

PRISON MINISTRY

SHARING JESUS WITH PEOPLE IMPACTED BY INCARCERATION

SUMMER 2022 NEWSLETTER



FINDING HOPE WHEN LIFE SEEMS HOPELESS

Bob Fink, Prison Ministry Committee member

Psalm 42 is a favorite of mine. The psalmist pours his heart out to God, looking for help because he is in a seemingly helpless situation. We feel the pangs of his heart as he asks "where can I go and meet with God? ...God, my Rock, why have you forgotten me? ...why are you so downcast, O my soul?" (verses 2, 9, and 11)

Put yourself in the shoes of a first-time inmate. Last week you were out, free to decide how to spend your day. This week, every moment is scheduled, every movement dictated. And yet, amid all the structure, everything is uncertain. How long will I be here? What

will my sentence be? What do my loved ones think of me? And most importantly, what does God think of me?

We don't have to be an inmate to have these thoughts, either. Life is uncertain at times for all. We may feel lonely, or that God is distant from us. Thankfully, these are only our emotions, tainted by sin, not our reality. For the believer in Jesus, our God is always near. He is not ashamed to call us his friends. He has a future planned for us, one not filled with uncertainty, but with the sure hope of everlasting life.

Not all people understand this or know how loving and understanding our God truly is. An inmate may not want to think of God as his Father because of the poor example of his human father. An inmate may not be able to trust the Bible, or the visitor who brings God's Word, because he has never known someone who is truly trustworthy. An inmate may have a hard time believing his sins have been forgiven; it just doesn't follow the rule of "what goes around, comes around."

The writer of Psalm 42 invites us all, whether inside a cellblock or not, to where he found answers to his questions and the hope that truly filled the hole in his broken heart. He went to God. And our God is as near to us as our Bible. There we find, "The Lord is close to those whose hearts have been broken. He saves those whose spirits have been crushed." (Ps 34:18) "He lifts



up all those who feel helpless." (Ps 145:14) "The Lord will watch over your life no matter where you go, both now and forever." (Ps 121:8)

Our God is more than simply near; he is someone who acts on our behalf. "All of us are like sheep. We have wandered away from God. All of us have turned to our own way. And the Lord has placed on his servant the sins of all of us." (Is 53:6) "Christ didn't have any sin. But God made him become sin for us. So we can be made right with God because of what Christ has done for us." (2 Cor 5:21)

"EXCELLENT COURSE. I LEARNED A LOT! THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR EVERYTHING YOU DO TO HELP US PRISONERS. YOU HAVE GIVEN ME (AND OTHERS, I'M SURE) A POSITIVE GOAL. THANKS AGAIN." — HEATHER

When the psalmist writes "Put your hope in God" (verses 5 & 11), he means trust what God has done on your behalf. Reflect for a moment on all that God has done for you: God has come to a rebellious planet, has lived the perfect life we cannot live, has taken the punishment of hell that we deserved, has gone to a grave that should have been ours, and has risen to demonstrate his power over death. As we hope in this kind of God, we praise him for saving us by living for him, and no longer living for ourselves.

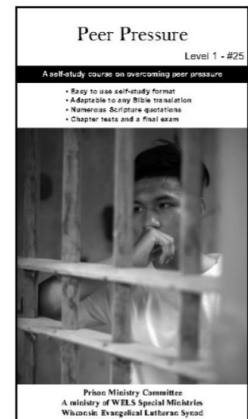
Often inmates do not know this kind of God. Many believe God is seeking only justice. That's where we come in. "We are Christ's official messengers. It is as if God were making his appeal through us." (2 Cor 5:20) Our task is to show Christ to others. As God gives us opportunities to witness to others the deeds he has done for all, they learn of Christ's love for them. As God gives us opportunities to help them with deeds of kindness and love, they see Christ's love in action. In so doing, we bring hope to the hopeless. It is our high privilege to show Christ to others as we show them Christ working in us.

PEER PRESSURE

WELS Prison Ministry has just released our newest Bible study booklet entitled "Peer Pressure." The booklet

helps inmates see that the people we spend time with can have either a positive or negative influence on us. The author uses the experience of the disciple Peter in the courtroom of the High Priest to show how followers of Jesus can feel pressure from others to deny Jesus. In times like this, fitting in is wrong. But gathering with brothers and sisters in Christ can help us follow Jesus more closely.

Peer Pressure is the 25th Level 1 Bible study. In the weeks and months ahead, we will be exploring other topics for future booklets. In addition, WELS Prison Ministry will seek to have more of the studies translated into Spanish. Currently we have 17 of the 25 of our Level 1 booklets available to inmates in Spanish. Like everything else, the cost of printing has risen substantially. Please consider a donation to help us continue to print our booklets and make them available to inmates without charge.



WELCOME BOB FINK

The Prison Ministry Committee welcomes Bob Fink of Manitowoc, Wisconsin. Joining us at the start of 2022, Bob has been involved as a volunteer in jail ministry at the Manitowoc County Jail since 2014. Bob brings the experience of both called ministry and business to the committee. He served WELS high schools in Westland, Michigan and Manitowoc from 1978 to 2008, teaching mainly chemistry, physics, math and German. In 2008 he took a position as a software engineer and Technology Specialist at Emerging Technologies of Two Rivers, Wisconsin, retiring from there in 2019. He currently serves Grace Lutheran Church of Manitowoc as a part time retired staff minister, visiting shut-ins and teaching the adult Bible classes there.



