

Liberty University School of Divinity

**Connecting the Church Beyond Prison Ministry:
Transitioning the Discipled Prisoner into a
Discipleship Community**

A Thesis Project Submitted to
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in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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ABSTRACT

The prison population in the United States surpasses all other countries on a per capita basis. The number of released inmates, who return to prison (recidivism) is staggering. In-prison Christian discipleship programs have successfully transitioned parolees into the free world, but little research has been done to confirm a standard practice for the transition process. Theories abound from clergy and laity alike; yet apathy and fear remain persistent deterrents. The church is confronted with a biblical mandate to assist the incarcerated (Matt. 25:36) and to make disciples (Matt. 28:19). By addressing the current concerns of church and prison ministry leaders, as well as, the concerns of incarcerated disciples, the implementation of a focused transition process can be achieved. Ultimately, disciplined releasees will quickly become productive citizens and the Christian community will have proven methods to provide successful transitioning.

DEDICATION

To my Lord and Savior, the giver and sustainer of life. The amazing compassion of Jesus Christ affords true freedom, regardless of physical barriers, and His gift of salvation gives hope for a perfected, eternal future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The old proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” could aptly be revised for a doctoral student completing a Thesis Project. The new and revised axiom would attest “it takes compassionate villagers from divergent backgrounds to assist a student with a Thesis Project.” I have grown personally and educationally, because of the extraordinary support of many people and groups.

I am thankful for my professors at Liberty University and my mentor Dr. Michael Whittington for his unending guidance, throughout this lengthy thesis process, and to Dr. C. Fred Smith, my reader and encourager. Dr. Rodney Dempsey expanded my definition of Christian discipleship and enabled me to have a sharpened vision for prison ministry. The late Dr. Charlie Davidson taught me the meaning of endurance in the midst of physical challenges and I honor his life. Many other professors, including Dr. Dwight Rice, taught me how to survive the challenges I often placed upon myself.

A thank you to Dr. Paul and Jerri Carlin is merely a token of my gratitude. The contributions of Paul Carlin, founder of Therapon, cannot be over emphasized; without his support, I would not have been able to conduct the prisoner research. The ongoing faithful ministry of Paul and Jerri is changing the atmosphere within the Texas prisons and Christian discipleship among the inmates is becoming the new normal. The wardens and chaplains, who assisted and approved the surveys within the prisons, made this project educationally unique and valuable for future program development.

I am especially grateful to the hundreds of Christian inmates that completed surveys in Texas; without their willing participation, this project would not have been possible. Each inmate

gave of his time, not for compensation, but believing he could contribute to a successful discipleship-transitioning program.

Church and ministry leaders from various sectors took the time to complete surveys and lend crucial information to develop programs for transitioning prisoners upon release. I would like to personally thank the following groups for contributing to the survey base: Prison Fellowship, Humanity for Prisoners, All Life Is Precious Ministries, Liberty Church Network, The Ministry Church, Therapon Institute, and Kairos of Texas.

The fellowship of Oh Happy Day and the hands-on assistance of Dee Wyly and Joy French allowed me to finish this project. My sisters and a brother-in-law, along with, one special sister and brother-in-Christ are listed last. They have believed with me, prayed with me, and endured with me, as I followed the Lord's call on my life. Eternity will bear witness of my love for Susie, Diane, Linda, Scott, Sylvia, and James.

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Abbreviations and Definitions

Abbreviations:

DOJ – Department of Justice

IFI - Inner-Change Freedom Initiative

KDOL – Call letters of a local Livingston, Texas, radio station

T.D.C.J. – Texas Department of Criminal Justice

U. S. B. J. – United States Bureau of Justice

Definitions:

Cognitive dissonance – the cause of excessive mental pressure and anxiety, when an individual holds two or more conflicting beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time.¹

Ex-offender – an individual previously incarcerated in a state or federal correctional facility, who has been released from incarceration.²

Exonerated or Exoneration – a term referring to an official decision to reverse a conviction, based upon new evidence of innocence; it vacates the conviction and requires no retrial or an acquittal, or an acquittal occurs at a new trial, or the governor grants a pardon.³

Lock-down - lockdowns are performed as a routine unit security shakedown. Prison personnel search for contraband, especially looking for weapons. During lockdowns, the entire unit

¹ N. Chabrak and R. Craig, “Student Imaginings, Cognitive Dissonance and Critical Thinking,” *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 24, no. 2 (2013): 91.

² Terri Winnick and Mark Bodkin, “Anticipated Stigma and Stigma Management Among Those to be Labeled Ex-con,” *Deviant Behavior* 29, no. 4 (2008): 296.

³ Brandon Garrett, *Convicting the Innocent Where Criminal Prosecutions Go Wrong* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 11.

will stop any and all offender traffic, while the searches are being conducted. The lockdown may involve one or more units, or it can be system-wide. During a lockdown, the offenders will be staying in their cells, food is distributed in paper sacks called “johnnies” and they dispersed in the cellblock. Lockdown status can vary from hours to days or weeks.⁴

Recidivism – a designation of an offender, who is rearrested, reconvicted, and reincarcerated. A standard equation for recidivism is unavailable; therefore, the results are inconsistent. A major controversy exists between whether or not administrative violations of parole should or should not be included as a new conviction.⁵

Reentry – every ex-offender is subject to reentry, regardless of how they are released. It is a simple term used to describe the process of leaving a jail or prison and reentering society. Successful reentry may include the benefits of a place to live, employment, family schools, religious freedoms, and community involvement. Successful reentry means the ex-offender is no longer a burden to society, but a benefit.⁶

⁴ William Habern, David O’Neal, and Debra Bone, “Going to Prison in Texas in 2015, Part Two,” *Voice for the Defense*, no. 2 (2015): 1.

⁵ M. Ostermann, L. M. Salerno, and J. M. Hyatt, “How Different Operationalizations of Recidivism Impact Conclusions of Effectiveness of Parole Supervision.” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 52, no. 6 (2015): 771-772.

⁶ Stephen Bahr, Lish Harris, James Fisher, and Anita Harker Armstrong, “Successful Reentry,” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 54, no. 5 (2010): 668.

Preface

The Holy Spirit allowed one Scripture verse to completely change the direction of this writer's life and clarify His calling. "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me; To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners" (Isaiah 61:1, NASB).

We often allow our daily life responsibilities to cloud the voice of the Lord for fulfilling His purposes in our life. At the age of fifty-three years old, the Lord called me to return to school and finish my education in support of His calling. Prison ministry was not my choice in life, until the Lord moved in my life and changed my perspective. It is true that a person does not have to be called to prison ministry, to be an effective disciple for releasees or anyone in need. The charts and diagrams displaying the collected research speak for themselves; the need for the Christian community to arise and lend-a-hand cannot be over emphasized.

Chapter One: Introduction

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners.⁷

—Isaiah 61:1 (NASB)

Background

The United States has exhibited an apathetic approach to a desperate problem within the criminal justice system. While changes need to occur within the federal and state levels of criminal justice, the church and Christian community can make significant contributions, to reduce recidivism and promote a safer society. The problem is trifold: mass incarceration, a high rate of recidivism, and apathic Christian communities. Many individuals and groups feel justified in their desire to remain uninvolved, because of prior involvement, which ended badly. Many Christians have mentored inmates and diligently supported them upon release; only to become the victims of the releasee's new set of crimes.⁸ It is a heartbreaking situation. In-prison discipleship programs have recorded amazing results, but disciplined releasees are often left to fend for him or herself.⁹ If a successful program to transition disciplined releasees were available, the results would affect the number of mass incarcerations, the rate of recidivism, and provide support for those who would like to help.

The consequences of recidivism affect the safety of the American public and the income of every single taxpayer. It is an expensive proposition to incarcerate individuals and the cost of

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New American Standard Bible* (Anaheim: Lockman Foundation, 2000).

⁸ Individuals and groups have requested to remain anonymous.

⁹ C. James, G. Stams, J. Asscher, A. De Ron, and P. Van Der Laan. "Aftercare Programs for Reducing Recidivism among Juvenile and Young Adult Offenders: A Meta-Analytic 147 Review." *Clinical Psychology Review* 33, no. 2 (2013): 264.

those victimized is incalculable.¹⁰ The United States incarcerates the highest number of people in the world, yet only boasts 5% of the world's population; this results in approximately 25% of the world's prisoners.¹¹ The prison system has expanded at a distressing and unparalleled rate, during the past four decades, and the rate of incarceration in the United States has more than quadrupled, while crime rates relatively remained the same.¹² The rate of recidivism makes reentry of releasees an ongoing, problematic cycle. Recent studies have shown a slight decrease in the number of incarcerations and recidivism, propagated through fiscal cuts, but it is too soon to actualize and forecast an enduring effect.¹³ Society bears the burden of victimization over and over again, when the behavior of the released individuals remains unchanged.¹⁴

Michelle Alexander suggests mass incarceration reaches beyond a criminal justice issue and extends into an American civil rights issue.¹⁵ The founder of The Equal Justice Initiative, Bryan Stevenson, argues mass incarceration carries the same stigma as slavery once did in the United States.¹⁶ By sheer logic, the massive number of incarcerated individuals equates to a higher number of recidivisms. The effects of incarceration not only affect the prisoners, but their

¹⁰ Todd R. Clear and Natasha A. Frost, *The Punishment Imperative: The Rise and Failure of Mass Incarceration in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 11.

¹¹ E. R. Meiners, "Life After OZ: Ignorance, Mass Media, and Making Public Enemies," *Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies* 29, no. 1 (2007): 23.

¹² Jeremy Travis, Bruce Western, and Steve Redburn. *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*, National Academies Press, 2014.

¹³ Clear and Frost, *The Punishment Imperative*, 10.

¹⁴ J. Le Blanc and P. Nolan, "Partners for the Successful Reentry," *Corrections Today* 71, no. 6 (2009): 59.

¹⁵ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 9.

¹⁶ James Kilgore, *Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People's Guide to the Key Civil Rights Struggle of Our Time* (New York: The New Press, 2015), 11.

families, communities, and society.¹⁷

The intention of this study is to highlight the positive approaches and outcomes of discipling inmates within the prison and to correlate the transitional benefits to the releasee and an involved Christian community, upon and after reentry. Faith-based discipleship programs, which begin after an individual is incarcerated and extend into post release, are experiencing positive results.¹⁸ By educating the church and the Christian community with result-oriented programs, which positively affect recidivism, the fear and apathy associated with prisoners and ex-offenders can be greatly reduced.¹⁹ The body of Christ can make a positive impact and fulfill Jesus' mandate in Matt. 25:36b, 40, "...I was in prison and you came to Me. The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'" When an offender becomes eligible for release, the further responsibility of the church and Christian community is found in Ps. 146:7-9, "Who executes justice for the oppressed; Who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free. The Lord opens *the eyes of* the blind; The Lord raises up those who are bowed down; The Lord loves the righteous; The Lord protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, but He thwarts the way of the wicked."

¹⁷ Clear and Frost, *The Punishment Imperative*, 5.

¹⁸ James, Stams, Asscher, De Ron, and Van Der Laan. *Clinical Psychology Review*: 264.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Statement of Problem

The United States ranks number one in the world in prisoner incarcerations. The prisons are filled to capacity; therefore, inmates are being released at an unprecedented rate. A report published by the United States Bureau of Justice (USBJ) confirms 2,266,800 inmates were being held in state and federal prisons and county jails; notwithstanding, another 4,887,900 men and women were on parole or probation in the same year.²⁰ Direct effects on American society are: 1) the rate of incarceration, which has increased by 460% between 1980 and 2006 and 2) the rate of offenders released on parole, during the same period, increased by 360%.²¹ More than 60% of the releasees are reincarcerated within three years and the cycle continues to repeat itself.²²

The church and Christian community need to take a realistic look at this problematic situation and become educated and solution-based. Jesus presents a biblical mandate to His church regarding discipleship, but many faith-based organizations and churches are divided in their approach to fulfilling Jesus' mandate, as it relates to prisoners and releasees.²³ Within the past ten years, faith-based programs have been shown to be a highly effective means of deterring and reducing recidivism.²⁴ By examining the currently successful models of Christian discipleship within the prisons and those utilized through discipleship reentry programs; the

²⁰ L. Glaze, "Correctional Population in the United States—2010," *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice (2011): 3.

²¹ B. Johnson, "The Faith Factor and Prisoner Reentry," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 4, (2008): 2.

²² M. L. Ostermann, M. Salerno, and J. M. Hyatt. "How Different Operationalizations of Recidivism Impact Conclusion of Effectiveness of Parole Supervision." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 52, no.6 (2015): 774.

²³ Matthew 25:26,40; Mark 2:17; Hebrews 13:1-3.

²⁴ L. Cei. Faith-Based Programs are Low-Cost Ways to Reduce Recidivism, *Corrections Today* 72, no. 4 (2010): 4.

church can become educated, build God’s kingdom, and make American communities a safer place to live.

The cost of recidivism extends beyond a monetary value and it places an extraordinary burden and cost upon the emotional, physical, and spiritual stability of the American population. The repeated victimization of countless people is a continuous cycle of desperation, when men and women are released from prisons and jails—unchanged. The statistics prove that only one-third of all offenders retain their freedom for more than three years after their release.²⁵ The statistics are valid to the American public, because even if the margin of error is high, it does not counter the relevance of the extraordinarily high rate of recidivism. The inmate population continues to rise at an unprecedented rate, with an increase of 460% in the twenty-six years between 1980 and 2006.²⁶ The number of parolees (in this same period of time) has increased over 360%.²⁷

The problem appears disparaging. In the entire world population, the United States ranks number one with carrying 25% of the worlds incarcerated, while only holding 5% of the total population.²⁸ Certainly, the problem of recidivism is apparent, but a broken criminal justice system in America is not solely to blame; the American public and the living church hold a weight of responsibility for rehabilitation of offenders.

²⁵ P Langan and D. Levin. “Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994,” *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice (2002).

²⁶ B. Johnson, “The Faith Factor and Prisoner Reentry,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, no. 4 (2008): 3.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ E. R. Meiners, “Life After OZ: Ignorance, Mass Media, and Making Public Enemies,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies* 29, no.1 (2007): 23.

