

## TO OPEN THEIR EYES

We are very excited about what our Lord is going to do this year in the lives of those He has sent us to. It is very exciting to me to know that our Heavenly Father is always at work in the hearts of men. In my first service this year, the room was packed wall-to-wall with inmates. One inmate who has been coming to our services on a regular basis waited to talk with me after the service. He wanted to thank me once again for bringing the light of the gospel to him while he was in darkness. He said, "Bro. Downs, I feel as though I have had spiritual eye surgery, because for the first time in my life I can see! I can see the plan and purpose that God has for me!" My mind immediately went to Acts 26:18. It is in that one verse that Paul summarizes the mission God has called us to: **"TO OPEN THEIR EYES**, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." I thank the Lord for all of you that are standing with us both in prayer and financial support. Only eternity will tell the whole story of what the Lord as we work as co-laborers with Christ.

## IT TOOK A DRUG ADDICT TO REACH THIS DRUG ADDICT

I often share with the inmates that I believe the primary reason that God allowed me to live through the many years of heroin addiction and crime was to one day bring me back to jail with the only message of hope. The miracle of our own salvation is always a big part of the confirmation that there is a living God who redeems lives. God did not call us to be a witness, rather, He said, we are a witness. All of us are a witness for Him and of Him, and our testimonies should bring glory to God. Not long ago I shared my testimony in a service and, as always, presented the plain gospel of Jesus Christ. In that service was a middle-aged white man that I had noticed while I was preaching. I noticed him because he looked very ill, and his eyes looked like the saddest puppy I had ever seen. After the service he lingered while I dealt with some of the other men. We began to talk and he told me that he, too, was a heroin addict, and that his liver had been severely damaged by the drug abuse. He told me that some of the other inmates had told him he needed to come to church and hear what God had to say. That day Charles trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior, and we prayed together that the Lord would touch his body. Charles did not get better, and just a few days later he sent for me to come to the medical wing where they had placed him. When I walked in I was not ready for what I saw. He looked like a man who had been in a concentration camp for years, but on his face was the biggest smile I had ever seen. He said he was so glad that I had come because he wanted to tell me how he thanked God for sending me into his life. He said, "I have heard the gospel before but I was always so hard-hearted. I guess **IT TOOK A DRUG ADDICT TO REACH THIS DRUG ADDICT.**" He said he had been so afraid to face everything, but that now he felt he could face anything that confronted him, including death. In the days that followed, we prayed together, claimed God's promises together, and wept together. He showed me a picture of his 12-year-old daughter and asked me to pray for her. In just a few days Charles went home to be with his Lord. How I thank the Lord for giving me the honor of being the deliverer of His mercy and grace to Charles. His mom wrote me a letter shortly after his death and said that all Charles ever talked about in his last days was the church service on the 10th floor where he finally found the peace that he had been searching for.

## UNFORESEEN DOORS OF MINISTRY

One of the **UNFORESEEN DOORS OF MINISTRY** that the Lord has opened has been the ministry to the inmates' families. There is no more difficult ministry that I do than being with a mom when her son is executed. I have stood three times with my hand on the shoulder of "Mom" as she watched her son take his last breath. Although I am glad I can be there to "weep with those who weep," it is never an experience that I look forward to. All of the men that ask me to be at their executions are deeply committed Christians, and want me to be there to help their families deal with death. Please pray that God will use me in the lives of the families of the inmates on death row. I have had the blessing of holding three funeral services of men that have graduated from death row. This has been an incredible opportunity to share the grace of God that brings salvation to family members and friends who are lost.

## THE ONLY PRESENTS UNDER THE TREE

Another ministry that the Lord allowed us to have a part in was bringing Christmas to some of the inmates' children this year. I praise God for Anne organizing this ministry and for the members of Southwinds Baptist Church and others that made it a real success. My heart is broken for the real victims of the plague of sin that has a grip on our nation. I am speaking of the precious children who

are so confused, rejected, and hungry for security. I shall never forget knocking on the door of one particular house late one night. We had called and told them we were coming with Christmas gifts from the father in prison. When the door opened, there stood a precious little 8 year-old boy. The mom told us that he had been waiting all day for us to come. They had even put up the Christmas tree that day in anticipation of our arrival. I wish you could have seen that boy's face when we handed him the presents and told him that his dad had sent them along with his love. They were **THE ONLY PRESENTS UNDER THE TREE**. The greatest need in that boy's life and the greatest gift he could get apart from salvation is a dad who loves the Lord Jesus Christ. Please pray that God will raise up some godly dads within the walls of the various units we go.

### **TELL HIM HE IS FULLY FORGIVEN AND FULL LOVED**

One of the services I hold on a regular basis is a service that is called "P.C. Church." Those who attend this service are offenders that are police officers, judges' sons, and others who are somehow connected to the judicial process. P.C. does not stand for privileged characters, rather, protective custody. You see, these are inmates that other inmates would love to kill if they could get their hands on them. They must be separated from the rest of the inmates. Last week, I was relating to these men a story about a young man I know on death row that killed a police officer. As I told the story, a police officer that attends our service began to weep. He is a man who has come to Christ and has attended faithfully for about six months. I stopped the service and asked if we could pray about something. He said that he needed to say something to everyone. He went on to say that the boy I was talking about had killed his partner and the best friend he had ever had. He related the story of that dreadful day and how he had determined that he would find the kid that shot his friend. He wanted to avenge his friend's death, and planned to put a bullet in the boy's head. He told the church he knew that God had prevented him from finding that boy. With tears streaming down his face he said, "I want you to tell that young man that **HE IS FULLY FORGIVEN AND FULLY LOVED** and that I am praying for him." The men began to applaud and give God praise for His mighty grace. You see, that officer is not the same man he was the day he was intending to kill that boy. He is a new creature in Christ, and by the power and grace of God he can obey the admonition of Ephesians 4:32: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."

~ **CHAPLAIN JOHN DOWNS**

### **DONATIONS IN MEMORIUM**

Eagle Ridge Villas Association I

\$50.00 in memory of Mrs. Anita Quinlan