

Website Calls Prodigals Back Home

A Dallas-area pastor is calling prodigals home through a website that has received tens of thousands of hits since it launched last year.

Steve Hill, pastor of Heartland Church in Irving, Texas, said thousands have returned to faith in Christ since he started in April 2009.

"They write us from all over the world," he said. "Many of them feel like they drifted too far. This website helps them come home."

A former drug addict turned evangelist, Hill spent five years preaching nightly services during the Brownsville Revival, which drew 4 million visitors from around the world to Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Fla.

Hill left Brownsville in 2000 and later founded Heartland Church. But since being diagnosed with a "vicious" melanoma in 2001 that has spread into his bloodstream, forming two tumors near his lungs, Hill has increasingly been using the Internet to evangelize. In addition to , he has developed "cybertracts" that he posts on YouTube. (View "Good News, Bad News" and "Hell to Pay" below.)

"I've taken the gospel and I've put it where the world is," Hill said. "The world is right in front of that screen watching."

Hill's ministry, which funds , advertises the site on MySpace and Facebook. Hill said God showed him there were 20 million prodigals in the U.S. alone, but the site has drawn visitors from 130 nations, including China, the United Arab Emirates and Japan.

On the website, Hill shares his testimony of overcoming addiction and the parable of the prodigal son from Luke 15. He then invites visitors to recommit to Christ and share their stories with the ministry, which is working to help direct people to a local church.

Visitors frequently send messages asking for prayer or testifying of salvation. A high school student from Texas wrote that since being raped she had made some of the worst decisions in her life.

"I have always grown up in a Christian home, but after I was raped I went completely opposite of how I was raised," she wrote. "I was so mad at God for letting that happen. ... But today things changed. I was on MySpace, saw a link to this website, went to it, watched the clips and just finally turned my life around."

A 70-year-old man said he made a new start after visiting the website. "I thought it was too late," he wrote. "Now I believe there is much, much more."

A 21-year-old drug-addicted woman sent the site a note that she hated people who believed in God. "But I am scared ... a druggie that is pregnant and I don't know what to do," she wrote.

She planned to get an abortion, but after e-mailing ministry staffer Kathy Duffy for six weeks, the woman accepted Christ, was delivered from drug and alcohol addiction, and decided to keep her baby.

"We flew her out to our church in Dallas to have a baby shower and to get baptized," Duffy said. "She is now enrolled in Correspondence Bible School and loves Jesus with all her heart. There is no greater joy on this earth than helping people find Jesus!"

Next month, former Brownsville Revival leaders including John

Kilpatrick and Lindell Cooley will gather at Heartland Church for a special service to honor Hill, who is currently undergoing his third clinic trial at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

Prayer leader Cindy Jacobs, who is convening the July 16 service, hopes the money raised during the benefit will help offset Hill's medical costs and allow him to take a break from preaching to focus on improving his health.

"God burdened me to do this," said Jacobs, co-founder of Generals International. "[Hill has] never asked for anything. He doesn't want to bother anybody. He's so pure-hearted. He's just [focused on] souls and honoring God."

Hill said he's humbled by the generosity of his ministry friends and is thankful that "the troops are rallying" in prayer for him. He said he believes God will heal him, and in the meantime he will continue to win souls, whether in the hospital or on the Internet.

"I don't ask Jesus why," Hill said. "I ask Jesus, 'Use me.'"