The benefits of incarceration are seemingly temporal, as violent criminals serve only a term of approximately 49 months.²⁹ A former attorney general of Virginia and later president of Chuck Colson’s Prison Fellowship, stated, “We have failed to balance justice with mercy by all but ignoring rehabilitation.”³⁰ The State of Texas executes more prisoners than all the rest of the United States combined; they have not solved the problem of recidivism—even with desperate attempts.³¹

Statement of Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

Limitations place restrictions on the methods and conclusive results of a study; they are the influences, circumstances, and the shortcomings, which cannot be regulated. This thesis project is not designed to give exact percentages of increases or decreases in recidivism. The guidelines for determining the rate of recidivism are not clearly defined and to declare exactness would be misleading. The survey process with church and ministry leaders is designed to determine what can be done to bridge the gaps, created by apathy and fear, and successfully work with prisoners and reentry individuals, as disciples of Jesus Christ.

This writer is most familiar with the Texas prison system and founded All Life Is Precious Ministries in 2005, to specifically move the Gospel within the Texas prisons. Texas is known for their “tough on crime” position and for the severity of their criminal justice system. All of the prisoners surveyed are currently serving their sentences in Texas, but Texas is harshly

²⁹ M. Earley, “The Role of Non-Profits in the Rehabilitation of Prisoner,” *Criminal Justice Ethics* 24, no. 1 (2005): 58.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Texas Department of Criminal Justice, “Fiscal Year 2014 Statistical Report,” Huntsville, TX: Executive Services, (2015).

representative of all states of mass incarceration. Certain limitations exist by solely focusing on the Texas prison system and their reentry programs, because different states will have diverse social constructs with which to contend, along with different prison regulations and privileges.

This study is limited to three maximum-security prison units and two minimum-security units. All of the prison units are male-only prisons and each unit has well-structured Christian discipleship program or programs offered within the prison. The inmates surveyed are located in the following prison units: Eastham, Ellis, Huntsville (“Walls”), Wallace Pack, and Cleveland. The total population of each unit varies; notably, maximum-security prisons usually have a substantially larger total population.

The prisoners were not given any type of compensation for their participation in this project, nor were they offered any type of incentive. Although, sincerity is no guarantee for truth, the inmates selected for this voluntary survey are currently involved in a Christian discipleship program or were recently participating in a program. The length of time a prisoner participated in a discipleship program was not addressed; therefore, the spiritual maturity level of the inmate is not taken into account.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries determined by the researcher, which describe the restrictions applied to the study, including what literature is not pertinent, what populaces are not studied, what methodological practices are not used, and the reason why. This study does not include women inmates or any juvenile offenders; although, the researcher recognizes these groups could greatly benefit from the results of the study. A boundary was established for only male inmates with present or past participation in a formalized in-prison Christian discipleship program.

The time frame to administer and collect the inmate surveys was a consideration. The original plan allowed for a thirty-day completion, but it had to be extended to sixty days. Two of the prison units with inmates being surveyed went into lock-down after the surveys were distributed and two other prisons could not complete the surveys, because the lock-down was underway at the time of distribution.

Theoretical Basis

The theoretical framework for this study is underlined by the title of this Thesis Project, “Connecting the Church Beyond Prison Ministry: Transitioning the Discipled Prisoner into a Discipleship Community.” Prisons are inundated with requests from Christian groups, to supply prison ministry programs, outreach, soul saving, preaching, and music. Although, well intended, many Christians are uneducated about the deep needs of prisoners and how their efforts should be gauged for present and future successful rehabilitation. While this fact is not true of all churches and prison ministries, the true meaning and action of discipleship becomes misguided. The situation is similar to people who attend church on Sunday, as a token of their allegiance to the Lord, yet the rest of their week is spent conforming to secular activities. Conversely, a disciple of Christ desires to follow Christ daily and he/she will actively attempt to conform their life to the will of God. True discipleship is

Most prisoners will one day be released into society and their perception of current culture is severely tainted by years of prison institutionalization; it is not uncommon for a releasee to engage in his environment in the same way he engaged prior to entering prison. For many of the releasees, the time lapse from prison to freedom, can amount to more than twenty years. Theological viewpoints about criminal justice and prisoner discipleship in dominant denominations vary widely. According to Fred Kniss and Paul David Numrich, theological

agendas are often augmented by a sense of moral order, which can cause a two-tier dimension, dividing a moral order issue into two parts: moral authority and moral project.³² In a similar fashion, Paul Froese and Christopher Bader argue the theological differences are attributed to four individual views of God: authoritative, benevolent, critical, or distant.³³ Each of the viewpoints will be further addressed, as a major consideration of theological concern lies in what a mentor, supporter, or community believes about redemption.

The biblical concept of discipleship is over 2000 years old and, in many areas, the concept has been embraced by Christian society; somehow, a segment of believers within the prison systems and ex-offenders have been largely ignored. This writer's ten years of prison ministry experience have identified the areas of fear and apathy in the Christian community, which hinder effective discipleship in this neglected segment of society. The focus of this study is grounded in biblical directives to the church and the faith-based groups, when implemented achieve measurable results. Primary theorists, S. Ball-Rokeach and Paul Carlin, both express Belief System Theory's. Rokeach theorizes the relationship between behaviors and beliefs, as predictive and interrelated; he suggests that when an individual changes their central belief, there is a major impact upon their behavior.³⁴ Paul Carlin stresses that prisoners are human beings that have made a mistake in their lives; prisoners can be rehabilitated, forgiven, and lead productive lives in society, through faith-based initiatives.³⁵ A. Bandura suggests a self-efficacy theory,

³² Fred Kniss and Paul David Numrich, *Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement: How Religion Matters for America's Newest Immigrants* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 56.

³³ Paul Froese and Christopher Bader, *America's Four Gods: What We Say About God & What That Says About Us* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36.

³⁴ Grube, J., D. Mayton, II, and S. Ball-Rokeach. "Inducing Change in Values, Attitudes, and Behaviors: Belief System Theory and The Method of Value Self-Confrontation," *Journal of Social Issues* 50, no. 4 (1994): 155.

which basically relates to an individual's ability to organize and respond to differing courses of action; self-efficacy defines a person's involvement with his/her environment.³⁶ Each of these theories assists mentors with supporting concepts, as they disciple ex-offenders.

Paul Carlin is an ex-offender himself and his interactions and principles, similar to Chuck Colson (Prison Fellowship), are tested and practical. He relates to the prisoners and the ex-offenders, "as someone who has been there" and his hands-on approach is invaluable. He has developed a four-year seminary program for inmates at the Eastham Unit in Texas, which is quickly moving into other Texas prisons. Carlin implements programs for rehabilitation and discipleship that extends from the early stages of incarceration and into the reentry phases of the ex-offender's life.³⁷ Preliminary data suggests a massive reduction in recidivism.

Therapon is a four-year intensive seminary program for inmates; upon completion, the inmate receives a bachelor's degree in Christian Studies. Therapon also offers a master's program on a limited basis. For many of the graduates, it is an emotional time of reflection and realized accomplishment; men, who believed their lives became meaningless with a prison sentence, realized they could complete hard-earned spiritual and educational goals. The men involved in the program all live together in a separate dorm located on the prison grounds. They learn to work together, as a Christian community, reflecting the principles of the 1st Century Church. Carlin is an entrepreneur of Prison Ministry and he foundationally laid the groundwork for similar programs in other Texas prisons.

³⁵ Paul W. Carlin, *Mastering Life Through Belief Therapy: Why We Do What We Do When We Do It!* (Berryville, AR: Kerusso Company, 2001), 15.

³⁶ A. Bandura, "Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change," *Psychological Review* 84, no. 2 (1977): 191.

³⁷ Paul W. Carlin, *Mastering Life Through Belief Therapy*, 18-19.

The Bible is the utmost authority for the theoretical basis of this paper. A person becomes a new creation in Christ, as he/she accepts salvation. There is an internal awakening, as they are transformed by faith (2 Cor. 5:17). Mankind is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26); therefore, values of restoration are available in that perfect image. People can be forgiven and redeemed; they can have hope for eternity.

Statement of Methodology

This thesis project is both a qualitative and quantitative assessment of how the church and Christian community can overcome apathy and fear, as they learn to effectively disciple prisoners and ex-offenders. The purpose of this hermeneutic and transcendental study is:

- 1) To connect the church and Christian community in the discipleship of Christian prison releasees
- 2) To address the limitations associated with fear and apathy
- 3) To bridge the gap between what a prisoner expects upon release and what the Christian community can provide
- 4) To provide direction and education for the future of transitioning disciplined releasees into a Christian community

The qualitative portion of the study relies upon the answers given to the survey questions, which are based upon the leader's knowledge, experience, and biblical application of discipling prisoners and releasees. The qualitative approach is supplemented with the survey answers supplied by the inmates. The inmate responses will provide an understanding of their own set of expectations, responsibilities, and support (or lack of) upon release. Paul Carlin's principles are utilized to provide additional insight into the discipleship classrooms and the transitional

structure of reentry programs into the “free world.” Ideas or hypotheses will be formed, based upon the qualitative data, to expand the basis for further quantitative research.

The quantitative approach will include the cumulative statistics obtained from the survey answers, supplied by the church and prison ministry leaders and the disciplined inmates. The success of faith-based prison and reentry programs will be evaluated, and commonalities cited, to determine the most effective way to educate the church and Christian community.

A total of thirty-three church and prison ministry leader surveys were completed; all thirty-three surveys were completed online, through the SurveyMonkey service. Many of the submitted surveys were supplemented with additional information concerning their group involvement with in-prison and re-entry programs. The survey elicited responses to ten questions; the online survey was presented via Survey Monkey (an online survey company) and Paul Carlin and other ministry leaders working within the prisons distributed the written surveys. When online survey was completed, their response was sent to a secure account by Survey Monkey and retained with all of the other anonymous replies. The surveys were then printed, and the data was cumulatively grouped. The written survey responders were asked to keep the information anonymous.

The purpose of the survey was to determine the commitment level our Christian leadership has to prison ministry, how their congregation is affected by prisoners, their level of belief in redemption, how educated they are about the U. S. penal system, and how involved they feel the church should be in prisoner and releasee care. The prison ministry leaders would include many of their successful techniques for ministering to inmates and their concepts of successful reentry. The successful faith-based prison and reentry programs that will be studied are the Therapon and Prison Fellowship programs. Both faith-based programs have a detailed

approach to tackling recidivism and discipling individuals, beginning at the point of incarceration, extending to reentry, and on into aftercare. After the data is collected, it will be reviewed for commonalities and a professionally structured analysis of the data will be submitted.

The following is a brief summary of each of the chapters of the Thesis Project. The introduction and first chapter provide an overarching scope of the Thesis Project. The presentation includes: background information, identification of the problem, understanding the limitations, and providing a theoretical and methodology basis. The review of literature highlights the academic, applied research, and the theological basis of the accomplished project.

The second chapter introduces the reader to the applied research section of the thesis. The prisoner surveys are analyzed in chapter two. The most unique feature of this Thesis Project is the number of disciplined prisoners, who completed surveys. This is a very select group of men in prison and the number of surveys submitted is extremely significant and a rare opportunity, to realistically evaluate prisoner concerns. A total of 430 Christian inmates completed surveys and their responses will determine the current needs and expectations of transitioning releasees.

The church and ministry leader surveys are analyzed in chapter three and the discipleship programs of Therapon and Prison Fellowship will be highlighted. This chapter will discuss the various similarities and differences regarding methodology of the two programs. This section will provide information concerning other current experts in faith-based prison reform and reentry programs. The main focus of the surveys and insights will be addressed in this chapter.

Chapter five will serve as the conclusion to the Thesis Project. The common themes between the church/ministry leader surveys and the prisoner surveys will support a plan for successful transitioning and an action plan for additional education and support of both

communities. Recommendations for future research and programs are suggested, along with a Weathers' model, to encourage church and ministry leader participation for the future success of transitioning.

Review of Literature

Paul Froese and Christopher Bader in their book, *America's Four Gods: What We Say About God- and What That Says About Us*, trace America's cultural diversity to differing beliefs about God.³⁸ The authors's' principles are important, because how a person views God can determine the extent their moral authority and moral project converge. For the mentors or discipleship leaders, believing in an engaged and judgmental authoritarian God, will directly affect their level of moral absolutism, view of science, understanding of economic justice, concepts of evil, and how they respond to it.³⁹ According to Froese and Bader, fifty percent of evangelicals hold the authoritarian view of God.⁴⁰ The authors also suggest that an individual can hold more than one view of God and life events may cause their view of God to change.⁴¹ The information and statistics presented in *America's Four Gods* is relevant to this thesis, because those supporting the efforts of releasees are grounded in one or more of the author's views of God. Additionally, a prisoner or releasees view of God can change, as his circumstances and environment change.

The ways in which churches and ministries engage in discipleship are wide-ranging; regardless of the various methods of delivery, commonalities on foundational principles abound.

³⁸ Froese and Bader, *America's Four Gods*, 24.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey define a disciple, "...a person who has trusted Christ for salvation and has surrendered completely to Him. He or she is committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines in *community* and *developing to their full potential for Christ and His mission*."⁴² Discipleship is always practiced in community. When disciplined prisoners are released, they need know they will be accepted into another discipleship community. A transitioning process benefits the releasee and the community. Earley and Dempsey apply excellent discipleship concepts, which benefit the transitioning prisoner.

Fred Kniss and Paul Numrich describe several directions of adaptation to a new society and argue that religious traditions can be significant in a variety of ways. As disciplined inmates begin their life in a new society, the following chart displays the various options. The far end of the scale on one side reflects the moral project pursuing the growth of individual utility; the other end envisions the enlargement of the (united) community good.⁴³ It should be noted that the primary focus of individualized method has commonalities associated with the libertarian concept, which applies individualism to the questions of politics and economic relationships.⁴⁴ Libertarianism values individuals acting in their own logical self-interest in a free market, providing competition for esteemed resources and goods, these networks form the basis of social bonds.⁴⁵

⁴² Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2013), 28.

