



# OPENING DOORS<sup>sm</sup>

A Prison Ministry

April 2006

## I Have Placed Before You An Open Door (Rev. 3:8)

A word from Deborah L. Roeger, Executive Director



I thought you might want to meet Timothy Steward, the winner of our 2005 Writing Competition, so I am dedicating this space to him so he can introduce himself.

See his entry on page two.

*"I'm 22 now. My grandfather was a preacher and died when I was 12 years old. After he died, I started to question my faith which led me to become atheist. My mom has been married and divorced 4 times leaving me without a stable father figure. My father beat us as children and got his rights taken away when I was 10 years old. After that, I didn't see or talk to him till I was 17 years old. I was locked up 5 days after my 18th birthday and I've been locked up since. My skills from Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> are still being used. My faith is stronger than ever. God has done so many wonderful things in my life."*  
See: About the author continued on page 4

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Winner Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> 2005 Writing Competition
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## Jail Break...of a Different Kind

by Chuck Avey (aka "Cheerful Chuck")

Jail Break! How does this sound in your ears? What images are conjured up when you hear that there has been a jailbreak anywhere near your area? Well, allow me to tell you of such an event - of a different kind than imagined. But first . . . My prison story started in March of 2004, when I announced at a church committee meeting that my last day of work was going to be March 21. The person sitting at the other end of the table pointed her finger at me and said, "I want to talk to you." I later came to know her as "Dancing Diane" (Clever) her "adjective name" as an Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> program facilitator. She pulled me aside and asked me to consider going to prison. My initial reaction was what you would expect. However, within a few weeks, I agreed to be a participant, along with the inmates, so I could check out the program. The long and short of it is after meeting and talking with Debbie at my first prison experience, I decided to "give it a try." I have had many opportunities to be a facilitator at Marion and Warren Correctional Facilities in Ohio after my initial program experience in Mansfield. I love the mingling and sharing with the men and having an impact in their lives. This program is so powerful! I have seen men weep, and I have wept. Men who have been "in your face" all their lives change - some sooner than others. This is such a

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***"The program is so powerful....men change...it is a life-changing experience."***

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dynamic program in itself; but for the men, it is a life-changing experience. It causes them to rethink their relationship with God, their families and with their fellow inmates. On the afternoon of the

*continued on page 2*

## From Atheist to Believer

By Timothy A Steward, Ross Correctional Institution  
**Winner Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> 2005 Writing Competition!**

When I first attended Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> it was fun and interactive, but it really didn't change much of my behavior at first. It just didn't have a lot of impact. Two or three weeks later I attended another program called Kairos. During this program I truly realized the impact Opening Doors had on my life. After Opening Doors I more or less went back to being the same way I was before. And I wrote Opening Doors off as a wonderful experience. Occasionally seeing someone I went through the program with and saying hi. I really didn't take anything I noticed with me except those acquaintances I met during the program. Then two to three weeks later I attended Kairos and that is when I would realize the real affect Opening Doors had on my life. Kairos is a four day long religious retreat. You got fed and got to eat all the cookies you could, so I went. In Opening Doors when asked what someone wouldn't know about me after meeting me for the first time I revealed that I was an atheist. Once again I revealed to the people in Kairos that I was an atheist. Now this is important because I was proud to be an atheist. In both instances I told Christians that I didn't believe in their god, yet there was no judgment in the eyes of those I told.

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***I truly believe with all my heart and soul that Opening Doors planted a seed that was later watered to bring me to my Savior.***

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During Kairos I felt what I now know to be the Holy Spirit pulling on my heart strings. I fought it and actually made it go away a couple of times, but after a few days I couldn't deny what I was feeling was in fact the Holy Spirit. I had read the Bible and a lot of other literature that strengthened my belief that Jesus Christ was *not* the Son of God and that there really was no god; just us and possibly other life somewhere else in the universe. That knowledge could not shelter me from the Holy Spirit, so I got saved and yet again picked up more books that held evidence for God and Jesus Christ. I am now proud to say I'm a born again Christian. I truly believe with all my heart and

program's third day, and shortly before program "graduation," they have a chance to give us feedback on the experience of Opening Doors.<sup>sm</sup> It is overwhelmingly positive as the men appreciate our coming, sharing with them and providing tools for them to use for the rest of their lives. While the blessing of this shared experience is theirs, it is also ours. Regarding the "jail break" that I mentioned at the beginning of my story: we don't encourage *real* jail breaks, but one of the favorite segments of Opening Doors is a "light and lively" activity that the men enjoy called "Jail Break." The light segments break up the day, allow everyone to move around the room, practice teamwork and interaction, and let our hair down (which is a little tough for a bald guy like me). Going to prison is a

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***While the blessing of this shared [Opening Doors] experience is theirs, it is also ours.***

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cherished opportunity that I covet, but only as a volunteer. I jokingly share with my friends on the outside that I must have been very bad, again and again since I have to go back. Of course, I get some strange looks until I explain myself. Nevertheless, it has provided opportunities to share my love of Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> and to see the interest in their faces. God promises an opening door for us to walk through. It is a blessing to watch His Spirit work wonders in the lives of men and women, even those who are incarcerated for a time. ♥

**About the author:** Chuck Avey has co-facilitated 8 Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> programs since retiring from Bank One in 2004. He and his wife Donna attend First Presbyterian Church of Westerville. In their free time they enjoy traveling and bird watching.

**Editor's note:** Opening Doors would benefit from having more men become involved as program participants or co-facilitators. Will you pray and ask God whether you would be one?

