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# NewLife

## BEHAVIOR

### Ministries



Family Upreach, Inc.  
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## **“WANT TO LIVE LONGER?” VOLUNTEER!**

Americans are already living almost 30 years longer than our forefathers 100 years ago. In fact, according to Eric J. Schneidewind (AARP THE MAGAZINE, June/July 2017), a ten-year-old today has a chance to live to be at least 104! Schneidewind gives this suggestion on what to do with all this “extra” time – Volunteer! He states: “A growing body of research tells us that those who volunteer have lower mortality rates and less depression, along with a greater sense of control over one’s life and higher rates of self-esteem and happiness.” Actually, **the older the volunteer – the greater the personal benefits of volunteering.**

It is easy to reach this conclusion if you are involved in prison ministry. The majority of volunteers are gray or white-headed, if they have hair at all. They may walk with a limp and be a bit bent over. It may take them some additional time but they show up on time and get the job done. Plus, it is usually done right the first time!

Some prison ministry leaders cry over the lack of younger volunteers. A huge incoming wave of young workers would be wonderful and never give up on trying to attract, recruit, and train them. However, let’s be grateful for the more mature workers He has supplied. These *Senior Saints* rejoice for being able to serve in this ministry and see with their own eyes the lives of offenders drastically change through the strength Christ supplies. They have been in the church for 50+ years and have seldom witnessed significant change in the daily lives of regular church members. **Prison ministry is exciting and rewarding!** These aging disciples favor “wearing out” over *rusting out* and will continue faithfully serving until Jesus calls them home.



## **SUICIDE ATTEMPTS UP IN TEXAS PRISONS**

The first line in a February 8 (2018) article by Keri Blakinger is deeply troubling: “The attempted suicide rate recorded inside the Texas prison system has doubled in four years” (*San Antonio Express-News*). Troubling as this is, it is complicated. Consider the following contributing factors:

“I wondered if anyone would miss me. If anything would be different.”



- ▶ Texas Department of Criminal Justice is more serious about tracking mental health concerns
- ▶ The percentage of the mentally ill within the prison population is increasing
- ▶ There is a higher rate of turnover in prison staff
- ▶ A 2013 push in suicide prevention training has better defined what constitutes a suicide “attempt”
- ▶ While *attempts* jumped from 65 to 97 to 150, actual suicides generally remained under 35 per year
- ▶ The prison population has decreased, meaning the *percentage* of suicides consequently, goes up

Jason Clark, TDCJ spokesman, reports the vast majority of attempts do not result in suicide and 88% do not involve “recorded” injuries. The University of Texas Medical Branch oversees the medical and mental health care needs of most inmates. Dr. Joseph Penn is the director of mental health services there. Dr. Penn states: “We’ve had a doubling in the number of mentally ill offenders.”

## **“JUNK OR JEWEL”** **THE PINKY BATES STORY**

If you are where I was a few years ago, your self-worth is below the floor but don't give up! You still awaken to the fact that God made you and loves ALL that He creates. "God saw everything he had made and it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). Hi, friend! My name's Pinky. Yes, that is my *real* name (like a boy named *Sue*). This face beat up a lot of fists. I grew up fighting. My life was as Johnny Cash sang, "in the mud, the blood and the beer!" I clearly recall fights over my name as early as in First Grade. However, by God's grace coupled with loving Christian friends and a willingness to let God keep working on me – I no longer fight over my name. My name is really easy to remember. *Pinky* is just a servant of God and my battle for respect is over. "I can do ALL things through Christ who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). My life has been and is blessed by God as I struggle to serve Him rather than my selfish desires. I am a grateful recovering alcoholic, drug addict and ex-offender with 38 years of insanity, pain and shame under the bridge. In 1977 I was serving time in the Walls Unit (Huntsville, Texas) where Buck Griffith came to see me. Buck was my only visitor. I'll never forget his words: "Don't give up. God can still use you." Many years have passed. Like Job, I had *heard* the Lord before but I sure do **see** Him now (Job 42:5). He walks with me today. He talks with me. He gives direction to my feet, heart and mind. God made me in His image! No, God *doesn't* make *junk*! But man has the ability to take the finest jewelry and trash it!

