



Newsletter Snippets – God Visits an Inmate

Week 1. I first visited Michael, sentenced to prison, on suicide watch. He was allowed a heavy, quilted canvas blanket, and a mattress - not even clothes. Desperate for a Bible, I helped him memorize Jeremiah 29:11. He scratched it into the paint of his cell with his fingernail. I encouraged him to focus on God, to strip away everything else that he had come to rely on. As I spoke and read the Bible to him, I could see the Holy Spirit visibly calm his agitation.

Week 2. Michael seemed at peace, but had still been kept on suicide watch. I told him that, even though it didn't seem right, God promises that nothing can touch His child without His permission. I asked him to be still before God, to look for what God wanted to accomplish in him through this time and put it into practice. He said he would.

Week 3. Michael bounded up out of the stairway with a grin to see me in the visiting room. He showed off his jumpsuit (no more blanket) and Bible, and told me his story. Michael had started talking to the guy in the cell next to him (also on suicide watch). He stood up on his bunk to get as close to the vent as possible (it carried the sound). He reached up and put his hand on the vent as he prayed fervently for his neighbor's needs.

The next day, he was off suicide watch! God had been waiting for him to demonstrate that Christ-character that reaches outside of himself to help another, even in the deprivation of suicide watch. God's purpose had been accomplished; Michael had learned the lesson of passing God's grace on to others.

The next day, his neighbor hanged himself. When the guards and medical responders arrived, Michael prayed on his knees for his neighbor's life. When he heard the medic say, "I've got a pulse!" he knew God had answered his prayer! Now, his prayer was that he could spread the testimony of God's work in his life, and enjoy the fellowship and support of other believers.

Week 4. I visited the open pod where Michael had been moved. His testimony of God's work in his life, giving him peace, teaching him to reach out, and answering his prayer to return life to his neighbor, had transformed everyone in the pod. They were eager for God's Word!

Week 5. Michael was gone. God had delayed his move to state prison long enough to change his life forever, and leave behind a testimony that changed many others. We still write each other. Pray that God would use Michael's testimony wherever he goes.

What does a funeral have to do with Jail Ministry?

I visited Jim in jail, shortly after his arrest, a long-haired, bearded 66 year old hippie, with no regard for Jesus or the Bible. I knew he had killed a man, and I had no idea what to expect. Slumped and dejected, he turned his hollow, hopeless eyes straight at mine, and said, "I'm 66 years old. They're talking about 25 years to life. Do you have any advice for me?" Everything in his demeanor told me that he already knew the answer to his question. What possible hope could there be for him?

But I said to him, "As a matter of fact, I do!" I opened my Bible to Jeremiah 29:11, a verse that has been a source of hope for me and my family when we faced difficult and wrenching circumstances.

"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."
Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

I told Jim of the God of the Bible, who created us, loved us, pursued us as we fled from His Holy presence, seeking our own way, and Who sent His only Son to suffer and die so that we might be reconciled with Him. I told him that the God of all ages, Who created the universe and all things we can see and even those we can't, cared about him right now, sitting in jail, agonizing over an uncertain future. I told him that this didn't take God by surprise; He had a plan for Jim, to give him a hope and a future, to prosper him and not to harm him. Jim had God's solemn promise on that! Jim hadn't expected that, and he had a lot to think about.

The following week, Jim came bounding up out of the stairwell, beaming at me, and holding the Bible he had received. He told me "You saved my life!", but of course, it was not me but Jesus Himself Who had met him and changed his life. I learned that Jim was a Vietnam vet with a degree in psychology. His active mind had been all over the world, in geography, philosophy, religion, and literature. He had all kinds of questions.

In solitary confinement, Jim couldn't see the other prisoners, but he loved to sing out "Amazing Grace" so that as many others as possible could hear it. His conversations lifted up many others close to his cell. He wrote reams of encouraging letters to other prisoners. He left for prison resting in Jesus' promise in John 16:33,

"In me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Jim told me that he was better off in jail for the rest of this life, but free on the inside for eternity, rather than out of jail, but still living in bondage to things destined to perish with this world. Jim had faced the extinction of all his dreams and hopes in this world. He had, like Solomon, tried "everything under the sun." But in the end, when the enemy of our souls destroys all that we have clung to, even taking Jim's life through cancer, Jim found that there is only one source of hope and joy and victory over death, and that is the freely given love and truth of Jesus Christ. The guards and nurses witnessed that in his life and words, even at the end. It was my privilege to tell Jim's story at his funeral just before Thanksgiving. He was the first of my jail connections to "graduate" to glory with his Savior. I pray he will be the first of many who find their way to our Savior's glorious eternal presence through the ministry of ARM.

Mentoring. Roxanne and I helped put on a Thanksgiving mentoring potluck to celebrate the launching of Butte County's Community Impact Mentoring program for ankle bracelet releasees. It is a great tool for shattering prejudices and bringing people together: blacks & whites, Hispanics & Asians, offenders and officers and community members, all learning to trust and appreciate one another. The man I mentor is a disabled veteran of the Iraq war, and a Christian, but he developed substance abuse issues after coming home injured. He played an amazing acoustical guitar and sang *That's Why I'm Here*, by Kenny Chesney. He's playing

*"It's the simple things in life,
Like the kids at home and a loving wife,
That you miss the most, when you lose control.
And everything you love starts to disappear;
The devil takes your hand and says, 'No fear-
Have another shot, just one more beer.'
Yeah, I've been there. **That's why I'm here.**"*

Kenny Chesney

with the worship band of a local church, and working with them to help the homeless in Butte County. The song and testimonies brought tears to many eyes. That's why they're here – to find help getting their lives back, and there are so many more men and women who need that one-on-one support. Jesus can help them – and He can use you! Pray for them, as they learn to walk in freedom, for us on the

planning committee, as we prepare another, larger mentoring training session in February, and for Jesus to show you how you, and many others, might be called to help. Wouldn't it be amazing if Christians would fill the mentoring program to provide grace, support, and examples of well-adjusted relationships, not only with other people, but with God as well?

Praises and Prayer Requests:

- We have our structure and approvals in place. We have places we can work. Now our biggest need is for partners to join us. The fields are white, ready for harvest. Nowhere else have I seen such eagerness for the gospel. Nowhere else have I seen such potential to transform our community's life and health. Pray that the Lord of the harvest will raise up workers, teachers, mentors, pray-ers, helpers, givers. Pray for churches and Christians in Butte County to hear of the need, and rise to the call of our Savior.
- Please pray that God will raise up prayer warriors and a Prayer Coordinator, someone who would take the initiative to get our specific prayer requests out to those who have committed to hold ARM's ministry to inmates and their families up before our Lord.
- Please pray for God's financial provision for ARM, and for Roxanne and me.

I'm excited to see what God is doing, and going to do!
Thank you for your prayers, your help, and your encouragement.

Blessings to you, my friends and fellow Ambassadors!

Ian and Roxanne Carlisle

