

I COULD NEVER THROW IT AWAY

One of the greatest joys in the prison ministry is to see the intense love a new believer has for the Bible. I have no greater thrill than to hand an inmate his first Bible. It is special to see that same inmate come to church week after week, and to see his Bible looking more worn and ragged, and his life more renewed and peaceful. A worn out Bible is a good sign of a brand new life.

Recently, after I had finished conducting a service, an inmate that had come to the Lord several months ago lingered behind to ask me something. In his hand was the paperback Bible I had given him when he got saved. He had so ransacked and marked up this copy of the Word, that he had to hold it together with his hands. This guy never misses a service and glows like a 100-watt light bulb every at service.

He wanted to know if he could possibly get a new Bible before they transferred him to another facility. I told him I would bring him one the following week. Although he was excited about getting a new Bible, he got a little teary eyed and said, **“I WILL NEVER THROW AWAY THIS ONE.”** He said he wanted to hang on to the copy of the Scriptures that had forever changed his life.

May God help us all to “hang on” and stay in the Book that changed our lives.

YOU ARE THE CONFIRMATION

Last week, I boarded the express bus that takes me to downtown Houston where nearly 10,000 inmates are incarcerated. I sat next to a lady who was reading a copy of Wilkerson’s book on the prayer of Jabez. I told her I had just read it for the first time, and we began to discuss the goodness and guidance of God. After we talked about the book she asked me if I happened to be an attorney, or if I knew one that could help her son who was incarcerated. You can imagine her face when I told her that I was a chaplain in the same building her son was locked up in. After I got the name of her son, we prayed that the Lord would give guidance to her and her son.

On the way to do one of my weekly Bible studies I went into the cellblock where her son was. When I walked in and called his name the other inmates pointed to a man asleep on his bunk. I woke him up and began to tell him about a divine appointment I had that morning on a bus with a person who loved him more than any other person in the whole world. I gave him a hug and told him it was from mom and he broke down. That usually happens to any inmate when you talk about mom.

When I asked him where he was with the Lord he told me that he had been saved but he had become angry with God for the way that some events had turned out. He then told me that he had on that very morning asked God to do something special to confirm that God still loved him. He began to tremble and said, **“YOU ARE THE CONFIRMATION.”** I gave him another hug, we prayed, and I shared with the rest of that cell-block the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and how it had transformed me from a heroin addict to a new creation. That morning, many of the men responded to the invitation Jesus gave in Matthew 11:28-30.

ONLY THROUGH THE CROSS

God has placed me in some very unique areas of prison ministry, including to the guys on death row. However, no group of guys has captured my heart like the group I have every Wednesday known as the “certified juveniles.” These are the kids who have committed crimes so serious that

they have been certified by the state of Texas to stand trial as adults. When I took on this challenge, only two teens came to services, and now God has done such a beautiful work that almost all of the kids come when the deputy calls for church. They know I love them, and they now love me, and more importantly, the One I represent.

Recently one of the young men brought me a small cross he had made out of a used white trash bag he had shredded up and woven together. He wanted to give me something for bringing the message of the cross to him. He is only 16 years old and will spend the rest of his life behind bars. That little white cross was special to me and serves as a reminder that **ONLY THROUGH THE CROSS** can a life that has been “trashed by sin” be transformed into something that is beautiful. Only through the cross could God’s requirement for sinful man to be reconciled to Him be met. I pray that none of us will ever “get over” or forget what the cross means to us as believers.

YOU DID MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Recently during a service a middle-aged inmate who has been saved and transformed stood up in the middle of one of my services and asked permission to say a word for the Lord. He praised God for his new life and then said, “I thank God that Chaplain Downs did not forget where he came from, and that he came back to jail to tell us how to be free.” With that said the rest of those knuckleheads stood up and began to praise the Lord with a clap offering. It was a special time.

As we come to the close of another year and evaluate what has been done this past year I want to remind you that those inmates are now free and happy because you choose to be a part of their lives. As you enjoy these holidays with friends and family I want you to know that **YOU DID MAKE A DIFFERENCE** this year in the lives of some men that just needed someone to care.

Merry Christmas from our family, and from your extended family of inmates that you have touched this past year.

~ CHAPLAIN JOHN DOWNS