent a sister who prophesied to me and said, "Your gifts and calling are without repentance." I did not understand at that time what this meant. But after a time God began to show me that prison does not alter the plans and purposes that He has for my life.

**I couldn't explain it
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found what I had been
looking for.**

It was during this time that God began to take things out of my life that He did not have in the plans for me, and this included several of those women I spoke of. And over these ten years that I have been incarcerated God has kept me from my old sinful habits.

Because God's word says "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 1:24), I have been kept by the faithfulness of God, and it is and has been a great joy for me.

In this purging process, the women and sins were replaced by Bible study and prayer, which I would not have ever thought I would be doing. God counted me faithful and put me in ministry. I have continued witnessing, reading and studying all these years, and by the help of the Holy Spirit, I have not backslidden since I was saved. Believe it or not, and although I did not ask God, He has sent me a wife, and I am now married to a wonderful woman who is a woman of God. She is a blessing and an encouragement to me and a true prayer partner. I thank God for her. I have four children that I love dearly. By the grace of God through prayer, God has kept them, protected them and been a father to them for me while I have been incarcerated. My wife is like a mother to all of them.

Since I have been saved, my mom has gotten saved, and my dad is now saved and we have formed a relationship after all these years. Even my sisters too are coming to the knowledge of the truth. I thank God for saving our household. God is truly fulfilling His word in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house."

I truly thank God for His love and forgiveness that He has shown me through Jesus Christ who died for my sins and died for the sins of the whole world. And now I am no longer empty and confused. May the peace and love of Jesus Christ be with you all!

Volume XXXVI, Number 7

Published eight times a year, *The Connection* provides news and views to friends of We Care Program. We Care Program is a non-profit, interdenominational organization consisting of Christian men and women who share a burden for and commitment to helping incarcerated men and women. We are accomplishing our mission by recruiting, funding, training, placing, and administering missionary chaplains and chaplain's assistants in prisons to provide friendship evangelism, teaching, peer counseling, and encouragement.

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Inmate names changed

Change Is Good?

by Marvin Bender



All of us experience changes in our lives. Some changes we consider to be good; others we think are undesirable. It has been said that trials can either make us better or bitter. I think the same could be said about changes. When I think about Jesus' blood being shed on the cross

for my sins, and the change that has taken place in my life due to applying that blood to my sins, then I gladly admit that **change is good!**

Recently I talked on the phone with the mother of a former inmate. Her son "Richard" was released on February 7, arrived home on February 8, and died on March 8, 2005, exactly one month later. While going through his belongings, she found my name and phone number (at We Care) that I had given Richard. As we conversed, she thanked me repeatedly for being there for her son. She was so grateful for the *change* that she had seen in his life. She said Richard had gone to church prior to his incarceration but during that last month she saw a new man. While in prison, Richard had received an award Bible and a concise Bible dictionary/concordance for completing some Bible studies. During his last month at home, she often saw him reading his Bible, something she had not seen him do earlier in his life. She now claims that Bible as her own, and it is very special to her.

Do I get the credit for the change in Richard's life? No. The credit goes to our God and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit Who convicted him. Other We Care chaplains and Christian inmates ministered to him too. I'm reminded of the verses in I Corinthians 3 that say we are only servants. We plant and water, but God makes it grow. It is true that we are promised a reward according to our labor, but God gets the glory, and **change is good!**

God has been preparing me for some time to serve in a small mission church in northern Florida. The pastor, Joseph Horst, was diagnosed with a rare bone marrow disease in June and died in August. I have accepted the call to serve as pastor there for a minimum of one year. Changes. They happen all the time. Some seem much more significant than others. Joseph has experienced death *and life*. For him, **change is good!** What about us who are left behind? We face many questions when we experience major changes. Are they also good? What changes might God bring to my roles and involvement in prison ministry? Changes and questions.

The Bible promises that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35-39), and God's commands are not grievous (I John 5:3). God

does not give commandments to be grievous or bring changes to be cruel. Some changes come because of living in a sinful, fallen world. Some come because God has spiritual discipline and growth in mind for us. If we accept things from God's perspective, then **change is good**. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." (John 15:10-11, KJV) Joy comes with obedience to God's will and Word.

Is God calling you to ministry and work that you are resisting? Please surrender to His will, obey Him and rest in His joy. Will He bring change? Oh, yes. But you can trust God. He will be with you; He *is* with you. I've heard it said (and I think it's true) that "If we could see everything the way God sees it, then we would do everything the way God does it." With that in mind, let me again state that if God is in it, **change is good**.

