

Looking for Home

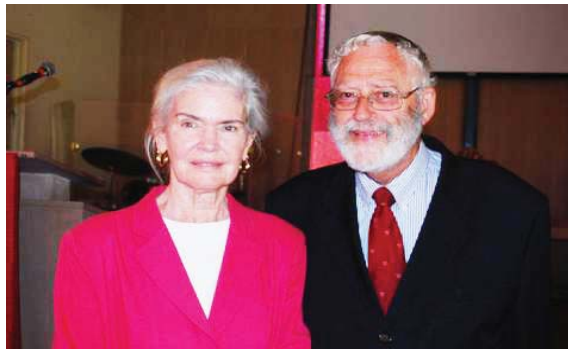
by Dr. Duane Christensen

Martha and I attended services at the Garden Chapel Christian Fellowship in San Quentin State Prison this morning, where Dr. Morris A. Curry, Jr., is Senior Pastor. I often wondered exactly what he was trying to say with that title, since he has no paid staff at all who are working under him in the prison chapel. This morning I saw clearly what Pastor Curry is trying to communicate.

Though Pastor Curry's name was listed on the program as preacher of the morning, he surrendered that privilege to present in his place an "Associate Pastor" in the person of a prison inmate who delivered one of the most remarkable messages I have ever heard. Few times in recent years have I been moved to tears by what was said in a worship service. I was so moved this morning, and it felt good to feel those tears running down my face.

Before the speaker of the morning began the message, another incident occurred which set the stage. The worship leader was another prison inmate. He

began by trying to communicate why he was not emotionally up for the worship service. The entire prison was under lock-down much of this past week [my scheduled class on Thursday was canceled] and the Protestant chapel service itself was closed a week ago today. Other things had been going on which had taken MUCH out of the worship leader to the point that he had apparently almost given up altogether. Gradually in



that worship experience he came back to life again, and before the worship experience itself had ended he was literally dancing around on the platform along with others who were caught up by the Spirit of God. It was beautiful. How I wish that I could let go so completely and express my worship of God with such freedom

as what I observed on that platform this morning.

A few minutes later the speaker of the morning (another prison inmate) made an open and public apology to his friend (the other prison inmate who had led the worship experience) asking forgiveness for his failure to reach out to him at his particular point of need this past week. He then continued by making one of the most masterful presentations of a theological interpretation of what the true Christian life is all about that I have ever heard. No one could have said it any better. Those two prison inmates are part of the pastoral staff of Garden Chapel Christian Fellowship serving as "Associate Pastors" (along with others) under the leadership of Senior Pastor Morris Curry, Jr.

At the conclusion of the service we saw a dozen prison inmates at the altar steps—some were prisoners who had stepped forward for prayer, and each one was met by another prison inmate who prayed with and for his fellow member of that congregation.

Martha and I found ourselves talking about the service all the

See What God is Doing

Third Quarter Ministry Report

During our third quarter at California State Prison-Solano we held a banquet celebrating the conclusion of two classes; Great Dads, facilitated by Pastor Dave Dove with assistance from Herman Littleton and the fourth class of the 40 days of Purpose, facilitated by the *ebenezer outreach ministry* team with assistance from inmate facilitators.



Reverend Timothy and Katie May

The banquet celebrated those who had completed requirements established by Sol Irving, Correctional Counselor III and myself; two hundred seventeen men completed one and/or both of these classes. The celebration featured worship led by the inmates along with brief testimonies from several team members.

The celebration included a barbecue meal prepared by Chris and Carol Davis of Mission of Grace Foundation (<http://www.gracefound.org>); Arquilla Conner, of Men of Purpose provided cookies; *ebenezer outreach ministry* provided soda and

additional items to complete the meals. It was a memorable time for our volunteers who had the opportunity to break bread with our brothers in Christ. Volunteers who served were Brett Braidman, Dave Dove, Ernest Echelberger, Loyal Friesen, Herman Littleton, Ramon Molina, Daniel Robinson, and Robert Silva, volunteers unable to attend were Richard Atchley, David Fernandes, and Ron Handa.