Bob's main responsibility will be the oversight of the production and printing of our inmate-focused Bible

CORRECTORS CORNER

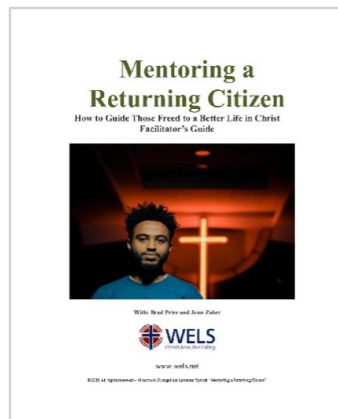
As we mentioned in a previous issue, for the time being we have enough regular test correctors. We are not seeking additional correctors of English tests currently. However, some of our Spanish test correctors have had to discontinue their service to our ministry. At the time of publication, we are seeking one or two test correctors who can read and write Spanish fluently to assist with this task. If you are interested in helping, please inquire at our office (prisonministry@wels.net or 507-354-3130).

studies. He is also currently tasked with following up on the many chaplains who ordered our prison ministry study booklets in the past.

ARE YOU MENTOR MATERIAL?

While visits to correctional facilities are still hit and miss in many areas because of COVID, there is a steady stream of inmates that are being released upon fulfillment of their sentences. This is a huge opportunity to share the love of Christ where it is really needed and a potential harvest field. A group in Phoenix, AZ is forming for this purpose. WELS Prison Ministry encourages individuals and congregations to explore this form of ministry and has prepared training for this purpose.

Join us either in August or October for an online offering of our training course Mentoring Returning Citizens. The training course will help you evaluate whether you have the gifts and abilities to serve as a mentor and, if so, equip you to begin your service. There is no commitment to serve by taking the course, and the skills that are taught and practiced have application in many areas including parenting and



interacting with people at work. So the time you invest will be well spent regardless of whether or not you decide to pursue this ministry.

Our facilitator for this course will be Prison Ministry Committee member Tom Koepsell. "Mentoring is a subject near to my heart," says Tom. "Having worked with the incarcerated for well over a decade, I have come to appreciate the challenges they will face upon release. But more than that, I have experienced the role their Savior is playing in their lives and what Jesus means when he talks about seeking and saving the lost. When you bring Jesus to such people, you learn to love them as Jesus does. It's a rewarding experience."

The course will be a combination of online sessions with other participants, videos that can be viewed individually by the participants, and activities in a workbook that will be a combination of individual and group exercises. The exact number and dates for the online session are still to be determined, but the classes are scheduled to begin the weeks of August 1 and October 3 and meet weekly for approximately 4 weeks.

To register for the class or obtain more information, contact Prison Ministry Administrator Dave Hochmuth at dave.hochmuth@wels.net or Tom Koepsell at tgkoepsell45@gmail.com



"JUST WHEN I THOUGHT THESE LESSONS COULD NOT GET ANY BETTER, I GET THIS ONE!!! [THE GOSPEL OF JOHN] I LOVE IT. GOD BLESS YOU WELS." — LLOYD

DONATION REMINDER

Because of the stricter policies for what can be sent to an inmate, we are unable to use the normal quantity of recycled greeting cards that we send to inmates. For the time being we have an abundance in stock and do not need new donations. We do still accept bookmarks for inmates. We also still welcome donations of Meditations that are less than a year old, in good shape (not curled up), and no stickers or writing on or in them. Call the New Ulm office for further details.

THANK YOU FOR THIS COURSE. [PARENTING FROM PRISON] I WILL USE IT TO BE A BETTER FATHER TO MY SONS. THE BOOK GAVE ME A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT MY YOUNGER SON IS TRYING TO EXPRESS AND WHAT HE HAS BEEN GOING THROUGH. — LARRY

To get WELS Prison Ministry news and updates delivered straight to your inbox, subscribe at 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: guidance for moving into electronic communication with inmates; for continued improvement in the pandemic situation so that personal visits to correctional facilities become commonplace; for blessings on the planned mentor training and new mentor ministries; for continued designated gifts to fund all our ministry activities.
 - 1. Serve** – All our ministry efforts are driven by volunteers motivated by Christ's love. To volunteer as a pen pal, please contact us at prisonministry@wels.net or 507-354-3130.

To explore jail visitation or post-release mentoring opportunities, call 414-256-3243 or send an e-mail to dave.hochmuth@wels.net.
 - 2. Give** – We thank our Lord and you for your helpful special offerings to Prison Ministry, which support our efforts to share Jesus with people impacted by incarceration!
- To provide additional gifts for Christ's work through Prison Ministry:

**WELS, Attn. Gift Processing
N16W23377 Stone Ridge Drive
Waukesha, WI, 53188**
(Make checks payable to WELS and list Prison Ministry in the memo line.)
 - Donate online at wels.net/donate-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 2022 designation is due by March 31, 2023.