

## Ashley's Message Maker

**Ashley grew up feeling rejected and alone. She dismissed the idea of Christianity because she merely saw a façade of religion in the home, and abuse was present. When she entered prison she was bitter and angry. She had built a wall around her to conceal all the pain, and later despised the woman she had become. When she finally broke down her defenses, Christ changed her life and her former beliefs. Her life's hurts had become her testimony of hope. This is her story.**

I came from what appeared to be a functional family on the outside, but behind closed doors, was very dysfunctional. My father abused my mother and us kids; he would go on drinking binges, used drugs, was a very heavy gambler, cheated on my mom, beat her and then me when I got old and bold enough to try to stop him. Religion was there, but as a show. Others saw the perfect family that had the best of things.

In my childhood, I learned to pretend everything was perfect. After my parents divorced, I thought life would be better, but it got worse. My mother, who provided safety, became a depressed drinker and pill popper. Her time was spent working or in bars, so I was responsible for my sister. Mother brought random men home every weekend; some trying to play daddy, some creeps, so I became protector of my little sister. My father, whom we saw every other weekend, was now a full-blown junkie. He introduced me to drugs at the age of 11, and told me I could get whatever I wanted with my looks. He taught me to manipulate men, to sell them a dream. By 13, I was a full-blown addict, and my dad was in prison.

God brought a wonderful man into my mother's life, and it was back to pretending. I watched my mother pretend she wasn't an addict, that she was an avid churchgoer. Looking back, that saved her life. Our circumstances improved, my stepfather got me clean and provided a stable, safe life full of what I'd never had – love. My mother became the mother I needed.

As a teenager, I rebelled. I attended church, but pretended. I couldn't believe what was preached, because it didn't line up with my reality. I became angry with church, feeling that people came there to lie and pretend. I did whatever I wanted, and had no boundaries because my stepfather was too nice and my mother didn't want me to expose the truth about her newly created fantasy life.

So, at 15 ½, I met a man 8 years older, and thought I was in love. I got pregnant and dropped out of school. Three months into my pregnancy, this man was shot in the face and found dead. My world was crushed; I was 16,

pregnant, and alone, because my circumstance didn't fit into my mother's perfect fantasy world.

So at 16, she signed off for me to marry. I finished high school, went to college, and tried to be a good mother. But my husband started being very controlling, beating me daily, and burned me, leaving scars I'll have to live with the rest of my life. I was now, at 21, mother to three children, drained mentally and physically.

My bad choices and lack of self worth led me to hanging with the wrong people. I was eventually incarcerated and entered prison a divorced woman. Being sentenced to 4 years changed and saved my life.

My first year in prison I was mad at the world. I fought all the time and spent my first year in the hole, and didn't want to live any more. I felt broken, dirty, worthless and used, hated the scars on my body, felt like a failure and just wanted to die. I didn't have the fight in me, and I couldn't pretend any more. I had forgotten how to truly feel, because I'd spent most of my life being stoned, pretending everything was okay. I still don't know why, but in prison I showed up in church, sat in the back, listening to what I knew could never be true – that God was merciful, kind and just. After church, this lady approached me and seemed to look right through me. She invited me to join the faith-based housing unit. I just laughed and said okay, not knowing she took me seriously. I figured, 'yeah, lady, I'm definitely not like you, and with my prison record, they'd never let me through the doors.' But by God's grace I moved in the week after, and that lady I 'wasn't like' was my bunkie. I thought she and her 'Jesus friends' were weirdoes; she was always happy, reading her Bible, and was kind, even when I made it clear I wanted nothing to do with her.

On January 7th, I broke down and asked her how I could get what she had, the peace and happiness. I sobbed about my past, who I was, what I'd done, who I'd become and who I wanted so badly to be. She showed me the love of Christ, lying on that floor with me, being more vulnerable than I'd ever been in my life, and I felt a peace beyond my understanding. I **felt** that day; I hadn't felt in years. I found my true purpose in my Savior. I had a fire in my soul I'd never had before, and a light in my eyes; when I smiled, I really smiled. It didn't happen overnight, but day by day I got through my past hurts through God's Word. I discovered He'd gifted me to reach out to other women, to show them something different, to turn my mess into my message. And I became one of those 'Jesus people.' The ones I'd laughed at became my closest friends and support system. I'm now a prayer warrior for hurting women, facilitator for the faith-based unit, and a role model for baby Christians. I came to prison a broken 21-year-old girl, and will be walking out a 26-year-old woman with a love for Christ that I never could have imagined.

