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→ **MINISTRY UPDATE** ←

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UPDATE

While we are in the process of dotting the i's and crossing the t's in preparation for the financing, we are also doing the same thing on all of our programs and paperwork. While we work tirelessly to keep our system simple, it takes a lot of effort to keep it that way. A) Our financial system is well on its way to being beyond reproach. B) Our spiritual system is solid, but we will always be evaluating and refining it. We are working on getting all of our locations doing the same thing. We will soon be ready for duplication anywhere. C) Our physical system is workable, but far from where we want it. That takes money to improve. We provide the basics for every person: housing, food, clothes, transportation, etc. There will be a lot of improvements as we grow. We don't need to make things too easy for them, but better, yes.

We were able to provide a chili dog dinner for all of our locations. That may not be much, but it is from the heart. It is better than the food they received in prison. Some of their personal problems far outweigh anything else: amputations, chronic disease, cancer, and you name it. Your prayers are always appreciated.

Changing subjects, Christmas is mostly about traditions, family, vacation time, with Christmas songs, giving of gifts, and, with some, remembering Jesus' birth. Too many times, the real reason for Jesus'

birth is lost in all the distraction of the season. In Jesus' day, the Jews were looking for the Messiah to be born according to their rules and traditions. They thought the Messiah was supposed to deliver them from the Romans and set up His kingdom on earth. Because Jesus didn't fulfill their checklist and priorities, they rejected Him as the Christ.

The Muslims, also descendants of Abraham, and, therefore, having a kinship to the Jews, were also looking for the Messiah, and they rejected Jesus because he was born of Isaac's lineage and not the lineage of Ishmael, Abraham's oldest son. Both were Abraham's lineage. Both were, and are still, looking for the Christ. Both reject Jesus for reasons of their religion, though they are both very religious. Both are waiting for Christ to come and set up his kingdom on this earth!

Then we have the third group, who acknowledge Jesus is the Christ, but they have set up their own traditions and expectations. They give him verbal acknowledgement and outward praise, but their heart is far from him. It is the "Christian Religion" that has many factions of followers who proclaim Christianity, but who walk after the flesh. Most acknowledge Christ when it is beneficial or appropriate for them.

Then there are those (unknown numbers) who walk by faith in His Spirit, who practice his teaching, and who are his disciples now. They listen to Him, they love one another, and they show God's love to all men, practicing what Jesus did. Their life is not their own. They are not serving to receive, but to give freely. The carnal mind cannot understand them and considers them to be weird. They are alive and serving while

looking for Christ Jesus' return (second coming).

— David Nichols



BEING F.A.T. IS NOT ALWAYS A BAD THING

My thoughts for this newsletter are inspired by a book I once read by Howard Hendricks. I can't remember the title of the book, but the premise he was making is that Christians should be F.A.T. He was not promoting being overweight, but he was using an acronym meaning Faithful, Available, and Teachable. How do you check out on that scale (pun intended)? Are you faithful, available, and teachable when it comes to the things of God?

Let's look together at a story in the Bible that happens to Mary leading up to the traditional Christmas. In Luke 1, where the angel appears to Mary and reveals to her that she was favored before God and that God had chosen her to bear a son and he would be called the Son of the Most High and his kingdom would never end.

This is a pretty fantastic story considering that Mary was a virgin and that probably she felt like she did not deserve such favor from God. Let's forget all the fantastic and almost unbelievable aspects of this story. Unbelievable, that is if you are not a born again believer in Jesus as your

Savior. Nevertheless, I want us to concentrate on the three attributes that I mentioned earlier. The important factor was that Mary was having an encounter with a messenger from God. In these kinds of encounters, it might be easy to let fear dominate you or get sidetracked by the power of the moment. In these times, our internal character will guide us and we will respond with what is inside of us.

The first of these attributes is FAITHFUL. Mary was a faithful follower of God. She was not promiscuous in her sex life. She was faithfully serving her family and performing her duties expected of her. Her faithfulness was perhaps one of the things that caught Joseph's eye and prompted him to seek her out as a mate. The point is, God could use her as an instrument to display His own glory on earth. I believe God still looks for Faithful people today to carry out his ministry in the earth. How about you? Are you being faithful to the things you know God wants of you? Are you serving God with humility in whatever tasks you are assigned by church leadership or by God or even by your boss at work? When God is choosing people who he can use to further His kingdom, I believe faithfulness is one of the things He looks for.

Mary was more than just faithful. She made herself AVAILABLE. After the angel had revealed this fantastic and overwhelming story to her, her response was, "I am the Lord's servant." Mary answered, "May your word to me be fulfilled." Mary didn't try to argue the point or ask any further questions. She simply made herself available for the miracle of God to happen. I'm sure that this did not make a lot of sense to Mary, but she knew in whom she had believed. How about you? Have you missed some miracle in your life because you were always doing something else and were never available to God? Or have you been so busy that you simply never make time for God in your life? Or do we just simply argue with God in unbelief that He wants to do something special with our life? The point is, how can God use our talents or gifts if we are not available to Him? I believe it begins by being faithful and then saying to God, as Isaiah did the Old Testament, "Here I am Lord, use me."

