

Bill Bowman: A Profile in Commitment

Bill Bowman and I met at Skillman Church of Christ in Dallas. He was the son of Gus and Mary Ellen Bowman. Bill was a gentleman and a Bible scholar. He supported himself by working as an engineer while a missionary in New York. He and his wife, Doris, helped with the Timothy Hill Ranch, a ministry on Long Island that was started by Jerry and Fern Hill. Fern wrote a book about her son, Timothy, titled "Graduated to Glory." It was written after he was killed in an auto accident. It was the first book I read after becoming a Christian.

Bill suffered the loss of his wife, Doris, and later the loss of his adopted son in a car accident. His adopted daughter, Laurie, is alive, married, and active in a Palestine, Texas Church of Christ.

In 1994, Bill and Lea, his second wife, moved to McKinney, Texas where he served faithfully in the Eastside Church of Christ. Lester Balcolm, a member at Waterview Church of Christ, was the first NLB instructor in the Collin County Jail. Following Lester, we recruited Bill to take his place.

By 2000, Bill had secured prison approval to enter the Collin County Jail to teach the NLB courses. Bill and I would talk and correspond with each other. He helped me better teach on self-esteem. Bill always used the Scriptures to explain his ideas. My interest in "Self-Esteem" came from my work with schoolteachers, professors, and therapists. Some wanted people to have self-esteem without believing in God.

My goal was to teach prisoners that we are of great value. We have value not because we are on the first string of a sports team, etc. We have value because we are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). Created by Him, we have a noble and meaningful role in our social settings with fellow humans and our families.

On December 27, 2000, Bill wrote a friend who was an evangelist in Huntington, New York about our work and how to get in touch with me. Bill sent the evangelist what I thought was a great comment about NLB. Bill wrote, "I personally use this {curriculum} in my ministry at a County Jail in McKinney, Texas. I unhesitatingly suggest that it is a winner with the inmates. Many have been baptized because of inmate studies."

Bill started with 15 students. Seeing the opportunities in the jail ministry, he began recruiting others to come help him and/or start their own classes. Some of these included Mike Russell, Don Umphrey, Tom Cooper, Bill Goodwin, Ken Polk, David Jenkins, Clay Short, Terry Dalrymple, Mike Brewer, Brooks Neal, and Robert Mitchell.

According to Bill, the reason he got involved in jail ministry was that he thought it was a good fit for him. He had dealt with people with similar needs when a missionary on Long Island. He felt God had led him into this type of work through Lester and me.

Bill shared the following story. Bill had a prisoner in his class who was transferred to a state prison. The inmate's family did not move. They stayed in McKinney, living in a trailer near the airport. Bill's wife and another lady would purchase groceries for the family and deliver them to their trailer house. Naturally, the wife was grateful, and the

children expressed their joy. The mother had health issues but still worked to support her family. Bill and the ladies would get down on the floor and play with the children. The mother was impressed and grateful. The father learned of these deeds of kindness and wrote Bill expressing his gratitude. He also asked Bill to write him how the children and wife were doing.

Out of these types of experiences, Bill stated that he became more highly motivated to help inmates to get to know Jesus on a more personal basis.

Bill suggested that we put more emphasis on the county jail ministry. NLB had been focusing mainly on *prison* ministry. He also thought we might add information to our curriculum to guide inmates into ways they could be more successful once released. Both are valid suggestions.

Bill, it has been an honor and privilege to work with you and your team of instructors. The work in the county jail fits your love, not only for the souls of the men, but for their families as well. You are truly a blessing to us all.

HM Motsinger