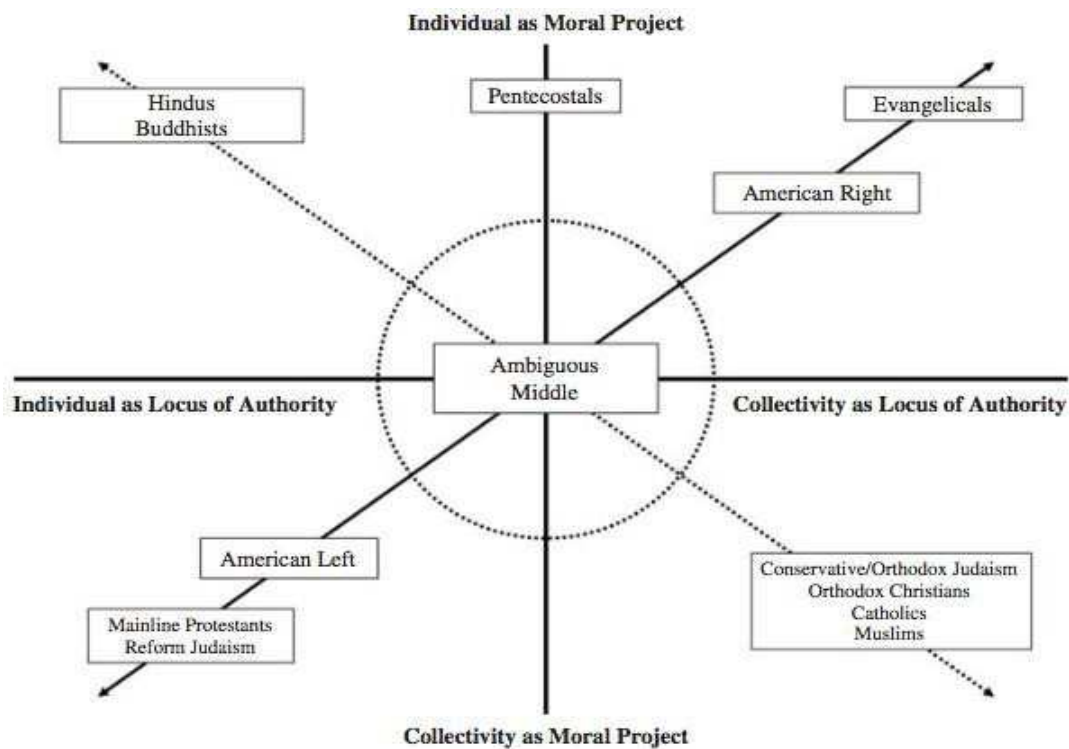
⁴³ Fred Lamar Kniss and Paul David Numrich. *Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement: How Religion Matters for America's Newest Immigrants* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 56.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Fred Lamar and Paul David Numrich. *Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement: How Religion Matters for America's Newest Immigrants* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 56.

The counter to libertarianism by the religious considers the primary moral project to be the individual's moral enhancement and essentially his/her salvation. Networks pursuing religious goods, such as: salvation, ecstatic experience, personal well-being or enlightenment are called congregations.⁴⁶ The far right of the chart accentuates the collective good rather than individual utility; in the political economy, communalism favors a regulated market over an unregulated free market.⁴⁷ "A congregational approach brings religion into both local context and institutional focus, important ways of grounding theories about the civic implications of America's evolving religious diversity."⁴⁸

Figure 1:1



⁴⁶ Fred Lamar and Paul David Numrich. *Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement*, 56.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 218.

Discipleship has a corporate nature and it is a collective effort with a collective result.⁴⁹ John Koessler develops principles of discipline, trust, encouragement, and unity, which are invaluable for the building of the body of Christ.⁵⁰ Koessler has credible principles and concepts for the Christian community and the releasee, as they mold a unifying relationship.

A prisoner will face challenges upon release, which are unique to his environment. In prison, everything is structured and security is a high priority. Living the life of a disciple of Christ in society does not convey the same type of restrictions. The process of transforming into a functional, productive disciple in society is done in stages.⁵¹ Greg Ogden's *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, is an excellent resource for developing mentors and leadership to understand the needs of a releasee. The need for the corporate presence of the church cannot be overstated, but the need exists for a small group or a one-on-one type relationship for wholesome growth.⁵²

M. Scott Boren develops principles of connecting relationships in his work, *The Relational Way: From Small Group Structures to Holistic Life Connections*.⁵³ A portion of his book provides basis for this thesis, because he defines and emphasizes four levels of connecting relationships: 1) personal, 2) intimate, 3) public, and 4) social.⁵⁴ Every releasee will be faced with connecting on each of these four levels.

⁴⁹ John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 179.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 178, 184.

⁵¹ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 155-156.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 149.

⁵³ M. Scott Boren, *The Relational Way: From Small Group Structures to Holistic Life Connections* (Houston: Touch Publications, 2007).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 173-191.

Michelle Alexander is a black civil rights attorney and she has written a book entitled, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.⁵⁵ Although many of her concepts are controversial, she grasps the implications of prison reform from a civil rights perspective and it is important to note that controversial does not equate to untrue. Her legal contributions lend credibility to the staggering prison statistics and allow the reader to identify on a human level with the prisoner.

The task of community involvement has many faces; history is varied concerning social problems. Historically, people tend to avoid situational crises, because they do not know how to cope with the situation.⁵⁶ Prison officials are crying out for assistance with their record high prison populations and they are seeking faith-based programs and approaches, because of their successful results.⁵⁷ Dr. Carlin has an approach, which initially began through his work on *Belief Therapy*; based upon biblical transcendentalism, belief systems can counter and change deviant behaviors.⁵⁸ He further explores his concept of *Belief Therapy*, as it directly relates to prisoners and reentry individuals in *Mastering Life Through Belief Therapy: Why We Do What We Do When We Do It!*⁵⁹ The results Carlin has achieved through his Therapon Program in the prison system are astounding and similar programs are currently operating in other Texas prisons.

⁵⁵ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

⁵⁶ A. Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986), 35.

⁵⁷ A. Persky, "A Question of Faith: Cash-strapped States Look Elsewhere for Inmate Rehab Programs," *American Bar Association* 94, no. 6 (2011).

⁵⁸ Paul Carlin, *Belief Therapy* (Berryville, AR: Kerusso Company, 1997), 5.

⁵⁹ Paul Carlin, *Mastering Life Through Belief Therapy*, 2.

Inner-Change Freedom Initiative (IFI) claims to be the first faith based prison program in America; it was founded by Prison Fellowship and is located outside of Houston, Texas.⁶⁰ Byron Johnson documents studies in his book, *More God, Less Crime: Why Faith Matter and How It Could Matter More*, regarding the success rate of the IFI.⁶¹ The author's findings correlate with other successful in-prison and releasee discipleship programs.

Joan Petersilia delivers realistic statistics in her book, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*.⁶² Her evaluations are generalized and include the broad segment of all released prisoners, but her results give relevancy to the success of Christian based prisoner reform and release programs.

The support of family and friends, when an individual is incarcerated, is usually minimal. The inmates feel a sense of loss, alienation, and exile from the world they once knew. Ben Crewe and Jamie Bennett write about the *inside* life of a prisoner in their work, *The Prisoner*; they relay detailed accounts of actual inmate prison experiences.⁶³ The authors add a human touch to the reality of incarceration and substance to the value of the prisoner surveys in this thesis.

Reentry into society for most prisoners is a complex task. Most releasees are left at a bus stop with minimal funds and expected to make it to a halfway house and parole meeting within the coming day. The majority of the men released have received no instruction on how to reenter society nor are they skilled to find suitable employment. Lior Gideon and Hung-En Sung address

⁶⁰ Byron Johnson, *More God, Less Crime: Why Faith Matters and How It Could Matter More* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2014), 101-102.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Joan Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶³ Ben Crewe and Jamie Bennett, eds. *The Prisoner* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2011).

the problems associated with reentry, rehabilitation, and reintegration in *Rethinking Corrections: Rehabilitation, Reentry, and Reintegration*.⁶⁴ An important contribution to this thesis is the author's alternative perspective on how society accepts releasees.

The rehabilitation of ex-offenders is crucial; the church must take an active role in protecting society and discipling the entire community in service of the Lord. According to Day, humans have three ways to address values: organizationally, professionally, and personally; it is in these three ways that Americans address crime and punishment.⁶⁵ Interestingly, faith and value based programs are based upon a theory that for a behavior to change and remain changed, the first change must come with the values that dictate behavior.⁶⁶ The fear and apathy of many Christian believers stems from a cognitive dissonance, defined as mental pressure and anxiety experienced, when an individual holds two or more conflicting beliefs, values, or ideas at the same time.⁶⁷ This principle was previously assessed of prisoners, but it carries universal implications for all of society. The Christian faith determines the truth of "all men are created in the image of God;" Thompson suggests they are redeemable, valuable, and purposeful, a new definition and truth is inevitable for rehabilitation.⁶⁸

Todd Clear and Natasha Frost received their PhD's in criminal justice and they have assessed the changes and challenges in the United States penal system in their book, *The*

⁶⁴ Lior Gideon and Hung-En Sung, eds. *Rethinking Corrections: Rehabilitation, Reentry, and Reintegration* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2012).

⁶⁵ A. Day and T. Ward, Offender Rehabilitation as a Value-Laden Process, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 54, no. 3 (2010): 290.

⁶⁶ J. Markway and D. Worsham, "The Potency of Faith in Successful Offender Reentry," *Corrections Today* 71, no. 6 (no date): 99.

⁶⁷ Paul Carlin, *Mastering Life Through Belief Therapy*, 10.

⁶⁸ W. Thompson, Jr., *Concentric Circles of Concern* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 21-23.

Punishment Imperative: The Rise and Failure of Mass Incarceration in America.⁶⁹ The authors have compiled credible statistics about recidivism and the effects of successful programs designed to reduce recidivism; notably surmising, “The reduction in prison intake coming from greater rehabilitation will lead to a reduction in prison costs as success rates rise.”⁷⁰ The authors are in agreement on the value of successful programs for recidivism, but are skeptical of the number of programs, which can claim success.

A stigma exists for “ex-cons” among society and it is a difficult challenge even for those who have been wrongly incarcerated to break. Long after a prisoner has been exonerated or pardoned, the stigma lives on. James Jacobs confronts the problems associated with discrimination against men and women who have been rehabilitated but remain unaccepted by society in *The Eternal Criminal Record*.⁷¹

Biblical and Theological Basis

This writers’ personal involvement in prison ministry began with the desire to bring hope into a hopeless environment. Hope is a four-letter word, which gives meaning to life. Hopeless prisoners can experience the love of God and receive forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, and have hope. The Bible is filled with references to forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation, and hope; since God is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11), prisoners are inclusive. The Bible references prisoners specifically in several passages:

⁶⁹ Todd R. Clear and Natasha A. Frost, *The Punishment Imperative: The Rise and Failure of Mass Incarceration in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2013).

⁷⁰ Ibid., 161.

⁷¹ James B. Jacobs, *The Eternal Criminal Record* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

Isaiah 42:6-7 speaks to prisoners, "I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, ⁷ To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison."

Isaiah 61:1 lends exaltation to the afflicted by stating, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners."

In Luke 4:18, Jesus reiterates the decree, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed."

The author of Hebrews reminds Christians to treat prisoners as part of the body in Hebrews 13:1-3, stating, "Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body." As disciples of Christ, each and every part of the body is important, as reflected in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, "For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

Salvation and forgiveness are closely related and linked to the hope made available, through the grace of Jesus Christ. The Scripture states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:23). The gift of God is available through salvation, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God

raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation” (Rom. 10:9-10).

The ability to forgive is not always an easy task and in the case of violent crimes, it is often impossible without the grace of God. Jesus knew the human condition as He vocalized a mandate to His followers in Matthew 6:15, “But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” Reconciliation is closely connected to forgiveness, but not identical. Reconciliation is made available through Christ and it is called the ministry of reconciliation, as found in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, “Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

Disciplined inmates are aware of their redemption in Christ. They trust, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, ‘Cursed is Everyone Who Hangs on a Tree’” (Gal. 3:13); and “Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ*” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Discipleship is not based upon a set of circumstances or situations; it is a Christian’s service to the Lord and does not condone partiality (Jas. 2:9). If true Christian discipleship is to imitate Christ, the responsibility of discipling prisoners and reentry individuals falls upon the Christian community and the church (Eph. 5:1). It is not enough to realize that American society has a problem and sit back and do nothing. Discipleship involves action and determination; it

also requires perfect love to cast out fear (1 John 4:18). Jesus further explains the importance of kingdom principles in Matthew 25:35-40.

For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me. Then the righteous will answer Him, Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You? The King will answer and say to them, Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.

Summary

Discipleship is scripturally based and the majority of Christians believe in the need for disciple-making and the significance of disciples in the body of Christ. The prison population in the United States is often forgotten and disciplined prisoners should have the opportunity to serve Christ in society, supported and encouraged by the Christian community. While this thesis only addresses a select segment of the prison population, it is a growing segment, empowered with biblical knowledge and a desire to follow their Savior. The church and Christian community have a call-to-action.

Chapter Two

Methodology: Disciplined Inmates

The first prison I ever saw had inscribed on it CEASE TO DO EVIL: LEARN TO DO WELL; but as the inscription was on the outside, the prisoners could not read it.

—George Bernard Shaw

Introduction

The above quote by George Bernard Shaw symbolizes the division which exists between the men behind the walls of a prison and society on the outside. The church and society in general often have preconceived ideas and opinions about what prisoners desire and believe, which are in direct conflict with the answers a researcher receives from prisoners. The voice of an inmate remains stifled, until he is asked to share his thoughts and desires. As George Bernard Shaw attests that, "...the inscription was on the outside, the prisoners could not read it," so also society also rarely hears the concerns of those behind the wall.⁷² The results of the inmate surveys will open a discussion about the current needs and desires of a disciplined incarcerated man, as he considers and answers, pertinent questions about his future.

Research Design

The design of this qualitative study is based upon a hermeneutic, ethically collaborative approach and explores the perceptions and expectations of prisoners, who are engaged in an in-prison discipleship program, as they consider transitioning into society upon release. The selection of only disciplined inmates for this focused survey group was deliberate. The designated selection is based upon the assumption that churches and ministry leaders are more inclined to assist disciplined inmates transition into their churches and Christian communities. The research

⁷² George Bernard Shaw, *Imprisonment* (Chislehurst: Prison Medical Reform Council, 1944), preface.

also considers the desire of the disciplined inmate to transition into a Christian discipleship environment upon release.

The focused survey groups voluntarily complete a twelve-question survey, acknowledging they will not receive any form of compensation. The Texas prison system has a large number of Hispanic inmates and the surveys were made available in Spanish. A copy of the informed consent accompanied each of the surveys. The men are informed that the information attained will equip church and ministry groups with a better focus, to provide for the needs of transitioning disciplined releasees. The wardens and/or chaplains of each prison unit distributed the surveys to the inmates and each chaplain or warden is well acquainted with the individual inmate's involvement in Christian prison activities at their unit. While there is no guarantee of an inmate's genuine lifelong commitment to discipleship, a stable foundation suggests a higher probability. The two successful Christian prison ministry programs, evaluated in chapter three, are available in at least one or more of these prisons.