Marvin Bender has been serving as chaplain at J. O. Davis Correctional Facility since January 2002. As friend, counselor, and teacher, he desires to see positive change in the lives of the inmates, especially changes brought about through yielding to the conviction and power of the Holy Spirit.



Part of Marvin's responsibilities at We Care include teaching a fatherhood class to inmates at Fountain Correctional Center in Atmore, AL. Pictured is Marvin with students displaying the pillowcases they had decorated to send home to their children as part of a class assignment.

From the Field

Marysville, OH

Ohio Reformatory for Women

She was sitting stiffly upright, rigid in her chair, eyes glaring into mine. With her jaws clenched and lips tightened into narrow slits, she hissed her words at me. "If my aunt was standing here right now, I would spit in her face!" I didn't doubt it. She was so consumed with anger and lost in the memory of her wounds, that I would not have been surprised to find a wad spewed across the desk at my face. Up to now, her main relief had come in spitefully hurling her aunt's few letters into the wastebasket, unopened.

I could easily tell why another inmate would repeatedly tell me, "I can't take it! Everybody in here is so MEAN! For no reason!"...Except that there always is a reason. The anger is only the surface problem. Hurting people hurt people. And people need love most when they are most unlovable. Cliches, but true. We can keep on trying to tiptoe around the "everybodies" as if we were walking on eggshells, repeatedly assigning them to anger management classes (which does have some value), giving in to appease them—or we can offer to take time to look with them at the wound and have Jesus bring His Truth to their pain. *We are Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.* (2 Cor. 5:20, Message)

She began the process herself as she leaned back in the chair, her eyes filling with tears, and whispered, "I need help...I need help. I can't keep on going with this anger inside me..."
- Wilma Mullet

Cherrylog, GA

Fannin County Jail

I received a letter recently from an adjacent county's jail written by a man who has given his life to the Lord and who happened to find my name on a piece of literature I had handed out in the Fannin jail. Now, I had never visited the Gilmer jail and had to get directions in order to visit "Tony", so somebody apparently valued the brief sheet enough to carry it with him/her from one town to another and perhaps points in between. During the visit we were separated by glass, and I found having to visit via telephone very frustrating. He seems to me to be very genuine, and I hope to keep in touch with him.
- Del Yoder

Atmore, AL

Atmore Work Center

Recently a Christian inmate went for a parole hearing with the hope of early release. As it turned out, the victim's family contested his parole in spite of all the good things and changes he has made in his life. The parole board set him off for another three years before he is eligible for parole again. He was naturally very disappointed. However, I was blessed to hear him say, "You know I never questioned God why. I never blamed God for not getting me out. I never questioned His love for me. God is still faithful." He admits that he committed the crime he's charged with. He also recognizes that even if he has to serve his full twenty year sentence, God is still faithful.

Hearing his comments was such a blessing to me since often men question or blame God when they are denied parole. Some think they should have a free ticket out of prison if they give their lives to God. Yes, God will go before them, but sin has its consequences, and the law of sowing and reaping is still in effect. Please pray that God will give me wisdom as I encourage the men in their disappointments as well as their joys.
- Bob Depew

Holman Corr. Facility

Death row continues to be good ground for God's love. Just the thought of being in a 5 ft. by 8 ft. cell keeps me going in to encourage and converse

with the men there. For various reasons, many days they do not leave their cells at all. A face from the outside world is welcomed in most cases as I walk around visiting.

The church composed of inmates on death row continues to grow. I am encouraged as I look into their cells and see Bibles and Bible correspondence courses spread across their beds. I think that is just plain awesome. A couple guys share with me what the Lord has put on their heart to share at their chapel services. It seems to be right on target and backed by the Word of God. Pray for the leaders there. These solid leaders in Christ have some battles of their own as they strive to be saints in darkness.
- Ron Hock

The Things He Did for Me

He cured the sickness that I had within.
He cleansed me from the leprosy of sin.
He calmed the storm that raged inside my soul.
He touched my withered heart and made it whole.

He drove the unclean spirits from my mind.
He taught me how to seek and how to find.
He gave me ears, that I might hear His word
And helped me understand the things I heard.

He raised me from the dead. He opened up
My eyes to see. He overfilled my cup
With living water; now I thirst no more.
He showed me what I was created for.

