



The  
**CHURCH**  
PREVIEW ISSUE  
“...one in spirit and purpose...”  
at Austin

**ON CAMPUS:  
RENOVATE UT**  
Campus Effort Provides Model  
for the Church to Reach the City

**GENERATIONAL  
DISCIPLESHIP**  
A Father's Reflection on God's Faithfulness

**REMEMBERING  
THE PRISONER**

The God of Hope  
is at Work in Our Prisons

**ALSO INSIDE:** Learn the REAP Bible Study Method  
Word Study: HOPE

# WELCOME!

I would like to formally welcome you to *The church at Austin* magazine! It is my honor and privilege to present the flagship issue of this magazine to you and your congregation! As you read through the pages of this magazine you will see real, practical examples of our magnificent God at work. But the unique aspect of these stories is that His work is happening through the body of Christ - the church - right here in the Austin area! Look what God is doing through His people in your city!

The mission of *The church at Austin* is to facilitate faith, purpose and unity in the people of God. We will strive to accomplish this mission by providing real, practical examples of God at work in the Austin area. We do not believe that this mission originated with our magazine, but that we are simply joining with God as he “conforms us into the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). Our goal is to provide stories that encourage, inspire, and promote Christian unity in our readers.

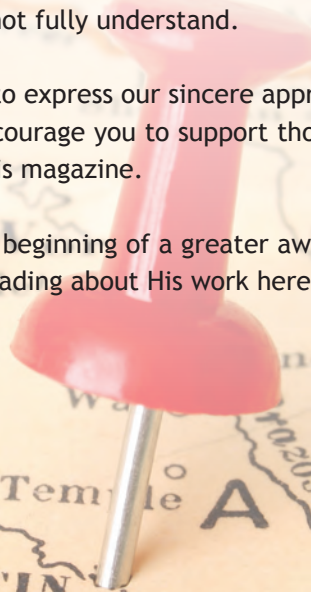


As you read *The church at Austin*, you will encounter stories of faith and encouragement as the good news of Christ is spread across this great city. You will read uplifting testimonies from Christians here in Austin that will inspire you to follow God more faithfully, as you sense His leadership in your own life. You will see the work of God played out in the service of believers throughout the city in many different environments. You will be exposed to different opportunities to share the love of God through various not for profit and other service organizations. You will see examples of Austinites who have discovered practical ways of sharing the love of God in their workplace, home, neighborhoods, campuses, and other spheres of influence. We will also let you peer into the hearts of some personalities in the city through our *R.E.A.P.* devotional section. Maybe this method of bible study will serve as a tool in your own walk with Jesus as well. We will strive to encourage you with our *Word Study* section to help you gain more insight into some of those words that we always hear associated with our faith but may not fully understand.

*The church at Austin* magazine would also like to express our sincere appreciation to the businesses and individuals who support this publication and its mission. We encourage you to support those who give of their funds so that the work of God would be shared across the city through this magazine.

Once again, welcome. I believe this can be the beginning of a greater awareness of what God is doing around you. Who knows what He might do in you as a result of reading about His work here in Austin!

Corey Wagner



*The church at Austin Magazine* is a free publication and is published monthly by Cornerstone Publishing, Inc.

**Editor**

Corey Wagner  
corey@thechurchataustin.org

**Graphic Design**

Blake Atwood

**Writers**

Corey Wagner  
Jacob Noland  
Don Bebee  
Justin McOllister  
Campus Renewal Ministries  
www.campusrenewal.org/blog

**Photographers**

Todd White  
Brian Smith  
Jamie Talley

**Marketing**

advertising@thechurchataustin.org

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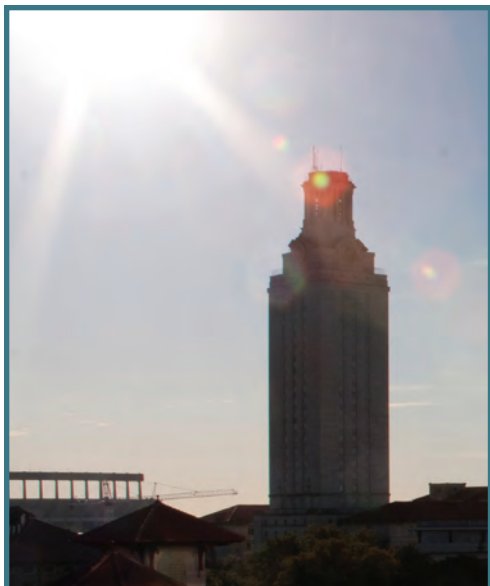


Photo by Brian Smith

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# THE BODY OF CHRIST ON CAMPUS

## Campus Renewal Ministries and Renovate UT

*“RAQUEL IS A STUDENT LEADER who has been actively involved at the University of Texas for the past 3 years. Besides being extremely passionate about prayer and her relationship with Christ, she also leads a bible study at the student apartment complex where she lives. Raquel’s passion for taking the gospel to the lost reached a new level this semester. By simply living out her Christian walk authentically and passionately, she quickly saw all three of her roommates give their lives to Jesus this semester.*

