

PMA

Outreach



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JERRY SPRINGER, CULTURAL CORRUPTION AND PRISON

by Donald Sommer

For more than six years I held afternoon Bible studies every Thursday in a county jail in Central Indiana. I would go into four different cell blocks meeting with men around a table in a common open room where 3 to 10 inmates would gather to examine and discuss God's Word. These day rooms, as they are called, are where the inmates spend most of their time during their waking hours. There is a single television mounted in the corner of the room and each day a different inmate is able to use the remote control to determine what the rest of the cell block will watch. Sometimes the person in charge of the TV would be polite and turn down the volume while I conducted the Bible study, but more often than not I simply had to raise my voice to be heard over the droning sound of a soap opera or game show. Because of the time of day I was normally in the jail, there was predictably at least one cell block television that was tuned to a particular program that would cause my blood to boil, that was the *Jerry Springer Show*.

While trying to communicate the most important things these men could possibly know, truths about God, sin, salvation and the Lord Jesus Christ, I would be in competition with the crazy antics of the show's guests. These verbal exhibitionists freely exposed the most bizarre and shocking behavior imaginable, while at the same time the audience would cheer them on, followed by the inevitable open brawl between two women

fighting over some deadbeat boyfriend that doesn't care two bits for either of them.

Most of us in the mainstream of society look at this ridiculous display of depravity, roll our eyes in disgust and write it off as simply harmless pandering to the lowbrow tastes of the daytime TV watching crowd. In reality, it presents a far more insidious and dangerous threat to our entire social wellbeing. The message of the *Jerry Springer Show* and others of the same ilk helps to spawn a further corrupting of our culture which results in the destruction of families and the loss of personal dignity that leads to people seeking temporary emotional escape through alcohol and drug abuse and in turn, greater incarceration rates.

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My first exposure to Jerry Springer came in 1993 while my family and I were temporarily living in the U.S. between missionary terms in the Philippines. Each time we returned to our homeland after being away for an extended time we felt that our culture was like the frog in the pot of water that would allow itself to be slowly boiled to death as the temperature gradually rose. We could notice the dramatic moral decline to which the rest of society, even Bible believing Christians, seemed oblivious. The first time I saw the show it featured men from the audience lining up to have sex behind a screen with a prostitute. I was so shocked that I called the television station to complain. The person answering the call seemed oblivious to why someone would find such material offensive.

There are several ways in which the exposure of TV audiences to the degrading and perverted themes

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A Note from the Director



Don Sommer—Director

There's big news to announce in this issue of *PMA Outreach*. When you read "Karen's Korner," written by Karen Bodeutsch, you will find out about the new office facility that the ministry moved into in late December. After more than six years of using a small house on the property of Grace Bible Church in Port Orchard, WA, we had the opportunity to relocate to a newer building less than a mile down the road. We are very grateful to the church for making the space available to us for those years and we are looking forward to how this new facility will enhance our outreach in the future.

This edition of our newsletter addresses the problem of the coarsening of our culture through the influence of morally degrading television programs such as *The Jerry Springer Show* and how it

contributes to the problems that lead eventually to incarceration. We also have an exciting report about our Spanish ministry from Arnie Selfors. Pastor Brent Biller from Ridgley, WV, has an update on his church's exciting ministry at a prison in Cumberland, MD, and an offer to help others establish such an outreach for themselves.

We encourage you to go to our website, www.pmabcf.org, where you can read previous issues of *PMA Outreach* and where you can find a variety of resources to help your reach others with the Good News of the gospel.

Reaching Out by Reaching In



Sam Roksandich **Berlin Collett**
Brent Biller

Editor's Note: Pastor Brent Biller of Grace Bible Fellowship in Ridgley, WV and his team (Berlin Collett and Sam Roksandich) have a highly effective prison ministry in Cumberland, MD. They have overcome a number of obstacles as they faithfully teach God's Word to federal prisoners. They would like to share their experience with others that desire to begin a prison ministry. Pastor Biller can be contacted at (304) 726-4063.

Two men and myself have had the wonderful opportunity of conducting a ministry at the Federal Correction Institution in Cumberland, MD, for almost three years. Though difficult to get started, and at times even more difficult to stay above the internal politics and myriad of religious interplay within the prison, it has been one of the most uplifting and positive experiences of our life. The challenges are great but the opportunities even greater. We meet men of every facet of life and religious background including no faith background whose lives need to be turned around. We believe the best way to reduce the recidivism rate of these individuals and help them to become productive members of society is to first make sure they are saved, and then to ground them in the Word of God, rightly divided. That will do more to change their lives than all the other educational and social rehabilitation programs put together. We have seen many positive results, and know that there are even more happening behind the scenes of which we are not aware.

We encourage other churches and individuals to get involved in prison or jail ministry. In our opinion, nowhere is evangelism and good solid Bible teaching more important than in this area of the mission field.

