

## DRUGS, PRISON AND CHRIST

The strong correlation between drug and alcohol abuse and America's prison population is indisputable. Official statistics are hard to come by, but I have seen estimates that as many as 85% of all inmates are in prison for committing crimes that are somehow related to a substance addiction. If not for the possession and use of illegal substances, many are arrested for trying to sell illegal drugs, stealing in order to support a habit, or for committing other crimes under the influence of alcohol or narcotics. In my personal experience I have met very few inmates that have not had a problem with drugs or alcohol before they were arrested and their addictions invariably somehow played into the desperate conditions of their lives.

What I have experienced over the past six years of ministry with inmates has so disturbed me that I feel compelled to write about it for this newsletter. I hope this article will heighten awareness of this serious problem and better prepare Christians to try to reach out to anyone that God may bring their way that might be falling into the bottomless pit of substance abuse.

There are hundreds of books and articles that describe the nature of drug and alcohol addiction written by authors who have diligently researched the problem. I encourage anyone that has an interest in knowing more about this issue to find such a resource and to learn as much as possible about substance abuse and addiction. The things I will be saying in this article are not based on scientific research but are rather thoughts I have had through interacting with hundreds of inmates and hearing of their struggles with addictions and how many have found freedom through the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

There are many reasons why people first use drugs or alcohol. In many cases it starts out as curiosity when they were teenagers, or because of peer pressure. I have met a number of men whose first exposure to drugs was through their own parents, having some warped idea that getting high together would be

a bonding experience with their children. Although many people experiment with drugs, not all become addicted to the point that it destroys their lives. The most popular theory as to why people become drug or alcohol addicted is that they have a genetic predisposition that makes them more vulnerable than most people. While there may be truth to that idea, what I have heard from most of the inmates I have spoken with is that they used the drug as a way of easing emotional pain that they could not cope with in any other way. They tell me of feelings of self-hatred, or anger because of physical or sexual abuse or some other tragedy in their lives. The

term most often used to describe their substance abuse is "self-medication." They are seeking an inner peace and healing that they have not been able to find elsewhere in life. The drugs can't make the pain go away, but it helps to relieve it temporarily. When the drunk or high wears off they want the sadness erased again so they go back to the drug to seek more relief. They are looking for something that only can be found through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

People find themselves in prison because of the way these addictions control their lives and impede their ability to make rational decisions. Once the drug takes control of a person he does whatever it takes to satisfy the need for what it provides. A significant number of people are arrested for the use and possession of illegal drugs, but that only accounts for a relatively small portion of total drug related convictions. People will steal in order to pay for their drug habit, drive while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or lose their temper when high or drunk and hurt someone. For all these reasons and more there are over 2 million people in America's jails and prisons, the vast majority of them there because of their addiction to drugs, either legal or otherwise.

Since the late 1980's the U.S. has tried to control drug abuse and the criminality associated with it through tougher prison sentences. Between 1985 and 2000 our country witnessed the most dramatic rise in the



# KAREN'S KORNER

Like many Christians, I desire to be a godly person. As a pastor's wife, I've heard many sermons on being godly. As a women's Bible teacher I've taught the essentials of godliness, godly speech, godly discipline how to be a godly encourager, godly wisdom, having a godly home, personal purity and one of my favorite studies by Elizabeth George "Loving God with All Your Mind." God knows my heart and at times, like everyone else, I find my thoughts overwhelmed by fear, worry and depression. It can be very difficult to keep ones mind focused on truth that produces joy.

Cal & I recently went through a struggle at our church. It was the kind of struggle that demanded God's wisdom and guidance. For me personally, as I went through hurt and many other unpleasant feelings, I had to pray hard that God would make me the godly woman I needed to be, no matter what! I needed to think, feel and live like Christ Jesus.

One day, while driving to work I asked God to give me a specific passage of Scripture that would help me deal with all my feelings. Little did I know how God would answer that prayer.



Upon arriving at the PMA office, I began to process the mail from inmates. This is my favorite part of the job as I enjoy answering questions and writing notes of encouragement to everyone who writes a personal note on their lesson form. On this particular day, when I needed to hear from God the most, an inmate told me he couldn't fill in the blanks on a passage of Scripture because he had a different version of the Bible.