*Now, she has gone from one person trying to reach her neighbors, to having her roommate and new sister-in-the-Lord, Natalie, join her in this mission. It is evident that Natalie is very different now that God is in her life. She is filled with joy and a constant smile, and a light seems to radiate from within. Her excitement and new passion for life is contagious, and I couldn’t help but smile as I listened to her telling me how in less than a month, she is “completely transformed.”*

*Her days, once spent “aimlessly existing,” are now filled with purpose and hope, and it’s beginning to affect those around her. Natalie’s brother has also given his life to Christ, and her pursuit of God through prayer and reading her bible have left family and friends astonished at the radical change that has taken place.*

*Perhaps what is most exciting is that Natalie is not keeping this gift to herself. Together with Raquel, the two also began leading a bible study in their apartment complex for 6 girls, hoping to introduce them to a personal relationship with God. Just before thanksgiving last year, their prayers were answered, when in one night, all 6 gave their hearts to Christ!*

*Natalie and Raquel’s story is just one of the many that is taking place on college campuses in Austin right now...”<sup>1</sup>*



Photo by Brian Smith

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS REPRESENTS** a microcosm of the city of Austin as a whole. Students prepare to insert themselves into society as they spend their days on the UT campus. They represent all different cultures, lifestyles and interest groups. They come from all over the world to learn, and all are in need of the good news of Christ and salvation. There are 62 ministries on campus - representing on-campus ministries and church university ministries from around the city - each doing their part to reach out to the university with the gospel, much like the efforts of our churches here in Austin for the city. Over the last 18 years, one organization has made it their ambition to promote unity among the Christian ministries on campus for the sake of streamlining the efforts to bring the gospel to everyone on the campus.

Campus Renewal Ministries is an organization that has joined the Lord in His pursuit of hearts on the campus of UT. This unique ministry serves to create partnerships and build communities of prayer in order to take the gospel to college campuses and beyond. They accomplish this through creating partnerships between students, professors and church collegiate ministries in their particular spheres

<sup>1</sup> Excerpt taken from [www.campusrenewal.org/blog](http://www.campusrenewal.org/blog) and modified to compliment the story. You can read Raquel and Natalie’s story in its entirety, as well as many other stories from across the nation, at this site.

of influence. The vision for these partnerships is to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel to every single person involved with the campus. Raquel and Natalie's story represent just one of the many partnerships established through this ministry.

Justin Christopher, the Director of Campus Renewal Ministries at UT and one of the founding members of the organization, followed the call of the Lord to start this effort while in college at the University of Texas. He has spent the past eighteen years developing, training and overseeing partnerships between various ministries and student communities. "Part of our main strategy is equipping students to be missionaries within all the different parts of their campus. We estimate there are about 500 different people groups on campus from the Taiwanese Student Association to the Muslim Student Association; to every floor of every dorm, in every Greek fraternity or sorority, every sports team, to every club sports team, the young democrats, the young republicans - if you break all those groups down you'll see there's at least 500, and it might even be safe to say there's closer to 1,000 student groups. So we're trying to mobilize and equip students to go be missionaries in all of those locations."

Campus Renewal Ministries agrees with scripture that all Christians "are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that [they] may declare the praises of him who called [them] out of darkness into His wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) Students are sent out to the campus as missionaries with the purpose of setting up biblical communities in the particular student group that they influence. These student missionaries are trained, mentored and sent out through the leadership of their affiliated Christian ministries. Campus Renewal Ministries keeps up with each community and provides leadership to the Christian campus ministries as they train students.

Along with that leadership, they also have created a database to keep track of all the student communities. This database allows the Christian ministries on campus to work together more efficiently. "Because of the nature of these communities, they are often not going to be based out of one ministry group. If you're trying to reach the Ultimate Frisbee team, the odds are that it's not just a Campus Crusade [for Christ] team, but it's made up of people who

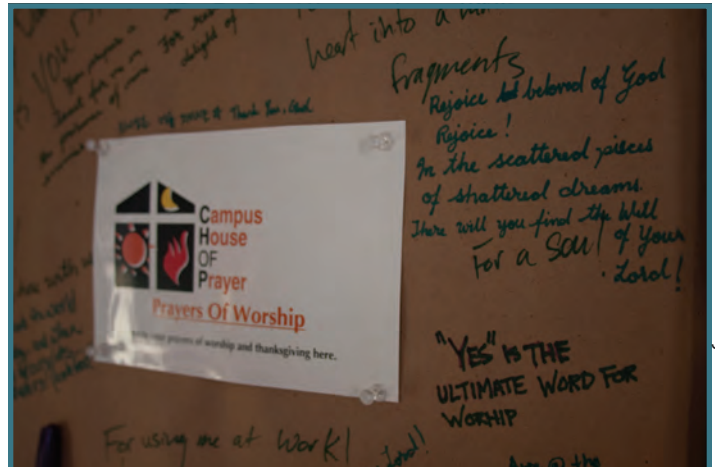


Photo by Brian Smith

have a heart for this particular ministry. There are likely students from a variety of churches and ministries there." Campus Renewal Ministries oversees and communicates between these ministries so that multiple ministries can join together to reach specific people groups on campus rather than acting individually.