We have begun two new classes; Passport to Purpose, written by Carol Davis and Going for the Goal, a Prison Fellowship Program. This October, we have two additional classes planned; returning is *Self Esteem by Gods Design* with Dr. Larry and Gail Day and a financial class utilizing the text, *Good Sense Budget Course*, facilitated by Brian Rexford and John Rankin.

One Voice Praise Choir ministered to the men of California State Prison-Solano on three of the four yards; Sierra Conservation Center-Jamestown; and twice at San Quentin State Prison-San Quentin, with Antonio Saldana and Pastor Jeff Bryant, both of whom spoke powerful words of encouragement. We had the opportunity to minister to approximately 1300 men at these facilities with 50 men dedicating or re-dedicating their lives to Christ.

Joyful Expressions ministered in song and Word to the men at the main chapel of Sierra Conservation Center-Jamestown, where Pastor Jolene Queen delivered a powerful Word; this is in addition to the regular weekly ministry services

in the chapel and the Joseph Project at California State Prison-Solano. During this quarter, Pastor Tim May ministered at Folsom State Prison, Represa on two occasions and on a monthly basis the *ebenezer* team ministers to the young men at the Sacramento County Boys Ranch in Sacramento.

In addition to the musical component, *ebenezer outreach ministry* provides weekly preaching, individual counseling, and assists with coordinating the CSP-Solano Demonstration Project as part of the Joseph Project featuring special rehabilitation teaching programs and guest speakers. Pastor Darren Paulson, senior pastor of Providence Community Church in Vacaville, enjoyed his first ministry experience at CSP-Solano and is looking forward to future ministry opportunities. Bob Brigham, who attends The Father's House in Vacaville, was a guest speaker representing Voice of the Martyrs (VOM). This ministry, which began in 1966 by Richard Wurmbrand, tells of Mr. Wurmbrand's fourteen years of confinement in a communist prison camp. Mr. Wurmbrand's book, *Tortured for Christ*, tells of many victories, through the grace and mercy of our Lord that took place in those prisons. Our Spanish ministry also began this quarter with Pastor Ruben and Charisse Padilla and Dina Zamora-Alexander, we saw three men receive Christ.

Let You Lead Me

Well, it seems You've answered my prayers,
in ways I wouldn't have dared!
The El Dorado & Sacramento County jails,
have invited me to come work with women who are
derailed.

In addition to that,
there's other ways You're bringing me to the mat.
The Solano men's prison wants me to teach,
and I'm helping Second Wind Ministries as You they
seek.

As I enter this whole new realm,
I feel vulnerable at the helm,
because I'm not sure what to say or do.
I really haven't a clue.

But I know You're guiding me along this path,
so I'm following You to see what You hath.
I'm not sure where it all will go,
so I'll just keep throwing out seeds to see which ones
grow.

I am excited about what's to come,
and know it won't always be fun,
but I know I'm on a mission of grace,
and it's an honor to be standing in that place.

I guess I now clearly see,
why You had to breakdown and expose me,
because previously I really didn't feel,
the abundant grace that now makes me kneel.

I was always a good person,
who wouldn't have related to those in prison,
because I didn't see the true need,
for Your grace and love to abide in me.

Now that You've brought me down,
throwing away my false crowns,
I now truly see,
just how much I need Thee.

My heart is wicked to the core,

my body is wounded and sore,
from fighting life's battles in my own power,
rather than from Your strong tower.

It's such a lie to think we can be good,
without Your love it's just hay, stubble & wood,
waiting to all be burned up,
when you return to pick us all up.

The only good thing that has any value,
are the things we do empowered by You.
All the rest will just rust,
and eventually turn into dust.

It's such a relief to just know,
it's not the Carol Davis show.
All the work You want me to do,
is totally up to You.

It takes the pressure off,
allowing me to focus on other stuff,
doing what You want me to do,
in the power coming from You.

As I said before,
I'm not sure what's behind all these doors,
but I know it's all going to be OK,
as long as I let You lead me day by day.