Though not experts in any sense, we have experienced a lot in our brief ministry and would be happy to share what we have learned with others who are called to this kind of ministry. *We would be honored to visit your church and give a brief presentation on our prison ministry and tell you that God has been with us every step of the way, and if we can do it, YOU CAN DO IT!*

KAREN'S KORNER

On December 26th we moved the mission from a tiny 800 sq. foot house to a much roomier 1200 sq. foot facility. We knew we needed a bigger working space and rejoice that it has finally come to pass. Now, all of our literature is out on shelves and for the first time we know where everything is and all that we have.

We have rooms, and a very thing in it. I have window looking had many walk-ins wanting to know what lot of interest in our



large windows, two bath-nice kitchen with every-my own office with a large into the work room. I've also from people in the neighborhood we do. The move has stirred a ministry.

On February 15th we had a volunteer appreciation brunch. For the first time we could all meet together in the same room. It was wonderful!

My husband, Cal, and I were in Thailand in December ministering to a group of missionaries. Someone from the group we were working with graciously gave us a book, "Embracing the Love of God." I just recently started reading it and came across this gem. *"Unfortunately, in today's world many people fail to experience the freedom and healing power of God's grace. Even Christians too often experience judgment, rather than the love that is the vital essence of Christian life."*

Men and women in jails and prisons around the country need to experience the love and grace of God. The judgment and condemnation of society and the legal system is minor compared to the self-judging and condemnation that often comes from their own heart. Their gnawing sense of insignificance and isolation causes them to doubt if they could ever be loved by anyone.

There is no more wonderful message than, "You are loved!" No reality is more freeing, or more transforming than that of unconditional grace and love. In many different ways, we at PMA seek to express that love to the prisoners around the country. Every question they ask is answered personally. Even when we correct mistakes we seek to encourage them in their progress.

One does not need to be a Bible scholar to understand and appreciate God's love. The theologian, Karl Barth, was once asked, "What is the most profound thought you have ever had?" His answer was "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so!" At PMA, we want those who take our Bible correspondence courses to learn about the Bible. We teach some pretty advanced theology in the later lessons, but if all they get is head knowledge then we are not doing our job. If prisoners learn facts about theology but miss experiencing the love of God then we have failed God's calling for PMA.



Photos of the new PMA office facility in Port Orchard, WA, and volunteers that came to an appreciation brunch

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THE SPANISH SIDE



This report comes from Arnie and Sally Selfors who direct the Spanish speaking ministry of Prison Mission Association. They live in Largo, Florida, and Arnie ministers weekly at the Pinellas County Jail to around 50 inmates.

One of my faithful coworkers in the Spanish ministry who is actually in charge of the Tuesday morning Bible Study in the local jail, is William Gonzalez. William is a treasure, and we are so thankful for him. I praise God that he is the fruit of a jail ministry, for I had the privilege of leading him to the Lord in the local jail in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, over 40 years ago. He was born in Santa Cruz, and never ever had a father who lived in the home or to whom he could look up to. He was raised by his mother alone, and she did her best, but it was usually a challenge for her just to put food on the table. So, when he saw me carrying a Bible under my arm in the jail one day, he stopped me and asked me if that was a Spanish Bible. Since it wasn't, he wanted to know if I could get one for him. That began our time of discipleship together.

Little did we know when we arrived here in this area of Florida, that we would find William. After William had his citizenship papers, he brought his mother to Florida, where she lived and took care of him as he was alone.

William says that the preparation for his present work in the jail came to him through his study of the Word and his obedience to it. A verse that is precious to him, his constant companion, is Psalm 18:2: "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer, my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

William says that if there is one thing he would like to leave with you who read this article, it is the fact that unless you TRY it, you will never know what a joy it is to be used in God's service. His love is for those prisoners. Today as he left us after being with 21 different prisoners, he told us that as they prayed together, many had tears in their eyes. William is so gentle and understanding of their needs. He is just great with these men. William says that the death of his mother, who alone had been his companion for the better part of his life, was very difficult for him, but his pain was turned to joy as he began to serve the Lord. Pray for us, he pleas, so that many more Latinos will come to Christ through our weekly meetings and the correspondence lessons they take with them to keep them in the Word. Usually we have a different group of inmates, as from here they are sentenced and then sent to state or federal prisons. Our desire is to get them into the Word. Thank you and God bless you.

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In closing let me share another brief quote from "Embracing the Love of God" and another quote from a prisoner.

"One of the most difficult Christian doctrines to believe is the incredible value of human beings. It is difficult for many of us to accept God's love, to believe that God looks upon us and smiles. What we long to know is that we are loved. To be more specific, we hunger to know that we are accepted as we are, forgiven for all we have done, and cared for by a gracious, loving God. When we know this we walk away well."