*Ashley is currently serving her sentence in an Ohio prison. She is actively involved in various groups and assists the presiding chaplain with various duties. She attends The Inside Connection, a discipleship program of Providence Ministries that assists prisoners in developing their personal relationship with Christ.*

*She is an off-campus student of Youngstown State University, and is pursuing a business degree. She plans to graduate upon her release.*



If you would like to accept Jesus as your Savior, say this simple prayer:

Lord, I believe you are the risen Son of God. Please forgive me of my sin, and be the Lord of my life.

*If you were sincere, God has forgiven you and now lives in your heart! Please contact us, so that we can celebrate with you and assist you in your new journey.*

## —OHIO REENTRY PROGRAM—

In partnership with ClearView Church, Providence Ministries helps Ohio prisoners with the often difficult task of transitioning back into society, and connects prisoners with resources and programs that are essential for successful reentry.

Providence Ministries is a member of Northeast Ohio's faith-based organizations and community partners participating in Ohio's *North-east Region Faith Challenge*. This endeavor is a collaborative effort with the Ohio Department of Corrections to strengthen the reintegration process of offenders from the prison system to the community.

# Crossroads

As we humble ourselves before man and God, the Lord of Glory will exalt us. As we delight in the Lord and bow down before Him, He will be the lifter of our heads. It is those who come on bended knee who will drink of His living water, and satisfy their thirsty souls. As we seek out His wisdom in meekness and reverence, we will be privy to the Lord's whispered secrets.

—Claudia Forster

Would you like to be on our mailing list? Drop us a line to stay current with ministry news and information pertaining to the criminal justice system.



Providence Ministries ♦ PO Box 428 ♦ Naples, FL 34106-0428

Providence Ministries is a ministry of reconciliation, and your gift of love heals broken families.

HELP us restore lives, **GIVE TODAY!**

## HOLD TIGHT

BY Claudia Forster

Are we to His scarlet cord clasping  
Always in God's Son truly basking  
Or stumbling, our toes dashing  
At straws, continually grasping

To Lord Jesus so faithfully, clinging  
With evil schemes be not grappling  
Into God's Word keep digging  
For truth never turns baffling

To our Lord we need to be cleaving  
So the devil is not forever deceiving  
On His truth, totally believing  
For to His vine He is grafting

With Jesus in a love-bond we dwell  
Hidden in Christ, souls are made well

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At ClearView you will find people from many backgrounds and locations. We come together to grow in our knowledge of and love for God. We seek a place to worship Him and nurture our children in faith and Christian values. You will find a warm, welcoming atmosphere where God is praised, hearts are raised, and you may be amazed at what the peace and power of God can do in your life.

We build relationships with one another through our Sunday service, as well as a Wednesday night study of the Word.

If you're ever in the area, please accept our invitation to come and worship Jesus with us.

You will get a *Clear* view of what a personal relationship with your Creator and Savior can do in your life.

Blessings,

Rev. Jim Hurst

While Joseph was in prison, the Lord helped him and was good to him. He even made the jailer like Joseph so much that he put him in charge of the other prisoners and of everything that was done in the jail. The jailer did not worry about anything, because the Lord was with Joseph and made him successful in all that he did. *Gen. 39:20-23*

## MINISTRY EVENT CALENDAR

- N. E. Reintegration Center—Thursdays at 6:30 pm.
- OSP—1st Sunday monthly, begins at 12:00 pm.
- Lake Erie C I—3rd Sunday every quarter at 2:30 pm.

## WORDS from the SAVIOR

*"But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."*

(John 4:14)

*"I am the way, the truth, and the life..."*

(John 14:6)

*"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."*

(Matt 11:28)

*"...I will never turn anyone away who comes to me."*

(John 6:37)



Directors, Rob and Wanda Cupp