The inmate survey does not classify inmates based upon their length of commitment to an in-prison Christian discipleship program, but simply acknowledges their active involvement. Also, the inmate survey does not take into consideration the nature of an inmate's offense, which resulted his incarceration; therefore, violent offenders, child molesters, and sex offenders can be included in the data. The survey *does* reflect an understanding that a disciplined inmate has made a commitment to Christ; he is applying discipleship principles in his prison life and asserts the desire to continue training and perfecting his skills, upon release.

Statistics confirm the effectiveness of faith-based programs in reducing recidivism.⁷³ A study conducted by G. Duwe and M. King noted, "The findings further suggest that the

beneficial recidivism outcomes for InnerChange participants may have been due, in part, to the continuum of mentoring support some offenders received in the institution and the community.”⁷⁴ Their findings are significant to the broad Christian community, because the study pinpoints the need for mentoring support from the community. The question becomes, “how can the Christian community effectively help releasees?” The survey responses of a large base of disciplined prisoners will add clarity to this question.

Sample Size and Locations

The inmate surveys were distributed to five Texas prison units: Eastham, Ellis, Walls, Wallace Pack, and Cleveland; the first three units are maximum security and the latter two are minimum-security units. In presenting this survey, while there is a diversity of religions practiced within the prison units, for the purpose of this survey, only disciplined Christian inmates were selected. My knowledge of the successful Therapon Program located at the Eastham Unit influenced my decision to expand the research into other Texas prisons with discipleship programs. The need for rehabilitation of inmates within the prisons is evident and prison chaplains (seventy-three percent) in all fifty states consider religion related programs for inmates to be “absolutely critical” to the rehabilitation process of prisoners.⁷⁵

The sample size of the inmate surveys is significant with 430 responses. While the survey location is limited to the mid-eastern part of the State of Texas, the Texas Department of

⁷³ G. Duwe and M. King, "Can Faith-Based Correctional Programs Work? An Outcome Evaluation of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative in Minnesota," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 57, no.7 (2013): abstract.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Stephanie C. Boddie and Cary Funk, *Religion in Prisons: A 50-State Survey of Prison Chaplains* (Washington D.C.: U.S.A., 2012).

Criminal Justice implements a standardized operational system, throughout the entire state. Prisoners can be relocated within the state prison system, if deemed necessary.

Survey Questions: A Discussion

The disciplined inmate survey lists twelve questions. Six of the questions can be answered with a short, one or two-word answer and the remaining six questions engage the inmate, asking for a more detailed response. Each of the survey questions is addressed below, along with the cognitive reasoning in selecting the particular question. Several of the questions will include generalized responses; although, the details of the responses will be highlighted in the data analysis section.

Question One

- How long have you been involved in a formalized, in-prison discipleship program?

This question is a qualifier for the type of responses given. Usually, an inmate with a longer history of discipleship has appreciably grown in their Christian faith. The type or name of discipleship program was not asked in this survey, but the prison's location in East Texas highly support a variety of programs, including: Therapon, Prison Fellowship, and Kairos. Successful discipleship programs instill a sense of hope for those who participate. Many of the inmates have long sentences or they may be serving "life without parole," instilling hope is essential.

In her new book, Gaye D. Holman suggests, "When there is a total lack of hope, there are no incentives to lead to a better man or improved situation. It is the people without hope, those who are unable to see anything positive in their futures, who are the most dangerous in a correctional facility. They have very little to lose."⁷⁶ A discipleship program, which instills hope for the hopeless is beneficial on many levels.

Question Two

- When will you be eligible for parole/release?

This question places a time frame upon the need for immediate Christian releasee programs and the ability to implement successful options in the future. Interestingly, the surveys reveal a high number of men currently eligible for parole; many lack a viable option to facilitate their release, while others are detained by administrative actions.

Question Three

- Do you have a desire to continue your discipleship training when you are released?

Discipleship is a life-long process, but it is also an individual choice. Prisoners responding “no” to this question would not qualify for a discipleship-transitioning program. An overwhelming number of men would like to continue their discipleship training, upon release. The question does not contain stipulations or any details about a program, but simply the desire to continue discipleship training.

Question Four

- Do you have family support for transitioning into society?

Many of the prisoners do not have family or friends that will support them, when they are released. Based upon their prior freedom environment, family and friend support can be a blessing or a hindrance. Positive family support, according to Ruth Armstrong, reinforces a sense of “proactive trust,” a trust that is capable of surviving and motivating an ex-prisoner’s truthful revelations of failures and successes post release.⁷⁷ For the purpose of this survey, family support

⁷⁶ Gaye D. Holman, *Decades Behind Bars: A 20-Year Conversation with Men in America’s Prisons* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2017), 188.

⁷⁷ Ruth Armstrong, “Trusting the Untrustworthy: The Theology, Practice and Implications of Faith-Based Volunteers’ Work with Ex-Prisoners.” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 27, no. 3 (2014): 300.

is considered positive. An overwhelming number of affirmative responses suggest most of the men will have family support upon release.

Question Five

- Do you have a Christian mentor?

Mentoring receives much attention today and the evangelical community includes a mentor within the realm of discipleship. The mentoring of a prisoner can be a tough and extremely challenging calling. According to Anthea Hucklesby and Emma Wincup, there is no universal definition of a mentor, but the term embraces a range of theoretical models and various activities; “Mentors, typically volunteers, act as positive role models and draw upon their experience to provide advice and guidance to individuals in need of support over an extended period of time.”⁷⁸ A recent mentor survey implies that mentors of prisoners need formal training and support in order to effectively develop discipleship relationships with long-term success.⁷⁹

A mentor often functions as a spiritual parent; he or she chooses godly behavior over ungodly behavior and they know “the value of God’s promises and will not barter them for profit or pleasure, no matter how immediate either may be.”⁸⁰ The goal of every mentor should be the spiritual maturity of the mentee. The process is time consuming and lengthy, but the rewards of a man or woman bearing the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 6) are priceless. The survey results

⁷⁸ Anthea Hucklesby and Emma Wincup. "Assistance, Support and Monitoring? The Paradoxes of Mentoring Adults in the Criminal Justice System." *Journal of Social Policy* 43, no. 2 (04, 2014): 376.

⁷⁹ James Drake Langteau, "Former Mentors' Perceptions of the Faith-Based Approach to Reducing Recidivism Implemented by the Marinette-Menominee Jail Outreach, Inc.," Order No. 3646011, Liberty University, 2014, 126.

⁸⁰ John Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 107.

suggest that many of the inmates have found mentors. A future question will clarify whether or not the mentor is another prisoner or not.

Question Six

- How has the in-prison discipleship program changed your life?

This question is asked in order to determine the benefits of the inmate's participation in a discipleship program. If a prisoner recognizes and appreciates positive changes in his life, as a direct result of his involvement in an in-prison discipleship program, he may be substantially more committed to discipleship, when he is released. Many past researchers of prison reform and recidivism have not concentrated on survey results from a discipleship-focused sect of inmates. The research included in this thesis is crucial to defining the distinct differences between inmates, which are involved in an in-prison Christian discipleship program, and the rest of the general prison population.

James Langteau's dissertation concentrated on a group of twenty-one mentors from the Marinette-Menominee Jail Outreach organization.⁸¹ His sampling for research purposes is relatively small, but correlates in many areas to the findings from this much larger inmate survey base. Langteau asked his mentor's group, "Why have offenders' beliefs changed?" The most prominent answer given was "offenders developed a relationship with Christ."⁸² The inmate survey results recorded in this Thesis Project (with 430 inmate responses) confirms Langteau's survey responses from mentors.

In-prison and in-jail discipleship programs are an effective way for offenders to embrace change in their lives. In a trustless environment, the offenders can learn to trust the Lord and rely

⁸¹ James Drake Langteau, "Former Mentors' Perceptions," 48.

⁸² Ibid., 97.

upon His guidance and direction. When an individual becomes a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), he or she views the world through the glasses of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:16-21). The flesh (body and mind) is in conflict with the new spiritual creation, but as a believer aligns with God's Spirit, the flesh can no longer be in control (Rom. 7:14-23).

It is vitally important to recognize the need for continuance of discipleship training received during incarceration. The Scripture denotes the example of the Sower and the Seed in Matthew 13; discipleship training is a way of changing the soil of the human heart, but the fertile ground must be maintained. Many of the inmates are new Christians and the transition into a church or discipleship community on the outside is crucial to their continued spiritual growth. The percentage of inmates responding affirmatively is very encouraging for in-prison discipleship programs.

Question Seven

- What are your expectations of society when you are released (acceptance/un-acceptance) and how will you cope?

Many prisoners have lengthy sentences and their current knowledge of culture and the changes in society are limited. They assume they will be either accepted or unaccepted and each of their choices is laced with reservations and expectancy. The inmates with positive support from family, mentors, or community are considerably more optimistic about being accepted by society. An additional category of "both" is added to facilitate the answers to this question.

A "both" response suggests the inmate feels they will be accepted on some levels and unaccepted on others. Many responses were affirmative for family acceptance, but negative about society in general. The category of "trusting God" was created, because the majority of

positive responses specifically denoted their trust in the Lord for acceptance. The total number of positive responses to question seven is 284 or 66%.

Question Eight

- What contributions can you make to the Christian community?

This is a difficult question for inmates feeling hopelessness to answer, because they often feel as if they have nothing to contribute to society. The inherent biblical worth of humankind is challenged by public attitudes of “lock them up and throw away the key” and coupled with limited program funding; many inmates have a low self-esteem.⁸³ Numerous other factors can contribute low self-esteem and hopelessness, but the prison chaplains and Christian programs, such as: Therapon, Prison Fellowship, Humanity for Prisoners, and Kairos are changing this valueless concept held by inmates.

The answers given to this question also suggest empirical and discipleship values. The basic needs in life remain a constant concern for all prisoners; those needs include: food, shelter, job, transportation, identification, and access to medical care. All basic needs reflect the secular interest of the individual and a category of secular documents these responses. A category of “Christian response” is implemented to categorize the responses in which the inmates intend to give to others. Paul Carlin lists “low self-esteem,” as the number #1 seed of failure.⁸⁴ Based upon the number of positive Christian responses, inmates involved in Christian discipleship have a higher self-esteem; they are discovering their value in Christ.

⁸³ Stephen T. Hall, "A Working Theology of Prison Ministry," *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 58, no. 3 (2004): 170.

⁸⁴ Paul W. Carlin, *Barriers to Re-Entry: The 10 Seeds of Failure* (Crockett, TX: Paul W. Carlin, 2013), 14.

There is a total of eighty-seven different answers to this question. The most prominent themes are: personal testimony, volunteer work, lead family to Christ, work with those incarcerated, counsel misguided children, preach the Gospel, community support groups, show the love of God, evangelize, share musical talents, and do whatever the Lord desires.

Question Nine

- On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being unimportant and 10 being the most important), how important is it to you to avoid going back to prison when you are released?

Prison can become a “way of life” and many prisoners grow “prisonized” (prisoners become like their environment), during their incarceration.⁸⁵ A staggering number inmates come from families living at poverty level or lower, which can translate into a “welfare mentality;” others regard their arrest as a form of rescue. It is vitally important for an inmate to have a healthy self-concept to keep from returning to prison. “Self-concept is the evaluation you make and customarily maintain with regard to yourself, express an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which you believe yourself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy.”⁸⁶ Embracing the intangibles of reentering, readjusting, and successfully reintegrating into society is a challenge, which requires commitment; they must mean more to the ex-offender than the practical realities of getting a job, finding a home, clothing, a car, or a sexual companion.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Paul W. Carlin, *Barriers to Re-Entry*, 9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

Question Ten

- A clearly structured transitional discipleship program would be a “hand-up,” not a “hand-out.” What key elements would need to be included in order for you to make a decision to participate?

An attitude and acceptance of entitlement is growing in the United States. In 2011, the United States Census Bureau estimates indicated, “that just over 150 million Americans, or a little more than 49% of the U. S. population, lived in homes that obtained one or more entitlement benefits.”⁸⁸ Many prisoners lived in a home receiving entitlements, prior to their conviction and incarceration; therefore, many of the releasees will return to a similar, self-defeating situation. A structured discipleship program is a “hand-up” and while it incorporates many benefits, it is not based on any form of entitlement.

A “hand-up” will help to alleviate the harsh reality of reentry, as stated by Joan Petersilia, “Since 1980, the United States has passed dozens of laws restricting the kinds of jobs for which ex-prisoners can be hired, easing the requirements for their parental rights to be terminated, restricting their access to public welfare and housing subsidies, and limiting their right to vote.”⁸⁹

The responses to this question are wide-ranging; therefore, a sampling of the various responses can be found under the heading of data analysis. The answers given to this question are instrumental for a successful transitional program; the inmates are expressing what they need to make a commitment to a program and church and ministry leaders are supplied with a clear directive from the inmates. It should be noted, there is an overwhelming response by many

⁸⁸ Mark Bauerlein and Adam Bellow, eds. *The State of the American Mind: 16 Leading Critics on the New Anti-Intellectualism* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2015), 157.

⁸⁹ Joan Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 22.

prisoners; they assert, “just *offer* me the program, I am ready;” approximately 30% of the responses included this type of statement in their answer. An additional chart, which combines common themes into four categories: spiritual, practical, teaching, and leadership needs is utilized in question five of data analysis.

Question Eleven

- If a discipleship program were available to help you transition into society by offering housing, transportation, jobs, administrative assistance (securing ID, driver’s license, medical options, etc.) would you be willing to commit to the program for a period of 1 year?

Current transitioning programs for releasees provide solid data for determining the need for a substantial time commitment, after release.⁹⁰ The previous question (#10) asked the inmate what elements he would need in order to participate in a transitional discipleship program; this question facilitates the majority of the inmate’s practical concerns and asks their approval for a time commitment of one year. There are several practical reasons given for a negative response; considerations include: family responsibilities, health concerns, and location.

Question 12

- Would you be willing to contribute further to the development of a successful transitional discipleship program for re-entry and sustained Christian growth?

This question determines the interest of the surveyed inmate to assist in further research, after this study has been published.