There was a time when I felt useless. My drugging and drinking got me shot, stabbed, and lots of broken bones. Vehicles ran over me three times. I've been in a body cast from my armpits to my ankles. I've suffered a broken nose, jaw, legs, arms, ribs, and hands. My insane lifestyle destroyed 3 marriages, two profitable businesses and plenty of good jobs. I've been arrested over 30 times (that I recall). I spent lots of birthdays and holidays locked up. I spent time in a French prison and one in Mexico. I once *escaped* from the military stockade in France only to realize I made a *big* mistake . . . I didn't speak the language, was flat broke, barefooted, hungry, exhausted. I was "free" but trapped! As usual, I had jumped from the frying pan into the skillet. So, I rushed back to the prison and I asked if I could be re-admitted!

The words Buck spoke to me in prison stuck in my head: "Don't give up, God can still use you." How could my sorry past be useful to *anyone*? Our Lord said, "With men, it is impossible but with God . . . all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). By God's Amazing Grace, I was blessed in 1992 to go back to the same prison where I did time – but as a servant of Christ this time instead of a lawbreaker! Today, I constantly praise Him for bringing "my soul out of prison" (Psalm 142:7). I know that *with God*, I have endless hope. *Without Him, I had a Hopeless End!*

Philippians 3:13-14 advises us to put the past behind us, reach ahead, and press toward the prize. Before my spiritual awakening, it was easier to cop out, blame some person, thing or circumstance. I used to blame my insanity on my parents. My Mom died from years of abusing prescription drugs and Dad died an alcoholic, *a Hopeless End*. By the standard of this world, I was a lost cause. Except for God and Buck, everyone had given up on me. I had given up on *myself*. I pondered the words of Romans 7:24 - "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? ***I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!***"

Let God have His Way in your life. As hard as it is to believe, He loves YOU. Take one day at a time and let Him direct your path. You can't face anything greater than you can bear because the Lord is in control and there to help you escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). Those of us in prison and alcoholics/drug addicts are always scheming ways to *escape*. Jesus helps us escape the right way. The better we behave - the better we feel about ourselves. It helps if we get a few victories under our belt. Start with small stuff. Early on my road to recovery, Buck got me a job for me in a print shop. I was tired of emptying trash cans one day and said I could do a lot more. He said: "If you can't handle a little job, you can't handle a big one." Jeremiah 12:5 says: "If you have raced with men on foot and *they* have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in *safe* country, how will you manage in the thickets?" The key is: Don't quit! Ecclesiastes 9:4 says: "Anyone who is among the living has hope; even a *live dog is better than a dead lion!* The living know they will die, but the dead know nothing!" You may *feel* like a dog but if alive, get up (with help from above), shake off the fleas and do better.

God don't make junk. Junk is made by man.  
We see it all around us in recycling bins.  
We see it in things once useful, with beauty,  
style and grace.  
But, now it is broken, useless and left in a  
lonely place!

When we forget who made us and choose our  
own way,  
We, too, will end up useless, broken and alone  
some day.  
He said we are the branches and He is the vine;  
Without Him, we can do nothing as we all learn  
in due time.

God don't make junk - He created you and me.  
And, His wonderful creation, we will always be.  
If we will depend on Him our whole lives  
through,  
We will live with Him forever with no junk to  
clutter our view.

No, God don't make junk and He has never  
been wrong.  
By keeping His commands, we sing a victory  
song;  
Because our God, the Great Physician, never  
wrote a wrong prescription.  
And, with Him in heaven is where He wants all  
of us to be.

So, no, God don't make junk . . .  
Junk is made by you and me!

**Pinky Joe Bates won victory on June 19, 2003. His long struggle over, final rest is his – safe in the arms of Jesus. By the way, like you – Pinky was a *jewel!***