A particular effort called Renovate UT is a conglomeration of campus and church ministries who have committed to working with each other. Justin Christopher said about this effort, "The Renovate UT ministry is currently a group of ten ministries who have been diligent to put on paper where all of their students are, and they are going to start connecting the dots." The desire of Renovate UT is to place biblical community in every student group on campus. "And wherever there are communities existing, we don't really care who is providing leadership for the community, but whoever is will be held accountable to keep up with that community." The effort has continued to bear fruit since its inception. "There are about 200-250 known communities at UT right now, and about 164 of those are currently under Renovate UT."

As a part of the documentation of these student communities, Renovate UT has also been able to conduct some research through these communities in order to more effectively deliver the gospel to the campus. They are able to locate some of the hindrances to the work of God and address them specifically. Some of the most pressing issues that have been uncovered through this process are the issues of pornography in males and poor self image in females. "Pornography is a really awful issue as well as

eating disorders. One of the statistics that I can give to is something like 33% of men in the Christian community voluntarily view pornography once a week or more. Something like 10-15% of women struggle with eating disorders, but 70% say that they feel bad about the way look at least once a week.” From this information the ministries cooperate with Campus Renewal Ministries to create “Catalytic Events” which are meant to address some of these issues facing the students. “When we put on joint united events, we pick events aren’t just random. They are issues that need to be addressed in a united, public way. Once or twice a year we will put on an event that can serve as a catalyst to combat stuff that’s important and real - not just a vague perception.”

One of the more encouraging activities occurring through Renovate UT is a commitment by students to pray for the campus. The Campus House of Prayer, or what the students refer to as the CHOP, is open at all hours for students to enter and pray for the renewal and welfare of their campus. Students from various campus ministries have joined together in an effort to have someone praying for the campus at all times. “Prayer-wise, the fact that we have a Campus House of Prayer... the fact that we actually have a presence on campus, and that there are students from multiple ministries that are coming in and out for 100 hours a week praying in one location, tag teaming one after another praying for our campus - that is significant. As far as Renovate UT, that is one of the coolest things happening.”

The vision of Campus Renewal Ministries and the cooperative efforts shown by the campus organizations are a great example of what can happen when the church comes together for one purpose.

So what would it look like for the church at Austin to come together in partnerships to seek the welfare of the city together, so that the gospel might reach further than if we acted individually? Imagine churches working together as we seek to bring the message of Christ to the city.



Photo by Brian Smith

Justin Christopher

Imagine multiple churches joining together in a common ministry to a particular people group, working efficiently together for one purpose. If we as Christ followers in Austin served as one, prayed as one, worked as one - how much more would the light of Christ shine in this city!

There are over 900 Christ-professing, bible-believing churches in this city - each of which have the desire to reach certain people groups in the city with the gospel. What if we, as the Church at Austin, were able to somehow streamline our efforts and connect with each other as a network of believers for the city? Might we see a more strategic approach to delivering the gospel? Could we be a more effective presence in the city, able to meet the needs of the community in a stronger, more unified way? If God were to bless such an effort in the same way as with Campus Renewal Ministries and Renovate UT, I think it is possible.

The leadership at Campus Renewal has expressed a need for prayer support from Christians in the city for their efforts in reaching the UT campus with the gospel. To learn more about the mission and needs of Campus Renewal Ministries or to donate to this effort, you can visit their websites at [www.campusrenewal.org](http://www.campusrenewal.org) or [www.texasunited.org](http://www.texasunited.org).

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# WORD STUDY: HOPE

by Justin McOllister

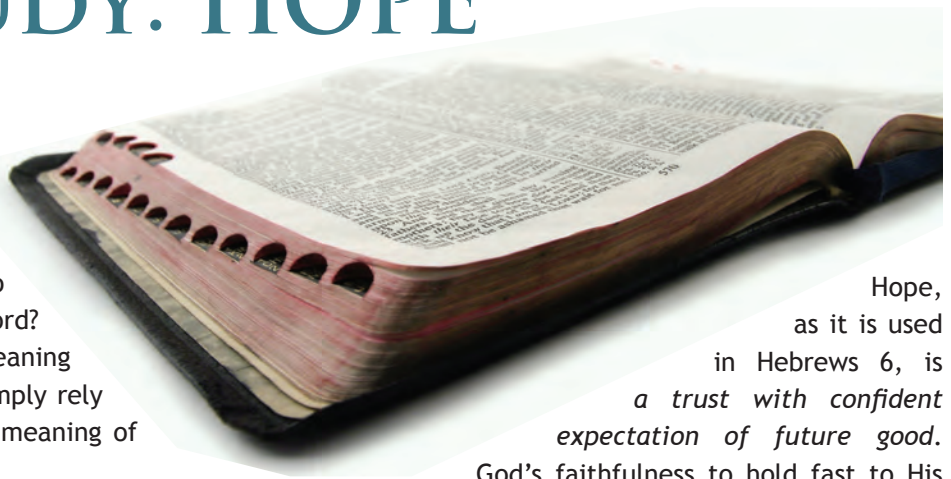
So what is hope? Is it not obvious? Don't we use this term multiple times a day in many of our conversations? Why would *The Church at Austin* see it as helpful to focus an article on the meaning of this word? The answer is that there is a biblical meaning to the term that we might miss if we simply rely on our day-to-day understanding of the meaning of hope.

