



Pathway To Freedom, Inc.

April 2020

Crisis or not, it's onward Christian soldiers!

By Scott McLean

Well, at least in prison we're not short of toilet paper. That's about the only "normal" thing at PTF in this season of trial.

We know we're in your prayers and we want you to know how we're faring in these troubled times. First – praise God! – while other units have experienced serious outbreaks of COVID-19 our facility has not registered a single case. We are beyond thankful for His protection.

As you might expect, we are unable to admit the volunteers who provide so many valuable services to our program, including facilitating classes. This in itself creates a considerable disruption. It is far from the only one. Our members' families are also barred from the unit for the duration and their absence results in emotional stress for the men.

PTF staff continues to operate the program, but with significant differences owing to the social-distancing regulations in effect. Along with our members, we're all masked men these days. We're unable to mix inmates from various barracks in classes as in normal conditions.

In our version of "distance learning," members remain in their barracks and work from a course syllabus for their class, committing to completing their assignments daily and submitting them to their counselors. This system is far from ideal. It's simply the best we can do in the circumstances.

And by God's grace, our victories go on! We continue to work with our members as they



Who are those masked men? *Vince Mathes (r), our member most recently released, steps outside the wire with Scott McLean. Vince is carrying his "freedom basket" of clothes and toiletries for his transition back home in Jonesboro.*

are released from prison in the midst of the pandemic. Our most recent member released was Vince Mathes. Many of you will remember him from our office. Vince worked as my orientation clerk.

No small part of our hardship has come in the area of financial support. Giving is down. Ministries, like other non-profits, are taking a severe hit during the crisis. Our work is particularly difficult to fund because of the stigma our society attaches to prisoners,

whom God loves.

We are aware, of course, that many of our faithful donors have suffered serious reversals. We ask simply that you give prayerful consideration to your continuing support. If you are unable to give at your previous level, please seek His guidance regarding a lesser amount. No gift is too small.

And we covet your prayers. Pray for us as we pray for you. We will endure, for one thing has not changed: God is in control!

Marion Butler: When at first you don't succeed . . .

By Marion Butler

Looking back, my spirit made a U-turn on the bus ride back to Newport. I had been kicked out of PTF and shipped back to my old unit. It just took a few years for my mind and body to catch up.

I was what the state of Arkansas calls a habitual offender. My charges included residential burglary, kidnapping, robbery and first-degree battery. For my first five years on the inside I was every bit the criminal I had been on the outside.

Don't let anyone tell you prison changes a man. Change comes when a man becomes sick and tired of living in hell. And change of this sort is not an event but a process.

I lost my grandfather, aunt and uncle. I got to see my parents once a month. I had to witness my parents aging in visitation. I was beginning to grow sick and tired.

The year was 2010 and I was sitting in the barracks thinking about the next eight years and how I could do them. I was not happy and when a man wants to change and does not know how that's the worst feeling in the

world. A friend told me about PTF: "Butler, you always going to church; why not go to PTF."

I asked questions. The crazy part was that my friend had gone through the



Marion Butler, the "after" version program but could not handle the regimen and got kicked out. I asked him, "If you didn't make it through, what makes you think I can make it?" We went back and forth for days until one day I filled out the application. I was accepted.

The peace hit me when I went through the back door and that's when I started to understand culture shock: no TV, everyone giving you positive words, men telling each other "I love you." I

went from chaos to community, went from "it's all about me" to "what do you need?" Mr. McLean saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. He was willing to give me a chance to change my life. I wanted that change, but I was so stuck in a pattern of destructive relationships and destructive situations that I could not handle PTF.

I was kicked out of the program. That bus ride back to the unit was a wakeup call for me. I got back comfortable in the prison cycle — but the things I witnessed in PTF did not leave me. God was in my life and I didn't know it but in those months a change had taken place. I knew I was not the same man.

But prison is not PTF and I told myself I had to survive. I didn't know what to do. In 2014 I asked for a second chance and Mr. McLean granted it. I was released from prison on Feb. 21, 2018. Since my release I have been a certified welder, an active member of my church and an usher. I now serve as associate pastor. My change would not have happened had I not gone through the PTF program. When you look at others living in that dark place where I once lived, please think of my story and remember that change is a process.



Members of Group 28, with counselor Gerren Frazier, gather to celebrate completion of the pre-release phase on April 1.



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