I opened the Bible at my desk, and began to read this particular passage, **Romans 12:9-21**. As I read, tears came to my eyes. It was God's answer to my earlier prayer. And God used an inmate's question to lead me to it. My heart's desire is that I might be used of God to minister to the many inmates who receive PMA's correspondence courses. That day, instead of being on the giving side of a blessing to others, I was on the receiving end.

By God's grace,

*Karen*

## Reaching Out by Reaching In



*Editor's Note: The Following report comes from the prison ministry team of the Grace Bible Fellowship of Ridgeley W.V.*

On August 6th 2007 a group from Grace Bible Fellowship, Ridgeley, WV., began a prison ministry at the Federal Correctional Institute located in Cumberland, MD. It took one year to get through the paper work, background checks, and multiple postponements, but with God's help we persevered and it finally paid off. Twenty four inmates attended our first meeting followed by 31 the next week.

We elected to use a Bible Study format which was well received.

The meeting is two hours long, the first hour is spent reviewing the P.M.A. lessons given out the previous week, and a doctrinal/practical application lesson presented in the second hour. They enjoy this format because they are given a opportunity to participate in the discussion and to ask any relevant questions they may have.

Our group, Pastor Brent Biller, Berl Collett, Dave Summerfield and Sam Roksandich will be under a newly arrived chaplain who warmly welcomed us and thanked us for our service. We are also indebted to a prison staff member, Esther Hart, a member of our church, for greatly assisting our group by escorting us to and from the chapel, and tending to our needs during our study. Though Satan greatly hindered us (1 Thessalonians 2:18), there is a great work to be done in this facility and we thank God for allowing us the opportunity to serve in this way.

# GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

This is the twelfth in a series that examines the references to prisons and prisoners in the Bible. This will be the second article focusing on Paul the Apostle. Much of Paul's ministry took place while he was imprisoned and as we shall see, he viewed his incarcerations not as great hindrances to his work, but rather as opportunities to proclaim the gospel in an environment that would not have been accessible to him had he not been in that situation.

In our previous article we looked at how Paul had been transformed from a persecutor of the gospel who had Christians thrown in prison, to the strongest proclaimer of the message of Christ so that he himself was imprisoned because of his testimony of faith. The last article also looked at how God had been glorified through Paul and Silas' imprisonment in Philippi when He caused an earthquake to open the doors of the prison, but none of the inmates escaped. As a result of the miracle, the jailer and his family became Christians and new members of the Body of Christ were welcomed into the hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus.

We know from the record of the book of Acts that Paul was arrested in Rome and was imprisoned for two years in Caesarea, before beginning a journey to Rome that took almost a year. He spent at least two more years under house arrest in the city of Rome. The period from Paul's arrest in Jerusalem until the end of his two-year imprisonment in Rome was at least 5 years. It was during this time that Paul wrote at least three of his most important letters; Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, in which he describes in the fullest detail the nature of the Church of this dispensation, the Body of Christ. In these epistles Paul provides us with the complete teaching about the truth revealed to him that had been kept a secret in God's mind since before the world began, specifically that Gentiles could be saved and be in relationship with God through faith alone by grace, regardless of the nation of Israel's lack of faith in Jesus the Messiah.

There is a great deal that we learn about the apostle's character, and the nature of God's will and work during

this current Dispensation of Grace through the story of Paul's Roman imprisonment and the events that led up to it. The story, as it is related to us, begins in Acts 19:21 where we are told that Paul, while in Ephesus during his third missionary journey, had determined that he wanted to visit Rome after first going to Jerusalem. Some time later, while in Corinth collecting funds for the impoverished believers in the Judean churches, he penned the Epistle to the Romans, where he tells the believers in the Imperial City that he hoped to visit them and he asks for their prayers so that this desire of his would be realized.

Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints; That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed. *Romans 15:30-32.*

As the story continues we find that when Paul was traveling to Jerusalem to deliver the money he had collected for the churches he was warned by the prophet Agabus when he reached Caesarea that he would be taken prisoner by the Jews and turned over to the Gentiles. Paul responded by saying, "for I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 21:13b). The book of Acts then tells of how Paul is arrested in Jerusalem, taken to Caesarea, shipwrecked on the way to Rome and then kept under house arrest for two more years.

This narrative illustrates the intensity of Paul's commitment to preaching the gospel of Christ. Even though he knew what was in store for him, and despite the pleas of his clos-

est companions not to continue to Jerusalem, he was willing to go there in order to complete the ministry the Lord had given to him.

Furthermore, we learn a great deal from the account of Paul's journey to Rome and his words in his epistle to the believers there about what we should expect in terms of God's intervention and the question of unanswered prayer in the dispensation of Grace. In the passage in Romans 15 we find Paul asking the Romans to pray that he would be delivered from the unbelieving Jews and that he would be able to travel freely to Rome in order to preach to them and help them better understand the grace of God that they had experienced personally through faith in Jesus Christ. This was a perfectly fine request. Paul clearly believed that God would intervene to make such an appeal take place. There is no reason to believe that Paul thought it inappropriate to ask for such intervention. In fact, in an earlier letter Paul made it clear that he had been delivered from a similar peril in Asia because of the prayers of the Corinthian believers on his behalf (2 Corinthians 1:8-11). Likewise, Paul wrote in a later epistle, probably during the Acts 28 imprisonment, that because of the prayers of Philemon he would be released and be able to visit his dear friend from Colosse (Philemon 1:22). Paul clearly believed that God had the power to intervene, and that he could expect such intervention in response to the earnest prayers of devout believers. We see, however, that God is not bound by our personal wishes and desires to grant us everything we ask. This legitimate prayer request of a man who was probably the most spiritual Christian of all time was not answered according to his wishes. There was nothing wrong in the petition itself. If Paul did not know how to make a prayer request, who

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prison population in the history of the world. It is believed that the threat of severe punishment will deter others from committing crimes and risking the same for themselves. The problem with that line of thinking is that it requires the ability to make rational decisions in order for one to understand the consequences of their behavior. Unfortunately, alcoholics and drug addicts are so driven by the need for the substance that they cannot count the cost their addiction will have on any area of life, much less the threat of incarceration. Thus tougher sentencing really fails to act as deterrent either to potential offenders or even those that have been locked away before, as the high recidivism rates among offenders indicates.

The impact that abuse has on families is devastating. The hardest thing I have to do in prison ministry is to hear the heartbreaking stories of young children separated from their parents because the adults' addictions have led them to criminal activity. The chaos that the incarceration of a parent brings into a child's life is overwhelming. So often these children are at extremely high risk of repeating the same destructive behaviors of their parents and continuing the cycle of despair, abuse and imprisonment.

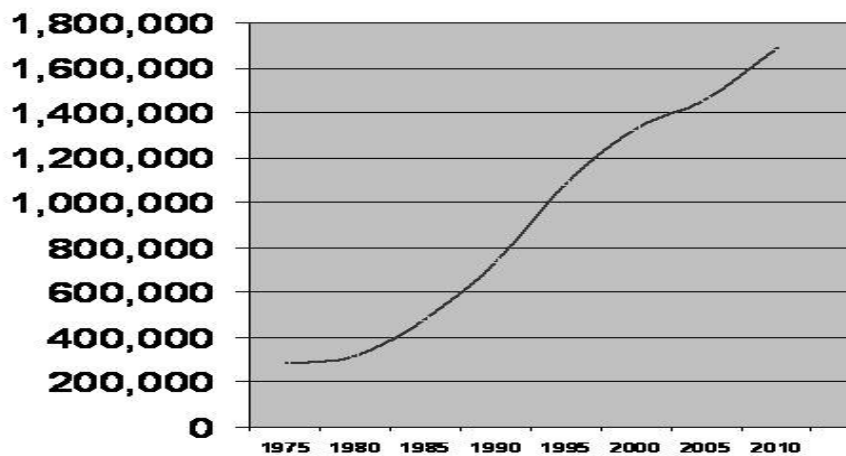
The economic effect that drug abuse has is incalculable. I have spoken to far too many people who have told me that they had good jobs or successful businesses and ended up with nothing to show for it because all the money went to support an addiction. A man I spoke with recently said that he earned \$263,000 one year as a cement contractor, and at the end of the year had nothing. Today he is released from prison and walking with the Lord but living hand to mouth. He

can't get a good job because his driver's license has been revoked for life.

