



Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.

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## “GOD MADE A WAY”

The road to recovery is rocky and to be successful, having someone in your corner can be, quite literally, a Godsend.

When I was told whom we were interviewing for volume three of the Berean Newsletter, I was bombarded by several emotions. I was thrilled to be sharing the stories of two wonderful and strong women growing in their relationships with Christ.

At the same time I was filled with an enormous sense of responsibility. These women were entrusting me to tell their stories - where they were the most vulnerable and where they felt the most alone. It was my job to make sure I shared each struggle, each fight, each heartache, and each triumph with Christ's help that has brought them to where they are today.

When Amber entered the system on August 27, 2013, she was indicted for conspiracy to manufacture methamphetamines. Amber had been addicted to meth for 17 years and the year prior had started using needles to inject meth directly into her veins.

Amber's story doesn't start with her incarceration. As a child she always knew about God - her grandparents were Catholic and taught her about God. However, at age 11, her mother passed away on Christmas Eve, shattering her perception of God. A grieving, angry little girl, she turned her anger to God, wondering why He would take her mother from her.

While her father turned to alcohol, Amber began using drugs to block the pain of

her mother's death. At 12 she tried to commit suicide, but her father was able to get her medical attention before she bled out on their bathroom floor. At 16 she dropped out of school and was introduced to meth.

Seventeen years later, Amber was sent to Fulton County Jail for conspiracy to manufacture methamphetamines. What may have initially seemed to be the worst thing to happen in her life actually started her on the path to her recovery. In Fulton Co. she was introduced to Berean Prison Ministries and asked God to come into her life. "I felt a peace I'd never felt before," she remembered.

In prison she really began studying the Word and was able to get clean by the time she was released into rehab at New Leaf in Peoria after serving five months. She spent three months of intense in-patient rehab at New Leaf before she was released to her pastor and his wife, where she served six months of out-patient rehab.

Around this time, the father of her four children was released from prison and they decided to try getting back together. When he started using again, Amber realized they couldn't be together and she asked him to move out around Christmas of 2013.

He got clean and got a new girlfriend by March of 2014 and at that point, an exhausted Amber decided she needed a break.

She loved him but she knew his continuing drug problem would simply take her down with him. Heartbroken, she needed a break from working and raising their children while he had moved on. She was *done* and the children went to live with their father in Texas at the end of March 2014.

By April 2, 2014, Amber had relapsed though she knew she had a urine test in three days. She ended up failing three urine tests, but after hearing nothing for weeks, she began thinking maybe she'd gotten away with it.

She hadn't. Amber was arrested while her children were home visiting for Mother's Day. Tears filled her eyes as she told me that she'd been arrested in front of her children for the second time and left them when she'd promised she would never do that again.

Around May 12 she was back in Fulton County. While there she was able to make her amends with God and started going to the Berean church services and meeting with the Berean volunteers again. She had stopped going to church while she was using, trying to hide from God.

She chuckled at that thought. "You can't hide from God. You can't just put an umbrella up and say, 'God can't see me today!'"

God has done some amazing things for Amber, especially this last time around at Fulton County. She is cur-

rently at Esther House in Peoria with her kids and without the grace of God she doubts her application would have ever been accepted.

Esther House is part of Peoria Rescue Ministries and serves as a transitional, grace-based facility for women and/or women with children. It is a long-term program that provides a Bible-based opportunity for ladies who have experienced various circumstances (such as incarceration, abuse, homelessness, and emotional and spiritual wounds).

Esther House had never had a mother and four children living on the premises. When she arrived, she wasn't even sure they would be allowed to stay since it was the first situation of its kind.

"God made a way for them to come be here with me," she spoke with watery conviction. "He's done some really great things. He's put me in a good place."

As a requirement of her probation officer, Amber must finish the nine month program at Esther House, but she's going to be staying until school let's out for the summer. Due to her past struggles with staying clean, Esther House will let her and the children stay indefinitely. She's not sure whether she will pursue her GED or a job. Right now, she's leaning towards a job so she can support her family, though she makes it known that God really does



AMANDA & AMBER

provide at Esther House.