⁹⁰ Joan Petersilia asserts that operative prisoner and releasee programs usually match the offenders’ needs with program features, ensuring participation is timed close to a prisoner’s release, this ensures that prison programming (such as discipleship) is transitioned into community-based post-care upon release, and provides “programming for a minimum of six months.” Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home*, 211.

Data Analysis and Results

Each survey question is analyzed and the results are reported below. The total number of inmates surveyed is 430.

1. How long have you been involved in a formalized, in-prison discipleship program?

Under 1 Year		1 – 5 Years	
152		167	
5 – 10 Years	Over 10 Years		No Answer/Uninvolved
55	39		17

2. When will you be eligible for parole/release?

Now	Within 6 Months	6 Mo. - 1 Year	1 – 3 Years
136	31	46	52

3 -5 Years	Longer than 5 Years	No Parole	No Answer
41	90	17	17

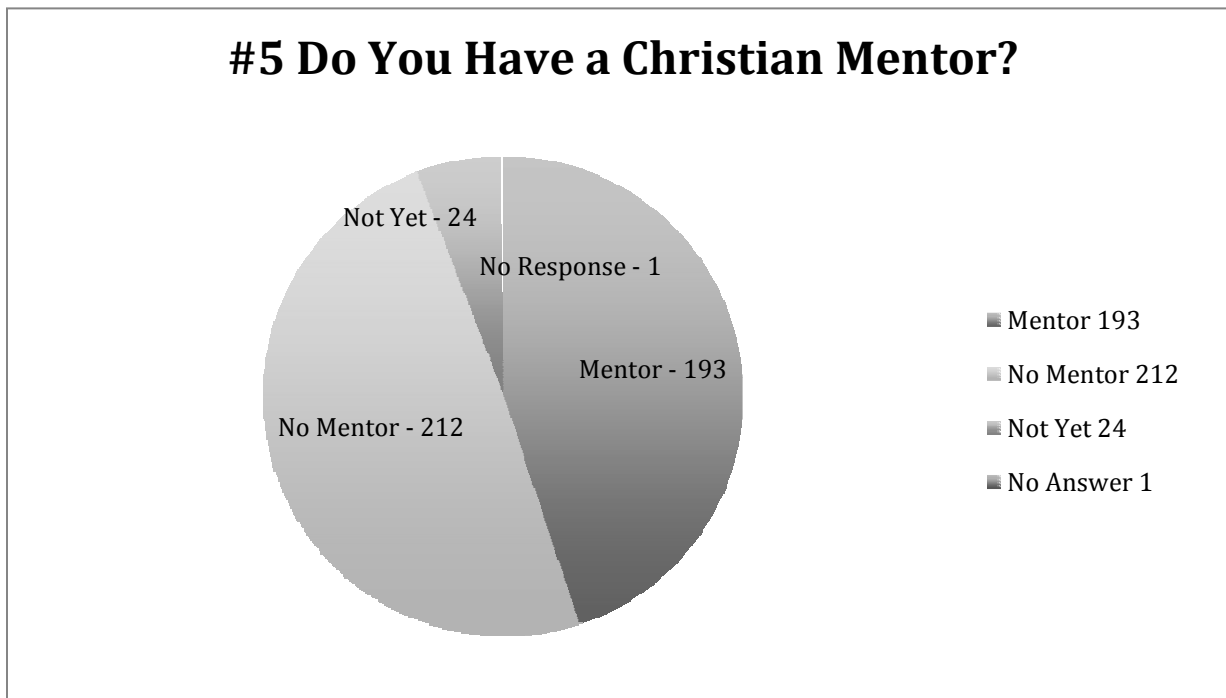
3. Do you have a desire to continue your discipleship training when you are released?

Yes	No	Maybe	No Answer
404	11	9	6

4. Do you have family support for transitioning into society?

Yes	No	Unsure
342	65	23

5. Do you have a Christian mentor?



6. How has the in-prison discipleship program changed your life?

Life-Changing	Positive	Negative	No Program	No Answer
171	223	12	3	21
Total Positive				
394				

The following is a sampling of the many life-changing answers given to question six. When the positive and life-changing answers are combined, the total for positive answers to this question is 394 or approximately 91%. The majority of the “no” answers credited their own religious beliefs and practices for their spiritual growth and changed life not a discipleship program.

“It has given me a formalized education and deeper understanding of the Bible and nurtured my ability to teach and mentor.”

“I am able to surround myself around ‘godly’ men who are also trying to make the right changes in their lives that will enable us to remain free upon release.”

“It has transformed my life and I will never be the same. This is the key to all my success. I surely can’t fit every benefit I receive into this space.”

“I’ve learned what a real man is like and have a totally different view in every way. It’s totally changed me.”

“It has given me a moral anchor.”

“I was never a Christian before and now that I’ve given my life to Christ, I am learning more and more each day about our purpose of being free.”

“It taught me patience and to depend on the Father and the Son, because without them, I’m nothing and can’t do nothing.”

“The shorter list would be how it has not changed my life.”

“It has equipped me with information on family, living, and peace that I never have thought before.”

“It has given me hope when nothing else would.”

“It’s showed me to think about the outcome of situations, certain trials in life in a Christian way of life.”

“I’m not who I use to be...God changed my heart to a heart of flesh and I’m not thinking in a negative way anymore.”

“It has shown me that despite diversity or hardships Jesus can and does help those who follow Him.”

“It has allowed me to be with like-minded brothers in Christ to sharpen each other’s swords in the Word of Truth, encourage each other, support each other, and hold each other dear and accountable.”

“It has given me an assurance that in all things I can rest in Christ and find comfort in the arms of my true brothers.”

“By giving me a true measure of faith and allowing me the opportunity to establish a closer relationship with God.”

“It has shown me that God can make prison a place of freedom.”

“It’s a process with me, I’m learning and it’s getting to me. It’s a war going on in me.”

“It has helped me own up to my mistakes in life and helped me be more responsible with my decisions.”

“It is helping me become the mature man of God He has called me to be.”

“I no longer live for myself, but walking according to God’s will and He has completely done a 180 in my life.”

“I have a better relationship with God and with my family and I am being a better father to my son and being a light to others in their darkness.”

7. What are your expectations of society when you are released (acceptance/un-acceptance), and how will you cope?

Trusting God		Acceptance	
157		127	
Unacceptance	Both Unacceptance/Acceptance		No Answer
87	30		29

8. What contributions can you make to the Christian community?

Secular Response	Christian Response	No Answer
90	328	12

The following is a sampling of the anonymous responses to question eight:

“I want to be able to talk to the youth and go to the streets and reach people with addictions.”

“Volunteering, talk to the lost and give them my testimony of what God has done in my life, helping others that can’t help themselves.”

“Help mentor and guide younger youths to avoid the situation I put myself into...help them avoid that road that I took.”

“I have experience, testimony, teaching ability, and love. There is no position too low. My heart is to serve, educate, encourage, and shine my light in a way that attracts all that are called.”

“I can teach new believers how to come to Christ and how to live for God. I have an excellent testimony.”

“Just show my community that I’m not the same man I was in 2015 when I got locked up and be of help where ever I can.”

“Be a faithful witness and server of the Lord.”

“I am going to be a positive role model and minister to others.”

“By being involved in anything to better the community and Christ’s Kingdom.”

“Teach my family about God and do Bible study with them.”

“Be a part of the body of Christ.”

“Live as Christ, teach, mentor, make disciples.”

“Musician, teacher, counselor, etc.”

“When I get out – I will open a Christian ministry, by opening a Christian car club – and preaching His Word.”

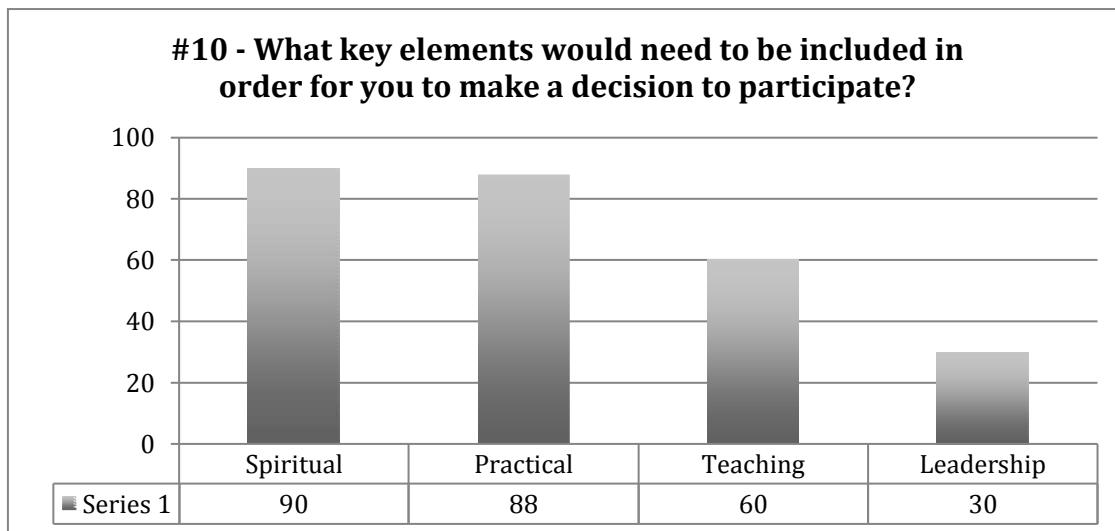
9. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being unimportant and 10 being the most important), how important is it to you to avoid going back to prison when you are released?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No Response
						1	5	4	399	21

10. A clearly structured transitional discipleship program would be a “hand-up,” not a “hand-out.” What key elements would need to be included in order for you to make a decision to participate?

All-In (no key elements)		Accept (with Spiritual Elements)	
120		127	
Accept (with Practical Elements)	Unsure/Other Commitment	No Answer	
125	26/7	25	

The following chart lists the number of different elements desired by the inmates in order for them to make a decision to participate in a transitional discipleship program. The information following the chart combines common themes for the various areas of concern.



Spiritual Needs

Christ-centered, Bible study, Godly environment, faith-based church, fellowship with believers, a mentor, prayer, opportunity to minister, counseling, five-fold ministry, faith-centered, Christian social etiquette, opportunity to practice my faith, meals together, truthfulness, nice Bibles, and doctrine-free.

Practical Needs

Job skill training/placement, housing, transportation, self-improvement classes, job search, like-minded participants, no long-term commitment, trust, accountability, support, structured environment, a big brother, family inclusion, location near family, rehabilitation for drugs and alcohol, spend weekend with family, Spanish programs, out-patient programs, and incentives.

Teaching Needs

Practical skills, motivational skills, nurture personal gifts, society acceptance, further education, reintegration issues, financial freedom, transitional thinking skills, networking, and group activities.

Leadership Needs

Leaders who live what they teach, pastoral guidance, committed leaders, operating in the love of God, hospitality, acceptance, integrity, patience, positive, and friendly.

11. If a discipleship program were available to help you transition into society by offering housing, transportation, jobs, administrative assistance (securing ID, driver’s license, medical options, etc.) would you be willing to commit to the program for a period of 1 year?

Yes	No	Maybe	No Answer
365	33	22	10

12. Would you be willing to contribute further to the development of a successful transitional discipleship program for re-entry and sustained Christian growth?

Yes	No	Depends	No Answer
415	7	2	6

Commonalities

The aggregate inmate surveys have many commonalities. The above data results speak loudly for the willingness for prisoners to continue with a discipleship program when they are released. The vast majority of the men (94%) are also very descriptive and extremely positive about how their in-prison discipleship program has changed their lives. The survey results (97%) lend confirmation to the willingness for the disciplined inmates to contribute (either secularly or Christian response) to the Christian community, when they are released. While all of the responses for avoiding recidivism were positive, a total of 92.7% claimed “10,” as the highest ranking to avoid a return to prison.

The overall concepts of a discipleship-transitioning program with a commitment of one-year was viewed positively (86.5%), but a notable response to this question was the “I’m all-in” statement. The question suggested a discipleship program that provided housing, transportation, jobs, and administrative assistance and for almost thirty percent (27.9%) of the men, no further clarification or requirements are needed. in order to make a commitment. The inmate surveys (96.5%) revealed a willingness to contribute further to the study and development of successful discipleship transitioning programs.

Differences

The differences within the summative surveys were limited. There is a broad range of the time in which the men have been involved in an in-prison discipleship program, according to the survey results. Almost seventy-five percent (74.1%) of the responding inmates have been involved in a formal discipleship program from under a year up to five years. This statistic translates into the fact that the majority of the men in discipleship programs are fairly young in their formalized pursuit of the Lord. Christian mentors are making themselves available to prisoners, as about half of the inmates responded affirmatively to having a Christian mentor, but more than half of the responders do not have a Christian mentor and twenty-four would like to have one.

The survey revealed a substantial split in the responses as to how the inmates perceived their acceptance by society. The answer of “trusting God” can be viewed and positive, but it does not address their perception of what society might think; regardless, their response is a decision to allow Christ to affirm their acceptance.

Clusters of Meaning

Many of the questions asked in the survey have clusters of meaning. The second question concerning eligibility of parole spreading the release dates of the men over an extended period of time and many will never make parole. A total of 136 men are currently eligible for parole based upon their responses and whether or not they are released immediately or not, society will have these disciplined men returning to society within a short time frame.

Family support can be very important, but the support must be positive and encouraging. Often, the men serving sentences come from extremely poor and crime-ridden communities and they have often suffered from child and/or sexual abuse before being incarcerated.⁹¹ Many of the men can only assume their situation has changed and the support they will receive from family members will be positive. For the 342 men answering affirmatively to having family support, these assumptions are filled with unknown answers. Clearly, for the men who answered negatively, their support must come from other sources.

Multiple meanings can be assessed from the responses to an inmate's acceptance by society. By and large, society is afraid of parolee's coming into their communities.⁹² The disciplined inmates may be a new creation in Christ, but society has no reason, without faith, to accept the fact that they have changed. A truer picture of the situation may be the selection of "both," meaning accepted and unaccepted; the reality of victims of crime confirms the fact that not all communities will accept releasees.⁹³ The men professing that they will "trust God," will still need a community of believers to help them transition and renew their faith.

⁹¹ Gaye D. Holman, *Decades Behind Bars*, 86.

⁹² Joan Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home*, 22.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 184.

The responses given to question 10 are overall positive, but a deeper meaning can be derived. The question asks: “A clearly structured transitional discipleship program would be a “hand-up,” not a “hand-out.” What key elements would need to be included in order for you to make a decision to participate?” Many of the responses could be considered a “hand-out,” because the answers implied their “giving nothing in return.” The 120 responses of “I’m all-in” are not asking for anything...solely, the opportunity.

