

# NEWS

August 2024

## → MINISTRY UPDATE ←

David Nichols — President  
Main Office —

(405) 236-3349

# UPDATE



All praise and honor to the God who cares about his creation, regardless of whatever failures they may have had. He gave his blood to cleanse those failures for those who ask. Our understanding of

His love is so shallow, and it only increases as we experience failure, heartache, and trials. It increases when we see or experience a lack of love from those we think should love us. We then have the choice to seek God's love and experience the love that is beyond human understanding, or become bitter and sink into despair. If we ask, God's Spirit floods our heart with a love we don't understand and can't explain. Bitterness kills the soul and brings a life no one wants.

I know this because I have had the displeasure of experiencing both sides of life's situations. I have seen the cruelty life brings to some, and I have experienced the unexplainable love of God when needed. I don't know why God entrusted me with the responsibility experiencing and sharing His love to the most hated people in America. It makes me as hated as they are. Just overcoming that hate is an assurance to those who face it that there is a true God



that loves us and never turns His back on us, regardless of what man has to say. As Paul and Silas had joy while bound as prisoners, we all can experience joy in any circumstance. While it is not acceptable to talk about it in church today, most of the founding fathers of the church of Christ had jail or prison records because of obeying God and being hated by many religious men who didn't agree with them. Political priority was more important than God's love.

The city government is requiring us to get rid of the tents we use to house men, which means we will have to put out men we wouldn't have to otherwise put out. These men will become homeless. We have had to stop accepting men out of prison because without the tents we have no place to put them. Our tracking is showing an increase of 15 men a week being made homeless, and this is just of men desiring help in this county. We are still getting more than 40 applications a month. Does anyone care? I know that I care to the point that I feel crushed in my spirit because we can't help them until we get more beds. We only help those who believe they are ready for our program. There are many more who are not yet at that point. God is changing the life of the majority of those who come to us. Many are now not being given the opportunity to get the chance. The mentally handicapped and the physically handicapped will be going to the streets, and they will have little chance of making it there. These facts will never be made known to the public. Only those who read this newsletter will know.

We are working hard to increase our bed space, and I will wait till next month to share more about this matter. Pray for God's provision for His work, and pray for the people

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There lie a thousand quiet things.

## Testimonies

We measure days in deadlines met,  
In to-do lists half unread,  
While blessings bloom beside our feet—  
We rush past roses, blind instead.

The morning sun still paints the wall  
With gold that doesn't charge a fee,  
But emails blink with red demands,  
And we forget to simply be.

We trade soft smiles for schedules tight,  
Forget the laughter in the rain,  
We overlook a child's small joke,  
Too tangled up in grown-up strain.

Yet in the hush between the storms,  
A gentle voice will sometimes say,  
"Look – your heart still beats, your breath is warm,  
You're living, even if astray."

A kindness comes, a friend holds on,  
The sky breaks open, blue and wide—  
And if we pause, just once, too see,  
We find the joy we set aside.

So slow your step and raise your eyes—  
Let gratitude unfold its wings.  
For even in the noise of life,

I was born in Bakersfield, California in June 1962. I was the middle child of 12 children. I have seven sisters. It was always active in our house. It was hard growing up. We didn't have much, but we always had enough. We also had each other. My mother worked as a maid at a local hotel, and my dad was a chef at a classy restaurant. My dad cooked the holiday meals at home. My mom was a chef at home. She made tamales for us. They were my favorite. We were Pentecostal, and on Sundays we would pile into the station wagon and go to church. My brother Rubin was my best friend. We walked everywhere together. We walked to the store and to the park. My oldest sister would take care of us. She was my second mom.

I met the love of my life in 1973. We were inseparable. We got married in 1981. We had four children, and we were married for 38 years. Things went wrong, and we separated. I moved to Oklahoma City in 2014. I had my own apartment, and I worked in recycling until 2017. I found out I had to register and I couldn't live where I was living. I was homeless for six years, and I worked with Homeless Alliance. I sold magazines for Curbside Chronicles. Homeless Alliance found housing for me. After a year I got into an argument with my neighbor, and I was kicked out of my apartment. Homeless Alliance called Hand Up Ministries, and I moved into Hand Up in October 2023. I had to live in a tent, but I was grateful to have a place to live. I didn't have to live on the street, and I was away from drugs. Hand Up has helped me stay sober, and Hand Up has given me a community and security. I have a stable place to live. Today I stay in a trailer. I have a TV and a place to cook my own meals. I also have a warm bed. Praise the Lord.

-Elias Villalpando

I moved a lot during my childhood because my dad was a pastor. It was difficult to make friends and it was more difficult to keep friends. During my teen years I spent a lot of time playing basketball and playing music. I regularly attended basketball camps, music

camps, and church camps. I took weekly

trombone lessons at Oklahoma City University. Thanks in large part to lessons and camps, I received numerous awards. I played a lot of music in churches. I attended church regularly, which was my saving grace. I was also in the Oklahoma Youth Symphony. The more I performed music, the more I was able to minister through music.

