

Prison Ministry

Summer 2019



Sharing Jesus with people impacted by incarceration



Love as I Have Loved You

Adapted from a devotion by WELS Congregational Services Director Jon Hein

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:34-35 (NIV)

I sort of wish Jesus hadn't said that. I would have preferred him to say, "If you are wearing a cross or if you go to church, everyone will know you are my disciple." Though I know people who wear a cross or go to church and don't follow Christ. Others think wearing a cross or attending church somehow makes them better than others. Instead, as a mark of discipleship, Jesus picked a task that is, in a sense, so easy even a three-year-old can do it. So easy. And yet...showing Christian love...also so, so, so hard.

What makes it so hard when Jesus asks us to love? A couple things. First, we know that in God's eyes, love is more than

an emotion—it is an action. Say I see a homeless man and, because I'm kindhearted, I feel bad for him. That kindly feeling does nothing to fill his belly.

That leads to a second reason why showing Christian love is so hard. We know the length to which God would have those actions go. The standard for love is Christ himself. And he is awfully loving. John chapter 13 begins with Jesus taking off all his outer clothing, wrapping a towel around his waist, pouring water into a large bowl, and—one-by-one—washing the disciples' dirty feet. Man! You need help moving furniture in your office. I'm there. Your car needs a jump. I got the cables and am happy to help. Your feet stink. . . brothers and sisters, if I'm being honest, I might draw the line there. Not Jesus. Jesus' love never draws lines. On the evening of that same Maundy Thursday, Jesus predicted Peter's denial. He excused Judas to go and betray him. Jesus didn't have any expectations that people would ever be as loving to him as he was to them. He just showed love, without expecting any payback.

In 1 Corinthians 13 Jesus says things like, "Love is patient; love is kind; love never fails; love keeps no record of wrongs." To show the type of selfless, sacrificial love that Jesus showed . . . to demonstrate love that draws no lines, that knows no limits. . . that's too much. When we think like that, we need to remember that Jesus does not say, "a new suggestion I give you." He also does not say, "a new helpful tip I leave for you." He says this is the will of the Lord and King that you love one another as I have loved you.

But here's the thing with Jesus. . . every single time he asks us to do something, he also gives us the ability. Flawed and foolish humans sometimes ask the impossible. Your boss might demand that a task be completed by a certain day and time.



And you may want to say, "Dude, unless you have the ability to magically make days have 30 hours instead of 24, there is no way that gets done on time." Jesus is not flawed. He's not foolish. When he asks us to do something, he gives us the power to do it.

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Christian love gains an audience for the gospel. When unbelievers look at believers, they see a radical love within them. They experience it. They want to know more. It is going to take more than wearing a cross or going to church for others to see you are a disciple of Jesus. Think of the inmate who is convinced everyone has given up on them, or one who has recently been released and is struggling mightily to adapt. Has Christ empowered you to give a love that draws no lines and knows no limits to this person? God grant it among us all. Amen.

Unexpected Blessings

Matt Brown, a WELS pastor in Houston, Texas, shares how God used a recent visit with an inmate to bring about unexpected blessings.

Yesterday I almost did not go to the jail at my regularly scheduled time to visit inmates. I was with a family that was taking a loved one off of life support and felt it necessary to be with them during these hours. I spent time with the family in God's Word until the doctors informed us their loved one would more than likely hang on a few more days.

After some hesitation, I headed to the jail in what became a driving rain storm, yet another seemingly credible reason to skip my visit. However, the Lord got me safely to my destination. Upon my arrival, the secretary handed me an inmate request. I immediately recognized the name. When I entered his cell in the infirmary, sure enough, it was he—the individual with whom I had started this jail ministry some 18 months prior. He had been arrested in the summer of 2017 and asked that I bail him out. I did not bail him out, but I did meet with him twice. Now here I was, visiting with him again. I shared a devotion with him about the day of Pentecost. I expressed to him that he was responsible, in a way, for the gospel coming to hundreds of souls in that jail. More specifically, my first visit with him opened the door that has since led to 300-400 personal law and

gospel presentations as well as distribution of 300 devotion books from WELS Prison Ministry, 300 New Testaments, and thousands of WELS Spanish Bible studies. These resources are being used by all the chaplains in the jail.

I often forget how the Lord uses the little things we do in some big ways. Yesterday made me realize again that the Pentecost power of the gospel is working even when we don't see it.

Thanks Matt! What a great reminder of the joyful blessings that come unexpectedly to us, to inmates, and to the whole body of Christ as we carry out his mission.



For the Generations to Come

Since its inception, Prison Ministries has relied on the gracious efforts of volunteers to help carry out the great commission. Part of this volunteer base is located at Martin Luther College where students



gather to participate in the worthwhile spiritual care of those who find themselves in jail or prison. A major part of this ministry involves test correcting and encouraging. Inmates who request the Bible study booklets can complete the test included at the end of each booklet before advancing to the next one. While correcting these tests, the inclusion of positive remarks can uplift and strengthen the faith of the inmate. These MLC students graduate and can pass their enthusiasm and love for hurting souls on to members of their congregations, whether as called workers

or laypersons. Thank you to those students who have given freely of their time to support this important outreach for the growth of God's kingdom. May he bless these endeavors for the generations to come.

