

Set Free Prison Ministries SINCE 1971

Rehabilitation by Regeneration

If the Son Sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:36



Jesus Christ *the Resurrection & the Life.*

John 11:25

Happy Easter 2019

Dear Friends,

I would like to wish you a blessed Resurrection Sunday! The historical fact of Christ's bodily resurrection is truly the solid foundation of our faith! What a blessing to have a living Savior. We can echo the words of the apostle Peter who states, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3)!"

Thank you for your continued interest and prayers for Set Free which is now in its 48th year. Hundreds of thousands of Bible study courses have been provided totally free of charge, including postage to destitute inmates on three continents. Over the past 47 years, literally thousands have responded to the Gospel and opened their hearts to the Savior. To our living God and Savior be all the glory.

All of us at Set Free are very encouraged. Personally, I don't think I have ever seen a greater interest and response to the Gospel than what we are now experiencing! **According to our records in 2018, we received 9,342 new enrollments! During those 12 months, 1,802 inmates made professions of faith while completing their Bible courses.** This is totally 100% all of the Lord! Please join us in praising the Lord for all He has accomplished and for the spiritual growth of the many new believers!

We are so grateful to the Lord that we were able to close out 2018 in the black. Humanly speaking on December 1st, this looked like a total impossibility. But, with God all things are possible! We were able to print 125,000 Navigator Bible courses (retail cost \$750,000) for under \$40,000.

We cannot thank Tyndale House Publishers and NavPress enough for granting us this great privilege and also, totally royalty free! We too are very thankful to each of you who prayed and those who lovingly and sacrificially gave to make this miracle possible.

We are praising the Lord! He has raised up 15 additional new Set Free volunteers. We now have 140 precious volunteers to assist with the grading and processing of the thousands of courses that we mail out monthly. They pour their hearts, time, and energy into the ministry, encouraging and impacting those living behind prison walls.

This year the ministry continues to greatly escalate! Many hundreds of new requests and hundreds of completed courses from our 4,800 plus active students continue to flood our office. *Prisons are basically universities of crime. They are Satan's domain and apart from the new birth, inmates will exit far worse morally than when they first entered the prison system.* The vast majority of those living behind prison walls are hurting, lonely, discouraged, depressed and feel like worthless failures.

So many feel the weight of their sins and are seeking forgiveness and spiritual help to change the painful direction of their lives. In the past two weeks, we have received three letters from inmates who have totally lost all hope. Their sinful pasts haunt them and they feel the best solution is to end their lives. They are beaten up by life, beaten down by sin and are truly Satan's captives (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

What a privilege to be flooded with hundreds of requests for spiritual help. What a joy to share the greatest and most important message in the world - that God is a God of love, grace, forgiveness, fresh starts and new beginnings. Thankfully, where sin abounds, grace much more abounds! **Our loving Lord, sinless substitute, and sin-bearer took the death penalty for our sins on the first Good Friday** (Hebrews 2:9). Now a blood bought pardon is available to "whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord" (Romans 10:9-10)! Our sin-bearer is also willing to be our burden bearer. He says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Set Free's slogan for the past 48 years is "Rehabilitation by Regeneration." Our name contains our message, "If the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed" and "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32, 36). Our jails and prisons are fertile mission fields and truly white onto Harvest (John 4:35). So many inmates are responding to the Gospel - turning from the darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God - receiving forgiveness of sins ... (Acts 26-18).

Our loving God, through the miracle of the new birth, continues to wonderfully transform hard-hearted Hell bound children of the devil into kind-hearted Heaven bound children of God! While writing this letter we received an e-mail from a former inmate. It brought great joy and encouragement to our hearts. He wrote, "I did your Bible study courses in the 90's. I have been free for 19 years now. Thank you for your service. What can I do for you?" "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). To God be all the glory!