Programs are now being offered in male & female juvenile correctional facilities. New facilitators, men & women, with a passion to work with these kids are needed. You supply the "heart" and Opening Doors will provide the training and the materials you need.



## Opening God's Word

### ***No Room for Favoritism***

*"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons...'"*  
Acts 10: 34

Peter is preaching to the Gentiles concerning the fact that they too can have salvation because God doesn't show favoritism to anybody. Peter is letting them know that God doesn't care about race, color, age, sex, or creed. God welcomes everybody.

The whole time that I was on the street I showed a lot of favoritism. I even continued it when I was first incarcerated. Like many, I would always treat some people better than others, even going so far as being cruel to those who I literally couldn't stand.

This is common in prison. It's actually, often, that much more intense in here. If you're not a part of the "in crowd," then you're not welcome at all anywhere within the facility. The favoritism in here can stretch to some of the staff. It's frequently out of control. Cruelty always plays a part in it. The Scribes and the Pharisees were masters at showing favoritism and cruelty. Favoritism can even be found within the Church itself.

Some of the cruelty that comes from favoritism in prison is people getting picked upon because of the nature of their crime, the way they look, and because others may see them as weak. And it just keeps getting worse with each passing day.

The Bible teaches us that there is no room for favoritism in God's house. We are all equal in His sight. He showed me how to overlook people's flaws and to love and treat everybody the same, just as He does. The Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> program stresses this Biblical Truth. First and foremost we learn through Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> that all are equal. Let us stop and ask ourselves if we are showing favoritism, or showing God's love.

May God bless you all.– Shane T. Fickel

### ***Reflective Question:***

Who do you show favoritism to?

### ***Scripture References:***

**Psalm 118: 14-29 Acts 10:34-43 Colossians 3:1-4 Mark 16:1-8**

**About the Author:** Shane T. Fickel is currently at Ross Correctional and is a graduate of and facilitator for Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup>. Shane has completed numerous programs while at Ross Correctional Institution and is currently participating in "Discipling Another to love Jesus" (DA2LJ).

### **Prayers for Prisoners<sup>sm</sup> Is Looking For More Prayer Partners**

God has answered our year long prayers to see the Prayers For Prisoners<sup>sm</sup> web grow. Our biggest blessing is that two women have volunteered to become program administrators and manage the distribution of prayer requests. We welcome Marla Eland, North Region Administrator and Jeannie Cohmer, South Region Administrator. Jeannie, who lives in Hillsboro, has been covering female inmate prayer requests in prayer for almost a year. She became involved after Peggy Pence (see last month's article introducing Peggy) invited her to the Ross Correctional monthly Community Prayer meetings. Marla lives in Westerville and just learned about Prayers For Prisoners<sup>sm</sup> during a recent ministry fair at Worthington Christian Church. She laughs now as she recalls that she wasn't even going to enter the room where the informational booths were set up because she already had enough to do! We are excited to have the talents and time of both of these women. Thank you to those who have been praying for this need. Surely this is a testimony that God's hears and answers prayers and He is always on time! Four new men's prisons have joined the prayer web and will soon be sending inmate prayer requests: Madison, Ross, Marion and Oakwood. Please let your church and others know that we need more prayer warriors to be sure we can handle all of these new requests. Under new guidelines, churches can now send their requests to the coordinators for distribution to inmate intercessors. We are praying many of you will contact us to become involved.

## PRAYER REQUESTS:

- † Wise grant decisions under Ohio Strengthening Families Initiative & wise stewardship of all awarded funds
- † Ability to serve more Christian ex-offenders with SITG™ mentoring
- † Staffing & new volunteers
- † Corporate partnerships to do more prison staff programs
- † Expanding prison prayer teams & Prayers For Prisoners<sup>sm</sup>
- † New Funding Sources

## PRAISE REPORT:

Jeannie Cohmer has joined Marla Eland as a volunteer to coordinate Prayers For Prisoners<sup>sm</sup>

God worked mightily in our pilot Opening Doors<sup>sm</sup> program at Scioto Juvenile.

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soul that Opening Doors planted a seed that was later watered to bring me to my Savior. This changed my life significantly. When I started my walk with God I realized how I was living and as I get closer with God I stop my old habits. I now use a lot of skills that I was taught in Opening Doors--skills that I wouldn't have already had. The change is hard, but I struggle a little less each day. I try not to judge people and I actually give people a chance to show me who they are before I label them untrustworthy. And I have used my skills from Opening Doors when faced with a confrontational person. I'm not perfect, but I'm definitely a work in progress. In conclusion Opening Doors plainly and simply made me a better person and I look forward to opening more doors. ♥

About the author: [continued from page 1](#)

*I am breaking down strongholds of sin all the time. My father is back in my life. Me and my mother have a wonderful relationship now. My quality of life has improved as well. My attitude has completely changed. I am playing gospel music for Kairos. I am not perfect but I am a work in progress. The Lord is molding me constantly. I have begun ministering to other convicts who did not believe in Christ and some are beginning to come along.*

## CURRENT NEEDS

We need of all of the following volunteer resources:

1. More prayer partners for Prayers For Prisoners<sup>sm</sup>
2. More churches to send their prayer requests to participating inmate intercessors
3. A CPA with non-profit experience to conduct our first financial review
4. Marketing expertise to design our program display board and edit our informational brochures
5. Accounting skills to set up our internal fiscal controls and grant management process

We hope you will consider adding your time and talent to ours to benefit those we serve. Thank you

Deborah L. Roeger, Executive Director

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