Carol Davis

Written February 2, 2008

It is so easy to sail through life, especially when
we are experiencing minimal strife, thinking we
are good people, doing good things, for a good God.
But when God, all of a sudden, chooses to rock your
world, you suddenly start seeing with new eyes. At
times you wonder, "Am I really a good person? Do
the good things I do really matter? Am I really serving
a good God?"

A few years ago, a gentleman came into my life
whose entire life had been full of strife. Initially I
didn't want anything to do with him, until the Lord
came to specifically ask me to take a walk with him
(& with Him!). When we embarked on the journey

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there were many masks, covering up lots of pain and lots of shame.

As we came to know and trust one another, the masks began to fall away. Underneath Robbie’s masks, which were desperately trying to convey confidence, experience, wealth and success, was a broken heart desperately trying to be known, loved, and accepted. For years the attempted path was to fool people into accepting him as the man he thought they wanted him to be, but in actuality, it was a hoax that almost everyone could see. It took all of his energy to be someone he wasn’t meant to be, trying to keep up the façade he had invented himself to be.

One night as we were talking, he screamed out, “God, what do you want from me? What do *You* want from me?” As I listened, the Holy Spirit whispered in my ear, “Tell him I want him to let Me love him.” As I said those simple words, the tears began to stream, for unconditional love had been his lifelong dream. He had tried on his own for so many years and now here he was with those simple words ringing in his ears. “Let Me love you. Please, just let Me love you.”

*“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us...
1 John 4:10*

Robbie began to let the Lord enter in and begin to love him from within. He came to see that he didn’t have to be what he thought everyone else wanted him to be. He just needed to be who God had created him to be.

As he began to see his true

face, God brought him to a place of grace, healing him from pain and cleansing him from his many stains. He’d been adopted at a young age, had several step-fathers filled with rage, which led him to a life on the streets. In due time, he committed a crime, which led to many years spent at Soledad, San Quentin, and Solano. Through our journey, this was the past that he was freed from at last.

For years he had hidden his crime for fear people would toss him out on a dime. But now he’s come to see, that he can truly walk free-not hiding from his past, but giving God the glory for redeeming him in ways that last.

In the midst of this journey, God came to me and said, “You have the same issues as he.” I was shocked, for who was God to compare me to *him*? But quickly God showed me how I too had been hiding from Him – hiding from His love in the midst of all the good I was supposedly doing for Him. Job 35:7-8 in The Message translation says, *“Even if you’re good, what can God get out of that? Do you think He’s dependent on your accomplishments? The only ones who care whether you’re good or bad are your family and friends and neighbors. God’s not dependent on your behavior.”*

Just as God desperately wanted a love relationship with Robbie, He just as much wanted that with me. By showing me just how hard Robbie had strived, He had my attention when He said I too was striving to keep myself alive. Unbeknownst to me, I was relying on my accomplishments to feel good in my relationship with God.

If I was performing, I felt good; God looked good, thus it must be making God feel good. But, God didn’t want my works, He wanted my heart.

*“Unless the Lord builds the house,
the laborers labor in vain.”
Psalm 127:1*

Through my healing journey, I came to see how much God loved me and that I was no different than Robbie. We both fought and strived, but it was through God’s love that we both came alive. And, now that we’ve let God enter in to love us from within, we have so much more to give and a much bigger reason to live. Now we want to simply love, not just to get rewards from others and God above.

*“Who You are and what You’ve done are all we’ll ever want...
everything we’ve done, You’ve done for us.”
Isaiah 26:8 & 12 The Message*

At the end of this journey, Robbie was my dear friend, not my mission or ministry, thus I began to pray for God to give me opportunities to minister to others. Shortly thereafter, God began to open doors for me to enter jail and prison ministry, thus the poem above. I never thought I would be going into jails and prisons, but it is amazing what you can do when you truly learn to rest and let God lead you.

I now love my new life, love being at the jails and prisons, and love all those I serve. And, that is

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only because of the awesome loving relationship I have with a God that none of us deserve!

We love because he first loved us.”

1 John 4: 19

Carol Davis is the Founder and Executive Director of Mission of Grace Foundation and is currently teaching the Passport to Purpose program at California State Prison-Solano.

Change

by Ernest David B.