One of the inmates wrote, "Thank you for the way that the lessons come to me, as there is quite a lot of growing on my part, and there is a vigilant effort to complete them. What I have learned counts very much in my faith as a Christian and reveals just how much **God loves me** and I feel it's through you He speaks to me and I grow spiritually."

by God's grace,

Karen

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which pervade this and similar TV programs contribute to the general decline of our culture and promote a variety of social pathologies for which we all pay the price. These include: the loss of shame, the trivialization of serious issues, the normalization of outrageous behavior and the rationalization of personal sin.

Loss of Shame

It seems that the people that parade their dysfunction across the studio of the *Springer Show* seem to have no sense of shame, remorse, propriety or even a basic sense of right and wrong. Seeing this seems to be both a reflection of our cultural attitudes toward disgusting behavior as well as fuel for the fire that increases those attitudes among the consumers of such trash.

When I first became involved in prison ministry people that had been active in it in previous generations would often joke about how “everybody in prison is innocent,” implying that nobody admits to the crimes they have committed. I was surprised by those comments because I rarely encountered a person that would not admit his guilt. I pondered that incongruity for quite some time, wondering why the difference between the experiences of people that worked with inmates 30 years ago and my experience today. Then one day when I was in a cell block and the *Jerry Springer Show* was playing I realized that this generation is so free to admit guilt because they have lost the sense of shame associated with antisocial actions. When a culture has no personal conscience or concern about how others judge its actions there

will be far less incentive for people to control the things they do and act in a civil manner. The young inmates are not ashamed of their behavior because they have seen poor conduct modeled by those around them for most of their lives.

Trivialization of Serious Issues

The audience reaction during *Springer* episodes reveals the complacency and insensitivity of society in general to the serious issues that plague the lives of so many people in our nation. It is typical for them to cheer when someone reveals some tawdry detail of his or her sad life. They encourage the fights that break out and they try to egg on women to expose themselves publicly.

All these things have the effect of trivializing issues that have enormous power to destroy individual lives and entire families, whether it be infidelity, promiscuity, homosexuality, out of wedlock birth, sexual exploitation, degradation of women or a host of other very important matters. By making light of these problems there is a tendency in peoples’ thinking to believe that they are not as devastating to our society as they really are.

Normalization of Outrageous Behavior

Seeing the types of things that are regularly discussed on the *Springer Show* gives the impression that such conduct is normal and should be readily accepted. The more often the viewers are exposed to graphic descriptions of outrageous behavior the less they will be shocked by it and the more willing they will be to accept it as commonplace and not be disgusted at it.

It must be kept in mind that the television audience that watches the *Springer Show* is not just the peer group of the guests but includes college students, children home from school, stay at home parents, temporarily unemployed workers and a wide variety of ordinary people whose thinking and values can be influenced by what they are exposed to. Likewise, if people believe the things they are seeing are normal and typical they may be influenced by curiosity to engage in such activities themselves or to not give wise advice to friends and acquaintances that are acting in such a way. The more people carry on in the way they see the *Springer* guests behaving the less civil our overall society will become and the greater the social problems we will be forced to deal with.

Rationalization of Personal Sin

Probably the most devastating influence that the depraved talk show genre has is that ordinary people will use the gutter dwelling behavior of the shows’ guests to justify and rationalize their own actions in a way reminiscent of the self-righteous Pharisee that compared himself to the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14. It is very common for us to allow our own flesh to set the standard for righteousness. When we do so, the bar we use to judge ourselves is usually set just below our own actions and lifestyle. By watching such glaring examples of disgusting conduct it becomes very easy for us to reassure ourselves of our own decency by saying, “at least I’m not as bad as those people.” This is a strategy Satan uses to get us to rationalize our own sins and causes us to not

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look to God's righteousness as the perfect standard to emulate. Ultimately such compromise of holiness leads to the unsaved refusing to admit to their own sinfulness and need for a Savior and for those already saved to lower their personal expectations for holiness resulting in a weakening of their testimony for Christ.

In all these ways, the crude and sordid revelations displayed on public airwaves have a destructive impact on our culture that is far more serious than simply the tasteless entertainment it provides for the mindless viewer. These shows contribute directly to the coarsening of our society in such a way that we leave ourselves open to yet greater degradation. The problems that we face as a nation can be traced back to our

willingness to allow godless values to triumph over righteousness. Permitting ourselves to be corrupted in our own homes as we do through television is disgraceful and dangerous for ourselves and our future generations.

How to Have an Impact

As you read this you may be in total agreement with everything that I've said, yet feel helpless to do anything to reverse the trend of social destruction that is perpetrated by lowlife talk show hosts such as Jerry Springer. Besides simply not watching the show, Christians can express their disapproval to advertisers, especially to local sponsors that will be more likely to respond to negative comments. The

combined efforts of many individuals and churches in a community can make a difference.

It can seem hard to sit back and watch our culture deteriorate especially when we understand the awful consequences that such misguided trends have on vulnerable lives. We must be vocal and outspoken against the trend towards moral degradation which has become so prevalent all around

Go to the PMA Website

www.pmabcf.org

There you can read back issues of *PMA Outreach* and access a wide variety of resources to help you have a more effective ministry