

YOU

Turn for Christ

Freedom in Christ from Addiction

Story and photos by Geraldine Wilkins



Pastor Gerry Brown ministers to men at the Ranch near Maneadero, Mexico. They had informed the community about the coming outreach at a nearby park, cleaning up and painting benches.

When God delivered Gerry Brown from bondage to drugs and restored his marriage, he and his wife felt a calling to help others find a relationship with Jesus Christ and the freedom that He alone brings.

Since 1994, their ministry, U-Turn for Christ, has helped thousands of people turn

from substance abuse to a new life with Jesus, with many of its graduates helping newcomers walk the road to recovery.

In the early 90s, Gerry's drug abuse had broken his life into pieces. He was separated from his wife Peggy and their two children. She invited him to come to a

Bible study at Calvary Chapel Hemet in southern California.

He recalls one of his first breaking points came in a flood of tears on the side of a freeway. He knew enough about the Bible to realize that he wasn't living the way he should. But it took another week of self-pity

and more drugs before he gathered the courage to come to the study.

The Bible study that night was the fifth chapter of Ephesians, and exhorted, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." Convicted and angry, Gerry stormed out



Gerry tells Rafael that God loves him and has a plan for his life.

Rafael has fallen into a life of substance abuse. Pastor Gerry tells him that he can be set free from its bondage with Jesus Christ.

And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him...For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband?

1 Corinthians 7:13, 16



Peggy Ann Brown, Gerry's wife, visits with Trinity Kirwin, several months old.



A grandmother is comforted by Peggy and other U-Turn volunteers. The group prayed for God's will in the woman's life and the healing of her ear.

believing he had been set up. But Gerry returned to the Bible study a week later. He stayed there afterwards, not leaving until all his questions were answered.

Eight months later, he returned to his family a changed man. It was then that he and Peggy talked about the need for a place for those caught up in the deception of substance abuse. "Every center we called was \$25,000 to \$30,000 for treatment. Even Christian facilities were expensive. We began to think how neat it would be to have

a place for people to go who were in similar situations," he said.

The seed of U-Turn for Christ had been planted, along with Gerry's desire to minister to others. He and his wife served together in

children's ministry at CC Hemet. He taught a new believer's class, led the missions ministry and worked with the prison outreach. As he counseled men struggling with drugs and alcohol, he felt the Lord directing him to minister in that area full-time. He shared

"Change takes place by us getting to know God's Word and getting to know God."

Pastor Gerry Brown

with his senior pastor the desire to open a place of restoration for men.

How U-Turn Got Started

During Gerry's time as assistant pastor of CC Hemet, he oversaw a home for men just leaving the prison system. At a seminar, he met a realtor and told him his vision. Two days later, Gerry signed the paperwork for a piece of property in Perris, California. Thus

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

began U-Turn For Christ. The next day, men he had counseled in other restoration facilities moved in. "All the men knew that we taught the Word of God. Other programs lacked that foundation," recalls Gerry.

U-Turn For Christ Men's Ranch began in 1994, and the women's ranch opened almost two years later. The men's 4.5-acre ranch began with one building and five men. As many as 65 are served by the men's ministry and the women's ranch serves up to 25 at one time. Under a supervised strict regime, men and women are disciplined on two sepa-

rate ranches. The ministry's desire is for men and women to know Christ and to be conformed into His image by the power of the Holy Spirit. This goal is pursued by several daily studies of the Word of God and Biblical application. The program also involves community service, ranch chores, and personal devotional time.

Ministering to Women

The fruit of the program is evident. "Women's lives have changed. Some of these women didn't care about their children, but are now loving mothers," said Peggy Brown, Gerry's wife.

Peggy supervises the women's facility. Along with scheduling guest speakers and coordinating women's retreats, she also counsels one-on-one and teaches once a month. Her life is a testimony of how the power of God can change a family, a marriage, and a woman who yields herself to the Lord.

Peggy says her hope was anchored in the fourth chapter of Philippians: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." These verses "were the difference between life and death," she said. Looking back, she recalled her years of substance abuse and how the Lord saved her prior to her husband's conversion. "I thank God I didn't go into a secular drug program; I needed Jesus Christ. Raised in a Christian home, I returned to what I knew. Then God began to heal our family, our kids, and our marriage."

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Matthew 6:24

Renewing the Mind

The program works at replacing selfish desires with selfless behavior and cultivating a practice of feeding the spirit through reading and meditating on the Word of God. U-Turn's administrator, Mario Rocha, says, "As

ex-addicts, we realized that one of the main issues involved with addictions is selfishness, therefore, one of our focuses is recognizing this and learning to be selfless. God's Word says that we are to esteem others higher than ourselves."

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Galatians 5:1

Changed Lives at U-Turn

**Traci Lauer:
A mother's love renewed**

At age 13, Traci Lauer began using drugs for fun; she didn't see that drugs were slowly turning things upside down until what was wrong became acceptable. Recreational use led to habitual use. Habitual use led to selling, which led to her arrest at age 23.