Brother Tim, God wants to see us grow and mature. Growth is impossible without change. Those who are not open to growth condemn themselves to a lifetime of mediocrity, stagnation, and hopelessness.

Remember that change...

Is a process

Takes time

Can be painful

Involves mistakes

Involves small steps

Can be confusing

Provides hope

Results in healthy relationships.

The name of the game of life is change, change is a challenge. Stimulating and invigorating as change may

A Brother in Christ at Folsom State Prison

be, it's never easy. Changes are especially tough when it comes to certain habits that haunt and harm us. He who rejects change

is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery. Change is inevitable, growth is optional.

A Life Changed on Summer Vacation

by Mikki R.

Greetings, my name is Mikki and God sent me to prison this summer. Being a Bible college student requires that I stay active in ministry, so I hit up Pastor Tim and asked if I could help out with his prison outreach. As many of you know, Pastor loves stretching people and seemed



eager to get me involved. He invited me to join the prison choir (*One Voice Praise Choir*) and a week later I was standing on the yard of California State Prison-Solano headed for church.

There was no heads up before walking onto that yard and there were a good number of inmates

surrounding me as I walked towards the chapel. However, the brothers were so good to me. I felt safer with them than I did walking the streets at home. I met so many wonderful men of God and they all truly changed my heart. Through them I learned more about my walk with God and I feel more blessed than ever before.

God sent me to Sierra Conservation Center-Jamestown and San Quentin State Prison as well. I felt so blessed to sing in the same prison chapel my grandpa did when he was incarcerated in San Quentin. I also learned a lot of discipline. I had to be careful how I interacted and could not give hugs to the inmates, which killed me at times. I hope the brothers remember me because I think of them every day. I cannot wait to serve with them on my next school break. God Bless.

Mikki attends Bible College in San Dimas, California; she attends Valley Community in El Monte, California.

Are You Shooting Them or Sowing Them?

by Brother Rick M.

My name is Brother Rick M.; I am forty-seven years old and sentenced to a term of forty years to life for armed robbery. Since this is my third prison term, I was sentenced under the California “Three Strikes” law [signed on March 7, 1994, which applies to anyone who has two or more prior serious or violent felony convictions]. At the time of my arrest in December 2006, I was unemployed, an alcoholic, and former Assistant Pastor of a Pentecostal Church, fallen from grace. I had served the

A Brother in Christ at Pelican Bay State Prison

Lord faithfully for fourteen of the seventeen years I had spent out of prison but walked out of the church one Sunday evening, hurt, offended, and spiritually wounded, walked into a bar and left my precious relationship with the Lord at the door.

I hold no one to blame other than myself for my present circumstance. I made the decision to walk away from my family, my brothers and sisters in the Lord, my church, and my God. I allowed the enemy of our souls to use words spoken by a loved one, who had good intentions, to bring me down. Since then I have turned to the Lord’s embrace again, He who never left me, but held His nail-scarred hands out to me. All

I had to do was change direction spiritually and there He was.

I know there are others who have been hurt by words and the enemy has torn apart their lives because of them. I have a message for you if you are one of those: The only words that matter are His words! Don’t allow Satan to use the weapon of vocabulary to destroy God’s purpose for your life. I also have a message for those who would feel the need to advise or criticize: You can offer your words to others as bullets or seeds; you can shoot them or sow them.

Richard C. Halverson, former Chaplain to the United States Senate writes: *“You can offer your ideas to others as bullets or seeds. You can shoot them or sow them; hit people in the head with them, or plant them in their hearts. Ideas used as bullets will kill inspiration and neutralize motivation. Used as seeds, they will take root, grow and become a reality in the life in which they are planted. The only risk in the seed approach: once it grows and becomes a part of those in whom it’s planted, you probably will get no credit for originating the idea. But if you’re willing to do without the credit ... you’ll reap a rich harvest.”*

We can say the right words sometimes but use the wrong manner in which to say them. God’s words are wasted when we use a “ram it down your throat” approach. Christians’ especially need to learn how to say the right thing, in the right way. Isaiah 50:4

says, *“The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens me morning by morning, He awakens my ear to hear as the learned.”* To accomplish the desired effect in someone’s heart, the words we use must be the right words, spoken with the right attitude. We can’t help others move up higher in Christ if we don’t approach them with genuine love and care. Without those two crucial elements, efforts to help others will fail or even worse, totally alienate them.

