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Bored in Prison...What's a Buddhist to Read Around Here? (or Talking Donkeys and Other Ways to Lead Inmates to Christ)

August 2009 - As you know, 16 state prison chaplains (who were already reduced to part-time hours) lost their jobs this year. **But through God's great mercy, foundations, individuals and businesses stepped forward to help HeartBound put six of those chaplains back in the prisons.** In our last newsletter, we told you about one of those chaplains and his monthly inmate birthday party outreach (remember those 300 cupcakes?!). This month, we tell you about another extraordinary chaplain, John Eldridge, and a former Buddhist inmate named Vuthy.

After moving to the U.S. from Cambodia, Vuthy eventually found himself in a Georgia prison, confined to a cell 23 hours a day. A voracious reader, Vuthy grew tired of reading the 69-page prison manual over and over and asked to borrow his cellmate's Bible to read. When Vuthy got to Numbers Chapter 22, he read the story of Balaam's donkey and thought: **"In my religion, I believed that if you did something bad, you could come back as an animal. But this God of the Bible could make an animal talk!"** Vuthy was intrigued.

Vuthy's curiosity with the "God of the Bible" laid the groundwork for a Divine encounter with Chaplain Eldridge when Vuthy transferred to Walker State Prison. **"God put this man at Walker so that I would come to know Him,"** Vuthy says. One day, Vuthy accepted Chaplain Eldridge's invitation to come into his office to talk, and Chaplain Eldridge explained God's plan of "regeneration" – life in Adam vs. life in Christ – a very different concept from Vuthy's belief in reincarnation. That evening, Vuthy prayed for God to change him, and he became **a new creature...in Christ!**

Two years later, Vuthy was released from prison and mistakenly shipped to an Atlanta jail. He was released months later, walking out in jail-issued sweat pants, a long-sleeve corduroy shirt and women's house slippers. Vuthy walked 52 miles in those slippers, with his Bible and a prison-issued check for 98 cents in hand. But he prayed to his Savior for help. God sent Chaplain Eldridge and a prison volunteer to his aid, and with the help of a HeartBound donor, Vuthy soon had an apartment and a job. Today, Vuthy mows his own lawn, drives a used car, has joined a church, and never skips a day in the Word of God. **"God has blessed,"** he says. **"God planted HeartBound for this. I had no job, 98 cents, and nowhere to go – what were my chances? Without the ministry and the chaplain, I wouldn't be here."**

Vuthy testifies to the importance of chaplains for the fenced-in flock. When asked how his life would have been different without Chaplain Eldridge, Vuthy says: **"I would not have a relationship with Christ - I would die and go to hell. And I wouldn't have any hope. I wouldn't have realized there was a living God."** *"And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them unless someone sends them?" Romans 10:14*

It costs over \$17,017 a year to house just one Georgia inmate like Vuthy. If just 1% of Georgia prisoners (550 inmates) are positively impacted by the work of a chaplain and do not return to prison, that translates into an economic savings of close to \$10 million per year for Georgia. If 10% of inmates are impacted in the same manner, it results in a cost savings of almost \$100 million. And yet thousands of Georgia inmates find themselves without a chaplain – now **that's** criminal!

As 2010 rapidly approaches, we are boldly asking God to help us continue our support for prison chaplains like John Eldridge. **Please pray for God to provide funding for us to support chaplains** and thank you for **your** support. On behalf of all the Vuthy's, thank you. *Andrea Shelton & HBM*