We use the word "hope" in a few different contexts. Often we will make statements like, "I *hope* it doesn't rain this Saturday so I can mow the lawn." Here the use of "hope" expresses our desire for something good to happen in the future, though there is no guarantee it will happen. We also say things like, "Our only *hope* for getting to church on time is that all the traffic lights are green!" This use of "hope" is a requirement necessary for something we desire to actually come into existence, though there is still a likelihood that it won't.

Both of these uses of the word "hope" are valid and used in scripture in certain places. However, both of the uses of the word have an element of uncertainty associated with them. There are uses of the word "hope" in scripture that, if we were to assume the above definitions apply, could cause disastrous misunderstanding of what is meant. For example, how would the previous definitions of hope cause us to understand Hebrews 6:18-19, which reads,

*"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us..."*

How can hope be "an anchor for the soul, sure and steadfast", if an element of uncertainty exists within it? Would you feel sure and steadfast if your boat were anchored in a river just before a waterfall? What if you couldn't be certain that anchors held boats in their place? Thankfully an anchor is trustworthy to do its job, and biblical hope is rightly metaphoric to an anchor.



Hope, as it is used in Hebrews 6, is *a trust with confident expectation of future good.*

God's faithfulness to hold fast to His word and His promises produces this kind of hope in those who believe Him. Hope is faith in what God has promised for the future, certain that it will occur. This hope is where the Christian can find rest for his soul. David refers to it in Psalm 62:5-6,

*"My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken."*

Later in Psalm 130:5, David confirms that our hope should be rooted in God's Word,

*"I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope..."*

The interesting thing about hope rooted in Christ is that it affords the luxury of peace, no matter the circumstance. Apart from Christ there is no life, and certainly there is no hope, no peace. When the storms of life come, when the wind and waves crash against us with the intent to toss us about, we have hope. We see through our current situation to a greater purpose. Our anchor holds. God is faithful, and He will prevail. We do not see, but we believe and we trust. God has promised He is working all things for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28), and we have this hope that He is faithful to his word, just like He always has been.



# REMEMBERING THE PRISONER

By Jacob Noland

Photo by Todd White

I just got out of prison. At the Travis State Jail in east Austin, Texas. Last Wednesday night. I'm almost positive I'll end up back there again this time next week though.

For at least an hour, probably two. I've got some good friends who live there, spiritual brothers in fact. They're not the type of friends who can come to see me (yet), so as a discipleship small-group leader I go to them, willingly, gratefully, humbly, and bringing hope.

Most definitely with hope, because prisons are not generally places where hope overflows. In fact, because of overwhelming senses of loneliness and insignificance there, the enemy has turned the faucet such that hope barely drips into most of them. Sadly, to most of the men there, this hopelessness is not much different than the condition of their heart and the kind of life they led on the outside, before even coming to prison. As one of those good friends (we'll call him "Sam") recounted in a poem describing his journey from the hopelessness and despair of alcoholism and a life of darkness to one of Christ-centered hope and joy, the Lord used it to confirm something He'd been teaching me as He led me on my own journey into prison ministry: Dare I suggest that the story of all Christians can be found in that of the hopeless prisoner made hopeful by the cross and tomb of Jesus?

*There was a simpler time, when life was so pure  
No demons to fight, no hardships to endure  
When laughter and happiness permeated my life  
Everything was gold, no pain, no strife*

*But that was long ago, before Satan came around  
With his SOUL intention of taking me down  
I was easily deceived, believing he was my friend  
Beer in hand, I toasted the beginning of the end*

The only pain and strife I had in my own life one spring night in 2008 was in my thirty year old left knee, aching after a two mile run on the treadmill. Flopping down in the green stuffed chair in my living room I began flipping channels until I'd settled on MSNBC's show *Lockup*, a "behind the bars" documentary on day-to-day prison life. I was unexpectedly gripped by the darkness that to me was so palpable and obvious in the hopeless, indifferent voices of the interviewed prisoners and in the stories of the rampant sin that existed there, like drugs, murder, and deep hatred of both self and cellmate. I was saddened by how far the hearts of these men had fallen from the God-worshiping, Christ-exalting ones we were all created to have. And worse, there seemed to be no way for them to change unless God did something about it.