Despite the seeming hopelessness of these scenarios, jail or prison can be an opportunity for people to hit rock bottom and begin the process of restoring their lives. I regularly have men say to me that they thank the Lord for winding up in jail, because if they had not they knew they were on a destructive downward spiral from which they could not otherwise escape. It was during their darkest moments that these men found hope to be able to turn away from the drugs and drink and to start on a new life free from the bondage that held them captive

emotional pain they felt in their hearts because of some emotional trauma in their lives. Likewise, I have had many testify that once they came to know Jesus Christ as savior and understood God's will in their lives, the aching was relieved. In many cases it resulted in complete and total victory over their problem, but often that is not the case. The scriptures tell us how in the life of every believer there is a continual battle between the Spirit of God within us and the remnants of the old sinful nature that the Bible calls the flesh. That struggle takes different forms with different people. Each of us is tempted in unique ways to follow the pathway of sin, whether it be pride, envy, anger, greed, lust, dissatisfaction, or however

Satan and his demons can successfully distract our thoughts and actions from the will of God. For those that have dealt with substance abuse, the battle with the flesh often takes the form of the desire to go back to the drugs or alcohol. One man, who is now a strong Christian, and has been sober for nearly three years described to me how he recently had to deal with the



**U.S. State and Federal Inmate Population 1975—2010  
(projected) County Jail Population not included**

to that point.

One man I ministered to for nearly three years told of how he had not been sober enough in the previous 20 years of his life to be able to understand the consequences of his behavior. It wasn't until he was in jail and facing a 7 year prison sentence that his thinking was straight enough that he realized all the lives he endangered by his behavior while drunk or on drugs. While in jail, however, he came to trust Jesus Christ as his savior and his entire perspective on life changed.

As mentioned above, a common theme that I have heard from addicted inmates is that the substance they used helped to ease the

temptation to take a drink. He had driven past a bar he had frequented in the past and a flood of memories overcame him. He described to me that he could taste the alcohol going down his throat and the feeling that a few drinks would leave him with. He knew however, that if he had yielded to that desire he would begin a rapid descent to an abyss that would once again destroy him and leave his newly restored life in ruins. By God's grace he was able to keep driving and is still sober and able to give glory to God with a "sound mind."

While having an awareness of the relationship between substance

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# THE SPANISH SIDE



Sunday mornings are very busy for us in our church, so we always arrive early, but it was a surprise and almost an "irritant" that a stranger was waiting for us at the door. Who could this be? What did he want? "Are you Arnie?" I am Brian Kelley".....but that meant almost nothing to us. Who was this man?

Several months back, one of our English speaking prisoners wrote us a letter asking us if we could tell him where there were any "Grace" churches in the Central Florida area, for soon he would be coming out of prison and wanted to settle in this area. We wrote back and forth several times, and although his name did not "stick" with us, Brian Kelley was his name. What a blessed time we had that day with Brian.

We were able to take him to lunch and chat for quite a while.

A few years ago, in about year 7 of his sentence, someone lent him a book by C.R. Stam, and Brian came to know the freedom and glory of the Grace Message. He shared his excitement with several people, and soon they had a Bible Study going in that prison with those who believed in the Word rightly divided. Brian was moved to another prison in Florida, where he was able to procure more Grace materials and again begin a group that was willing to follow this wonderful message of Paul, the Apostle. But, after much opposition and having to live in a prison where there were many problems, many of those prisoners were moved again to a different prison in Florida. So, in a third prison, near Orlando, Brian again was able to teach a group of men who loved the Lord about the Message of Grace. It was from this place that he wrote to us. Brian says that little did he know what God would bring him to when he angrily hit another man in the back of his leg with an iron pipe and became imprisoned.

