

STREAMS

of Life

Volume 14, Summer 2019

Planting Trees of Life *by Esther Zeiset*

“The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago,” says a Chinese proverb. Indeed.

A tree of two decades provides a lot of benefits: it blocks noise, filters impurities from the air, prevents soil erosion, and provides welcome shade on a hot summer day. Birds find lodging and berries among their leaves. Mature trees increase property value and create both privacy screens and wind breaks.

But what if the tree didn't get planted twenty years ago? What then? Do we lament the lack of trees—or do we plant them belatedly? That Chinese proverb says that although the best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, “The second best time is now.”

Michael Clancy planted his tree belatedly. Abandoned by his biological father before Michael was out of diapers, raised by an alcoholic mother, and kicked out of Catholic school in seventh grade, Michael turned to heroin and alcohol. He spent 15 years in addiction, eight of them as a street junkie.

In 1999 he found himself at Philadelphia's Mercy Hospital, in the counselor's office for the third time, playing the “detox game”. Although he fully intended to kick his addiction, it never happened and as he attempted to sign himself out, his case worker said something that surprised them both. “I don't know where this is coming from, but there's something you're supposed to do.”

Michael knew full well where it was coming from. He had no doubt it was from God Himself. But Michael wanted nothing to do with Him. He blamed God for his problems and turned even further from Him. Within a few months Michael was homeless and robbing people to survive. His modus operandi was to fill a syringe with blood, tell his victims it was HIV infected, and scare them into giving up the goods.

During this time Michael tried to get back into detox but found that he was blacklisted because of his previous failure to enroll in an addiction program. Desperate to get off the streets, he asked a stranger, “Do you know of a church that would take me in?”

“No,” the stranger, a former Catholic priest, replied. “I don't think a church can help you. But Jesus can.”

It was a glimmer of hope. “Jesus, if you are real, save me!” Michael pled.

The next day Michael pulled off a robbery that went wrong. Well, actually, it went right because it landed him in the county jail where he went to a chapel service and heard the strangest question ever: “Do you want to accept Christ as Savior?” It seemed to be a lifeline unlike any other that had ever been thrown to him and Michael wondered why he had never heard it before. He was thrilled to respond to the invitation to invite Jesus into his life. So thrilled that he went to the altar the next week. And the next. After six times someone told him, “You know, you don't have to keep on accepting Jesus.”

Michael spent three years in prison and then nearly two more years in transitional housing. At SCI Mahanoy he was baptized by Chaplains Nelson Zeiset, a former employee of Jubilee Ministries in Lebanon, and Guy Giordano, a current chaplain of the same ministry. Michael immersed himself in personal studies of the Word, in the chapel's Bible studies, and in fellowship with inmate believers. He cites those years as being foundational for his walk with Christ and committed to using his time to prepare for life in the free world, as urged in Ephesians 5:15-16 (ESV): “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”

“I think one year in prison was like having three years in seminary,” Michael says. Still, in spite of a potential equivalency of nine years of seminary, he knew he needed strict accountability post-prison. During his time in Jubilee Ministry's after-care program he met three men whom he chose as mentors because he found that life on the streets was more difficult than he had imagined. “In prison, you might have ten hours a day to spend in the Word but on the outside, with a job and all, it's sometimes hard to find thirty minutes, and the temptations are so different.” One of his mentors turned out to be Michael's future father-in-law. Michael waited six years, however, before dating Deborah.

Today they are married, have two beautiful daughters, and Michael is pastor at Freedom in Christ Fellowship in Lebanon. He is also serving as an urban missionary in the city under Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM).

Second chances, as Michael experienced, don't happen by chance.