In closing, we would greatly appreciate your prayers for our ongoing daily expenses as the ministry continues to greatly escalate. **Everyday we operate is truly a miracle of the Lord's provision through His loving people.** January through April have been financially challenging. If the Lord leads and enables you to assist at this time, we would be very appreciative. **Thank you for your prayers and partnership in the furtherance of the Gospel as we together assault the kingdom of darkness with God's love and mighty power of the Gospel!**

Because He lives,



Phil Wagner

Christ's Greatest Trophy

The Repentant Thief (Luke 23:39-43)

On the very first Good Friday,

three men were crucified. All three were undergoing the death penalty for sins which had been committed. Two criminals were dying for sins which they were guilty of committing. The one on the center cross was totally innocent, sinless and was also dying for sins - mine and yours, plus the sins of every descendant of Adam's sinful race.

The corrupt religious hierarchy were extremely jealous of Jesus. They considered Him to be a great threat to their authority and the Jewish religious system. They had rejected Him and His claims to be the promised Messiah, and King of Israel. They rejected Jesus's many other claims, such as His eternal pre-existence, that He was the Son of God, and His equality with God the Father. He stated that He could forgive sins and only through faith in Him, could one enter Heaven. They considered Him and His claims total blasphemy (John 5:24-29, 8:21-59, 14:6).

They also rejected Jesus' mighty miracles which were visible proofs that His claims were absolutely trustworthy.

After having Jesus arrested, in a series of illegal trials, witnesses brought false charges against Him. Pilate, the Roman governor, found Him innocent and sought to release Him. The religious leaders who hated Jesus along with the fickle bloodthirsty crowd said, "Crucify Him." Pilate, fearful that a riot may develop, cowardly gave into their diabolical wishes. Jesus was nailed to a cross to be crucified between two criminals. The place where He was crucified was called Golgotha, or "Skull Hill." When our Lord hung on the cross they mocked and ridiculed Him and said, "Come down from the cross and we will believe."

On the human side of things, they were the ones who plotted and orchestrated Christ's death, which was truly the greatest injustice in history (Mark 15:16-32). **But on the divine side of things, this was the hour for which our Lord was born and the purpose of His incarnation** (Hebrews 2:9, 12:2). When Jesus hung on the cross, this was the fulfillment of God's promise in Genesis 3:15. God Promised to provide a Savior Who would reverse the deadly effects of the fall, bruise Satan's head and provide the way of reconciliation for Adam's sin-infected fallen race (Romans chapter 5).

Surprisingly, the two criminals who were being crucified also joined in blaspheming, mocking, and ridiculing Christ and His claims (Mark 15:27, 32). But, something began to transpire in one of the criminals' heart. **His thoughts of Christ miraculously changed. He turned to Jesus in repentance and believed in Christ at the darkest hours of our Lord's life and of all history.** After Christ had been rejected and abandoned by the Jewish nation, the Romans, and even condemned to death, amazingly, the repentant thief believed.

Christ was abandoned and forsaken by His closest friends and earthly family. Even His disciples, fearing for their own lives, cowardly forsook Him. They had seen the dead raised, lepers healed, demons cast out, the blind receiving sight and thousands fed with only a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish.



The repentant thief was not privileged to see or experience any of these incredible signs of Christ's deity and power. He only saw our Lord in agony, weakness, and with a crown of thorns pressed into His brow. This was the hour when the thief believed in Christ. He called Jesus Lord and believed He would have a kingdom. He believed Christ was able to forgive and give him eternal life. He defended Christ's innocence of the charges brought against Him. The repentant thief said, "This Man has done nothing wrong." He rebuked his companion in crime. He also witnessed to him saying, "Don't you even fear God?"

The repentant thief confessed his sins and said, "We are getting what we deserve." He said to the Lord, "Remember me when You come in to Your kingdom." The Lord graciously responded and said, "Today you will be with Me in paradise."

This is the reason why the repentant thief is considered to be "Christ's Greatest Trophy" and why many biblical scholars believe this to be the greatest demonstration of faith in the history of the world! Think of the joy this brought to our Savior's heart! This is why He left the glories of Heaven. He came on a rescue mission to pay for the sins of mankind. He came not to judge and condemn but to save (John 3:16-18, Hebrews 2:9).

There is so much to learn in this short passage. This demonstrates Christ's loving heart and willingness to forgive and save anyone who comes to Him in true repentance and faith. In our Lord's weakest moment, while dying, He imparted eternal life to the repentant thief! In the midst of excruciating pain and suffering, He felt compassion and cared for the needs of others. He even prayed for forgiveness for His enemies and those who brutalized Him and nailed Him to the cross. He also cares for us, our personal suffering and the pain we all experience in this fallen world.