So, early in August, 2007, Brian appeared at our church door, and has been faithful in uniting with us weekly since that time. Brian was amazed at the number of Grace books in our little book rack, and purchased one book to send back to the prison for the men to read and study from his \$100 given to him when he left. Brian has studied many of the PMA Bible Studies. His special friend and companion for many years has been Ruben Gomez Lopez, another prisoner who has been released and returned to his own country of Colombia. Thanks to our Director, Don Sommer, we were able to contact Ruben by E-mail in his own country, and unite Brian and Ruben again after many months of separation. Brian is interested in learning Spanish to help those brethren, and surprisingly enough, Ruben is doing very well in English to help out in either language. Brian asks prayer for the MANY brethren within the prisons who already know something of our wonderful message of Grace, and for those who as yet do not. Thank you for your prayers and support to this Spanish ministry, that overlaps into the English as well.

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would? But God, in His divine sovereignty, saw fit to overrule Paul's personal wishes and plans and even the sincere prayers of the Roman believers in order to fulfill a much greater purpose that He had in His own mind.

Paul came to understand that God's will for him was perfect, and that the Lord was able to bring greater glory to Himself if Paul was willing to submit to what God wanted for him. Paul was not delivered from the unbelievers in Jerusalem and though he did travel to Rome it was in no way how he imagined it would be when he asked the Roman churches to pray for him.

As we read more in the prison epistles we find how God's

perfect will, while not exactly what Paul expected, was still the best option.

But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Philippians 1:12-14

Paul recognized that his imprisonment gave him an opportunity to testify about Christ in a way that he

would never have been able to had he not been in that position. The good news of Christ even reached the guards in the court of Caesar. In fact, in Philippians 4:22 we find out that even some of the emperor's own household had embraced Christianity. The message of the cross had reached levels that would not have been possible had Paul traveled to Rome as a free man, rather than as a prisoner. Paul understood that even if his body was locked away the message would still be free to circulate throughout the world. He understood that the power of God was not him as a person, but the message he proclaimed. As he says in Romans 1:16, the gospel is the "power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes." Again in 2 Timothy 2:9 Paul says that although he was chained like a criminal, the Word of God is not bound.

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## Prison Mission Association

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abuse and incarceration is valuable, it is not enough. We need to ask ourselves what we can do to try to have an impact to reduce the devastating effects of this scourge to our communities. We as individuals and our churches need to make planned efforts to try to keep people from becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol in the first place. This can only be done by committed and dedicated Christians becoming directly involved in the lives of those that are most at risk of falling into the abyss of addiction.

We can start by focusing on the most vulnerable members of our society, children and youth. Children's clubs such as AWANA and Coached By Christ can have powerful, but often undetected results. Any of us that have worked with such clubs have known the kids from the troubled homes that attend for a few years, usually causing the leaders a considerable amount of grief, and then they disappear never to be heard from again. The parents of

these children often suffer from the types of dysfunctional problems discussed in this article and the children have a much greater probability of falling into the same patterns later in life. Even the short couple of hours each week provide a chance to plant the seeds of the gospel, and in many cases such meetings are where these young souls first find eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus. Often, the leadership of these clubs might feel they are wasting their time with such children, yet we can never know how those memorized Bible verses influence them later in life. I have run across young people that were in club programs years ago that I helped with who tell me how much they appreciated those meetings and how the Bible verses came back to them when they needed them the most.

Children and youth programs are just one of many ways that ordinary believers can have a direct impact on the lives of people at risk of addiction. Mature and stable believers should seek out oppor-

tunities to reach out to people in need. Often our churches are only interested in ministering to their own people so that they fail to see what they can do to help those who on Sunday mornings are on the outside of the church doors. Yet all around us there are neighbors, co-workers, people we encounter on a regular basis that are in danger of their lives falling apart. Our response to these individuals will not only have eternal results as they come to faith in Christ, but can transform them dramatically the quality of this life as they learn to conform their will with that of the Lord.

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Paul understood and accepted that God had the authority to accomplish His will in way He chose that that Paul was simply a vessel to glorify the Lord.