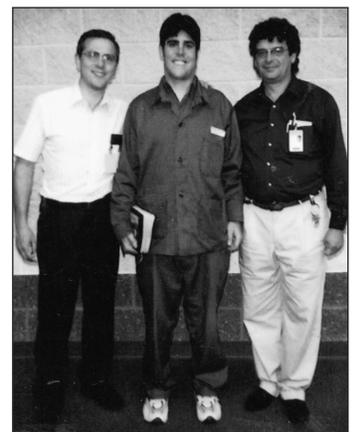
“A Successful Walk for Ex-Offenders” was the subject of a panel discussion at the Support for Prison Ministries (SPPM) conference held at Hinkletown Mennonite Church on March 2, 2019. Ryan Newswanger, CEO at Jubilee Ministries, facilitated the discussion with Rob Weatherholtz (Associate Ministry Director at Potter's House in New Holland, PA), Jim Newsom (Founder and Executive Director of Outward Focused Prison Ministry), and Boris Baxter (Development Director at Jubilee Ministries). The three panelists know of what they speak, each of them having done time in prison.

Jim Newsom felt thoroughly institutionalized after serving eight years on a 30-year sentence. In those eight years he learned to gobble the food served him within ten minutes; ordering from a restaurant menu for the first time after his release was traumatizing. The choices were overwhelming. Rob Weatherholtz lost

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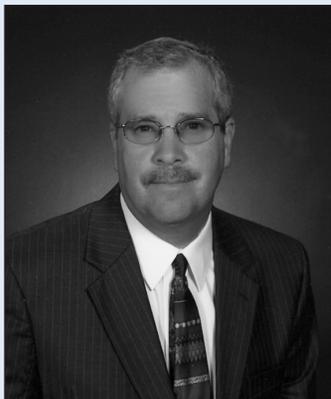


Michael Clancy and Family



L-R Chaplain Nelson Zeiset, Michael Clancy, and Chaplain Guy Giordano Circa 2002

Christianity and the Bible



Del Burkholder

I must confess I am troubled over the way the principles of Christianity are being treated in our country today by many. It seems as a nation we are also trying to erase the importance of the Bible in our nation's past. There have been great Christian examples in our American past that we can look to. George Washington Carver was one of the greatest inventors in American history. He said he would not start his day until he first read from the Bible. Dr.

Carver asked God to tell him the mystery of the peanut and, using a combination of the wisdom of God imparted on him, his own wisdom, and learned science, Carver discovered over 300 uses of the peanut. The Bible has played a role in great men of our past.

Below I present a few excerpts from chapter one in my upcoming book "Biblical Essentials of Christianity".

What some people are teaching today as Christianity

We need to be like the Bereans who went to the Bible to search the Scripture (as the King James Version states). While this does not give a free pass to usurp everything a Bible teacher says, it does hold a teacher accountable to scripture. Galatians 1:6-9 says if someone comes to us with another gospel we need to make sure what he is saying is true according to Scripture.

The Bible verses man's revelation

We need to believe the Bible for what it says as it has been given to us. Though there are many different translations used by orthodox

Christianity, they do not vary in the essentials of Scripture. They are all able to bring a person to Christ, and their common denominator is the same in different words. There is no other revelation of God which we must accept other than is written in the Word of God. All other revelation stands the chance of being tampered with man. The Bible instructs us to meditate on God's word, instruct others in it, and to teach our children. Examples are found in 2 Timothy 3:15-17, Psalms 1:1-3, and Joshua 1:8.

Biblical teaching and the church

God's Word has been used to teach morality for centuries through the core of Moses's Law. An example is in Exodus 20:1-17. Jesus affirmed this law in Mathew 22:34-40, and Jesus also taught morality in Mark 7:21-23. Paul emphasized morality through his writings (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Romans 1:19-31) and left a model of structure for how the church should operate (1 Timothy 3:1-7). In fact, some of the problems Paul faced in the early church concerning how to handle sin and the restoration of those sinners serve as examples that church leaders use today in handling these matters (1 Corinthians 5:1-13 and 2 Corinthians 2:1-11). I marvel how the Bible is such a tested and reliable tool and able to handle all church matters even 2,000 years later. There have been a lot of changes in history in 2,000 years, but the Bible is unchanging.