Most of the men at this prison already know what their problem is; they have been dealing with it long enough. Deep down they want to do better. But unless I want a “who are you to tell me” response, I have to demonstrate a genuine concern. As spoken in Proverbs 16:24, *“Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.”* Jesus said, *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* (John 8:32). His truth will always set people free, but if they refuse to listen to the truth, the way we are sharing the truth, maybe we are firing bullets instead of planting seeds. We all need to desire to be God’s gardeners and not Satan’s snipers!

Yet He Loves

by David B.

“If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”

Galatians 6:3

Our Lord has truly shown me many things as I continue to walk with Him and the above verse is one of those things. You see, without our Lord in my life, I am indeed nothing. So many years of my life were spent listening to the deceiver who had me totally convinced of just how great I was, in prison language, I

A Brother in Christ at California State Prison-Solano

was all that and a bag of chips, if you don't believe me, just ask me and I'll tell you.

This is the end result of one of Satan's greatest weapons against the flesh, Pride! I implore anyone who should read this to please take heed. Proverbs 16:18 says, *“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”* This is a very stern warning to anyone, who like me, struggled or is struggling with issues of pride. This warning should not be taken lightly. I say this because it was my own pride that ultimately destroyed my life and practically ruined the lives of all those in my family.

For the better part of my life I suppressed deep personal problems that adversely affected me. I say

this not as an excuse for all of the wrong I had done, but only as a contributing factor. I had the choice to do what was right and was well aware of the wrong I was doing. But, pride refused to let me believe that I had any kind of problem at all. This fact alone kept me from seeking the help I now know I desperately needed. I was boastful, a liar, a cheat, arrogant, verbally as well as physically abusive, and full of myself. There was a time in my life I would have never admitted these things to anyone. Even now I sometimes find it hard to admit, though I know that is the way I was. At the time I could not have seen these things in myself because I was blind to the truth. Since our Lord has opened my eyes I know now that pride was indeed the cause of my destruction.

To be sure, the enemy was not satisfied with my destruction alone. The ones I loved and cherished most, my wife, children, and family were all caught up in my fall. Their lives were put into turmoil. And if that weren't enough, I also brought shame and humiliation to them all. Needlessly, they each paid a horrible price for what I had done.

Sadly at this time I had the nerve to call myself a Christian. Yet my thoughts, actions, and deeds were anything but Christ-like, 1 Timothy 5:8 says, *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* To my shame, I not only didn't provide

for my family, I virtually destroyed their lives as well.

Even though I was very much aware of the fact that all things came from and are provided by our Lord, I was not the least bit deterred from taking advantage of all I had. So it really should not have come as any great surprise to me when our Lord allowed it all to be taken away, and yet, it did. I lost my home and everything I once owned. My wife has divorced me and neither my children nor anyone in my family write to me. In fact, if I were to be released tomorrow, of my own, I would have nowhere to go. Suffice it to say our Lord is most efficient when He takes away those things which He had allowed us to have. If you were to ask me now I would have to confess these things were necessary for our Lord to get my attention and break down the giant wall of pride I had built around myself.

Am I angry at God? While I must in truth say I was at one time, by His grace I am no longer. Now I am exceedingly thankful to Him for His mercy in saving my family from me and me from myself. I've no doubt if it was His will to reconcile me with my family and restore all that I had, He would, and I would be more than truly blessed. Of course whether He does or does not, I will always feel undeserving of His grace, mercy, and unconditional love for me.

In the nearly ten years since my incarceration and all that has taken place our Lord has continued

“Loves” continued on page 9

“Home” continued from page 1

way home, and even for a time after we got something to eat at home. We have been looking for a church home for some time now. I think we have found the church body that we would like to call our own church home at this particular moment in our spiritual journey. It is the Garden Chapel Christian Fellowship in San Quentin, California.

