

# PRISON MINISTRY

SHARING JESUS WITH PEOPLE IMPACTED BY INCARCERATION

SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER



## **"DON'T RUN AWAY FROM THE LORD"**

*Pastor Matt Brown, Chaplain at the Harris County Jail, Houston, Tex.*

The first time I met "Darren" at the jail our conversation was brief. I introduced myself as Chaplain Brown. He gave me his name and that was about it. I had trouble understanding him because he had been shot in the neck and his voice was weak. I said, "God bless your day and see you next Wednesday."

The next few weeks every time I went past his bed, Darren was sleeping. His blanket was pulled over his head, which was the norm for prisoners trying to sleep in the brightly lit room. A few times I caught Darren in the middle of a meal as he or a nurse were pouring liquid nutrition into his feeding tube. After his gunshot wound he could no longer swallow. Everything went through that tube.

I looked for Darren weekly and eventually our conversations got longer and centered on Jesus and all he said and did for us. Darren confessed his trust in Jesus and his interest in the Bible grew, especially Bible history. Moses, Joshua, and David intrigued him. One day I gave Darren a Bible study on the book of Jonah. He told me he would answer the questions and we would talk about it the next week.

The next week we went through the story and came to the question that read, "Have you ever run away from God the way Jonah did?" He answered "yes" and I asked him to tell about it, expecting to hear a little about what landed him jail. Instead, he told me how he used to see me coming and knew that I would talk to him about

God's Word, so he pulled his blanket over his head and pretended he was sleeping. That was his way of running away from the Lord. We both had a good laugh and then he assured me that he is not running any longer.

There are still times that I get to the jail and Darren is sleeping, but he is no longer running away. When he is awake, we talk about God's Word. We laugh when I talk about what I am having for lunch while he gets liquids. We talk about heaven and being able to enjoy the best of meats and the finest of wines (Isaiah 25).

**"LIKE JONAH, THIS RELUCTANT INMATE HAS NOW BECOME GOD'S MISSIONARY IN THE JAIL. HE IS NOT RUNNING AWAY FROM THE LORD, HE IS RUNNING IN THE PATHS OF HIS COMMANDS BECAUSE HE KNOWS GOD HAS SET HIS HEART FREE."**

And now, he is quick to pull other inmates into our conversations or direct me to others who need to hear God's Word. Like Jonah, this reluctant inmate has now become God's missionary in the jail. He is not running away from the Lord, he is running in the paths of his commands because he knows God has set his heart free.

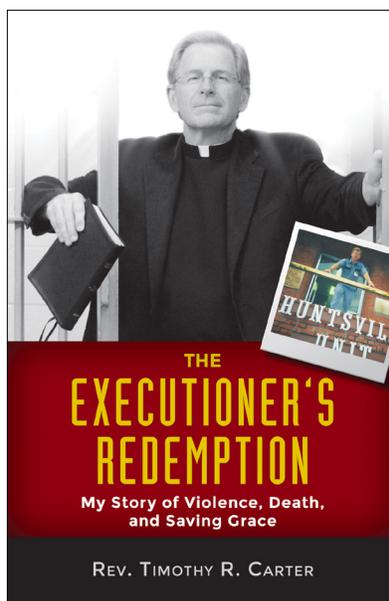
## BOOK REVIEW: THE EXECUTIONER'S REDEMPTION

Author Timothy Carter, now a pastor for the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, documents his fascinating journey from a confused, self-righteous, often violent correctional officer to a redeemed child of God who struggled with how to serve his Savior in a challenging environment. Along the way, Tim served on the Texas “death squad,” personally filling various roles during more than 150 executions by lethal injection.

Seeking a way to pay for his college expenses, Tim Carter began working as a correctional officer in Huntsville, Tex.

He often experienced various conflicting influences in this antagonistic environment. While believing he was a part of the war against evil criminals and an agent of God’s wrath, Carter used physical force and hate to help maintain order. Then the moment arrived when he considered what he had become, and he didn’t like it. Dr. Beto, a criminology professor at Sam Houston State University, advised him to consider the words of Jesus found in Matthew 10:16: “I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” Over the next two decades, Carter sought ways to implement these words by dying to self and walking humbly before the Lord.

After being appointed to the death squad, he carefully considered how inmates, victims, and the families of both were affected by the suffering caused by sin and evil in the world. Moreover, Carter grappled with his own uncertainties regarding God’s will for government executions. A spiritual struggle of justice versus mercy followed. Carter realized that he couldn’t fix troubled people, but God could. He witnessed this firsthand with an inmate named Karla Faye Tucker, who spent time on death row after committing an extremely brutal double murder. When she first entered the prison, she was unrepentant, manipulative,



**“I AM SENDING YOU OUT AS SHEEP IN THE MIDST OF WOLVES, SO BE WISE AS SERPENTS AND INNOCENT AS DOVES” (MATTHEW 10:16).**

and defiant. However, after the gospel permeated her heart, she became one of God’s sheep. The peace of God emanated from her countenance before, during, and after her execution. Her life and example left a lasting impression on Carter and many others.

During his years on the death squad, Carter witnessed many profound spiritual battles where the devil sought to destroy lives created by God. He observed death row

prisoners cling to God’s promises after prison ministry volunteers visited and shared Scripture with them. The patience and love these volunteers showed for the condemned prompted Carter to reexamine his role in the lives of those with whom he came into contact. He realized not only was he an agent of protection, but he was a conduit for God’s love. By praying for the condemned, the victims, and their families during the execution proceedings, God used Carter to convey his peace. He came to understand that sin is the problem. Jesus is the answer. When particularly difficult circumstances arose, he drew the conclusion that things went awry if he focused on

his own authority and on the earthly kingdom. However, when he focused on Jesus’ authority and his kingdom, circumstances fell into line as they should.