Both women laugh and share the story of how Amanda arrived with the clothes on her back and her whites from jail. No one in her family was able to bring any of her things, so she prayed for clothes and now has a dresser and a closet full of clothes to wear.

“I felt silly praying for clothes, because, you know, you pray for peace on earth -” Amanda started.

“- and for the children who are hungry,” Amber added, getting a nod from Amanda.

“You don’t-you don’t pray for bras and panties.”

Silly or not, God has shown these women countless times that He will provide for them in all ways. Amber stopped and looked thoughtful for a moment.

“When I get mixed up in my mess, I almost forget how good God really is.” This human flaw is articulated beautifully in that simple sentence.

Amber turned to Amanda and reached out to grasp her hand. “I don’t know what I’d do without her. She helps me run my wolfpack [of children]. When I need an extra back bone, she’s always got my back.” Then, with a choked, “I love you!” she pulled Amanda into a hug.

Amanda is 37 years old and quite possibly one of the strongest women I have ever met. She has survived child molestation and rape and is a recovering addict. Her mother’s boyfriends started raping her at age four and the abuse didn’t stop until she was 12.

By 13 she was using hard drugs on a daily basis (cocaine, crack, smoking pot, drinking), trying to block out the hurt of being abused. Both of her parents are addicts and her mother provided her with many firsts: first line of cocaine, first hit of crack, and first meth connection. She struggled with meth since the age of 17.

“I don’t really like to have anyone feel sorry for me, ‘cause yeah, it was messed up, and it was hard, but it made me the woman that I am today. And someday the events that happened to me,” a tear rolled down her cheek and she sucked in a shaky breath, “are going to save someone else.”

In 2011, Amanda was arrested on conspiracy to manufacture methamphetamines and even though she had three prior conviction, she was given the PADI (Pretrial Alternatives to Detention Initiative). She graduated the program and was clean for two additional years beyond the program.

Her grandfather’s death in 2013 and took an emotional toll. He was the only man in her life that had never once looked at her in a sexual manner.

“I resorted to what I knew best, and that was to be comfortably numb, with a needle in my arm...and I relapsed.” After her grandfather’s passing, she started using everyday and, after her fourth failed urine test, she ended up in Fulton County.

“When you get set down like that, at first it’s a sad relief, you know, cause...you don’t want to be in jail, but you also don’t want to wake up everyday wondering how you’re going to get a fix, because that’s what your life has resorted to.”

Amanda has always been aware of God and Jesus. Her grandparents were Sunday School teachers and would send Amanda and her sister to youth camp and retreats. At Fulton County she started attending services held by Berean Prison Ministries and met Ken who got her an application for Esther House. Considering her history with drugs and the 11 mental disorders (that all require medication), Amanda didn’t think she would be accepted.

“It’s not really a situation that they’re used to dealing with, but they went ahead and took a chance on me.” And for Amanda, that meant the world.

Esther House has been a blessing to Amanda. For a woman who doesn’t have much family to rely on, the ladies at Esther House are an insta-family, especially Amber and her kids. Everything she has comes from Esther House.

“I’m taking classes about codependency, Bible studies...learning how to *live* again. You know, I know how to destroy myself - I’ve been doing that my whole life, but now I’m learning how to be the woman God created me to be, which isn’t the junkie I’ve been.”

Recovery from addiction is not an easy road and it takes a strong support system every step of the way starting with Berean Prison Ministries. Observing these women and hearing them tell their stories, I’m struck with their strength that comes from their reliance on Jesus Christ. Seeing God’s plan of redemption, how he rescued Amber and Amanda from the midst of their addictions and destructive patterns and placed them on a path of righteousness, makes all the effort the Berean volunteers and the ladies at Esther House put in each year seem worthwhile.

“FOR I KNOW THE THOUGHTS THAT  
I THINK TOWARD YOU...THOUGHTS  
OF PEACE, AND NOT OF EVIL...”

