

PRISON MINISTRY: GOD'S TEST FOR PREACHERS

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Prior to March 12, 1990, James "Slim" Crabtree was a wild, hard-working, hard-drinking oilman. "Slim" had his own tool company and was making big bucks. But, what many did not know, "Slim" was consuming more than one-half gallon of whiskey a day, and eighteen to twenty "lines" of coke a day, and frequently "shooting-up" (injecting), more powerful drugs. But problems developed. As "Slim" puts it, "God took everything I had away." Business plummeted. The IRS took everything "Slim" had and suddenly, "Slim" couldn't support his habits.

On that day, March 12, 1990, Slim had run out of money to buy booze and drugs, and after three days of withdrawal, he became so sick, depressed, and desperate, he took his .44 Magnum Super Black Hawk revolver, put it to his head, and pulled the trigger! But the gun did not fire. The pillow case had caught between the hammer and the cartridge preventing the weapon from firing.

"Slim" said, "That almost scared me to death because I knew what, and why, this had happened. I rolled off my bed and fell on my knees, and I begged God for forgiveness. I realized this was the last chance I'd ever have. I made a commitment to God to serve Him the rest of my life in any way He could use me."

It was not long until "Slim" was invited to accompany a preacher friend to a local prison for church services. He stated that it was one of the most difficult things he had ever had to do, because he was afraid there were some there who would recognize him who knew the things he had done. But, as soon as services began, God gave him the "peace that passeth (surpasses?) all understanding." It was not long after, that God clearly revealed He wanted "Slim" in prison ministry.

In the opinion of this writer, there is not one pastor in the state who has accomplished greater things for the Lord than “Slim” Crabtree has accomplished under God’s leadership.

“Slim” serves as a Field Director for the Genesis program of equipping inmates to adjust to society upon their release from prison. “Slim” reports that inmates, who enroll in this program, are required to “measure up” to stringent and rigorous requirements for six months before they are released. If they are faithful in this program in prison, Genesis will assist them, when they are released, in finding a place to stay, finding a job, and finding a church that will gladly receive them. “Slim” also reported that the recidivism rate for all inmates released is 70%. But for those who have completed the Genesis program, the recidivism rate is only 11%.

The Lord has truly blessed this prison ministry. Listed here are some vital statistics that will amaze you:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Professions of Faith</u>	<u>Baptisms</u>
2003	330	265
2004	367	227
2005	166	129
2006	278	187
2008 (6 mos)	156	125
Totals	1297	1033

These are staggering statistics. God is truly at work behind prison walls.

We are happy to report that the Southern Baptist Convention has officially recognized the work of James “Slim” Crabtree and commissioned him as a NAMB Prison Chaplain.

The Oklahoma Baptist General Convention, likewise, has recognized “Slim” each year for the past four years by presenting him with a certificate of recognition for his outstanding ministry.

Sadly, however, “Slim” has had “little-to-none” support from his Association, the North Canadian Baptist Association. Only two churches in the association give anything toward “Slim’s” “Hooked On Jesus” ministry. Highway Baptist Church, and Twin Oaks Baptist Church, of Seminole, Oklahoma, faithfully contribute each month. The Association has contributed \$100 a month for several years, but “Slim” said he has no idea how long that will continue.

“Slim” drives over 5,000 miles each month ministering to prisons scattered throughout the State of Oklahoma. He has a very limited income, little assistance from other sources, and consequently pays the majority of his ministry expenses out of his own pocket.

Most preachers would no doubt feel they are humbly and faithfully fulfilling God’s call upon their lives. But is it possible that many preachers could have an erroneous appraisal of themselves? For instance, how pure are our motives? How self-less and humble are our objectives?

Plato, *428-348 B.C.*, said, “Everything that deceives may be said ‘to enchant.’” Julius Caesar, *100-44 B.C.*, remarked, “Men willingly believe what they wish.” Demosthenes, *384-322 B.C.* recalled, “Nothing is easier than self-deceit. For what each man wishes, that he also believes to be true.” How easy it is to deceive ourselves into believing that we are humbly serving our God, when, in actuality, we are serving ourselves!

There is no greater illustration of this principle than that which is demonstrated so often by a minister's unwillingness to get involved in ministries that would not enhance his own image nor would enhance his personal ministry. I'm referring to those ministries so many pastors and churches avoid—those “no-feel-good” ministries which include prisons, homeless, mentally ill, and the addicted.

The question has often been asked: if Jesus were back on earth, where would He go to church? May I suggest that Jesus would most likely not attend any of our churches! He would probably be found in some prison, ministering to inmates, or downtown Big City, USA, with his arms around the homeless, or some other ministry sadly neglected by pastors and churches.

If we are to be Christ-like, let us quit pretending and earnestly and honestly seek to emulate our Lord.