I leave you with this thought from a person often claimed to be a secularist, writing as an advocate of the Bible. Thomas Jefferson stated, "I have always said, and always will say, that the studious perusal (reading) of the sacred Volume (Bible) will make better citizens, better fathers, and better husbands."

Till we meet again!

Del Burkholder

GUEST CHAPLAIN: KENNY BOWMAN



Kenny & Kyonna Bowman

Kenny Bowman is a chaplain for our ministry at Lancaster County Prison. We are blessed to have Kenny and his heart for God as a chaplain. He has been either an inner city counseling ministry or a prison chaplain most of his adult life. Kenny, with his wife Kyonna, also serve in a marriage enrichment ministry for couples. (Del Burkholder)

I have been experiencing and witnessing God working in the hearts of men at Lancaster County Prison. There has been a shift in a certain Bible study group that I facilitate. The presence of the Holy Spirit is felt, seen, and heard through these men. It is a humbling experience that has at times brought myself and others to tears of joy. God has given the men and women a place of refuge through the chaplaincy team. A place where men feel safe enough to be transparent and vulnerable amongst other men and women with other women. Chains of bondage are being broken as the fig leaves are removed and people submit to God. All glory to God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

Serving at LCP has and continues to bless me. God is growing me in faith through my obedience of the deeds that He has assigned me. He's giving me the courage to be a willing vessel. In a prison setting, prisoners and staff may have many walls up. It is an honor and privilege that God has chosen me and others to be a part of helping to bring walls down and build bridges. Revival is taking place here. People throughout our communities will encounter Jesus through people who may have been written off. I am so grateful and thankful that God uses those who often appear to be unqualified.

No Badness at All



Esther Zeiset

I was nervous. What were Nelson and I thinking when we agreed to take our three young children to Camp Hill Prison for the Christmas service in 1988? My husband, a Jubilee Ministries chaplain since 1985, worked at the institution four days a week. The invitation was a rare opportunity for the children and me to see him operate in the capacity he loved and to meet inmates and staff with whom he interacted regularly. But our children were so young. Joel was five years old, Emily was nearly three, and Renee was nine months old.

In the weeks leading up to the service we prepared our children for the visit by reminding them against contact with strangers. Using language they could understand, we told them that there are many “bad men” in prison, some of whom had hurt children. We emphasized that they must stay by us at all times, and under no circumstances were they to go anywhere with the “bad men”.

On our way to the service we again reviewed the rules with our children. After a tour of Nelson’s office and the chapel, my husband seated the kids and me on the back pew where he could keep an eye on us while greeting incoming prisoners. A few guards scattered throughout the chapel. I held Renee on my lap and Emily sat on the pew beside me, pressing her small body against my side. Joel, mustering all the bravado of a kindergarten, sat protectively at the end of the pew near the center aisle.

Inmates began filing in, two and three abreast, all of them wearing drab brown prison-issued shirts and pants. Their prison identification numbers were stenciled above their shirt pockets and, across their backs, “D.O.C.” was emblazoned in bold white lettering, declaring the men and their uniforms property of the Department of Corrections. Men frequently broke step to wave friendly greetings to us. Pew after pew filled from the front of the chapel until the steady stream of inmates stepped into the row ahead of us.

“So good to have you here, ma’am,” said one with a wide smile. “And the kids too!”

“Amen!” said his friend. “Aren’t they just so cute?”

Soft chuckles and pleasant murmurs of “Mmmm, mmmm!” echoed down the row.

The chapel was filled to capacity. Two hundred prisoners in brown uniform sat shoulder to shoulder, the white D.O.C. lettering partially visible above the backs of the pews. I couldn’t shake the thought that our children, who looked around quietly in wide-eyed fascination, sat among murderers and rapists and robbers and (gulp) child molesters.