*Misery became constant, I was wicker to the bone  
Though surrounded by others, I was very much alone  
A heartbeat was present, but life ceased to exist  
For a lost soul named Sam, Satan sought to enlist*

Then I heard the voice, not audibly, but one I'd heard before saying, "I already did something about it...by My grace, I put the love of Christ and my Holy Spirit in you." The Lord gave me a picture of Earth, as it looks from the satellite photo we've all seen; you know the one of our planet, suspended in outer space, a perfect circle colored with swirling white, blue, and green? Except in this picture Earth was chained, and encased behind bars in a giant jail cell. I felt God reminding me that the entire world was a giant prison filled with convicted souls (including mine) carrying death penalty sentences...

*Hopelessness escalated, going from bad to worse  
My life seemed to be plagued by some incurable curse  
The wicked one whispered,  
"You're destined for destruction and despair...  
You're worthless Sam, your family doesn't even care."*

...that Jesus Christ came to visit (and ultimately set free). The more I thought about it, I realized that visiting prisoners is exactly what Christ did by stepping out of heaven, putting on skin and sandals, and willingly going to the cross for us. We've all committed crimes against God, as no one is righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10).

*Satan had won; I'd lost the spiritual wars  
My future was certain: pain, prison, iron bars  
Destined for hell, gonna burn for all eternity*

Yet Christ provided pardon for the death penalty we deserve so that now those in Him experience no condemnation (Romans 8:1). The physical version of jails, bars, and prisoners is a spiritual representation of my soul's condition without the grace and blood-love of Christ as its visitor. Could it be that coming to those in prison will mean so much to Jesus on Judgment Day (Matthew 25: 31-46) because that's exactly what He did for us? I came to my Jesus, but only after He came first to me.

UNTIL GOD STEPPED IN...GONNA SAVE THE SOUL OF SAM C!

God stepped in and saved me from similar clutches of despair and hopelessness. It became almost effortless to thusly feel sympathy for these men, whether they knew Jesus or not! If they knew Him, they needed my encouragement. If they didn't, they needed to know that a great freedom was available to them, even living behind prison walls!

*Tearful visions consumed me...love, a cross...  
A sign for those like me, for those who are lost  
There is a way out, an end to being a slave  
Freedom from Satan's stronghold, from his spiritual grave*

So I felt called to find a prison ministry...not because I had anything to bring anyone on my own. But I did have Christ in me, the hope of glory! I wasn't sure what He wanted me to do with this hope, but now that my heart was tuned in, He went even further to work on it, dealing with some of my preconceived stereotypes and preparing my proud heart with how to rightly view these men:

1) They, just like me (and you), were made in the image of God, structurally, relationally, and functionally. This inherent, intrinsic dignity means they have a purpose; their lives have value, their souls mean something! If being made in His image wasn't enough to remind us as much, that point is further confirmed by the act of Jesus Christ, who deemed their lives worthy of His, should they believe in Him. For those of us who still need further confirmation of the dignity of the prisoner, let us not forget the one whose story has been preserved in scripture for all time, who died alongside Jesus on Calvary, and was promised paradise by Him that very same day.



Photo by Todd White



Photo by Todd White

to express their desire and reasons for wanting to engage. I was then given leadership of my own discipleship group once I'd completed a few hours of basic orientation and training through the state.

Before I began with this group, I encountered some resisting voices from the enemy, about how these men were “getting what they deserved”, that they’d “made their bed and now they should lie in it”, that I should just leave them alone. The Spirit thankfully reminded me that while it was justice that they were in prison, it was also justice that I loved them! Why? Because justice is what is right and what is truly right is what is in harmony with the character of God. And the character of God as revealed in Christ is to love my enemy...like the enemies of society, the enemies of the system of the law...the prisoner. I also realized that sure, they should be held accountable and be expected to make better choices but at the same time, how self-righteous was that of me to dismiss their circumstances as completely their fault? Wasn't it nothing more than grace that I was born into a stable family that was present and supportive of me, that didn't have a substance abuse problem, which provided means of an education for me? After doing some research I uncovered some statistics that led me to realize that maybe I could have ended up there too, had I not been the unworthy and blessed recipient of God's grace:

- 1 in 54 men in America are in prison and Texas leads the way with 1 in 100 adults (over 156,000 men and women)
- In 2002, over ½ of all prisoners in America grew up with a single parent or guardian and came from family incomes between \$5K and \$25K

2) Hebrews 13:3 exhorts us to remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them. My bible doesn't say, “Approve of what the prisoners did” or, “Absolve the prisoners from facing consequences”, and I highly doubt yours does either. But it does say, “Remember them.” As in look upon them with mercy. Suffer with them, if but for a couple of hours a week. Show them compassion. Sympathy. Make a sacrifice of your time and emotional energy. Lovingly, not accusingly do I ask you this, but does this remind you of Anyone? Isn't this the way Jesus remembered our entire human race?