Invariant Structure

Based upon the high rate of recidivism, the determination of a releasee to remain free and a productive member of society can be questioned. As previously stated, many of the inmates have been institutionalized for long periods of time and prison has become a “way of life” and the closest similarity to a “home” they have experienced in years. The responses to question 10, concerning recidivism (97.7%), reflect the deep desire of disciplined inmates to avoid being reincarcerated. Wishful thinking does not suffice; the Christian community has a mandate to assist other Christian’s progress in their walk with the Lord.

Summary

The research involving 430 disciplined inmates provided more information than one could ever expect. The goal was to determine how many disciplined inmates would be interested in transitioning into a discipleship community, when released. The analyzed data unequivocally advocates the need for a transitional discipleship program. By choosing to survey this select group of men, it was possible to sample a small segment of the entire general population of the prisons. The goal is not to change or tackle all of the problems associated with recidivism, but to simply start in an area where the Lord is already working. For too long, a segment of humanity has been neglected and often forgotten, but the survey results of 430 inmates will be heard.

The next section, chapter three, will provide the second half of this puzzle; to determine how to transition releasees into Christian communities. The church and Christian communities have a voice and I believe they have a desire to fulfill the biblical mandate of Matthew 28:19 and provide discipleship to all of God's people. Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey pose a question for every ministry leader in their book, *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*, "They will need to decide how far they are willing to go to encourage, equip, and empower the members of Christ's body to do His ministry."⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2013), 279.

Chapter Three

Methodology: Church and Ministry Leaders

Judgement [sic] is the forbidden objectivation [sic] of the other person which destroys single-minded love. I am not forbidden to have my own thoughts about the other person, to realize his shortcomings, but only to the extent that it offers to me an occasion for forgiveness and unconditional love, as Jesus proves to me.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer⁹⁵

Introduction

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a church and ministry leader and he was also a prisoner.

Bonhoeffer is acclaimed for his work on the values and costs of discipleship. The church today can accept and teach the biblical principles of discipleship, but often the area of responsibility remains apathic. Bonhoeffer addressed this issue in his statement, “In short, it is much easier to see a thing through from the point of view of abstract principle than from that of concrete responsibility.”⁹⁶ One of the many responsibilities of the United States Criminal Justice System is the responsibility of judging guilt and innocence. A guilty verdict has the ability to remain a negative stigma upon an individual for a lifetime. Long after a prisoner is released for having served his/her sentence, been exonerated, or on parole; society continues to reflect upon the criminal act committed and the prosecution with a disregard for the individual.

Several years ago, man on Texas death row was exonerated and even after his release and exoneration, the family of the victims continued to believe his original guilty verdict. The stigma associated with guilty verdicts, regardless of being proven innocent, is very real. While the

⁹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 185.

⁹⁶ Marty, Martin E. ed., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 7.

majority of prisoners are not innocent, the church and Christian community should not judge or label the individual for the rest of their lives, by their one worst act. Bryan Stevenson, an attorney and author, has assisted death row inmates and he reflects upon his experiences.

Proximity has taught me some basic and humbling truths, including this vital lesson: Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done. My work with the poor and the incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice. Finally, I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned.⁹⁷

The Bible clearly states, "I was in prison and you came to visit me ... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:36, 40, NIV).

The Criminal Justice System has accountability for their policies and actions, but their responsibilities and accountabilities are not the focus of this study. Regardless of whether or not a prisoner is guilty or innocent, the biblical discipleship mandate remains the same, as found in Matthew 28: 18-20. The growing population of disciplined releasees is in dire need of a means to transition into Christian communities and continue their discipleship training. The results of the inmate surveys clearly define a road map for this transition, but a successful transition largely depends upon the church and Christian communities rallying in response to the needs. Can the body of Christ rise to the occasion and fulfill a biblical mandate?

Many of the responses to the Church and Ministry leader surveys suggests the need for the Christian community to be trained, before they commit to becoming actively involved with prisoners or releasees. Many programs are available to train volunteers to successfully assist inmates, as they transition into society; training programs are available through Therapon, Prison

⁹⁷ Brian Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2014), 17-18.

Fellowship, Kairos, and many other prisoner advocacy and church groups. Most prisons, including T.D.C.J., have ongoing training programs for volunteers.

Research Design

The design of this qualitative study is based upon a hermeneutic, collaborative approach. The research is specifically designed to target church and ministry leaders; many of the ministry leaders are directly involved in prison ministry. The survey questions explore the theological and personal perceptions of each responder, as it concerns: prisoners, theological beliefs, recidivism, successful and unsuccessful transitional programs, and a willingness to actively involve their respective groups.

An established and professional company called SurveyMonkey distributed the church and ministry leader surveys through the Internet. Many church and ministry leaders throughout the United States were contacted and asked for their participation. They were sent a copy of the informed consent form and asked to forward the survey to all of their leadership and other church and ministry association leaders. The surveys were made available for a period of eight weeks with a closeout date of September 30, 2017. A total of thirty-three church and ministry leaders responded, representing hundreds of parishioners and members. The surveys are anonymous and any identifying remarks or information were deleted. The Survey Monkey link to the Church and Ministry Leader surveys was sent to church pastors and ministry leaders, throughout the United States. Prison ministry groups, such as: Therapon, Prison Fellowship, Humanity for Prisoners, and Kairos were invited to participate.

Sample Size and Locations

The sample size of thirty-three surveys represents the leadership of hundreds of parishioners and ministry members. The exact number of ministry members and parishioners is only estimated, as no survey question regarding specific group representation numbers, was addressed in the survey. No specific Christian denomination was targeted for the survey. Several of the responders noted that their ministry operations were international.

Survey Questions: A Discussion

The Church and Ministry Leader survey has ten questions. Many of the questions can be answered with a simple yes or no answer and several require a detailed response. Each question is designed to determine the level of knowledge about prisoners and their interest in assisting disciplined prisoners, as they transition into the Christian community.

Question One

- Are you aware of the high rate of prisoner recidivism and have you addressed the situation with your congregation or leadership group?

The general population in the United States is relatively aware of the high rate of prisoner recidivism, but unless it affects them personally, they often appear apathic. This question is presented first, as a measuring tool, to determine the responder's knowledge of a universal problem. If the problem is not addressed, many of those affected will never voice their concerns.

Question Two

- Do followers of Christ have a biblically mandated responsibility to disciple prisoners?

The Bible does not separate discipleship of individuals into categories or sects; all people are called to follow Christ (Matt. 28:19). The responders involved in prison ministry are distinctly aware of the mandate for prisoner and releasee discipleship.

Question Three

- Do you believe that sinners are a “new creation in Christ” and “forgiven” when they genuinely accept Christ as their Savior and repent of their sins? If yes, do you believe that prisoners are included in this group, regardless of their offense/crime?

The majority of Christian leaders would conclude that sinners are forgiven and become a new creation in Christ, when a salvation experience occurs. There often remains a mental and moral conflict concerning degrees of sin and the complete atonement of prisoners. While God does not demarcate in His willingness to forgive a repentant heart (Eph. 1:7), an individual’s moral beliefs can cause forgiveness to become a challenge.

Question Four

- Would you be willing to pursue and contribute to a program that would disciple men/women, when they are released from prison?

This survey questions simply considers the willingness of the church and ministry leaders to become involved in the continuation of discipling releasees.

Question Five

- Are there offenders with particular offenses that you consider “unredeemable”?

This question builds upon question three and lends insight to the leaderships understanding of discipleship theology. Advocacy is hard pressed, if one believes the other is unredeemable. The inmate surveys targeted disciplined, incarcerated Christians; therefore, redemption is available based upon Romans 8:23-24, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” Pastors and ministry leaders are advocates and Disciples of Christ and according to

Bonhoeffer, discipleship comes with a cost.⁹⁸ F. David Bronkema and others have issued a clarion call for evangelical advocacy and close their book with the following statement.

We urge evangelicals to take up the biblical call to confront the powers and principalities of this world. We acknowledge that there will be costs to heeding this call and that our commitment must be serious and sustained. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and words ring in our ears as we make this call. But we have also shown that such activities are not herculean tasks for the body of Christ but rather natural and logical components of the mission of the Church in the world—the natural outworking of the Church simply being the Church.⁹⁹

Question Six

- There are men in our U.S. prisons who are currently being discipled and involved in prison ministry behind the walls. How supportive would you be of transitioning these committed disciples into our Christian communities?

Most church and ministry leaders are aware of the numerous discipleship programs offered behind the prison walls. Many anonymous comments on the surveys suggested a high level of participation in prison ministry programs. The question implies the releasees are committed disciples, but the commitment required of the Christian community to transition these men is enormous. I am acutely aware of the massive needs of a releasee; the spiritual, mental, and physical wellbeing of the releasee is placed upon a mentor and community. This is costly, but life changing, discipleship.

Question Seven

- Do you currently assist any ex-offenders through your ministry programs? If yes, how successful do you consider your programs to be?

⁹⁸ D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

⁹⁹ F. David Bronkema, Robb Davis, Stephen Offutt, Gregg Okesson, and Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, *Advocating for Justice: An Evangelical Vision for Transforming Systems and Structures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 181-182.

This is a two-part question and the data analysis section will divide the results of this question into two charts. Many churches have prison ministry programs, which assist ex-offenders on various levels. Prison ministries solely focus on prisoner and releasee programs, but the high number of releasees over-shadows the number of programs and Christian volunteers. If this continuing problem of recidivism is to be corrected, the Christian community must mobilize, become educated, and commit to assistance. The prison programs have varying levels of success. The question addresses *all* ex-offenders and this study solely focuses upon disciplined inmates, when they are released. The inmate's participation in in-prison Christian ministry programs and commitment to Christ is invaluable, when he is eligible for release.

Question Eight

- What do you consider to be the most important elements necessary to successfully reduce prisoner recidivism?

The intent of this question is to determine what our church and ministry leaders consider important; to keep releasees from becoming reincarcerated. The responders cited copious elements; each response is highlighted in data analysis.

Question Nine

- What percentage of your membership/congregation is or has been incarcerated and/or has a relative that is or has been incarcerated?

The percentage number given to this question is significant. Church and ministry leaders need a relationship with the individuals and families in their congregations and groups, which allows for this question to be asked without imposing guilt and shame. As I stated earlier, it takes a community to raise a child; it also takes a Christian community working together to disciple a releasee, especially when his or her family is a member of the church or ministry.

Question Ten

- Would you be interested in participating in a transitioning discipleship program, which would transition disciplined prisoners into a discipleship community in the free world?

This ending question searches for the willingness of the responders to assist in transitioning releaseses into their communities. Jesus’ words in Matthew 9:36-38 ring clearly, “Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”

Data Analysis and Results

1. Are you aware of the high rate of prisoner recidivism and have you addressed the situation with your congregation or leadership group?

Yes	No	No Answer
28	4	1

2. Do followers of Christ have a biblically mandated responsibility to disciple prisoners?

Yes	No	No Answer
31	2	0

3. Do you believe that sinners are a “new creation in Christ” and “forgiven” when they genuinely accept Christ as their Savior and repent of their sins? If yes, do you believe that prisoners are included in this group, regardless of their offense/crime?

Yes	No	No Answer
33	0	0

4. Would you be willing to pursue and contribute to a program that would disciple men/women, when they are released from prison?

Yes	No	Currently Involved with a Program	Possibly
22	1	6	4

5. Are there offenders with particular offenses that you consider “unredeemable”?

Yes	No	No with Exceptions
1	26	6

6. There are men in our U.S. prisons who are currently being disciplined and involved in prison ministry behind the walls. How supportive would you be of transitioning these committed disciples into our Christian communities?

Supportive	Supportive with Conditions	Unsupportive
29	4	0

7. Do you currently assist any ex-offenders through your ministry programs? If yes, how successful do you consider your program to be?

Yes	No	No Answer
19	13	1

Success	Mixed Success	No Program	No Answer
11	10	2	10

8. What do you consider to be the most important elements necessary to successfully reduce prisoner recidivism?

The responses to this question were extremely varied. The top three answers were church and Christian community, support programs, and discipleship (respectively). Each of the responder answers are intertwined; combined, they support a structural basis for a promising program to reduce recidivism.

Church or Christian Community – 19

Support Programs – 11

Discipleship – 8

Personal Accountability – 6

Understanding Their Identity-in-Christ – 5

Education – 5

Mentoring – 4

Gospel of Christ - 4

Job – 3

In-Prison Programs – 3

Love – 2

Grace – 2

Holy Spirit – 1

Pursue Holiness - 1

Relationship with God and Others – 1

Family Reformation – 1

Reformed Criminal Mind – 1

Testimonies – 1

Housing - 1

9. What percentage of your membership/congregation is or has been incarcerated and/or has a relative that is or has been incarcerated?

The preconceptions of this writer (which are held in abeyance) were completely dismantled with the answers to this question. This writer assumed that the vast majority of the church and ministry leaders would undoubtedly know the percentage of their membership, congregation, or relatives of members that had the challenge of an incarcerated loved one.

Unknown – 12

A Significant number – 2

90% or less - 2

60% or less - 2

30% or less - 1

25% or less - 1

20% or less - 1

10% or less – 3

5% or less – 4

Less than 1% - 2

Not Applicable – 2

No Answer - 1

10. Would you be interested in participating in a transitioning discipleship program, which would transition disciplined prisoners into a discipleship community in the free world?

Yes	No	No Answer
24	4	5

Commonalities

Numerous commonalities exist in the responses from the church and ministry leader surveys. The majority of the responders (84%) agree that recidivism is a problem and they have discussed the problem with their parishioners and members. Two of the highest percentages of agreement on the survey came with questions two (93.9) and three (100%): Do followers of Christ have a biblically mandated responsibility to disciple prisoners and do you believe that sinners are a “new creation in Christ” and “forgiven” when they genuinely accept Christ as their Savior and repent of their sins. The overwhelming positive responses to these two questions suggests: 1) a mandate to disciple inmates/releasees and 2) the inmate’s past crimes or offenses can be forgiven, when he becomes a “new creation in Christ.”

There was only one “yes” answer to question number five; implying, there are certain offenses, which are unredeemable, but the responder did not list the offenses considered unredeemable. Several responders suggested it would be “hard” and “discernment is needed;” barring one exception, they all agreed that offenders are redeemable, regardless of the sin or crime.