The service had barely begun when Emily stood up on the pew, steadied a hand on my shoulder, and stretched up on her tiptoes to look around the chapel. Front. Back. Side to side. Confusion etched her little face. “Mommy,” she whispered, “when are the bad men coming?”

Mortified and fervently hoping that no one heard her question, I clapped my hand over her mouth. “The men are all here now,” I said in a quivering voice.

The choir belted out, “Joy to the world, the Lord has come!” and, as I contemplated Emily’s question, a vivid picture grew in my mind.

Satan stormed to God’s throne, his finger pointed at me in condemnation. “Look at Esther! So bad! Her sins mark her as plain as the numbers stamped on these inmate’s brown uniforms!”

I cowered in shame, feeling the weight of my offenses.

Jesus sprang to the Father’s side. “But she has accepted My atonement for her sins and now there is no badness in her. None at all!”

The Father nodded in satisfaction and waved a dismissing hand at Satan. My accuser slinked away in defeat.

“No more let sins and sorrows grow,” the choir sang and I marveled at God’s astounding grace. The curse of sin runs equally deep among us all but, praise God, His mercy outruns it!

Planting Trees of Life *continued from page 1*

everything when he went to prison: his home improvement business was gone, his wife divorced him, he was estranged from his children, and he despaired of ever paying off his fines and making child support payments. Boris Baxter was released by mistake before his sentence was up, and lived on the run in a prison of his own making. He confessed to having been more scared of himself than he was of being put back into prison.

These three men, and untold numbers of men like them, wasted precious years of their lives. How could they begin again? Where to start? The task of fitting back into society after a lengthy prison sentence is more daunting perhaps than planting a forest of trees. But success comes only with effort. Even belated effort.

The White House declared April 2019 to be Second Chance Month, with initiatives to educate the American public of the obstacles faced by millions of Americans with criminal records (some sources cite 70 million, or nearly one-third of the adult working age population) and to initiate change for those who wish to regain their dignity and to make important contributions to society. The proclamation said, “Americans have always believed in the power of redemption that those who have fallen can work toward brighter days ahead.”

The bipartisan FIRST STEP Act addresses reforms to increase the likelihood of successful prisoner reentry and acknowledges that five out of six State prisoners are rearrested within nine years of their release, and more than a third of former Federal prisoners will be rearrested within five years of their release.

The three panelists at the SPPM conference would likely agree that second chances do not happen by chance. These men each took a hard look inward and, not at all liking what they saw, gave themselves to Jesus. That decision – and subsequent choices – made significant impact that changed the trajectory of their lives. Rob says it is imperative that ex-offenders get away from old associations. One must change people, places, and things, he said, because returning to the familiar old life will only be detrimental.

Ryan Newswanger says the biggest need men have when they leave Jubilee’s after-care program is for mentors to step into their lives and to walk the journey with them. Mentors, like those who interacted with Michael Clancy, ask hard questions and teach basic life skills and godly living. It’s like helping them to plant a tree. The best time to plant it was twenty years ago – but the second best time is now.

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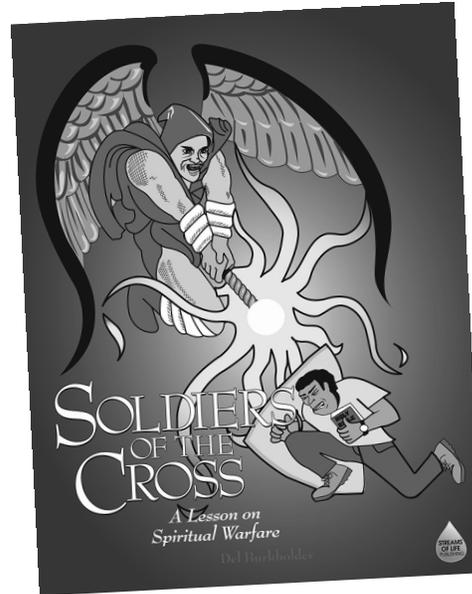
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