



Gary Wyder
Prison Evangelist

The Florida Prison Evangelist

"...He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners..." Luke 4:18
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Soldier of Christ

George Keith Bible Jr. got me involved in prison ministry. It was a Wednesday evening of June of 1980, when George asked me if I wanted to go to prison. I said, "What are you nuts?" George was the preacher at the Stone Mountain, Georgia congregation where we were members. George was conducting Bible studies at the Stone Mountain Correctional Facility.

The work began through Lowell Vines. Lowell was a Bible teacher in the church when his wife came down with cancer. She suffered terribly and died several years later. Lowell's business failed and with all the discouragement, he turned to drinking. Lowell was angry at God and quit the church. While intoxicated, he had an auto accident in which someone was injured and thus Lowell was sentenced to prison.

Lowell came to realize that God was not at fault for what happened in his life. He repented and started teaching other inmates the Gospel. Several decided to be baptized. Inmates were not allowed to baptize others, so Lowell made contact with the nearest church of Christ, which was Stone Mountain.

George was a graduate of Sunset School of Preaching and very keen on evangelism. He found that Lowell had done an excellent job of teaching his fellow inmates and that they were ready to be baptized. George knew I did not grow up in the church and had been involved in alcohol and drugs before becoming a Christian. He felt I could relate to these men and since I was a student at Southeastern Biblical Institute (preacher training school), it would be good experience for me.

"and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also." 2 Timothy 2:2

George trained me, then he turned the work over to me. It grew from one evening a week to three evenings per week.

The congregation made me deacon for the prison ministry, and that continued till my graduation from Southeastern in May of 1982. I don't recall how many more were baptized, other than I baptized nine men one evening in a horse trailer. That experience ultimately led me to full-time prison ministry in Lake Butler, Florida in June of 1982; the work I am still doing today.

I thank God for the foresight George had. George and his wife Beverly were great encouragers to Pat and I. They demonstrated a love of Christ and concern for lost souls that is special, even in the church. George was a great mentor to me; teaching me not only the Bible, but how to work with people and how to be an effective minister. None of the prison ministry work I have done since 1980 would have occurred without George helping forge me into the man of God I am.

George lived to be 88. He was still conducting Bible classes on a regular basis up until his death. George ministered faithfully for over 50 years in Georgia and Florida. George and Beverly moved to Conway, Arkansas after his official retirement to be near family. George is survived by his wife of 66 years, Beverly and many children and foster children.

A memorial service was held March 9th at the Palm Harbor, FL congregation (where George had retired from). It was amazing to hear others share how George had helped them in so many different ways and times. George leaves behind a great legacy of love and faith in Jesus. He lived every day with his life's motto in mind, ***"Always put the Lord first and do the best you can with what you have."***

The 46th National Prison Workshop

will be held June 12 - 14th, 2019 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ in Nashville, TN. Registration, motels, schedule, speakers and more is at: <https://nmpw46.myevent.com/> or Google the title line. Primary contact is Grant Carey 615.840.7664 gcarey@tnprisonministry.org The Theme is: *Reuniting with God, Family, Community and Church.*
Quite a few of us from Florida are going, see you there!

Prison Ministry Proverbs

from Daryl Townsend, Director of Off The Chain Prison Ministry in Middleburg, FL (daryltown@aol.com)

- The desires of a man's heart are eventually obvious to everyone.
- I can't control the things (the Department of Corrections) I can't control – It used to be very frustrating when I would show up to a prison and the men were late coming up or the camp was on lock down, etc. I finally began to see it is under my control to show up. It is up to God to get the men to me.
- God is wise – no really. I knew that before, but I see more clearly now that God's precepts work in every way and in every situation. If men will follow them, things will work out. We recently had a brother reconnect with his children after 12 years. It only worked because he kept his life on God's path.
- God is wise – no really – 2. God's word is practical. All the counsel and teaching I've given is simply taking them to God's word. It is better than any pop-psychology book, program of man, or experience that I have had. We can appear wise if we simply tell men the truths of God's word.
- Sin is uglier than I ever knew before.
- My sin is uglier than I ever knew before.
- Missy puts up with a lot. (*Missy is Daryl's wife*)
- God's people are generous beyond measure. Brethren want to make a difference in people's lives.
- Many faithful saints who started out supporting me on this journey have left this life. I miss so many of them, including my mom. However, others step in and take their place.
- Working with men after prison will never be easy, but I believe more than ever it is essential to the kingdom.
- The few that stay faithful are amazing men that I count a great blessing to have known.
- The world apart from God offers nothing.
- The more you help someone, often the more they hate you.

- No matter how many times I talk to men in prison about what to expect after release, it always surprises them.
- It is much easier to say the word love than to actually love someone.
- Missy puts up with a lot! Did I already say that?
- Men don't return to their vomit after prison because of no jobs or no education or no help. They return because they begin to live selfish lives again.
- The salvation and faithfulness of these men is much less about me and more about God than I ever thought when I started.
- There is always another letter to write, class to teach or man to visit.
- There is really no satisfaction when I get a letter from a man that has returned to prison, and he says, "you were right."
- I take things too personally.
- There are a lot of faithful people working in the kingdom.
- Just admitting I did something doesn't mean I have taken responsibility for it.
- Forgiveness is commanded, but trust is earned.
- Having a close family member die is always difficult. Having a close family member die while you are in prison is difficult to another degree.
- After watching what men will do for extra or better food in prison, I understand more fully why Jesus was tempted with food by Satan.
- Be careful of drugs. They destroy lives when used illegally and sometimes destroy lives when prescribed by doctors.
- Punishment alone does not cause change in most men.

Thank you for your continued support and prayers. Pat & I are doing well and back to regular teaching schedule and classes. My classes so far this year cover Job, James, Apologetics and Authentic Manhood. We rejoice over the 23 precious souls added to the body of Christ so far in 2019.