These two criminals are a picture of the entire human race. There are many religions, denominations, and

philosophical views of life. But **God sees only two groups of people - the saved and the lost.** The saved are those who say "yes" to the Savior and receive Him. And the lost are those who say "no", reject Him, His love and offer of salvation.


One thief immediately went to paradise with Christ, experiencing joy, peace, and happiness. The other thief chose to disbelieve and refused God's love and offer of forgiveness. He chose Hell over Heaven, and is suffering everlasting punishment with devil and his demonic hosts.


We also learn the true salvation comes through a personal relationship with Christ, not in religion of any shape or form. The repentant thief did not belong to a visible church, was never baptized or received communion or did any work for Christ (These are church ordinances and important for believers to observe but have absolutely nothing to do with our salvation) (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Sadly, many so called - "good religious people" will never enter Heaven. They only have religion, rituals, trust in their own morality, are often self-righteousness but have never entered a one-to-one personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone has correctly said, "The devil gives us a vaccination of religion so we won't catch salvation!" Heaven will be populated only by forgiven people, not perfect people, but only those who have received Christ and His imputed righteousness (Romans 3:10-23, 8:1, 31-39).

When Jesus triumphantly cried out "It is finished!" At that moment, every sin that has been committed from the creation of the world until the last one that will be committed, was paid for by our Lord's substitutionary death and precious blood. Our Lord is willing to save even the Devil's rejects and castaways (John 19:30, Romans 5:12-21, 2 Peter 3:9, 1 John 5:11-13).




 Thank you so much for the Bible courses you sent. The "Straight Talk with Inmates" was amazing. I really enjoyed doing the Bible lessons. Some of the inmates here are very eager to get started with your ministry. I have been going through a rough spot lately and prayer along with Scripture is the only way I am working through it. I know that this six year sentence is going to change me, but I am determined for it to be for the better. I want to be a more Godly woman, wife, and mother. *Stacy / Jamestown, TN*


 I just want to write a quick note to thank you for the Christmas card and the Bible verses! It really made me feel good to find someone cared enough to show God's love to an old inmate like myself. I am so grateful for the Bible studies. They are such a blessing to me and also to those inmates who are around me. Sometimes these Bible studies are just what I need and help me to break the ice with other inmates here. Others have been blessed and have had their lives changed. I am thankful I have not missed a chance to share God's love and Word. *William / Beatrice, NE*


We are all under the death penalty. It is just a matter of time for all of us. None have a lease on life or are not guaranteed another day, hour, or minute. Today is the day of salvation (Romans 6:23, Hebrews 9:27, 2 Corinthians 6:2 and James 4:13-14). **The repentant dying thief was the very first convert this side of Calvary.** Since that incredible day, thousands of prisoners continue to open their hearts to the Savior. This brings great joy to the heart of the Savior and rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:7).

We too as believers can bring great joy to the heart of the Lord. May we live for the One Who purchased us with His precious blood and lovingly share the Gospel with those who at this point in their lives still do not know the Savior (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). P.W.

Letters from Inmates

 This study did not just help me, but God also used me to bring a new believer to Jesus. Four others did this lesson with me. It was beautiful how everyday we would come to the Day Room, we read the lesson and answered the questions. Thank you so much brother and sister. I hope I passed this test. This is the first time for me that I did something to the end. Thank you Lord!
Gary / Wasco, CA

 I just want to thank you with all my heart for sending me the Christmas card. You don't know how much that meant to me. I never get mail. I know you don't know me, but now I know someone cares. That meant a lot to me. God bless you. *Bruce / Boise, ID*

 I did not do classes or even try to do anything productive. I definitely usually fail or quit. This Bible study is new to me. I have to put energy and actually pay attention. I did the quiz and the tests. Now I have received a certificate. I am feeling great!! Literally, I am excited! I am thankful for the certificate and lessons and going to let others know. I will stay focused. Thank you.
Natasha / Gatesville, TX.

**Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared
for those who love Him.**
(1 Corinthians 2:9)