*The absolute promise, to be forgiven for my sin  
Came from Christ Jesus...my Savior, my best friend  
The only One that guides me, this Savior from above  
He is unwavering strength and mercy...  
and never-ending love*

Armed with these new realizations from the Holy Spirit, I asked a good friend from my biblical community who was already involved in prison ministry (**with God of Hope Ministries\***) when I might be able to accompany him in on one of his weekly discipleship group meetings within the faith-based dorm at the Travis Jail. After only a couple of visits, it was obvious to me that the Spirit was at work in the hearts and lives of those men. I felt a kinship with them even after only a few meetings similar to what I experienced amongst the body of believers at my church. They were genuinely happy to see us, open to sharing their stories and hearing mine, and eagerly hungry to study the word. The men in this program have to seek it out and initiate contact with the warden and prison chaplain in order to be involved, even interviewing with God of Hope



Photo by Todd White



Photo by Todd White

trust in...lived out in a relationship where we definitely feel His presence.

Having the privilege to help administer such an antidote to my friends, and they are my friends, in the Fourteen Alpha Barracks in the Travis State Jail has been both humbling and rewarding. Humbling in the sense that it's made me more conscious of the blessings I've received from the Lord, like getting to go outside and feel the sunshine whenever I want or getting to decide what I'd like to eat that day. I've also been rewarded with encouragement from these men's

genuine joy, sincere faith, and hunger to study the word each week as they welcome me into their corner of Christ's body, also known as the multipurpose meeting room of Barracks 14A.

- Children of prisoners are six times more likely to end up in prison and in 2000 there were 2 million children in America with an incarcerated parent

May I attempt to disarm any preconceived ideas you might have of prisoners or jails from Hollywood or the media by asking you to remember that everyone behind bars falls into one of two categories? They're the same two categories the rest of the world falls into: a friend of the world or a friend of God, saved or lost...and Jesus has spoken about our heart condition and actions toward both:

"If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners to the same...but love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great...be merciful, as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:33-36)

"So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith (Galatians 6:10)

In my opinion, because prisoners have been placed in a third, separate category, their unofficial motto (according to the state) has now become, "DON'T TALK, DON'T TRUST, DON'T FEEL." That seems so sad and broken and hopeless to me until I realize that the gospel has the antidote to that disease of despair: God invites us into a dialogue with Him through His word and prayer...to a faith in a Savior we can

On December 19, 2009 I sat on the back row of another meeting room, inside the jail with other volunteers, during the graduation ceremony for the twenty-six men completing the latest curriculum in the God of Hope Ministries' faith-based dorm program. During the ceremony, us volunteers and the "offenders" dressed in white were required to sit on opposite sides of the room, separated by a wide aisle. I was reminded first how scripture encourages us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord...that these men, while considered by most of society at large to be outcasts or second-class citizens, were extravagantly and sacrificially loved by the God in heaven who made them. I was reminded again that the Holy Spirit's bonds of adopted brotherhood into the family of Christ are not bound by the walls of a prison, the razors of barbed wire, or the iron and locks on the nine different doors we passed through each week to visit these men.

Here, in this prison this night, hope was flowing...freely and loudly! It was evident that God had delivered to us all the words of Paul in Romans 15:13 (and the motto of God of Hope Ministries): "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." This hope delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit was evident through the joy on the men's faces as they posed for pictures with their volunteers toward the end, as we were allowed to mingle...evident through the peace with which some of them looked

forward to moving to other, non faith-based dorms to spread the gospel of hope in Christ...evident through the joy in the songs they'd written that we all sang together, singing of spiritual freedom...evident through the testimonies of three of the inmates speaking of living life with new dreams to elevate Christ in their lives instead of themselves...evident in me and my friend and fellow volunteer Matt as we sensed His presence in the room...and, evident in the smile and joy on the face of a particular inmate, known in the past as Sam, before he "found real friendship shared in Christ, not just with drinking buddies", before he "experienced the kind of love that can only be shared through Christ", before he "found another way", before he was...

*Rescued from darkness...a darkness blacker than any night  
By my Savior Christ Jesus, and His never-ending light  
I took His saving hand and His promise of salvation  
And from an undeserving fool emerged Samuel...  
A NEW CREATION.*

Thank you for allowing me to share the story of what Jesus has done in my heart in the last year and a half, as it relates to prison ministry. My hope, through the God of hope, is that He put Himself on display in a new way and in so doing granted you a perspective that you might not have considered before, one that ushers you into deeper worship of Him as Friend and Savior in spirit and in truth. If you'd like to meet Samuel yourself, I can promise you he'd love to meet you...as would many more of his fellow inmates if you'd ever like to join me on a Wednesday night for a few hours!