New WELS Prison Ministry video to premier

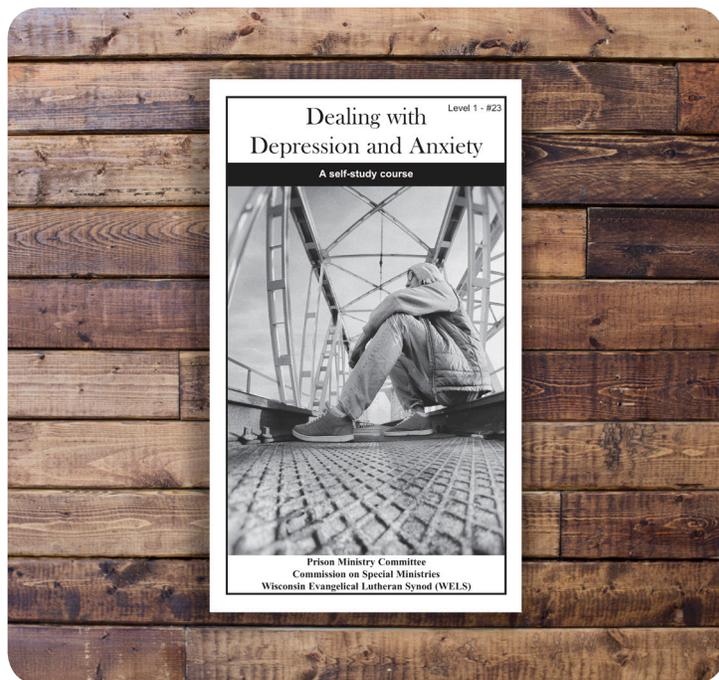
There won't exactly be a red carpet, but we are celebrating 25 years of God's blessings to WELS Prison Ministry with a short video. Produced by Boettcher+Trinklein Television Inc., the video introduces a new generation to WELS Prison Ministry and the amazing opportunities we have to share Jesus with people impacted by incarceration. Filmed in April, the video shows the blessings Jesus gives to both those who serve in the ministry and those who are being served.

At press time we anticipate that the new video will be available for some of the summer conferences and conventions in our synod. The video will also introduce people who visit our website at wels.net/pm to Prison Ministry. Check our website periodically over the next few weeks. After the video appears, invite friends to learn more about this amazing ministry and explore ways in which they might become involved.

New Bible study booklet introduced

This spring WELS Prison Ministry announced an addition to our list of self-study courses: "Dealing with Depression and Anxiety." The stress, loneliness, and discouragement of incarceration make depression a serious problem in jails and prisons. The six chapters in this book relate the real-life stories of men and women who have dealt with depression or anxiety, including an inmate and a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. These stories testify to the power of Jesus Christ as a key to gaining the victory.

This is the 23rd "Level 1" booklet we have produced and make available free of charge to any inmate who requests it from an institution that will allow us to mail it to him or her. Thank you for your support, which enables our efforts to share Jesus in very practical ways with people impacted by incarceration.



Ask and you will receive...

Give thanks and glory to God for his ability to bless us far beyond our ability to ask or imagine. Earlier this year we asked God and his people to provide the means necessary to continue this ministry at current levels because support had fallen to concerning levels. We are overjoyed to share that response to our request has been amazingly encouraging. For the month of April our gifts from individuals increased significantly in both the number of gifts and the total amount given compared to recent months. WELS Prison Ministry was also given a special invitation to request additional grant funding from the Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation. Because of these additional funds, we anticipate ending our fiscal year on June 30 with a similar amount in our operating fund as when we began the fiscal year. In other words, our total funding for the fiscal year will be approximately equal to our expenses, despite having some significantly higher printing costs than normal this year. We now are focusing on how to sustain our funding at these higher levels so that our work can continue unhindered by financial constraints in the years to come.



New location

The WELS prison ministry mailing center in New Ulm, Minn., recently moved across town to a small commercial building. Our two faithful administrative assistants, Beth Kretsch and Amy Rich, along with many dedicated volunteers, continue to distribute Bible study booklets, pen pal letters, Bibles, and devotions to incarcerated individuals and prison chaplains throughout the United States. They are thankful for the safer, roomier quarters. To God be the glory as he continues to provide for this ministry as he has over these past 25 years.

Please note that our mailing address remains P.O. Box 452, New Ulm, MN 56073. Donations of *Meditations* devotion booklets that have not been written in, have no address labels, and are no more than a year old should now be dropped off in the storage shed near the rear entrance to the building (call 507-354-3130 for directions).

Three ways to support our ministries

- 1. Pray** – As God’s redeemed children, our prayers are powerful and effective. Current prayer requests include: help us find ways to distribute God’s word electronically, especially where our booklets are not permitted; help us develop effective jail ministry and mentoring training; help us find a sustainable long-term funding plan.
- 2. Serve** – All our ministry efforts are driven by volunteers motivated by Christ’s love. To volunteer as a pen pal or a test corrector, please contact us at prisonministry@wels.net or 507-354-3130. To explore jail visitation or post-release mentoring opportunities, e-mail dave.hochmuth@wels.net or call 414-256-3243.
- 3. Give** – Much of WELS Prison Ministry financial support comes from people like you. We need it to continue to share Jesus. To support this work:

- Send your gift to:

WELS Prison Ministry
N16W23377 Stone Ridge Drive
Waukesha, WI 53188-1108

(Make checks payable to WELS Prison Ministry)

- Donate online at wels.net/sm-donation, click on “Designation” and choose: “Prison Ministry.”
- Give through your IRA charitable distribution, appreciated assets or your will or estate plan. Contact WELS Ministry of Christian Giving at 800-827-5482 for assistance.
- Direct your Thrivent Choice dollars (if you are a Thrivent member) to WELS Prison Ministry. Contact Thrivent Member Care Services at 800-847-4836 for assistance.

In Christ,
WELS Prison Ministry Staff

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