The last attribute of the three is being TEACHABLE. I find it hard in today's church to find men who are teachable. We always think we have a better way. Or even worse, we let jealousy or envy keep us from listening to other

men who are capable to teach us. In my own experience as a preacher of God's Word, it never fails that one or more will greet me after a sermon and try to teach me a better way to say what I said or that I might consider a different approach. My question to them is always the same. Did you fast and pray over this message? Or did you spend hours studying this passage and its correlations to the audience? Their answer is always no, so I tell them to let me preach my own sermons. It is not that I am perfect or that I'm the best preacher they have ever heard. I'm sure I'm not. The point of their need to correct or school me was that they were not teachable.

Mary only asked one question. "How can this happen, since I am a virgin?" When she was convinced that God was about to do a miracle, she simply listened and allowed the angel to instruct her. How much better men could we be if we put our pride out of the way and became teachable?

So, how about you? Are you ready to become a F.A.T. Christian? That is, one who is Faithful, Available, and Teachable? I hope I can be more this way for the sake of the kingdom of God, and I pray the same for you.



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— Ray Riddle

TESTIMONIES

I was raised in a Christian home with Christian family members, but I started to stray from the Christian path in high school. This behavior continued in college, but it got worse after my first divorce. Making poor decisions in life can happen to anyone, but a lifestyle choice to drink, use drugs, and womanize can lead to more poor decisions than the average person would make. My decision to be with a woman at work one night

was a poor choice, because we were seen by a minor. The girl told her mother, and her mother called the police. I was arrested and charged with a sex crime, and I was sentenced to two years of probation.

I had gotten away with many poor decisions in my life without getting caught. I thought this mistake was the beginning of the end. I was unsure of how to return to a wholesome life, but I knew it was going to take the power of God to do it. My sister told me about Hand Up Ministries, and she sent an application to me. I was scared of change, and I lied to her and told her I had sent the application. She called David Nichols to see if I had sent the application, and she learned I had never sent it. Her next call left no doubt that it was to be Hand Up or the graveyard if I kept on my path. I prayed, and I surrendered to God. I decided I would go to Hand Up.

When I arrived at Hand Up, all of my possessions were in a duffel bag. My father dropped me off at a trailer which was under repair, and I promised God I would do whatever it took to leave my old life behind. Good things began to happen almost immediately. The men here were inviting, and the staff gave me encouragement and direction. I was sober, and my mind began to clear. Daily prayer and reflection allowed me to make short term plans and goals. A job seemed just to appear. I moved to a better trailer, and I had two roommates who were Christians. They were both employed, and they were doing well on life. I wanted what these people had. Hand Up has given me a life and a hopeful future. I see God work every day, and I listen to Him.



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— Art Athens

I was a lost soul, but I didn't know it. I was introduced to Christianity when I was young. This changed my life, but I didn't take

it seriously. Satan was trying to enter my life, and I started doing things which weren't good. I woke up, and I started going to church again. Satan tried to come back into my life, but I knew better and I refused to let him into my life.

I got into trouble later in life, and I asked myself what happened. I went to prison, and I didn't know what I was going to do when I got out of prison. I heard about Hand Up Ministries, so I applied at Hand Up, and I was accepted. I knew only one person at Hand Up when I arrived there. This was a person I had known in prison. I started attending church at Hand Up, but I also started attending church outside of Hand Up. I became a Christian again at Hand Up. I am Native American, and my tribe wants me to be involved in our cultural customs in the Native American church. The elders of that church have taken care of me spiritually.

Hand Up has been good for me, and I am honored to be part of Hand Up. I am thankful to Hand Up for taking me into this ministry and letting me be part of this wonderful setting. I now have a better outlook on life.



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— Robert Ashley

I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1961. I was the youngest of six children. My family moved to a farm after my dad was hurt when I was six months old. The farm was on the edge of a small town called Strang. My mom worked at a nursing home to support the family, and we ate what we grew and raised on the farm. I went to school in Pryor.

I started going to church with the neighbors when I was in eighth grade, but I did this just to get out of the house. I didn't have time for school activities because I had to do chores at home. I started drinking, smoking weed, and experimenting with drugs when I was 12 years old. I graduated from

high school in 1980, and I worked at a manufacturing plant after high school.

I moved to Houston in 1986, but I only stayed there for six months. I moved to Venice, Louisiana and worked in an oil field. I was arrested for the first time in September, 1989. I was sentenced to a three year suspended sentence and two years of probation. My probation was transferred to Oklahoma, but I was arrested again less than a year after I came back to Oklahoma. I was still drinking and using drugs. I served nine and a half years in Oklahoma, and then I returned to Louisiana and went to court. The Louisiana judge gave me time served, so I didn't have to do any prison time in Louisiana. My mother died while I was in Louisiana. I returned to Oklahoma, and I stayed with my dad. I was still using drugs and alcohol, and I was arrested in 2000. I spent 14 years in prison. In prison, I took a class called "I Can." This class changed my life. I took another class called "Kairos." This class was a Christian class, and Christ changed my life. I haven't taken drugs or alcohol since then. I started going to church, and I took every class I could take. I was in Genesis One at Jess Dunn correctional facility.

I discharged from prison in May, 2014. I was staying at a motel in Tulsa when a friend told me about Hand Up Ministries. He was a resident at Hand Up. I came to Hand Up in June, 2014. Thanks to Hand Up and my Christian brothers, I am growing stronger in Christ every day. I have a job at a large laundry. I am thankful to God for the support from His family that helps me stay on the right path.

— Nathan Houston

We appreciate all our partners and donors. It is your support that enables us to assist individuals back into society as new brothers and sisters in Christ.