Photo by Jamie Talley

\*The God of Hope Ministries was started in Dallas in 2001 by Executive Director Robert Dorrrough, eventually moving to Austin in 2005. It continues to be maintained by him, a few paid staff members, and a bevy of selfless Christian volunteers who donate time and skills to teach, counsel, and love inmates in local prisons. The first faith-based dorm was opened at the Travis State Jail in 2006, providing intensive Christian training and teaching to fifty-six male inmates for a six month semester. God of Hope Ministries just began the sixth semester of this program, with a mission to "provide hope to prison inmates through prayer, evangelism, mentoring/discipleship, transitional assistance, and biblically based counseling." In May of 2009 they also opened their first women's faith-based dorm at the Lockhart prison in Lockhart, TX. For more information on how to pray, donate financially, or of your time, please visit [www.thegodofhope.org](http://www.thegodofhope.org) or call 512-891-1649.



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# GENERATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP

by Don Bebee

Photo by Todd White

Deuteronomy 6:5-7 states *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”* We have asked Don Bebee, a long time Austin area resident, to share how God has impacted his children and their friends as he and his wife, Debbie, applied this scripture in their home.

The Bebee home has always been open to friends. If you are a friend of our kids, you are a friend of ours so come on in and let's get to know one another. Over the years many of their friends were amazed that Shea, Ryan and Cara actually had extended meaningful conversations with their parents. Even more amazing to their friends was that the Bebee parents would take the time to have those same kinds of conversations *with them*. As we do with our own, we try to keep our conversations seasoned with salt and light, remembering that modeling works better than mandating.

Although some of our kids' friends would join us in going to church or church-related events, rarely did these conversations take place in a formal setting. Often we had lively discussions in the vehicle as we were going to and from sporting events, concerts, rodeos, movies, or on long trips to the hunting lease. And then there were those times when these personal illuminations ran late into the night especially when the fishing was slow. A large number of those interactive exchanges happened around our kitchen table as Debbie would miraculously whip out a pot-luck meal where everyone ate to their hearts' content. How did she come up with meals so fast out of nowhere? And as always there were the campfire ponderings while roasting marshmallows to squash between two graham crackers and Hershey bars (a.k.a. smores).

These settings allowed everyone to relax and not feel threatened - to “keep it real” - especially if they truly wanted our thoughts regarding those issues of life with which they were being confronted. Those life issues did not always have the perfect textbook ending for our friends. However, over the test of time and commitment to the Truth, right choices were made resulting in their living

fruitful lives. Although our three kids are now married as well as most of these friends, for the most part we stay in touch.

Someone has said that rules without relationship leads to rebellion. Our greatest success has come as we have tended our own “family garden” as the fruit of the Spirit’s labor in us *then* produces a blessing in the lives of others. In other words, as Christian parents, as followers of Christ according to scripture as well as we understood it, we did (and still do) the best we can each day loving our children and encouraging them to develop their own daily walk with Christ. As God honored our labors of love into the lives of our own children, especially as they accepted the responsibility for their own “garden”, then the increase of their fruit was a blessing to their friends.

What we did as family we often did including some of the friends of our children. In high school, before or after school, or athletic events, their friends would come by and hang out at our house. I’m still amazed at how much food Ryan’s buddies could put away as a “snack”! The same thing was true during their college days. I still don’t know how Debbie kept feeding all those college kids with our five loaves and two fish. Those were all great times of laughter and fun, fellowship and friendship.

Whether it was hunting or fishing, going to athletic events, church, vacations, camping, the mall, the hardware store, the movies, building a fort, repairing the lawnmower, going out to eat, veggin’ out watching TV, throwing around a football or frisbee... you get the picture- their friends, more often than not, were there with us.

Both in high school and college there were times when one of Shea, Ryan, or Cara’s friends would live with us. Typically, they just needed a place to stay for awhile and sort some things out. These were growth experiences for all of us. Some times were very difficult and demanded tough love. But most times were just normal day-to-day interacting with one another in compassionate, longsuffering relationships.

Reciprocity, being the inherent nature of relationship, is experienced as we love God with all our heart and our



Don and Debbie Bebee

Photo by Todd White

neighbor as ourselves. The truth is that while reaping what we sow and doing unto others as we would have them do unto us, we try to keep in mind that today it may be them needing our words of encouragement - whereas tomorrow it may be us needing theirs. In other words, from time to time we all need a soft place to land.

My parents had a plaque hanging in our breakfast room for years that said: “Make new friends, keep the old, one is silver the other is gold.”

When asked to write an article about how Debbie and I as parents of Shea, Ryan and Cara had influenced their friends with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I initially thought to myself: “I don’t know what to say about that. I didn’t go around all of these years keeping notes on how we influenced any of our children’s friends with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We just did the best we could at the time with what we had to offer.”

I have been told by one of these friends, that one of the unique things about our house was that in the living room there was always one or more bibles on the coffee table or opened on the chair, and it was obvious that these bibles were being read by somebody. The friend went on to say that they knew that sooner or later after coming into our house, the conversation would turn to talking about spiritual matters and that they would be encouraged to turn to the Scriptures for the truth.

Upon reflection and talking with some members of our family I have surmised a few things. Since we respected our children even though we may not have agreed with them and we treated their friends with this same mutual respect, their friends were more receptive to receiving our Gospel exhortations voiced in the context of respectful relationship. Accordingly, Christian discipleship is relationship for the long haul.

