

A box of names

The gospel reaches from jailhouse to church house

Jared Sexton was pacing back and forth in his jail cell. “I was like, ‘Man, I don’t know why I keep doing this... I don’t even want to live this way. I know not to live this way. I keep doing it over and over and over and over again.’”

His cellmate handed him a King James Bible and told him, “You need to read Romans 7.” In the complex passage, Paul complains about committing sins that he hates. Sexton had a hard time understanding the Apostle’s words, but, “I was like, ‘OK, well this sounds exactly like what I was just saying.’” He wanted to know more.

He began drinking at a young age. “I was always in trouble, in and out of jail, and rehabs, boot camps, prison—I’ve been to every one of them....I was literally at a point where the only thing I could do is look to God.” That was the point when he found himself in a jail cell with four other inmates, one of whom had just returned from a Bible study of Romans 7.



When Sexton bonded out of jail, he went home and found a Contemporary English Version Bible someone had given him. “I read it and it just blew my mind...I read the Bible [before] and nothing ever clicked. This time was completely different. It was like everything was jumping out at me.

“For the first time in my life I took a real look at what sin meant in my life...I wanted to know more what that meant. And so, I knew the perfect place to go; that was church.”

Sexton went to Metropolis First Baptist Church where his boss is a member and his grandparents had taken him a few times as a child. There, Sexton met **Cliff Easter**, the church’s youth and missions pastor, and gave his life to Christ.

Metropolis First is deeply involved in evangelism and missions through local outreach ministries, international



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mission trips, and church planting mission trips to Chicago. Easter said, “It’s not complicated. It’s just, ‘Go, reach somebody.’ We’ve incorporated that into some of our discipleship training that we’ve just begun in our church.”

That’s my ‘one’

IBSA’s Pat Pajak led an evangelism training in the local association, as he does across the state, sharing the “Who’s Your One” evangelism concept in which members pray for the people they know to find salvation in Christ. Three times in the past two years, Pajak has urged churches to dedicate one Sunday or a month of Sundays to a baptism emphasis, and baptisms in Illinois increased almost 7% last year.



EASTER

The Metropolis church keeps cards at the front of the auditorium for members to write the names of people who need Christ. The cards are an important part of the evangelism effort. “Every Wednesday night at our prayer meeting, we distribute every single one of those cards, and as a church we pray over them,” Easter said. “There are hundreds of names in the box.

“The idea is, if you put someone’s name on a card in the box, you’re praying for them, and you’re looking for opportunities to share the gospel with them.”

The first name Sexton put in the box was his childhood friend, Dakota Stevens. “We all began praying for Dakota,” Easter said. “You could tell that God was at work in him, and sure enough Dakota came to repentance and faith in Christ.”

“I don’t know when he put my name in there, or what date it was, but it obviously worked.... The power of prayer does work. It’ll move anything in front of you,” Stevens said.

Sexton, as a Christian and member in good standing at Metropolis First, had the privilege of baptizing his friend. “I came up out of the water... I was like, it’s a helping hand that he’s always had,” Stevens said. “He’s good about that. If he cares about you that man will help you no matter what.”

Sexton knows he is blessed to bless others to share the gospel, especially his old friends. “I’ll try to say some things related to the Word that are happening in my life. Whether it be with prayer, or a blessing God has shown me...I just pray...that something that they heard, something catches their attention that just breaks a little bit of the resistance away from them.”