I don't know exactly what our role is in that context, but I am more than comfortable calling Dr. Morris Curry my own pastor. It is a privilege to play a small part in helping him to equip some of those fellow members of that congregation who happen to be his Associate Pastors for ministry in that prison setting.

I walked out of San Quentin State Prison this

morning feeling that I was the one who was ministered to, perhaps more so than at any worship service I have attended in quite some time. I remember very few worship experiences in the course of recent months, perhaps even years, that surpass what Martha and I experienced this morning inside San Quentin State Prison, at Garden Chapel Christian Fellowship.

Duane and Martha Christensen are founders of the Berkeley Institute of Biblical Archaeology and Literature (BIBAL Corporation) a California religious nonprofit entity incorporated under Section 501 (c) (3); for additional information please visit their forum at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Prison-Link-Ministry/> or www.bibal.net.

*“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth,
and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!”*

Proverbs 15:23

Word In Season

Clear those cobwebs from your head, those thoughts, anxieties and worries. Release them all, for I have something to tell you and cannot connect when your line is busy.

I need you still and quiet before Me at all times, anticipating My voice to speak at any moment.

My children need to hear an encouraging word in season; one that lets them know

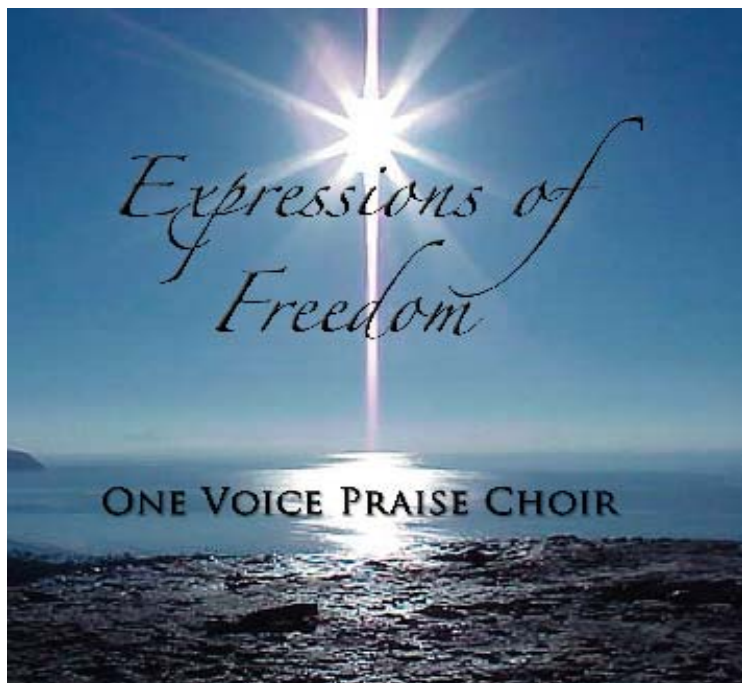
I am here for them always, never to leave or forsake them.

Keep your mind upon Me.

I am all you need.

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the very slow process of changing my life, thoughts, and heart. In every possible way He has blessed me and provided for my every need. He has made it possible for me to attend Bible College and allowed me the honor and privilege to serve Him in our chapel. He's found great favor with me in allowing me to be an assistant chaplain, preach His Word, sing in our choir, and lead Bible studies and precious souls to a saving knowledge of our Lord, Christ Jesus. Although I still have no communication with my family, He has allowed me to have been adopted into a very precious Christian family. They correspond with me regularly either by phone or letters. They've sent me numerous packages and have even traveled more than 400 miles one way to visit me on more than one occasion. Dear readers, this is only a very small part of what our Lord has done since I completely surrendered my life to Him. Realizing this now I can only imagine how very blessed my life could have been had I not surrendered myself to Him years ago.

Like the apostle Paul, I do not feel that I have already attained. I have still far to go and much to learn. Please don't learn as I did or wait until what has happened to me happen to you. The Devil waits for nothing, he seeks for whom he may devour and will seize any opportunity to cause you to stumble and fall. Humble and commit yourself to our Lord now and trust Him with all of your heart. He knows better than we do what is right for us. He also knows everything there is to know about us and yet, He loves us anyway! I am quite certain had I done what I just said (practiced what I've preached) many years ago, I would not be sitting here writing this to you now! May our Lord encourage, strengthen, and bless all who read this, in Jesus name.

