

11A

RELIGION

DON'T BE AFRAID

Sunday School Lesson

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 36: 5-12.

LESSON SCRIPTURE: Psalm 40.

PRINTED TEXT: Psalm 40: 1-5, 9-11, 16, 17.

A Quaker family who lived on the frontier of the newly settled Pennsylvania colony was having family devotions. They chose for their Bible study that evening a passage from one of the psalms that spoke of God's deliverance of His people. As they prepared to retire, the father pulled the latchstring inside so the door could not be opened from the outside.

"Father, why did you place the latchstring inside?" asked one of the children. "If we trusted in God like the man who wrote the psalm, we wouldn't have to be afraid of anyone." Moved by the child's faith, the father placed the latchstring on the outside of the door.

In the middle of the night, they heard the door open and heard men whispering. Then the door was closed again and all was quiet. When the family arose in the morning, they discovered that every other house in the village had been burned and the people massacred. Amid their sorrowing over their neighbors, they paused to give thanks for their own deliverance. Years later an old Indian told them how he had led a raiding party to the village, intending to destroy it and kill everyone in it. When he saw the latchstring on the outside of the door, however, he knew that the people in the house were Quakers and trusted in God. He also knew that the Quakers had treated the Indians fairly, and so their lives were spared.

The superscription, which is not a part of the original psalm, assigns Psalm 40 to David. Other authors have been suggested, but the situation that seems to provide background for the psalm fits the life of David. In fact, the psalm could very well describe either of two different crises in his life. One occurred during the reign of Saul, when David was forced to flee for his life and live for some time as a fugitive from the king who sought to kill him. He lived in the desert for years (1 Samuel 18: 6 - 30: 31). The other situation came later in David's career, when his son Absalom sought to seize the throne and threatened his life. This brought death to Absalom and terrible grief to David. The record of it is found in 2 Samuel 15 - 18.

The writers of the psalms lived thousands of years ago in a culture that seems almost primitive to us. Yet the songs of praise they lifted up to God rival or surpass anything we produce today. There are reasons for this. For one thing, most of the psalmists were farmers and shepherds who spent much of their time outdoors. Their extensive contact with nature made them appreciate its wonders. It was only natural for them to revere the God who had created the physical world.

Another reason they so readily praised God was that they knew they had to depend on Him for their livelihood.

So when we sing our songs, let us sing them with understanding. Let us note that many of our songs use themes that were familiar to the psalmists. Realizing this may help us recapture the simple but dynamic faith that characterized their lives.

INMATES SUPPORT MINISTRY

By Tammie Tolbert
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Lynard Lancaster is thankful to be in prison.

"Prison is not like any other place," Lancaster, 25, said. "On the street people have a choice and a lot of people are not going to go to church, but in prison people can stand still enough to hear someone minister to them."

"I feel like God leads some people to prison to slow them down, give them time to think and give them an opportunity to be ministered to. Being in here gives them time to focus on what is being said to them."

Lancaster is an inmate at the Right Turn Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Facility in Charlotte. The facility is a secured setting in which substance abusers serve prison sentences.

It's one of the many facilities

scheduling ministers to come and speak about religion.

Oscar Lewis, executive director of the Right Turn, schedules ministers to come and speak to inmates as often as three times a month.

"At the facility, we think that the religious component is an important part of the total treatment. We tell our inmates that when they encounter problems with their chemical abuse, they have to look to a higher power to help them overcome that desire," Lewis said.

Herb Rhedrick, chair of the Brotherhood Organization at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, is a volunteer speaker.



Robert Slade, Lynard Lancaster, and Donald Henderson (l. to r.), are Right Turn inmates who say prison ministry has helped them in many ways

"One of the reasons that I volunteer to speak to the inmates is because I feel that we all owe something back to society."

"Ministry in the prison system

is important because there are a lot of people in the prison system who need the gospel minis-

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Gangstas for life

By JEAN H. LEE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FRESNO, Calif. - Five years ago, Armando Gomez was a gang member cruising the streets of San Francisco, doing drugs and picking up girls.

Today, he belongs to another gang, one that calls itself God's Anointed Now Generation and preaches picking up a Bible instead of a gun.

Gomez was among more than 2,000 young people, many of them former gang members, who packed Saroyan Theatre in Fresno on Friday, the third of four days of fellowship held by the evangelical group Victory Outreach International.

The hints of the old gang life are there: buzz cuts, baggy shorts and striped T-shirts that signify one's gang affiliation; scars and tattoos that tell tales of guns and violence.

The stage featured a mock street scene complete with a pale blue convertible, a yellow fire hydrant and a nighttime backdrop of high-rise buildings. Only the graffiti tag marked this group's gang leader. It read "Jesus" in two-foot-high letters.

On stage, youth pastors, mostly former gang members, tell stories of how they went from gang life to God.

"We thought we had no chance in this world, but Jesus gave us new life," says one.

"Get crazy for Jesus, amen!" says another.

They show a segment of the ministry's promotional video, which looks and sounds more like an MTV video - except for the religious rap lyrics.

Like typical teen-agers at a rock concert, they jump to their feet cheering and clapping, but punctuate their screams with "Praise God!" and "Amen."

"They don't look like Christians; they look like gang members," said Gomez, 28, who is wearing a red Chicago Bulls jersey and a large, gold cross that sparkles on his chest.

He should know. He was a teen-age gang member when someone from Victory Outreach encouraged him to join. It took years of persuasion.

"(Jesus) delivered me from doing drugs," Gomez said. "It came to a point where I was really down. I was tired of partying, doing a lot of drugs, having a lot of girlfriends."