JEREMIAH 29:11

# LOCAL MINISTRY UPDATE:

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## FULTON CO. JAIL

When Berean Prison Ministry approached Sheriff Standard four years ago about holding services at the Fulton County Jail in Lewistown, Illinois, one of the sheriff's main concerns was for consistency. In the past, others had periodically held services there and would be there for several weeks and then miss for several weeks. He wanted to be certain that services would consistently be held every Sunday.

An agreement was struck. Ken Helmuth and Fedi Davidovics knew when they began holding services on Sunday mornings that it wouldn't always be an easy feat getting volunteers every Sunday, but a commitment had been made. A commitment that they have kept, ensuring that both the women's and men's services are held every week.

Compared to other nearby counties, Fulton Co. Jail has a small number of inmates; on most Sundays, four or five women and 15 - 20 men attend services. The number of volunteers helping with the services has grown to include Fedi's wife, Ruth, John Meister, and Bill Chasser, who plays the keyboard, as well as a number of volunteers who regularly speak at the services.

Along with Sunday morning services, volunteers meet each Tuesday with any inmate who has requested counseling. This face-to-face time allows for individual discussions with the inmates about their spiritual well-being. We have been so blessed to be able to see God working in the lives of many inmates, including inmates now released from Fulton Co., like Amber and Amanda (whose stories were featured at the beginning of the newsletter). Please pray for those who do not currently attend services, pray that God would draw them to himself.

Following are two letters from inmates in Fulton County Jail:

*To whom it may concern:*

*I cannot put all that in one page, so I will give you the short version. I've been in jail almost a year now, and every Sunday when they [Berean volunteers] are here...it doesn't feel like jail for us. For that one hour or less, I'm not behind bars. I am feeling the love, warmth, and compassion that Ken and his friends bring to us. Talking about and worshipping God with songs and terrific messages. And actually*



*listening and learning. I have learned so much in a year's time. Have them visit with us once a week also means more than I can explain. But I guess the biggest thing that I have learned the last year would be...when I used to pray in the morning, I would ask God to walk with me that day. But now I ask him to allow me to walk with him. Learning that has come from the teaching of the Berean Prison Ministry. And it wasn't a single one lesson. Thank you.*

*To Berean Ministries,*

*I would like to take this time to thank you for everything that you have done for me in my time here at the Fulton County Jail. Since I've started attending the Sunday services as well as the one on one sessions, I've been able to gain a better and deeper understanding of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I've also started to really understand the true definition of what it means to be a Christian. I've learned that our plans are not always God's plans, and that sometimes in life we have to let go and let God take control. Berean Ministries has really helped me to overcome my fears. I now have the courage to pray aloud as well as in the [presence] of others. That was a huge problem for me at one point because I never believed that I was good enough to do it. I've also been able to utilize my songwriting abilities to create songs for praise and worship, and I've been bless[ed] to get the opportunity to share my talent during the Sunday services. I have even started a daily Bible study in the cell block, which continues to grow and has even began to spread throughout the entire facility. Berean Ministries has been a tremendous blessing in my life and has shown me the path to a healthy Christian lifestyle. I'd just like to thank you for having such a great impact on my life. God Bless you and Keep you!*

# INTERNATIONAL MINISTRY: ROMANIA

In our last newsletter we told about a gypsy church in Miercurea Ciuc, Romania which Berean Prison Ministries was involved with starting. It all started when a young gypsy man, who had been released from prison, became a follower of Jesus Christ and started a Bible study in his gypsy village with the help of the Berean Prison Ministries volunteer. Berean partnered with the gypsy church to raise enough money to purchase a building where they could worship after they had been asked to leave the church they had been worshipping in with non-gypsy people. There were simply too many gypsies becoming believers. The church is led by John, who is a gypsy leader and is responsible for the gypsy communities in a number of Romanian counties.

In Miercurea Ciuc there is a community of approximately 200 gypsies who were not part of the church. They are the very poorest of the poor and live in extreme poverty. But God, in his infinite mercy and grace, began a revival in this community of 200 people and recently 45 of them committed their lives to Christ and were baptized

in a river on the edge of the city. Below is a picture of that wonderful baptism and you can see the joy in those waiting for their turn to be baptized.