I Was Lost, But Now I Am Found, In Jesus

by Cee Cee

And so it begins; a life I never could imagine at all. I was heading to Hell faster than my heart was beating. Knowing about the truth, yet refusing to accept it, led my life to fulfill the ultimate crime, sinning against God and grieving the Holy Spirit. With every aspect of life I was dead, in every area of life; I was a drunk, I was a drug addict, I was hopeless and lonely, and I was a sinner.

I grew up in a very good family and played it off pretty well, living in total denial that I needed help. The frustrations of life, relationships of heartbreak, misery, and yes, two failed suicide attempts, as well as overdosing on drugs two times, I just wanted to end life because of all the pain I carried.

Eventually my sinful life led me to jail and then to prison. Sitting in jail, knowing I had lost my freedom, nowhere to go, no family next to me, I broke down and looked to Heaven and poured out my heart and entire life over to God. That night, something happened. I had peace like never before. I felt this weight just lift off me. I cried

A Brother in Christ at California State Prison-Solano

like never before, I knew something changed. I picked up the Bible and read it daily and discovered who I was in Christ

Jesus and what He has done for me.

I was a drunk, now I'm drunk with the Holy Spirit. I was a drug addict, now I'm addicted to God's Word. I was lonely, now I'm full of joy. I was hopeless, now I'm hopeful. God has given me true life, and each day I live to glorify God. I thought there was no way, but God had a way, the right way in Jeremiah 29:11-14, *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”* It's been over nine years now and each day gets better and better. This testimony belongs to God, all honor and praise to Him.

“Go ahead, take away the stone!”

John 11:41

by Nancy Gould

The story of Lazarus' death is only found in the Gospel of John. This poignant story is omitted by the other Gospel writers, but “the disciple whom Jesus loved” knew this was an important story for us to know about the heart of Jesus.

There was a very special relationship between Jesus and these friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Luke 10:38-41 gives us another story we are familiar with about the sisters: Mary *sits at His feet* while Martha “frets”; and in another account in John 12:1-9, Mary *anointed Jesus' feet* with aromatic oils and wiped them with her hair. These were people that Jesus spent time with and loved dearly. They knew Him for who He really was...Messiah and Lord! Mary especially was moved to extreme devotion to Him, worshipping at His feet in every account where her name is mentioned. So it seems strange that in their moment of desperate need, when the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Master, the one you love so very much is sick,” that Jesus would delay His coming to meet their need for help. When Jesus got the message, to everyone's surprise, He stayed on where He was for two more days.

The most powerful statement in the whole passage is in verse 5, one that I have missed every time I've read it in the past: “*Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*” It stands out on the page now like a neon sign every time

I read it. It doesn't seem to make sense considering the decision Jesus just made to wait two more days and just let Lazarus die! And He knew it would take another two days to walk to Bethany where His friends lived. It was no surprise to Him that Lazarus would be good and dead by the time He got there! Why, if Jesus loved these people so much, would He delay?

There is a powerful lesson for us all here...we all have had the experience of asking God for something and had to live through the unsettling period of His apparent “delay” in coming to our assistance in *our* perfect timing. The one thing that is challenged in our minds during times like this is love of God...if He loves me, why am I not getting His help? I imagine that Mary and Martha had four very dark days waiting and wondering why this Friend of theirs, who was God Himself, had not even shown up! And we, too, because Jesus has called us His friends, wonder why there are delays in His responses to us if He loves us so much.

It is because He loves us so much that He waits for the Father's perfect timing to bring about the BEST for us that will glorify the Father through our lives and testimony. As Jesus told His followers when they asked Him why He delayed, “This sickness is not fatal. It will become an occasion to show God's glory by glorifying God's Son...and I am glad for your sakes that I wasn't

there. You're about to be given new grounds for believing. Now let's go to him.” While we humans are trapped in time and space in our limited understanding, God knows the entire plan for our lives and the moments in eternity, where He dwells and works, that His actions will accomplish what concerns us.

