

Life In Prison Ministry

Can Inmates Reform?

There is an old saying that goes "There are no atheists in fox-holes." The same is often true the first night of prison for a new inmate. After the shock wears off, men are confronted with the cold, hard reality that they are no longer in control of their life. Often times a person ends up in jail suddenly and without warning.

The first few days away from drugs, friends, and family really makes a person think deeply about their life, how they got into that situation, and what could have happened. During these times of being sorry for their actions, often times God and the Bible comes to mind.

In some cases God uses these situations to change a person's heart. Through the bible, preaching of Jesus Christ, and prayer, God can change a criminal to an ex-criminal and grant him complete forgiveness of sins. God will establish a deep desire to read the bible and obey it. This type of reform is what it is called to be born again, and the prisoner is changed for life.

In other cases, there seems to be a change in a person's attitude. Many times he will profess Christ, read the bible, and even pray. However, he is not truly sorrowful for his actions, and has never repented. Though he may have a vast head knowledge and bible understanding, without repentance of sin, no conversion can take place. This prisoner is one to leave his bible at the door when he is released from prison.

In the rest of the cases, criminals simply get harder and harder while behind bars. They have no remorse and glory in their evil, all-the-while proclaiming their own goodness. This is the fast track to destruction and death. Like a hired mobster, the criminal's heart grows harder and harder with each compromise of his conscience. But even for the worst of cases, there is always hope.

Put simply, most inmates end up in prison more than once, and each time, it gets a little more familiar and a little easier. No one wants to go to jail, but a second-timer will already know people, already know the routine, and can easily adapt to the conditions.

So how can an inmate reform? Does education work? The culture will say so. It will say to get on a 10 step program, take these classes and get a job, or go back to school. What do you get then? You get a drug addict who can afford his addiction. you get a thief

who does more intelligent crimes. Giving a criminal education will only make a smarter criminal.

What about responsibilities and life training? Some programs will claim that if you simply retrain the inmate and give him social skills and techniques to deal with his feelings and guilt, he will be reformed. This may work, for a while, but those reformed men and women still have the same desires, cravings, lusts, and greed. They have just trained themselves to hide it better.

Programs like Alcoholics Anonymous claim to help, but they also claim that there is no cure for alcoholism, and once you are an alcoholic, you will always be an alcoholic. Their techniques are only a poor substitute for replacing the addiction with a 'higher power' and a friend to call on.

Statistics always show that programs that are not Jesus-centered simply will not work effectively. Why? Because only with Jesus Christ can a man be completely forgiven of all of his sins, and adopted into God's family as a son. Jesus suffered and died on a cross two thousand years ago to pay for the crimes that every person has ever committed, and according to the bible, there is forgiveness of sin to all who truly repent (turn from their sins) and put their trust in Jesus' work on the cross. When they can look to and depend on Jesus' death, burial and resurrection for their eternal hope, God will supernaturally change their heart. The evil they formerly desired they will hate, and they will start loving good.

Often times this is a process and takes time, however many times a person's major sin falls away like a leaf to the ground within a short amount of time. Once a person is born again, they have started the process of personal reformation. God himself steps in and begins to take sins away, and change habits.

Who better to understand Justice than a person locked up in prison. Good judges are bound by law to put criminals away into jail. In the same way sins like lying to your boss or family member, hating others, lusting, fornication, envy, bitterness, and greed make you an enemy to God's society. God as the Good Judge of all the Universe must punish lawbreakers. Lying lips are an abomination to God. He judges far more strict and harsh than human laws.

When a person in jail realizes that God's jail is a place called hell and that we all are guilty criminals in His site, then he will understand why hell is so severe. The fear of God is clean and endures forever, and it is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge.

Then when that person realizes that God Himself became the man Jesus Christ, and walked a perfect innocent life, then died for criminals, what more can one do than be heartbroken? How else should the guilty one react to the news that the innocent was killed to free the guilty? Should he not love that Lamb who was slaughtered? Would he not owe God everything for dying to free a criminal such as himself? Should that news not want a criminal to reform his ways, because eternal life has been promised?

Yes, inmates can reform. And so can other criminals. Like you.

Posted by "D"

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