

A Unique Father-Son Outing

By: Nick Braschler

Many of you are aware that my dad and I were blessed to attend the graduation ceremony from the Freedom Challenge Program for five prisoners at the Hutchison Correctional Facility. You have heard my dad's experience from the newsletter that followed our visit. Now, after having a month to dwell on my personal experience, I would like to share with you what I saw and what I learned while I was in prison.

Just the walk up to the front door of the prison, I suddenly felt like I had been placed in the movie *Shawshank Redemption*. I began to wonder what in the world my dad had gotten us into by accepting this invitation. We waited very patiently (I learned that prison time has this motto, "It will happen when it happens.") to be escorted into the prison. The nerves began to kick in. I had no idea what to expect. We were escorted into the auditorium where the ceremony was to be held. I took my seat as I watched around 40 men dressed in all-blue denim walked passed me, two by two, and found their seat.

Once the last prisoner got into his place, the worship band began playing. The cool part about this band was that it was led by the five guys that were graduating and a man named Jack Jackson (this man was a legend within the minds of these prisoners – their mindset was if Jesus played guitar, it would probably sound like Jack). I had three moments during this ceremony that I was really blessed by – this was the first one. The band led the men in about 45 minutes of worship songs. I did not sing a note. I was incapable. I watched as these men worshiped. I began to compare this situation with the one I see every Sunday morning at my home church. I see people raising their hands and singing the words. I hear some notes hit with elegance and beauty and others that aren't even close. The difference between the two worship services is that one group goes home to their family and freedom and the other group goes home to their bunk and sentence. What did not change between the prison and my church is that both are equally and desperately in need of a Savior. For some of those men in that prison, they have done no worse than some in that church – these men just got caught. What brings the two very different places together is that God still accepts and deserves their worship. He does not care if they are wearing a new suit and tie or denim jeans and denim shirt.

The second blessing came after the ceremony was finished and dad got them excited about his *Fight Like a Man* Conference (these guys were stoked about the possibilities!), there was a table with sugar cookies and punch for the guys to eat. I collected my cookie and looked up to see Clay, one of the five who had just graduated. He was huge, bald and had a goatee. I think I could have taken him...but anyways. No, I saw him in the corner and knew exactly where the Holy Spirit was leading. I went over and, stumbling all over myself, I somehow started a conversation with him. It turned out that the reason he got into the program was because he wanted to learn how to play the guitar. Jack Jackson told him the only way he could was if he went through the Freedom Challenge. What he said next left me speechless. He said, "I came into this program with learning guitar as #1. I am leaving this program with it as #2." When I asked him what replaced it he said "Even though learning how to play guitar was an incredible part of his 8-month experience, the development of a relationship with God and a further understanding of my purpose placed what I learned about that guitar at a distant second." I was looking at a transformed man.

I was also blessed as one of the leaders of Freedom Challenge, Paul, walked us to our truck after it was finished. I listened as he poured out his heart for these men in this prison. He showed such love and such compassion for these men, some who will never see outside of those

prison walls again. He reminded me that, although it is easy to give up these men, we are called to love as Christ loved us. I don't deserve the love I am shown much of the time. Yet God never withholds it. Neither should we.

Honestly, before we left that Thursday morning, I tried to get out of going to the prison. I was pretty nervous. But looking back now, I know I would have missed out on one of the neatest times with my dad that we have had if I had stayed home. I know my dad knew that my eyes would be opened to an aspect of ministry I had never experienced before. He could not have been more right. I am exceptionally grateful for my dad allowing me to tag along with him. I pray that his ministry involvement with the prison will be able to continue in the future and that I will be able to attend the next graduation and hear a new set of stories of how God has continued to bring lost people closer to Himself. What an amazing God we serve!