When Jesus finally arrived, Mary came to where Jesus was and *fell at his feet*, in worshipful surrender, and cried out, “Master, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, the Bible says, “a deep anger welled up within Him” and He wept. Even the Jews said, “Look how deeply He loved him,” while others among them said, “Well, if He loved him so much, why didn't He do something to keep him from dying? After all, He opened the eyes of a blind man.” The Bible again states, “The anger again welling up within Him,” He arrived at the tomb and said, “Remove the stone.” Now even the sister of the dead man, Martha, said, “Master, by this time there's a stench. He's been dead four days!” She even thought it was too late for Him to intervene. But Jesus looked her in the eye and said, “Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” Then again He said, “Go ahead, take away the stone.” They removed the stone and then He shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” And he came out, a cadaver, wrapped from head to toe! Jesus' instructions were,

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“Stone” continued from page 10

“Unwrap him and let him loose.”

So often, we give up on the things that God has delayed showing up for, and we wrap our dreams or hopes up like a cadaver and lay them in a tomb. And in our minds there is a huge stone rolled across the opening and we live in mourning instead of in hope of Jesus’ resurrection power! We look at our experience and tell the Lord (if we are really honest) of our unbelief and say, “Master, by this time there’s a stench!” But Jesus comes to us like He did to Martha and Mary and looks us in the eye and says, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” If we obey His command to “Go ahead, remove the stone!” we will see Him begin His work in us. He doesn’t do it for us...we must remove it ourselves! It is our choice to believe Him for who He really is...risen Lord and Almighty God!

Yes, “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus,” enough to let Lazarus die and to let Mary and Martha suffer anguish for four days in order to demonstrate His power to them (and to us through this story) in their darkest hour. So we can take courage knowing what is at the heart of Jesus’ delays in answering us when we cry out to Him: He has a miracle waiting for us that we cannot even begin to picture now!

What is the *stone* in your life that you have used to cover up the pain of God’s delays? What have you wrapped in a shroud and laid to rest and forgotten about, afraid of the stench, but that God wants to resurrect? He calls out your name and tells you

to “Come out!” He wants you to be “unwrapped” and “let loose” to bring Him glory in this life and throughout eternity!!!

*Nancy is a member of One Voice Praise Choir and Youth Director for **ebenezer outreach ministry**; Nancy attends Providence Community Church in Vacaville, California.*

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Healed and Delivered

by Raymond M.

I was born in East Oakland, November 26, 1961; the seventh boy of seven boys and one girl. My parents have been married for over fifty years! I was brought up in a God-fearing family, raised by both parents; I went to church every Sunday, sang in the children's choir, and later joined the usher board as a member.

As I grew older I began to hang out with my buddies and friends, we drank alcohol, smoked pot, and experimented with drugs. From drugs I started getting violent and committing crimes. The day of my arrest changed my life forever on July 1, 1983, while sitting in the back of an Oakland police squad car, God spoke to me, "You cannot continue to live like this, Raymond, and unless you change you will not make it!"

Those words rang out in my head, even twenty-two years later they still give me an emotional jolt that keeps me going. I knew it was God who spoke to me that day. Before I went to trial or received my sentence of fifty years, my life started to change right there in county jail. God delivered me from drugs, pornography, cursing, and lying.

I didn't actually accept Jesus Christ as Lord in my life until I went to prison in 1984. God has given me so much! He has blessed me with a forgiving family, they love me very much. He has also blessed me with so many beautiful brothers and sisters in Christ, who truly love me too. Also, He has blessed me with many people of different races who love me. It's true; everybody does love Raymond (smile!).

Anyway, I could go on and tell you many more things about what God is doing and has done in my life, but it's not about me, it's about

Him and you. If you want God to change your life too, talk to Him. Ask Him to change your life right now, He will do it. He loves you and He wants you to love Him.

Think about what you have done to yourself and to others, look and see what kind of mess you have gotten yourself into. Do you really want to continue to live the way you are living? I love you also and I want to change your life too. You know what is right, so do the right thing.

A Brother in Christ at California State Prison-Solano

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