He did these things and more. How can it be
That He would do these things for one like me?
I understand it not, but this is true—
If you will ask, He'll do the same for you.

written by Michael Childs (resident of Faith Dorm,
Fountain Corr. Facility, Atmore, AL)

News of Note

Read-A-Thon

Nineteen readers, from five different states and ranging in age from 6 to 89, raised **\$8,414.55** in the 2005 We Care Program summer read-a-thon. Together they read 298 books. Winners in the youth division were *Shauna Yoder*, KY, (first place) and *Kyle Sauder*, MD, (second place). Adult winners were *Celia Landis*, PA, (first place) and *Goldie Huber*, AL, (second place). We extend a big **THANK YOU** to all readers and sponsors!

Young Adults Arrive

We welcome to our staff three young men who have committed themselves to the six-month chaplaincy internship program beginning October 3. Last year's intern *Ernie Glick* has remained on staff since that time and will serve as leader for this year's team who are all from Pennsylvania. Pictured from left to right are *Blaine Copenhaver*, *Ernie*, *Paul Sensenig* and *Nadon Zook*.



Needed: Servant Leaders

There is a growing number of opportunities for full and part-time chaplaincy volunteers to assist in the work of prison ministry with We Care Program. In addition to available positions in Atmore, Troy, Montgomery, and Birmingham, Alabama, recent requests have come from Southeast Ohio and Northwest Florida.

Of particular importance are several chaplaincy positions in the Atmore area requiring leadership giftings. (Some prison ministry experience preferred.) Persons will be needed within the next three to six months. There is also a need for persons interested in teaching men how to read. (A very high percentage of inmates do not know how to read!)

Interested persons should contact David Landis at dave@wecareprogram.org or 251-368-8818.

Needed!

Volunteers & Intercessors

28th Annual Alabama Prison Crusade

Bringing the Gospel Mes-
sage to Thousands of Men
and Women in Alabama's
Prison System

January 8-12, 2006

Applications due Dec. 5

- Begins with a Sunday of orientation and missions rally in Montgomery, AL
- Four days of friendship evangelism in 18 different prisons located in Montgomery, Troy, Birmingham, and Atmore
- Daily morning workshop sessions with gifted teachers
- Nightly prison services with special music and preaching
- Open to mature Christian men and women 21 and older*
- Fees start at \$225/person and cover event expenses, lodging and most meals**

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*Several prisons allow 18-20 year-olds by special permission.

**Reduced rate available for those not requiring lodging and meals

Perspectives



David R. Landis
President

Having recently attended the annual Alabama Prison Ministry Conference, I was again reminded of the importance of working together as ministry organizations to meet common goals as they relate to the incarcerated.

First and foremost, it is imperative that all of our efforts are centered around the belief that Jesus Christ is the ultimate answer to any and all problems (sin) that bring men and women to prison. Without this “key” to true freedom, I am convinced that most, if not all, sincere efforts geared towards rehabilitation are sadly quite ineffective in the long run.

Secondly, once a person makes the choice to receive God’s free gift of salvation through Christ and humbly realizes that his own efforts to change old behaviors are fruitless without God’s help, ministry organizations need to come alongside and offer Biblical learning tools to help begin the reconstruction process.

Thirdly, churches need to be made aware of the importance of welcoming into the body of Christ the newly released offender who is on the road to transformation. It is vital that God’s people are present and willing to provide encouragement, support, and accountability.

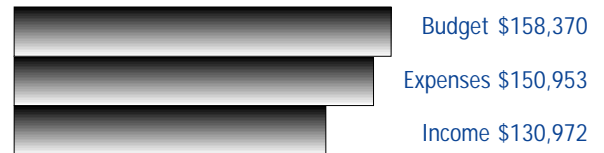
All three components must be stressed if we are to see decreased recidivism and positive changes in our communities, which welcome home over 600,000 newly released inmates each year. Genuine conversion, life learning and planning, and positive support models, both in prison and upon release, translate into men and women prepared to face an ever changing world. Our desire at We Care Program is to lead offenders beyond the classic “religious experience” to an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ that involves practical change in their *minds* as well as their *hearts*.

I'd love to hear from you.
Contact me at
dave@wecareprogram.org

The Bottom Line

Expenses have exceeded income by almost \$20,000 for the first three months of the fiscal year. Fortunately, when compared to the same time period last year, revenue has increased by almost \$19,000. Any donation you can give will help to close the gap. Thank you for caring and supporting this ministry.

3 months ending September 30



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