



August 26, 2010

Dear Friend of Damascus Way,

“I know what I’ve got to do.” Chester Watley raised his head and made eye contact for the first time in 10 minutes, looking to see if he’d been heard – and believed. I believed him.

Chester, age 62 this October, is a fine looking, strong and fit man who should be out doing what he loves – knocking golf balls around on the green. He graduates from Damascus Way on August 23, and while he’ll still be on probation for a year, he will, for the first time in over two years, have the freedom to get in a few strokes before the snow flies here in Minnesota. He might even challenge his son to a game.



Chester was out of circulation because he’s been in Minnesota’s prison system, paying a debt to society for a few big mistakes. “I come from a good family,” he marvels. “Good parents. Out of 11 siblings, I’m the only one to ever be locked up.” The regret is painful to see in this man.

“What do you mean about the mistakes?”

“Well, I was caught with drugs in my vehicle,” he says. “And because I’d had a prior (*prior arrest for a related offense*), the judge was hard on me.” Chester shakes his head sadly. The drug that did him in was crack cocaine, and he had broken free of the habit once, some years back. “But then, y’see, I took up with, I mean, I was unfaithful to my wife ... and this girl was using. And it wasn’t long until I was using again. And then selling.”

This man’s spirit is suffering but his long sentence is nearing an end and you can hear the hope in his voice. He wants to be able to mend family relationships. “I think this is the last time,” he says carefully. “You can’t make any guarantees; I know this – but I don’t see myself going back [to drugs or prison] anymore, ever again. I’m gonna beat this,” he says with humble conviction.

Where does God fit into the picture? After we’d talked for about an hour, it became clear that God holds the key to Chester’s success, and that’s how Chester sees it, too.

(continued on the other side)

He told about being raised in a God-fearing family in Oklahoma City. His parents took their children to church and attended faithfully themselves. His father – Chester calls him “a blessing” – spent many hours as a layman serving his church, and his paternal grandfather was a Bible-believing minister. Always, to this day, his 93-year old father urges his children to get themselves involved in a good church.

Though Chester did not fully heed his dad’s advice, it left its mark. God sent Charles, a fellow inmate while Chester served time in Faribault, to help Chester with his Bible study. “I have trouble with my reading,” Chester acknowledges. Interestingly, **it was just as he was beginning this recent imprisonment that Chester made his first intentional and personal decision for Christ.** So he began growing spiritually right there in prison. Charles died recently, just days after his own prison release—**God had used him up on Chester.**

Damascus Way was already known and recommended to Chester long before he qualified for work release, and he had no hesitation about coming here. Terrance, a Damascus Way staff member, became a good and trusted friend who guided Chester in the ways of the program as well as in his faith. “I came to catch on,” says Chester. “The staff really talks about faith, and they pray. There’s a strong support group from my church [which has a ministry at Damascus Way], and this place keeps us on the right trail.”

It’s been a long trail. Chester credits his wife and kids for their forgiveness and standing by him. He is determined to rebuild relationships ... he has a nice home to go back to ... a job ... and a welcoming church to pray for him. And Chester knows that God has forgiven every wrong. Today he has a clean heart and a clean mind.

Will you pray for Chester, his wife Mary, their three adult children and his grandkids? They could really use God’s help – and yours – in the days and weeks ahead.

Thank you, too, for helping Damascus Way. When you reach for the donation envelope I have enclosed for you today, please know how much we appreciate your generosity and kindness to us. Our men are depending on you. Thank you!

For the men of Damascus Way,



Dick Harden, Executive Director
Damascus Way Reentry Center

P.S. Chester spent six months with us, and not only did he have a word of appreciation for the staff, but he said the food was good and it was a clean home for him during this time in his life. **I was pleased ... and part of the gratitude goes to you. Thank you** for your prayers and your gifts!