

WEEK 31 • AUGUST 5, 2023

USA: Hope for Ex-Offenders

Matthew 25:36—“I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.”

After spending three years in prison for burglary, Shane Echols was determined to start a new life. But he had been in prison before, and he knew that his criminal record would make it hard to find work and acceptance in any community. The first time he was paroled, he eventually ended up back in prison. This time he was determined that it would not happen again. This time he had reason to believe it was possible.

While in prison Shane had met Jeffrey Cobb, a former prisoner who had found Christ and a calling. He knew the difficulty of finding work and housing after being released from prison. He knew that God was leading him to help ex-offenders with their most urgent needs—work and a place to live. Upon release, Jeffrey kept his promise to God and founded Shelter From the Storm, a transitional home or halfway house for ex-offenders. His transitional home provides shelter for four men at a time, and his lawn service provides them with employment. Jeffrey promised Shane a place to live after release and a job in his lawn service. Shane is free and building a new life.

Most U.S. prisons lack programs to train convicts in useful skills so they can find work when they leave prison. Programs such as Jeffrey’s help fill the gap.

Others have felt this call as well. Earl Gator spent 11 years in prison. He credits his family’s support and Adventist James Settles with helping him stay out of prison. “James took me under his wing and taught me how to paint,” Earl said. “Now I’m a painting contractor.” Settles, the founder of the Nashville-based transitional living program called Aphesis House, turned his life around in prison. Aphesis House now operates four facilities that serve 28 men, but there’s a waiting list of about 200 men.

God is using Aphesis House to provide men with the life skills they need to live a better life after prison. The relapse prevention program and behavior modification classes are particularly helpful in changing these men’s lives.

Your Promise offerings help support programs such as helping men and women who leave prison and need help establishing a new life outside prison and within God’s sheltering love. Investing in God’s work is a way to partner with Him to speed His coming!

He credits his family’s support and Adventist James Settles with helping him stay out of prison. “James took me under his wing and taught me how to paint,” Earl said. “Now I’m a painting contractor.”

Lucas L. Johnson II is a former reporter for The Associated Press. Reprinted and adapted with permission from the Southern Tidings.