While on probation, Traci fell back into drug use and was arrested again. While she thought nothing of being arrested, a new change was taking place in her body and heart. She was pregnant and had a strong



The women at the Ranch enjoy a time of fellowship while creating Christmas cards.



Linda Smith, right, of CC Costa Mesa Women's ministry, prays with Traci Lauer. The women ministered to the ladies of U-Turn.

desire to read the Bible. While incarcerated, she picked up the Bible for the first time and read all four Gospels. "I knew then that God was real." However, her old nature was still in control. She admits, "I used to make deals with God during my incarceration."

Her heart was changing, but she returned to drug use after her release. After some time, Traci accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord in 1994, but her devotion wavered. Drugs re-



CCCM women's ministry hosted a retreat at the Ranch. The theme was 'My Pilgrim Journey.' Your statutes have been my songs In the house of my pilgrimage. Psalm 119:54



The men gather each morning at 6:30 a.m. at the fire ring to have a devotion in the book of Proverbs. Once the chapter has been read, each man expresses

which verse they will apply to their lives that day.

entered her life, and her family decided to care for her daughter, who was three-years-old.

“They told me I could not have her back until I went to a drug rehabilitation facility. Through the anger and tears, I knew it was a good thing that my daughter was taken from me.” On the same day, Traci’s cousin found out about U-Turn.

She planned to stay only 60 days, but the Lord showed her that she needed to stay there to mature in her relationship with Jesus. She struggled with staying at the U-Turn facility but felt the Lord spoke to her through the book of Jeremiah.

If you will still remain in this land, then I will build you and not pull you down, and I will plant you and not pluck you up.

Jeremiah 42:10

Almost two years later, Traci is still at U-Turn and has learned to live in obedience and submission. Traci says the true miracle is her new respect for her mother and other people. In regards to future ministry, Traci says, “If I save the whole world for Christ, but neglect my daughter, what kind of mother am I? God is leading me to be a better mom.”

Lance Kerwin: An actor’s last performance

The youngest of five boys, Lance lived the Hollywood life as a child actor and teen idol and began abusing drugs at age 6. “I saw that that kind of lifestyle took people to a certain place, but I didn’t see I was on the same track,” said Lance.



Ali, like many of the men find time alone at the cross as a means of peaceful communion with God. This is a time when seemingly difficult circumstances fade away and are replaced with the peace of God.



Men chat outside their bunkhouse before a meal and share scripture.



Each day the men will have either chores on the Ranch or a work detail at one of the locations where they volunteer on a daily basis. Center, Michael Tiso, from Boston, works along side other men unloading wood at the Ranch.

He had built up a wall against the Gospel because several men in his family who were pastors spoke condemning words against his family's lifestyle. Nevertheless, God used one of his brothers to break through that wall. Lance began attending Calvary Chapel Capo Beach, and in 1987, he accepted Jesus Christ.

Simultaneously, Lance was attending Alcoholics Anonymous. "I was trying to recruit God to help me stay sober, but I was a big phony," said Lance. Being drawn back toward his old lifestyle, Lance fled Hollywood for Hawaii and attended the local Calvary Chapel. But leaving Hollywood wasn't enough, and Lance turned again to



Men for U-Turn for Christ, gather in the sanctuary for the weekly Friday night Bible study with Pastor Gerry Brown.



Lance Kirwin prays for a woman formerly addicted to drugs. She also asks for prayer for her son who will be released from jail in the next hour. The woman wanted someone to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with her son when he is released. She believes nothing else could save her son.



Maribel Dowdy washes an elderly lady's feet at an outreach held by U-Turn for Christ in Mexico, following the example of Jesus.

drugs when a personal crisis hit. The pastor there exhorted him twice to go to U-Turn for Christ.

In 1997, Lance called his brother for help. After his brother prayed with him, Lance



Pastor Teddy leads prayer for Antonio Sanchez-Lopez on an outreach in Mexico.

said, "I am tired of trying to make something happen. I'm just going to sit here on the curb until whatever happens, happens." His brother drove to Los Angeles to see if he was really on the street corner. Finding him there, he drove him straight to U-Turn. Since his arrival, Lance has had a couple of set-backs, but he has found victory in Jesus Christ one day at a time. Lance met his bride, Yvonne, at U-Turn, where they live and serve God together. They were blessed with baby Trinity in December of 2001.

Learning to Minister

But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Matthew 13:23

Many of those who have grown in Christ at U-Turn now share God's love by serving in U-Turn's ministries around the world, with several in Mexico and the Philippines.

The U-Turn For Christ in Perris, CA sends out godly men to oversee and set up the ministry under the leadership of the senior pastor in churches that teach the Bible. Currently, U-Turn For Christ has chapters set up in Bangor, ME, Lexington, SC, and Greenville, TN and would like to assist in other areas as well. ☞

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Mexican Pastor Tony Ramirez and Gerry Brown join hands with Lance Kirwin and Rafael to pray and give thanks for God's blessings.