All of the church and ministry leaders are supportive of transitioning committed, disciplined inmates into Christian communities. The vast majority of survey responses were very supportive without any type of condition; the conditional approvals conveyed the need for the proper training and education of the Christian community desiring to disciple previously incarcerated individuals. One of the comments states, “I strongly favor it “IF” the Christian communities are properly educated and trained to deal with a population damaged by incarceration. Most aren’t, get burned, and then become cynical about prisoners and ex-offenders.” This responder’s concern is extremely valid and throughout the prisoner advocate communities, many have given assistance to a releasee and felt victimized in the end.

The spiritual significance of a releasee having adhered to discipleship “in-prison” training dramatically reduces the obstacle field, when they are released and transitioned into another discipleship program. Emily R. Brault suggests, “People in custody need to develop external support systems beyond the prison walls, especially pending their release back into the community.”¹⁰⁰ The in-prison, faith-based programs serve as a liaison for the prisoners, by reinforcing faith-based behavior in the midst of prison culture.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ E. R. Brault, “Pastoral Care and Counseling in Prison: What Works?” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, JPCC. 68, no. 3 (2014), 3.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Nineteen of the thirty-three responders (57%) are currently assisting ex-offenders through their ministry programs. In this two-part question, only eleven of the responders (33%) indicated that their program is successful. Ten people (30%) indicated that they had mixed success in assisting ex-offenders. These percentages reflect those church and ministry leaders, who responded “no,” to currently assisting ex-offenders, but they were previously involved in ex-offender programs.

The commonalities in question eight are enlightening. This was an open response question asking, “What do you consider to be the most important elements necessary to successfully reduce prisoner recidivism;” the thirty-three responders suggested seventy-nine answers. All of the seventy-nine responses are inter-related, but the top three commonalities in reducing prisoner recidivism are: church and Christian community (19 responses), support programs (11 responses), and discipleship (8 responses), respectively. Each of these answers is a form of support. The remainder of the responses suggested ways in which physical support could be given or supported the values of pursuing godliness.

The last question, “Would you be interested in participating in a transitioning discipleship program, which would transition disciplined prisoners into a discipleship community in the free world,” is a positive indication of the willingness (72.7%) of the surveyors to take part in the transitioning of disciplined prisoners. Two of the responders, who responded “no,” cited age or personal health concerns as their reason to dissent. There were five “no answer” responses (15%) given to this question, which is notable.

Differences

Several of the questions have responses with significant differences, which are important to this research study. The number of church and ministry leaders currently assisting ex-offenders is low (57%) compared to the number of responders believing that followers of Christ have a biblically mandated responsibility to disciple prisoners (93.9%). Data would suggest those who believe there is a mandate to disciple prisoners are not compelled to fully utilize their ministries or churches in support, when the prisoners are released. Based upon the survey data, there is no way of knowing the collective reasoning behind the low active participation numbers for assisting ex-offenders or to know if the ex-offenders were Christian.

There are also differing opinions about how successful the current programs are (part two of question seven). Only 33% of the leaders felt their program was effective, while 30% considered their programs to have mixed success. Ten of the leaders (30%) did not answer this question; while there is no evidence of why these leaders chose no response, one can speculate that if they had a program, it was not successful. Proper training and education of those interested in prisoner and releasee programs is vital. Ministering to prisoners and releasees requires selfless dedication and commitment; the caregiver must be informed and aware of fundamental elements and conditions of working with the incarcerated or ex-offenders.

Developing relationships is a key component of discipleship.¹⁰² There is an art to developing relationships with men and women who are incarcerated or ex-offenders. It involves acknowledging a prisoner's past history with forgiveness and reinforcing the future with biblical compassion and authority. Holman writes about the reality of a prisoner's transition into society,

¹⁰² Scott M. Boren, *The Relational Way: From Small Group Structures to Holistic Life Connections* (Houston: Touch Publications, 2007), 44.

“The bottom line is that for the convict, rules for successful living on the outside are turned upside down with the prison. That makes the transition back to the community difficult.”¹⁰³ A disciplined prisoner is a child of God, no less or different than any professing Christian on the outside, but years of incarceration and the effects of being institutionalized are profound. The church and ministry leaders, who access their programs successful, are acutely aware of these effects.

Clusters of Meaning

By analyzing the responses to the questions with the highest percentage of agreement, various overarching meanings can be assessed. Church and ministry leaders agree that there is a biblical mandate to disciple prisoners and that prisoners are a new creation in Christ and forgiven when they accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. Regardless of the prisoner’s offense, the survey responses suggest upon repentance, unconditional forgiveness is available for all. The leaders are interested in supporting the disciplined prisoners upon release into a transitional program and many are currently involved in transitional programs. The lower percentage of those with ministry programs for ex-offenders offers a variety of conclusions. All Christians can assist in the transitioning of Christian disciples, but not all Christians are “called” into this ministry.

The elements listed to successfully reduce recidivism lend insight into the importance of the church and Christian community, support programs, and discipleship, but numerous other valuable elements were suggested. Together, these elements support a strong foundation for a transitional training program for the Christian community. In the seventy-nine responses given to this question (8), only four were specific to incarceration; the remaining seventy-five responses

¹⁰³ Gaye D. Holman, *Decades Behind Bars*, 82.

and immense majority are relevant to discipleship, in general. A disciplined releasee is clearly to be acknowledged as a disciple of Christ, first; the fact that he is a releasee only defines his situation and informs the Christian community to his unique and specific needs.

Thirty-six percent of the church and ministry leaders did not know the incarceration rates of their membership or congregation or if their relatives were/had been incarcerated. If thirty-six percent does not know the incarceration rate their church or ministry family, do they know the number of ex-offenders residing in their communities? Our prisons are maximized, but 93% of these prisoners will be coming home.¹⁰⁴ The research for this thesis only relates to the Christian population of releasees, but the total number of releasees should be a topic of concern for every Christian community. Petersilia suggests,

If most parolees remain unemployed and homeless, the social characteristics of neighborhoods begin to change in ways that affect crime rates. There are “tipping points,” beyond which communities are no longer able to exert positive influences on the behavior of residents. Norms start to change, disorder and incivilities increase, out-migration follows, and crime and violence increase.¹⁰⁵

The church and Christian community have the profound opportunity to assist disciplined inmates transition into society when they are released; yet, the opportunity exists with great need, to evangelize those released and lost without Christ. The importance of in-prison discipleship programs cannot be understated. The in-prison discipleship programs are proven to be effective and the community receives a more spiritually mature, educated, and accountable individual. Education has shown to deter recidivism. “Research consistently shows an inverse relationship

¹⁰⁴ Joan Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*, 38.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

between recidivism and education: the higher the education level, the less likely the person is to be rearrested or re-imprisoned.”¹⁰⁶

The funding for educational programs within the prisons is not adequate; in-prison church and ministry programs along with their volunteers are invaluable. Gregory Boyle relates that an educated inmate will not reoffend and cites, “They say that an educated inmate will not reoffend. This is not because an education assures that this guy will get hired somewhere. It is because his view is larger and more educated; so that he can be rejected at ninety-three job interviews and still not give up. He’s acquired resilience.”¹⁰⁷

Invariant Structure

The most compelling invariant element of this survey is the solid strength of the church and ministry leaders to believe Christ can change the heart of a man and make him a new creation. All of the responders are supportive of transitioning committed, disciplined releasees, even the few leaders with health and age limitations. Invariably, there is a need for a transitioning discipleship program for releasees and the specifics need to be addressed for a successful program, which supports universal training and implementation.

¹⁰⁶ Denise Gottfredson, David B. Wilson, and Stacy Najaka. “The Schools.” *In Crime: Public Policies for Crime Control* (San Francisco, Calif.: ICS Press, 2002), in Joan Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry*, 50.

¹⁰⁷ Gregory Boyle and Fr Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (Riverside: Free Press, 2010), 87.

Summary

Disciples are the salt and the light of the world (Mt 5:13-16). In this context, the church and ministry leaders completing the research surveys are salt and light. There is a call to action for discipleship, but it is not limited to solely prisoners and releasees. Dietrich Bonhoeffer states, “A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him,” but, “It is by seeing the cross and the community beneath it that men come to believe in God. But that is the light of the Resurrection.”¹⁰⁸

The call to prison ministry may be a specific calling, but the call to discipleship is not; all are called to follow Jesus. As portrayed by the inmate survey responses, there are many areas of support needed to transition a disciplined inmate into the church and Christian community. The body of Christ has the ability and responsibility to assist in their individual areas of gifting. Releasees are going to join the communities and some will join the local churches. The body of Christ needs to be prepared, trained, and capable of helping them to adjust and fill their position as a disciple in the body of Christ. Many of the church and ministry leaders are ready to accept their call to transitioning disciplined inmates and others are currently ministering with releasees; others are in need of training, motivation, and a clear vision, as to how they can contribute.

The sampling of church and ministry leaders represents hundreds and perhaps thousands of members, but it is only a minuet number of the massive number of churches and ministries within the United States. Releasees directly or indirectly affects all communities and not all releasees are disciples of Christ nor have all experienced the saving grace of God through salvation. The call to action is clear and the harvest is ripe. The body of Christ is incomplete without the numerous inmate disciples moving into Christian community with the miraculous

¹⁰⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 118-119.

testimony of how Christ has taken the “least of the least” and transformed them into a child of the King.

Paul Carson and Chuck Colson have personal testimonies of God’s amazing grace, through their incarcerations and call to prison ministry. Both of these disciples will be featured in chapter four, along with their prison ministries, Therapon and Prison Fellowship, respectively. Doug Tjapkes, founder of Humanity for Prisoners, will also share the spotlight in the final chapter. The experiences, teaching, training, and discipleship principles of these three men will contribute to a moldable program to transition inmate disciples into the Christian community.

The closing chapter of this Thesis Project will also explore the successes of prison ministries and suggest a plan for “where do we go from here?” The ministries of Therapon, and Humanity for Prisoners, and Prison Fellowship will be highlighted. Each of these wonderful ministries has foundational commonalities, but they each have unique and gifted ways of presenting their message of hope, through discipleship, to prisoners and releasees. The goal of this paper is to unite the responses of the prisoners in chapter two with the concepts of the church and ministry leaders in chapter three and formulate a successful plan to transition disciplined inmate into a discipleship community upon release.

Chapter Four: Successful Ministry Programs and Conclusions

The strategy of Jesus is not centered in taking the right stand on issues, but rather in standing in the right place — with the outcast and those relegated to the margins.

—Gregory Boyle¹⁰⁹

Introduction

Prisoners and ex-offenders have been considered “outcasts” for thousands of years, but Jesus has called His believers to stand in the gap and disciple the outcasts. The disciplined inmates surveyed in this thesis are eager and willing to take their place in society and be a representative within the body of Christ. Church and ministry leaders are willing to assist the disciplined releasees, as they enter the realm of modern society, and continue their discipleship training. There are far more prisoners being released than Christian communities that are committed to helping them succeed. The fear of the unknown is very prevalent and often people pre-judge individuals without any type of relationship or knowledge of the individual situation. It is human nature to be skeptical of unknown, especially when it involves a past criminal act.

God calls His disciples to a higher calling and provides for those who will do His will and serve His people. Education and training is crucial to recruiting Christian volunteers and mentors for incarcerated disciples. As relationships are cultivated between the Christian community and the disciplined releasees there are several general statistics about the prisoner population, release, and recidivism that should be considered. The Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBP) has made available several important statistics in October of 2017. The current

¹⁰⁹ Gregory Boyle and Fr Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (Riverside: Free Press, 2010), 72.

information is helpful in assessing the overall population of inmates. The following are facts about prisoners based upon the FBP reporting:¹¹⁰

- 1) Most are male offenders (93.2%) and the average age is 36 years old (18.7%).
- 2) The majority are U. S. citizens (79.4%).
- 3) Most inmates are non-Hispanic (67%).
- 4) Drug offenses are predominant (46.3%) and offenses involving weapons, explosives, and arson are a far second (17.2%).
- 5) Race: White represent 58.4% and Black represent 37.9%.

Other available data is relatively old, but many commonalities have existed throughout the years. According to Petersilia, “Today’s inmate is likely to have been in custody several times before, has a lengthy history of alcohol and drug abuse, is more likely to be involved in gang activities and drug dealing, has probably experienced significant periods of unemployment and homelessness, and may have a physical or mental disability.”¹¹¹ The author also notes the staggering amount of recidivism within the first year of release; almost two-thirds of recidivism, occurring within the first three years of release, takes place within the first year of release.¹¹² Petersilia describes the general population of inmates and releasees; sadly, very little research has been done to determine the differences with the disciplined inmate population. While all of the above commonalities may exist, the defining differences are the values of forgiveness, redemption, and living the life of discipleship.

¹¹⁰ Federal Bureau of Prisons, “Inmate Statistics,” (October 28, 2017)
https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_age.jsp

¹¹¹ Petersilia, *When Prisoners Comes Home*, 37.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 168.

Education is a valuable asset for reducing recidivism. In 1997, the Correctional Education Association conducted a survey entitled *Three States Recidivism Study*.¹¹³ The research included over 3600 people, released three years prior, who were participants in a longitudinal study in Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio; education was the major variable and research revealed, “simply attending school behind bars reduces the likelihood of reincarcerations by 29%.”¹¹⁴ “...The State of Texas reported the extraordinary recidivism impacts of postsecondary education in prison: “[T]wo years after release, the overall recidivism rate for college degree holders was as low as 12%, and inversely differentiated by type of degree.” The exact figures indicating these inverse recidivism rates for degree recipients were: Associate’s (13.7%); Baccalaureate’s (5.6%); Master’s (0%).¹¹⁵

The *Three States Recidivism Study* is very promising, but higher education programs remain limited. “Only a minute fraction of all people in prison even have access to postsecondary education. The vast majority struggle to read the information about basic supplies, like soap and stamps, on prison commissary lists.”¹¹⁶ The need for all levels of educational programs within the prisons is essential to reducing the rate of recidivism, but it also contributes to an easier transition for a releasee into society.

Churches and prison ministries are making a difference. There are numerous prison ministries and church groups that have worked with prisoners for many years; some are very

¹¹³ Stephan J. Steurer, L. Smith, and A. Tracy, *Three States Recidivism Study* (Lanham, MD: Correctional Education Association, 2001).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Kaia Stern, *Voices from American Prisons: Faith, Education and Healing* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2014), epilogue.

successful and others have experienced limited success. The global indication is that Christians who are willing to intercede and support prisoners are bearing fruit. This Thesis Project cannot highlight all of the ministry programs, but three life-changing ministries have been selected: Humanity for Prisoners, Prison Fellowship, and Therapon. Prison Fellowship is the largest of the three ministries and is an international organization. Humanity for Prisoners is primarily based in the State of Michigan and the Therapon program is located in the State of Texas. Each of these wonderful ministries has supported the research of this thesis and follows sound discipleship principles.