Gypsy people are held in very low regard in Romania and the baptism was covered by the local new media and was on the front page of the city newspaper. Afterward, two journalists visited the community to report on whether the gypsy's lives were the same as before. They were surprised and wrote a great article about how the gypsy's lives had changed.

In one of the pictures you can find on the website, John is pictured holding a solar powered recorder containing the Bible in the gypsy language. Most gypsy people are illiterate and the recorders are a tremendous asset for them. These recorders were purchased with his own funds by the Chief Chaplain for the Illinois Department of Corrections.

How thankful we are that our God is not a respecter of social classes and draws all people to himself. Please pray for Pastor John as he leads this large group of gypsy believers. Pray that God would provide someone to assist John with the leadership of this church.

To read Levente's report and see more pictures of the baptism service visit our web site at [www.bereanprisonministries.org](http://www.bereanprisonministries.org).



# LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

This issue of the newsletter contains the story of two women who heard of the love of Jesus Christ while they were both incarcerated in the Fulton County Illinois Jail. The volunteers who hold services in the jails and prisons and those who work with providing Bibles and Bible studies to inmates are blessed to regularly hear stories from inmates whose lives have been changed by the power of God. Each month we receive several thousand letters from inmates. Some of the letters are simply a request for a Bible, but many include testimonies to what God is doing in their lives. I wish to share with you excerpts from one of the letters recently received:

*First I would like to start this letter with thank you. Not only have you helped me obtain a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through participating in this Bible study, but you have also given me a way to escape these walls and re-evaluate myself. This Bible study has been very beneficial for me by allowing me to focus on my new spiritual man and not that old fleshly creature I was in the past...*

*Although I will never achieve perfection, with all my heart I will strive to be a living example of a changed man in the Lord's eyes! Submitting to Christ has changed my whole thought process and this change will impact my children's future as they will have a father who walks with God and stands on His word and in his light. Being a new man in Christ is what I have lacked for many years. I want to thank*

*you again and let you know how important this study has been to me.*

*James Carvan*

Stories such as those of Amber, Amanda and James makes us rejoice in how God changes the lives of people.

Bessings,  
Ken Hoerr

## PRAYER REQUESTS

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man (and woman) availeth much. James 5:16.

- Additional volunteers to help in Peoria, IL with processing the thousands of requests for Bibles and Bible studies each month.
- Wisdom for the Board of Directors as they seek ways to reduce costs while continuing to meet ministry opportunities.
- Praise for those in the jails and prisons where Berean volunteers minister who had put their faith in Jesus Christ. Pray that they would continue to grow in their faith and become men and women who seek God with all their heart and soul.
- Pray for those inmates whose lives are still bound by sin that they would receive the mercy and forgiveness offered by a loving savior.
- Praise for the good attendance and support received at Berean's annual banquet in September.

## FINANCIAL NEEDS

### PARTNER WITH BEREAN PRISON MINISTRY

Please check a box, fill in the amount you wish to contribute, cut out the form and mail into Berean!

- I wish to make a onetime contribution of \_\_\_\_\_ to provide Bibles and Bible studies to inmates.
- I wish to partner with Berean Prison Ministries on a monthly basis in the amount of \_\_\_\_\_.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION &  
GOD BLESS!**

Berean's postage costs increased by 2.5 times over last year, leaving a budget deficit. Berean Prison Ministries receives over 2,000 requests for large print Bibles per month, and gives many Bibles to inmates in the locations where our volunteers serve. Berean also has approximately 44,000 inmates participating in our Bible study course. An organization has graciously agreed to continue purchasing Bibles for us, but we still bear substantial postage costs. It is important to give any inmate who so requests a copy of God's Word, and we hope to be able to continue doing so. We are looking at purchasing options to reduce costs. Please consider how you might partner with Berean Prison Ministries by making a onetime contribution or a regular monthly contribution so we may continue making God's Word available to those in need.