Discipleship is not for a season. It's for life. Discipleship is a life message. It's not a lecturing monologue. It's about teachable moments. Discipleship is not about being perfect with regard to the letter of the Law. Discipleship is about being persevering with regard to the Love of the Light of the Lawgiver. Discipleship is not about self-righteously saying the right answers. It's about selflessly serving with the right attitudes.

So come on in, the door is always open, or it is supposed to be. If not, then ring the bell or pound on it 'till we get there. Due to our human nature, your patience is appreciated. However, sometimes the lights are on but nobody is home. We believe that relationships are designed to grow in mutual respect. In other words, none of us are perfect. None of us have "arrived". None of us are going to get it right every time.

*"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you."*  
(John 15:12-15)

The love of Jesus love never fails. Has someone's love ever failed you or has your love ever failed someone else? For whatever bizarre reasons, we tend to fail those we love the most and be assured that this writer is no exception to the rule. We are exhorted in Scripture that the goal of our instruction, our personal discipline, our disciple making, our relationship building, our friendships, should be love, God's love, from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. As He calls us friends, so let us be friends to one another.



Photo by Todd White

# R.E.A.P.

## Read. Examine. Apply. Pray.

The R.E.A.P. method is a simple, structured method designed to serve you in growth with Christ. The goal is to develop a healthy habit of spending regular time with the Lord. Be flexible in how you use it. Here are some simple instructions detailing how to complete your R.E.A.P. session for the day.

### 1. Choose your scriptures for the day.

This may come from a bible-reading plan or you can choose any passages of scripture you want. We recommend reading progressively through entire books of the bible over a period of time. Not only does this approach provide some structure as well as something to look forward to each day as you read, but it also allows you to read everything that God has intended for you to see in scripture.

### 2. Read - Read the passage(s) for the day.

As you read, pay attention to what is written. Open your heart to what the Lord would have for you today. Remember the words of Hebrews 4:12, *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”* Spend some time reflecting on what you’ve read.

Write the key text(s) that stood out to you as you read. This will be centerpiece of the day’s journal entry.

### 3. Examine - Examine and write about what you read.

This step can look different depending on the amount of time you have. It can be as simple as jotting down your thoughts about what was written, or it can be an in-depth “study” where you examine the context of the passage (who was it written to, when, for what purpose, etc.)



### 4. Apply - Apply the scripture to your life.

Allow God’s word to act as a mirror, showing you the areas where your life can change to better reflect Him in you. Write out how you will be obedient to the Lord in light of what you have just read.

### 5. Pray

Pray through the truths that were revealed during this time in God’s word, and write your prayer in the journal entry.

### 6. Give your day’s journal entry a title and a date.

Many people keep a daily journal devoted to R.E.A.P. If you want to keep a journal, create a table of contents (date, scripture, title, and page #) at the beginning of the journal.

# R.E.A.P. // HEARING AND DOING

Read. Examine. Apply. Pray.

## READ

Key text: Matthew 7:24-25

*“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.”*

## EXAMINE

If you hear the words of Jesus and put them into practice, Jesus has compared you to a wise builder who put his house on a rock and withstood the rain, wind and flood. This advice came from Jesus as he finished up the Sermon on the Mount, which covered the chapters Matthew 5-7. Throughout these three chapters, Jesus addresses many attributes for His followers including proper attitudes and behaviors, loving our enemies, forgiveness, fasting, praying, having a singular focus on the Kingdom and God’s will, etc. This comparison given in the key text is in conclusion to the sermon.

## APPLY

I will hear the words of Jesus today, and I will do them in obedience and love. I will not act righteous for the praise of man, but humbly in obedience to the Lord. I will trust God, knowing that the attributes He spoke of cannot be truly attained by any human effort, but only by the working of the Holy Spirit.

## PRAY

Lord, you spoke the words of life when you taught the Sermon on the Mount. However, there is no way I could ever be what you’ve challenged me to be unless you work it within me. So I will trust you, desiring a life that exhibits these qualities that reflect your character. As I read your word, impress them on my heart and expose my sin so that I might repent of it for your sake. May I look more like you today, for your glory. Amen.



Corey Wagner is the Executive Director of *The Church at Austin Magazine*. He and his family have been residents of Austin since 2004.



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# WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Send your story to *The church at Austin*



- Do you have a story to tell of God's work?
- Are you or someone you know experiencing the gospel in your sphere of influence?
- Is Jesus making His way to your neighborhood, your softball team, scrap booking club, birthday parties, golf outing, etc.?
- Is someone you know in the habit of creating environments that allow gospel-centered relationships to begin?

If so, we would love for you to share your story with the city!

*The church at Austin* wants to share these real examples of the gospel in the city so that other Christians might be encouraged to do the same in their own spheres of influence. Your story may seem ordinary to you, but you never know what could come when others hear it!

**If you have a story to tell, send it to**  
**[stories@thechurchataustin.org](mailto:stories@thechurchataustin.org)**

We would love to hear from you!

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