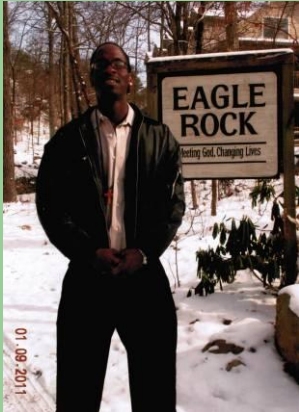




Focus Group Prison Ministries/ 865-694-3837

F.O.C.U.S. Following Our Choices Unto Success

This card was given to us after
our "Spiritual New Years"
retreat at Eagle Rock Jan. 7-9



Steve, Debbie & FCA:
Thanks 2 ya'll...
My obedience to Jesus
remains. Don't know where
I'd be if it wasn't for friends
like you all –
Happy New Years Jan. 2011

FCA Student
J. Burgins

Galatians 6:7-8



JESUS NEW YEAR

BY TODD GOOD

No other day of the year compels you to reflect back on life as Dec. 31st does. Since my early teens, most of my New Year's merriment was spent extremely intoxicated or incredibly high on anything from weed to cocaine to acid. Some were good times, like celebrating the turn of the century with my wife and kids downstairs in our new home, some I'm unable to remember at all. This year when the ball dropped and 2011 began, instead of looking back on a year of disappointment and regret, I found myself instead looking forward to a year of hope and promise.

I was never a proponent for declaring New Year's resolutions, mainly because I knew from experience that I was incapable of ever adhering to them. New Year's Eve to me was simply a convenient excuse to get really messed up (like I need an excuse). I started most of those evenings full of anticipation and excitement, but it usually ended with me wrapping up the "celebration" on January 2nd or 3rd broke, remorseful and confused. They say how you end the year is how you'll spend the following one and in my case, they were right. But by the grace of God above, this year was different.

As I drifted off to sleep my mind was swimming between unconsciousness and abstract thoughts very contrary to fear, remorse, dread and self-reproach. This year my mind was at peace and entertained feelings of hope, faith and optimism that in 2011, whether in or out of prison, I would be growing closer to my Savior, Christ Jesus. In many ways 2010 (albeit spent in Wartburg, TN) was the best year of my life. Because of God, the progress I've made in regard to my recovery and overall moral and ethical character has been monumental.

In my past whenever I managed to take a positive march toward a good life, I've always regressed five steps back. It's not that I didn't *want* to change, it's just that I didn't know *how*, or even if I *could* change. I'd convinced myself this was simply who I

was and despite whatever valiant efforts I made to rectify the path I was on, nothing was ever going to change my fate. Disgrace and remorse was a big part of my life. For the longest time I mocked and laughed at those who preached of "Higher Powers" and thought what a shame it must be to desperately generate some imaginary individual in order to address and help deal with your problems. It seemed the equivalent of creating a make-believe friend as a child to keep from being lonely. But thanks to my spiritual journey in 2010, I better understand the significance of such a being and know beyond all doubt that because of His Spirit living inside me, I will never be alone again.

You see, even when I've been surrounded with people I loved and who loved me, I always felt alone. I was convinced it was only a matter of time before they saw the *real* Todd and took off, so I never felt comfortable completely giving myself to anyone. This inhibition of my unconditional love cost me priceless relationships that I have lost forever. I've since concluded until you truly love and respect yourself, you can't completely love and appreciate others. For me, this also included a reciprocal relationship with God.

Jesus was sent to show us the way to our Father. This past year I accepted Him as my Savior and I'm grateful He kept me alive long enough to experience my new existence. This year, January 1st didn't kickoff the "first day of the rest of my life," but rather the first day of my eternity.

Todd Good attends Focus Group and gave his life to Christ last spring during Kairos Inside at Morgan County. He is the editor for *Discovery for Recovery*, the in-house newsletter for the Therapeutic Community A&D program. His writing talent has been recognized at a state level within the Department of Corrections and the newsletter he started will be included in an upcoming story about TDOC's Substance Abuse initiatives, to be featured in *The Tennessean*.

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FOCUS PRISON MINISTRIES

Ministry Needs:

1. We're looking for people to be on a rotating schedule to bring meals Monday nights to FCA for a time of fellowship with the students
2. We need a good seven passenger vehicle for transportation to and from the house

Walk-A-Thon Update:

We raised more than \$19,000 during our annual event. Thank you to everyone who walked and/or contributed to "Changing Lives"



LIVING FREE FRIDAY NITES

BY STEVE HUMPHREYS

We are launching Living Free Friday Nites this month at Central Baptist Church of Bearden. When fully implemented, this will provide a positive, Christian alternative to normal Friday night activities – with food, fellowship, Contemporary Worship, Testimonies, and small groups which will meet needs relative to our society today!

Our Living Free small groups will be a place where people will encounter God and gain Biblical understanding, Godly motivation and spiritual strength to find freedom in Christ. Each small group will focus on growing in Christ through ministry of the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God. Jesus said in John 8:31 that if we would hold to his teaching, we really are his disciples. Then we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free!

The curriculum for these small groups is produced by Living Free Ministries out of

Chattanooga, Tennessee (www.livingfree.org) - Founded in 1988 Living Free is now represented in more than 50 countries and nearly 1 million people around the world have participated in Living Free small groups. The curriculum has been or is in the process of being translated into 17 foreign languages. We were blessed at Eagle Rock to have Dan Strickland and Greg Keylon from Living Free Ministries to share the vision of the Ministry and begin training our Core team.

Meeting at 6:30pm for food and beginning at 7pm every Friday night, we hope you will plan to join us as we continue the journey of "Living Free in 2011."



A MOTHER'S JOY

BY DAVID ELKINS

I wanted to share an excerpt from a letter I received in December. This came from a mother whose son participates in one of the Focus Groups at Morgan County. She wrote:

I know that there are many of you that work through God to help my son...I want to thank you and all of you for helping him with God's love. When Stephen was 5 years old he would get us all to sit down and he would open the Bible and preach to us. I was so happy. I always thought he would be a preacher and I still have hopes...

I just thank my mighty Jesus he has you and others in his life... Thank you and God bless you all You are all in my prayers.

Sincerely,
Stephen's Mom

She also included a self-penned poem. Part of it reads:

"I want to thank you Lord
For the love you've put in Stephen's life
The people you work through
Have really changed his life
I see a different man
As I knew my son could be
Thank you my Jesus
For giving my son back to me
And thank the people who helped him
I will always be grateful to Thee"

God has opened the door for us to minister to literally hundreds of people like Stephen and his family. We thank you and covet your prayers every week as we go into the darkest of places to shine the true light of Jesus!

Do I think that work through God to help my son...
I know that there are many of you that work through God to help my son...
I want to thank you and all of you for helping him with God's love.
When Stephen was 5 years old he would get us all to sit down and he would open the Bible and preach to us.
I was so happy. I always thought he would be a preacher and I still have hopes...
I just thank my mighty Jesus he has you and others in his life...
Thank you and God bless you all
You are all in my prayers.
Sincerely,
Stephen's Mom

ABOUT US

Focus Group Prison Ministries is a nonprofit, 501c(3) organization founded in 1992 to help build a bridge to the community for a segment of society that is often forgotten. We seek to help inmates and their families to know Jesus as their Savior, to mature in their faith, and to help ex-offenders to transition back into society as good citizens through Focus Christian Academy. Our efforts at providing support, hope and encouragement have been recognized by the Tennessee Department of Corrections, twice naming Focus Group Prison Ministries the 'Best Non-Profit of East Tennessee.'