By the time I started high school, my dad was asked to step away from the pulpit to help the founder of Teem get that organization off of the ground. He helped inform people throughout the state of the mission of Teem. This was the first time I heard of a place called Hand Up Ministries. I performed music wherever my dad went, so I performed music all over the state.

I attended the University of Arkansas, where I got a music performance degree. After college, I joined the Marine Corps, and I was in the Marine Corps band. I received the same training all Marines receive, and I was deployed to several countries. I struggled to keep jobs after I left the Marine Corps. My most steady job was the Army National Guard.

I never strayed from the Lord, despite losing everything. My wife and kids moved to Las Vegas after I reluctantly took a plea deal to avoid the longer prison sentence I would have received had I gone to trial. Six months later my wife told me she wanted a divorce. My depression escalated, and for years I did nothing about it. My mom and sister researched programs that could help me transition from life in prison back to life as a civilian.

Shortly after arriving at Hand Up, I was put on staff in Hand Up's office, where I committed myself to helping as many people as I could. After battling through some health complications, I was transferred to transportation. I am thankful to get to know and help many of these men in a more direct role, whether they may be in need of food, clothing, or contact information. Even though I struggle financially with less income while supporting two kids and having very little SNAP benefits, it is still my mission to help as many people as I can. After all, Hand Up is a ministry.

-Mark Cato

I grew up in a home filled with love, even though we didn't have much. My mom raised me and my two siblings on her own, and she worked long hours to make sure we never went without. Money was tight, but she made sure we had what we needed: food on the table, clothes on our back, and, most importantly, a foundation of faith. We were in church every Sunday, and my mom taught us to trust in God when life got hard. She was my first example of strength. She never complained. She just prayed and pushed forward. Looking back, I see how much she sacrificed, and I am so grateful for the stability she gave us, even in the struggle.

Somewhere along the way, I lost sight of the values she instilled in me. At age 18, just one month after my birthday, I made choices that landed me in prison for eight years. Nearly a decade of my life was gone, years I can't get back. I was angry at first. I blamed everyone but myself, but prison has a way of stripping away all excuses. There is nowhere to hide when you are locked in a cell with your own thoughts. Over time, God broke down me down in the best way possible. He made me face the truth. I was responsible for my own life. There was no blaming the system, my circumstances, or other people. It was a hard lesson, but I needed it. For the first time, I truly understood what accountability meant.

As my release day got closer, fear set in. Where was I supposed to go? I had no money, no job prospects, and no real plan. The thought of ending up on the streets was terrifying, but God was already working ahead of me. My unit counselor in prison told me about Hand Up Ministries, a place that helps men like me rebuild their life. I had nothing to lose, so I had the counselor apply to Hand Up for me. That that decision changed everything. Hand Up gave me a place to stay, helped me find work, and set me in an environment where I had a chance to succeed. Without that counselor, Hand Up, and God, I honestly don't know where I would be. I would probably be setting myself into cycle of reoffending, like what got me in prison in the first place.

Today, I am working two jobs, which is something I would never have imagined for myself before. It's not glamorous, but it is

honest work and it pays my bills. Hand Up Ministries connected me with employers who were willing to look past my record and give me a chance. That is something I don't take for granted. Every day, I wake up thankful for the opportunity to prove myself and show that I am more than my past mistakes.

None of this would have been possible without God. He never gave up on me, even when I gave up on myself. He didn't cast me aside like I deserved. Instead, He placed people in my path to pull me back up. Hand Up Ministries was His way of showing me grace when I needed it most.

God can rewrite any story. I am proof of that. It wasn't easy, and it didn't happen overnight. Change is possible. You just have to be willing to take that step, own your mistakes, and let God lead you where you are supposed to be.

-Anonymous

I was raised by two wonderful parents. I was an only child. I was a rodeo rider after I finished high school, and that was when I started drinking and doing drugs. I was in and out of jail, and I went to prison for DUI's when I was 21. I started going to bars when I got out of prison, and that was when I committed the crime of sexual battery on an adult female.

I came to Hand Up Ministries when I got out of prison this time, and Hand Up has helped me a lot. The office staff is made up of wonderful guys. They have helped me a lot. If I could go into prisons, I would tell the inmates how much Hand Up has helped me. Hand Up has helped me get closer to God. I am thankful to the employees of Hand Up. They gave me a place to stay. I want to thank David Nichols. I would recommend Hand Up to anyone. The staff goes out of their way to help residents. I thank God for Hand Up.

-Jesse Tomblinson



## John 8:34-36

34 Jesus answered them, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, whoever commits and practices sin is the slave of sin.

35 Now a slave does not remain in a household permanently: the son does remain forever.

36 So if the son set you free, then you are free indeed.

Lets remember the men and women that have given there life, so that we may be free.

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