Today, Gomez is married and has a 2-year-old child. He has a job in telecommunications, but heads out at least once a week to recruit youths like him.

"We just mainly go into the 'hood, into the streets," he said. "We try to change the hard-core, messed-up kids and turn them into somebody."

Sonny and Julie Arguinzoni created Los Angeles County-based Victory Outreach nearly three decades ago hoping to reach drug addicts, gang members and prostitutes.

With God's Anointed New Generation, a program that has its own magazine called "G.A.N.G. Life" and a clothing line mimicking street wear, Victory Outreach doesn't ask the youths to trade their culture for a religion.

"We call ourselves Christians, but it's mainly a relationship with God," said Gomez. "We teach you how to pray, how to read the Bible."

He's trying to reach young men like 18-year-old William Ybanez of Fresno, who before joining Victory Outreach seven months ago had dropped out of school and was "gang banging" full time.

"Now, we don't even worry about it. We see each other as each other," Ybanez said.

African history subject of youth camp



PHOTO/PAUL WILLIAMS III

By Tammie Tolbert
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Terrie Chambers, organizer of afrocentric program at Walls Memorial AME Zion Church.

Walls Memorial Church is hosting an exploration of heritage program for Children on Aug. 12-16.

"The church decided to have this program because it is very afrocentric in its ways of combining functions about African heritage and spirituality," said Terrie Chambers, 30, an organizer for the program.

This program is geared to teach children about spirituality from an Afrocentric perspective. The children in the program will be between the ages of 6 and 16.

The program has worked with more than 500 students in Philadelphia, but it is a pilot program in Charlotte. Walls Memorial and the Greenville Recreation Center are sponsoring the Charlotte program.

"We want to expose our children to information about black people who are rarely or never mentioned and show the contributions that they have made in society," Chambers said.

The facilitator for the classes will be Meloyde Micere Stewart, an educational consultant who calls herself an afrologist.

"In Meloyde's classes the students will work on values and the guide posts for living which is done through the principles of Ma'at and Nguzo Saba," Chambers said.

The educational component of the program deals with teaching African American history and culture from a position of empowerment.

The different age groups will participate in various activities. "The groups will be bro-

ken up for educational purposes, but they will be brought back together, especially during the teambuilding exercises," Chambers said.

Chambers said that they have a lot to cover in terms of teaching the kids about their history and teaching them about the principles of the Nguzu Saba, but the focus is to teach them that Africa equals excellence.

The kids will have time to play at this workshop.

"During the course of the week the students will have individual arts and crafts workshops they can attend and people will come and talk to them about careers," Chambers said. "They will also be exposed to cultural performances and poetry and they will participate in swimming and sports activities

near the end of the day."

Chambers said parents and various volunteers from the church helped to make this workshop possible for the kids. "We hope the children learn to value their history and to live by the values and contributions set by our ancestors," she said.

"Basically, looking back through time, our people are the cultivators of all types of inventions and technology but since our children don't know this sometimes they have low self-esteem because they aren't exposed to positive information about blacks," Chambers said.

"Our children don't feel comfortable in mathematics and we want to teach them to stop feeling uncomfortable about math, especially since mathematics originated from Africa," she said. "Our children don't read books and

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EYE ON GOSPEL

Jamison, who was named GMWA chair in March; a new ministry track designated "Our Daily Bread," to feature prominent speakers on the evangelistic circuit; and a "Salute to Gospel Pioneers" which will honor the likes of Shirley Caesar, Albertina Walker, the Mighty Clouds of Joy, Sensational Nightingales, the Williams Brothers, Willie Neal Johnson and the Gospel Keynotes, the Barrett Sisters, the Pilgrim Jubilees, and the Soul Stirrers. Among those set to perform at the tribute are the Lumzy Sisters, Luther Barnes, Christianaires, the Bolton Brothers. The Malaco/Savoy

music group will kick off the Gospel Announcers Guild track (which doubles as the industry track) on Sunday (August 10) with a three-hour long showcase featuring their top acts, including Dorothy Norwood, James Moore, Bryan Wilson, the Mississippi Mass Choir, Willie Neal Johnson & the Gospel Keynotes, LaShun Pace, the Georgia Mass Choir, and Ruby Terry. (Terry's recent cut titled "Didn't I Tell You It Would Be Alright," featuring labelmates Dorothy Norwood and James Moore - off the album "God Can Do It" - has fast become a turntable hit at gospel radio). Also featured on the showcase

will be Blackberry Records recording artists and label owners, the Williams Brothers.

"Strength Through Diversity" is the theme of this year's industry track, which as always features a full slate of showcases from the nation's top gospel labels. In response to complaints about five hour-long showcases that dominated last year's meeting, showcases are now being tailored to a two hour and fifteen-minute window. Also new this year is a Manufacturer's Product Book, offering information about forthcoming releases. "There is a move on our part to provide as much information as possible in print form for dissemination to

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Destination - Pittsburgh:

More than 15,000 choir and church representatives, gospel label executives, broadcasters, retailers, and artists are expected to descend on Pittsburgh for the 29th Annual session of the Gospel Music Workshop of America, which is slated to get underway August 10 (through the 17th) in Pittsburgh, Pa. Pre-registration is at an all-time high for the eight-day long event that serves as a showcase for gospel's biggest stars while providing more than 100 seminars and workshops spanning a wide range of topics, including everything from choir decorum to concert promotion.

Among this year's highlights are the official installation ceremony for the Rev. Albert