After ending his career as one who wielded the sword of the state, Timothy Carter wrestled with the idea of becoming one who wielded the sword of the spirit. After attending and completing seminary studies, he was called as the Care Ministry Pastor in his home congregation of Tomball, Tex., where he ministers to individuals in hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice care. In addition, he frequently visits the incarcerated from his own congregation. It is no coincidence that he serves those who are suffering or near death in his

current career just as he did while employed at the penitentiary. While conducting one-on-one counseling in prisons, speaking at high schools and church youth gatherings, he relays experiences he encountered as a correctional officer, applying Scriptural truths. Believing the only answer to man's broken relationship with God is faith in his son's redeeming work on the cross, Carter hopes that many will join "to honor God's provisions for protecting his sheep while loving the wolves."

For any reader, Pastor Carter relates a journey first to faith and then in faith that clearly shows the power of God's Word, both law and gospel. His struggle to live his faith and his recognition of how God was using him, even in seemingly small ways, encourage us to seek and act on those opportunities in our own lives. He provides vivid insight into prison life that will help any volunteer better understand the souls we seek to reach and their environment. Ultimately, the book is a powerful testimony to Christ's saving love regardless of which side of the bars the soul is on.

## THANKS...AND PRAY FOR MORE OF GOD'S BLESSINGS

WELS Prison Ministry operates on a fiscal year that runs from July to the following June. We've known this fiscal year would be challenging because the foundations that have generously supported us recently (\$125,000 in the previous fiscal year) may provide much less or no grant funds this year. Yet God in his wisdom has found another way to supply some of our ministry needs. The WELS Ministry for Christian Giving allowed us to be the focus of their general appeal for financial support in December. This was timely because WELS Prison Ministry was also featured in the December edition of the WELS Connection video newsletter. As of the end of February, giving in response to this appeal has provided over \$45,000 in gifts from brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank the Lord for what he provides through generous people like you.

Join us in fervent prayer for God to guide us to additional sources of support for this vital, fruitful, and

## EXCERPTS FROM A RECENT INMATE LETTER SHARED BY A PEN PAL

...I know [God] keeps our faith alive in us, but so does reading the word daily. 'Cause without the word the Spirit doesn't have anything to pull from when our faith begins to weaken...

...[The Spirit] was starving for those 15 years [before my arrest] that I was partying...I'm glad I picked up the Gideon's Bible in county jail. Thank you for guiding me throughout these last 15 years! Without your input I might have just gave up. We have a chance to change the world with our testimony if we're bold enough to share it with those whose faith is weak or nonexistent. It shows what God can do with a life to the glory of God. But pride can ruin a life dedicated to God if we think it was all our doing, not Christ living in us...

...We're everything with Jesus and nothing without him...

joyful work. We are seeking ways to reach out to both new and existing givers, including individuals and foundations, to help support our work. If you know of any foundations or organizations that may be interested in helping us share Jesus with people impacted by incarceration, please pass that information on to Prison Ministry Administrator Dave Hochmuth at 414-256-3243 or [dave.hochmuth@wels.net](mailto:dave.hochmuth@wels.net). If the Lord has blessed you recently and you would like to share a portion of those blessings with us, we would be humbly grateful for your support and trust. There are instructions on the last page of the newsletter for giving a one-time special gift as well as starting or adjusting a recurring gift.

## CORRECTORS CORNER

Volunteer test correctors are vital to our correspondence course ministry. Inmates submit about 10,000 tests for correction each year. More than 120 currently active correctors scattered all over the United States help us respond to each submitted test. If you're interested in exploring this role, please contact our New Ulm office (pmsec@wels.net or 507-354-3130).

Thank you faithful test correctors, whether you have been correcting for many years or are just receiving your first packet. Please remember to:

- **Correct and return tests within two weeks.** Returning corrected tests quickly helps us build trust with our "students." Inmates are eager to receive their tests and completion certificates.

We assure them that we have a process:

- The same day we receive a test, the inmate is sent a new booklet and the test is sent to a corrector.
- The Tuesday after we receive the test from the corrector, our in-house-volunteers hand-write certificates and mail them back to the inmate with their final corrected test.
- Many inmates are moved without notice. Quickly returning the tests reduces the expense of returned tests/certificates and the time it takes to try to find inmates once they've been moved.
- **Contact our New Ulm office if you are on vacation or other commitments come up** so we can put your name on hold.

To get WELS Prison Ministry news and updates delivered straight to your inbox, subscribe at [wels.net/subscribe](http://wels.net/subscribe).

## THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT OUR MINISTRY

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; send the Holy Spirit to bless the Word and the inmates who are reading it; bless our current efforts to train more volunteers for inmate visitation and mentoring.
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](mailto:prisonministry@wels.net) or 507-354-3130. To explore jail visitation or post-release mentoring opportunities, call 414-256-3243 or e-mail [dave.hochmuth@wels.net](mailto:dave.hochmuth@wels.net).
3. **Give** – While the recent appeal from the WELS Ministry of Christian giving was helpful, needed ongoing support comes from people like you. To support our efforts to share Jesus:

- 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](http://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. Your 2019 designation is due by March 31, 2020.