The dynamics of each of these ministries will be explored and commonalities cited. All discipleship ministries working with inmates have commonalities, which make them successful or less than successful. The goal of this exploration is to determine the successful commonalities of existing programs; thereby, providing encouragement to those struggling with less than effective programs and motivating church and ministry leaders who are uncommitted to prison ministry. The foundational groundwork can be laid for future of dynamic discipleship interaction with prisoners and releasees. The transition from in-prison discipleship to a releasee's discipleship into the Christian community can be made.

Humanity for Prisoners

Discipleship within organizations and ministries is diversified. Humanity for Prisoners (HFP) is located in Grand Haven, Michigan and they help prisoners and releasees, on a per case basis. HFP's approach is individualized and they are available to assist, even in desperate situations. Doug Tjapkes is the founder of the non-profit organization and his son, Matt, is an active partner in their work. Doug has been an advocate of prisoners for many years and he founded Humanity for Prisoners in 2001. Doug's journey for prisoner advocacy began with a man on Texas Death Row with an innocence case. Tjapkes authored a book entitled, *Sweet Freedom: Breaking the Bondage of Maurice Carter*, because of his direct involvement in the life of Maurice Carter. Maurice Carter was serving his sentence on Texas Death Row and his sentence was commuted for medical reasons in July of 2004. Doug welcomed Maurice to freedom upon his release, but his freedom was short-lived, as he died from medical complications in October of 2004.

Tjapkes' effort to assist prisoners extends beyond his Michigan base, as evidenced by his support of Maurice Carter. His organization often goes beyond the limits of their mission statement: "With compassion for Michigan's imprisoned, Humanity for Prisoners provides, promotes and ensures—with strategic partnerships— personalized, problem-solving services for incarcerated persons in order to alleviate suffering beyond the just administration of their sentences."¹¹⁷ According to Matt Tjapkes, HFP simply offers help, which can be different based upon the request. He states, "For one, it might be some tough love when they do something stupid like getting caught with a cell phone. For another, it might just be words of comfort after

¹¹⁷ Doug Tjapkes, "Humanity for Prisoners: Action with Compassion," *Humanity for Prisoners Website*, Grand Haven, MI, accessed December 7, 2017, <https://www.humanityforprisoners.org/about.html>

they lost a loved one. For others, we help them prepare a commutation that's their only hope at freedom. And then some have an illness, and just want comfort and proper medical treatment.”¹¹⁸ They have received over 4000 requests in 2017 and answered each one with the best of their ability.

Humanity for Prisoners is highlighted, because they are making a difference in the lives of the incarcerated and they are creating and inspiring a public awareness of the need to care for prisoners and releasees. A large panel of professionals from many fields assists Humanity for Prisoners and they provide assistance in very neglected areas, including: medical care, terminal illness, mental illness, disability issues, commutation applications, and parole board preparation. Humanity for Prisoners professes the reason they help: “When a prisoner struggles, no one rushes to help; yet, 90% of these inmates will be free again someday.”¹¹⁹

Humanity for Prisoners practically applies their discipleship skills in areas most ministries tend to neglect or “pass-on” to someone else. Mental illness is higher among the incarcerated than the general American population; approximately one third of all state inmates have reported a physical impairment or mental condition and more than ten percent have a combination of conditions.¹²⁰ While disciplined inmates are often more spiritually mature, a physical and/or mental impairment can be a reality. Most inmates are educationally deficient, although, the availability of educational programs within the prisons is increasing. The role Humanity for Prisoners plays in the transitioning of inmates and releasees is extremely valuable

¹¹⁸ Personal correspondence from Matt Tjapkes via email dated December 5, 2017.

¹¹⁹ This information was obtained via a personal email correspondence with Matt Tjapkes and stated in their company brochure.

¹²⁰ Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home*, 52.

and every prison ministry desperately needs decisive methods to handle the challenges presented with these prevalent conditions.

Prison Fellowship

Prison Fellowship is the largest non-profit Christian organization in the nation, serving prisoners, ex-offenders, and their families. They are also one of the world's leading advocates for the reform of the criminal justice system. Chuck Colson, who served a seven-month sentence for his involvement in the Nixon Watergate scandal, established the organization in 1976. For over forty years, Prison Fellowship has equipped prisoners with the good news of Jesus Christ and instilled hope with Bible-based programs. Prison Fellowship has a comprehensive plan for reformation; they support a renewal cycle, which transforms and mobilizes prisoners and breaks the cycle of crime. A releasee can contribute to society with God-given dignity and become a vital part of their community. While it is impossible to get an exact figure of the effectiveness of this transformative praxis, general gauges exist to determine the value.

Chuck Colson (1931-2012) understood the challenges of prison life and he experienced the difficulties of transitioning back into society upon his release. Colson was a new Christian when he entered prison, but his faith and sense of purpose became stronger on a daily basis. He had committed an extremely publicized political crime, but by the grace of God, he was forgiven. Colson dedicated his life to helping prisoners and furthering the cause of restorative justice. Prison Fellowship Ministries began simply; "It began with a series of seminars held in Washington, D.C., during 1975, seminars designed to train Christian inmates in living the Christian life."¹²¹ Prison Fellowship has greatly expanded the original focus of their simple start and presently holds the status of the world's largest family of Christian prison ministries.

Prison Fellowship branches out into a host of diversified ministry offerings for prisoners and their families. Currently, they focus on five areas to move prisoners and their families from a cycle of crime to a cycle of renewal.

1) Restoring Prisoners

Every day by the hundreds, Prison Fellowship staff and volunteers are sharing the Gospel, teaching life changing classes, and providing hope, to incarcerated men and women. Through evangelistic events, such as: Bible studies, discipleship, and seminary level classes, they introduce a new future in Christ and nurture spiritual growth. They utilize a holistic approach to life skills, mentorship prospects, and re-entry plans and programs, which allow prisoners and releasees to become leaders inside and outside of the prison. The effectiveness of the programs is resulting in prisoners growing, changing, and finding positive lifestyles, through the guidance of the staff and volunteers.¹²²

2) Empowering Great Wardens

Wardens act as the CEO of the prison they represent; they have the ability to transform a correctional facility into anchorages of moral rehabilitation for the prisoners under their responsibility. The Prison Fellowship's Warden Exchange program is working to make the transformation a realization. The exchange program organizes leaders of the correctional facilities and facilitates a professional network of training. The training consists of the best

¹²¹ Winnifred Fallers Sullivan and Winnifred Fallers-Fallers Sullivan. *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 59.

¹²² Prison Fellowship Website, "Prison Fellowship Focuses on Five Areas of Ministry to Help Move Men, Women, and Their Families from a Cycle of Crime to a Cycle of Renewal," accessed December 9, 2017, <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/about/>

practices and support services, as they build a legacy to a safer and sustainable rehabilitative prison system. The culture within the prisons is changing, because of this dynamic program.¹²³

3) Ministering to Families

Children are often the victims of loneliness and abandonment when their mother or father becomes incarcerated. Prison Fellowship has a program called Angel Tree that provides for the children of the prisoners. Nationwide, church volunteers provide local children with gifts for Christmas and a Gospel message on behalf of the incarcerated parent. A message from their imprisoned parent is included, which reminds them of the enduring love that exists for them. The Angel Tree program brings the church to the families of the incarcerated during the Christmas season and extends year-round to provide the needed support, while their parent is absent.¹²⁴

4) Supporting Successful Reentry

The approach used by Prison Fellowship to help previously incarcerated men and women starts *within* the walls of the prisons. This type of program provides for a healthy reintegration through classes for life-skills, mentors, and the availability of resources from the local community. Several states have allowed faith-based dorms for prisoners to take useful classes and acquaint themselves with the process of reentry within the Christian community. Prison Fellowship supports the strengthening of local support networks, through church, organization, and community involvement of those previously incarcerated.¹²⁵

¹²³ Prison Fellowship Website, “Prison Fellowship Focuses on Five Areas of Ministry to Help Move Men, Women, and Their Families from a Cycle of Crime to a Cycle of Renewal.”

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

5) Advocating for Restorative Justice Reform

Prison Fellowship takes a straightforward approach in their view of humanity; they believe that all individuals are God's creation and are worthy of inherent dignity. Value is placed upon the factor of respect for all and their approach reemphasizes on the "worth" of people impacted by incarceration and their crimes. Their advocacy program works with legislators to retool a system to provide caring justice for all of the parties affected; effectually, this means communities will be safer, victims are shown respect, and those convicted of a crime are positively changed. Restorative justice is being mobilized by Prison Fellowship's national network of advocates for justice.¹²⁶

InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI)

In 1997, Prison Fellowship launched the InnerChange Freedom Initiative. The program is privately funded and offers values-based, educational services to inmates on a voluntary basis. This noncompulsory program allows the inmates to prepare for reentry into society and concentrates on specific areas of reentry, such as: religious and community living, family and social relationships, and integrating into the workplace. The values emphasized in the program reflect the life and teachings of Christ, but the program is open to prisoners of all faiths or no faith.

The inmates live in the same housing unit and are taught values and life skills in a program that can extend for up to eighteen months. After completion of this phase, the participants receive the guidance of a mentor and the support of the local faith community for a year after they have been released from prison. Interesting to this thesis, the InnerChange

¹²⁶ Prison Fellowship Website, "Prison Fellowship Focuses on Five Areas of Ministry."

Freedom Initiative was first launched in 1997 in a Texas prison. The IFI is currently operating programs in Minnesota (2002) and they opened a program at a women’s unit in Minnesota in 2006.¹²⁷

One of the major differences in this program and other in-prison Christian re-entry programs is that it is open to inmates of all faiths or no faith. An inmate is not required to have experienced salvation before they are accepted. The ultimate goal is the fruition of 1 Timothy 2:4, “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Colson attests to this fact, “sin is not simply the wrong we do our neighbor when we cheat him, or the wrong we do ourselves when we abuse our bodies, Sin, all sin, is a root rebellion and offense against God. Admitting our sinfulness and asking God’s forgiveness is the first step. We have the capacity to change anything about our lives . . . but we cannot change our own sinful nature.”¹²⁸

The results of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative program are posted on their website and they have far-reaching implications.

In 2003, the Texas Policy Council released a study of recidivism in the state and found that of the inmates who completed all phases of The InnerChange Freedom Initiative program, only eight percent returned to prison within two years, compared with a 20 percent return rate for inmates who were eligible for the program but did not participate. In other words, InnerChange Freedom Initiative graduates were 60 percent less likely to be re-incarcerated.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Prison Fellowship Website, “InterChange Freedom Initiative,” accessed December 7, 2017, <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/about/reentry-support/innerchange-freedom-initiative/>

¹²⁸ Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution*, 67. Partial quote taken from Charles W. Colson, *Loving God: An Inspiring Message and a Challenge to all Christians* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2002), 166.

¹²⁹ Byron R. Johnson and David B. Larson, “Texas Policy Council Study on the Texas InnerChange Freedom Initiative, 2003, and The InnerChange Freedom Initiative: A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program, June 2003. accessed on the Prison Fellowship website on December 7, 2017, <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/about/reentry-support/innerchange-freedom-initiative/>

A follow-up study was conducted by the University of Pennsylvania, which supported the above findings. The report confirmed that the InnerChange Freedom Initiative graduate (those who completed both the in-prison and post-prison components of the program) had a re-arrest rate of only 18%. The matched comparison group had significantly different result with a 35% re-arrest rate. The IFI program graduates were 50% less likely to be re-arrested than the comparison group.”¹³⁰ The results of this research are consistent with similar studies of evidence-based research in corrections, which gives definition to the characteristics of effective programs for individual change.

InnerChange Freedom Initiative has additional studies from the states of Minnesota and Iowa, which also deliver similar effectiveness. The results accurately attest to the ability of inmates completing the InnerChange Freedom Initiative program to successfully break the cycle of crime and become law-abiding, productive citizens. The positive influence and life-changing program is resulting in safer communities.¹³¹

Prison Fellowship has a wide array of diversified programs with successful results. Many prison ministries are following the example set by this group, but the need remains for trained volunteers to assist in each of the programs.

¹³⁰ Byron R. Johnson and David B. Larson, “Texas Policy Council Study on the Texas InnerChange Freedom Initiative,” 2003, and *The InnerChange Freedom Initiative: A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program*, June 2003

¹³¹ Prison Fellowship Website, “InnerChange Freedom Initiative,” accessed December 7, 2017, <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/about/reentry-support/innerchange-freedom-initiative/>

The Therapon Program

Paul Carlin was once known as #18349-149, a federal prisoner serving a six-year sentence for security violations and mail fraud. The number used to identify Carlin would be transformed into a pivotal marker for the calling God placed upon his life. Carlin

When Paul Carlin was federal prisoner number 18349-149, the other inmates called him "the main man." Today, as he heads one of the most successful para-church prison ministries in the country, the prisoners call him "the convict's preacher." Carlin is President of The Ministry Church, a 501(c) 3, faith-based, Biblical, Christ-centered non-profit organization, headquartered in Crockett, Texas. He is also pastor of the historic, 132-year-old Shady Grove Baptist Church located ten miles East of Crockett on Hwy 287.

Carlin and his wife, Jeri, have been in prison ministry for 33 years. Retired Texas prison chaplain John Larson once introduced Carlin as "the Apostle Paul of prison ministry." Vance Drum, chaplain at the Eastham prison in Lovelady, Texas, says, " Dr. Paul is a ministry entrepreneur. He has an idea and before you know it, it is a working, functioning model." Carlin has built the "Apostle Paul" and "ministry entrepreneur" reputation because of his enormous gift of creativity and his pioneer spirit.¹³²

In 1982, Carlin organized Prisoners Bible Institute. For 25 years he and Jeri directed teams of 40 to 100 lay people at a time into adult prisons in five states every month for an energetic religious program called the Lay Witness Prison Revivals. The unique ministry style was conceived and piloted while Carlin was still incarcerated at the Federal Correctional Institute, Texarkana, Texas. "The idea was a Methodist program used in local churches," he

¹³² Teena L. Myers, "The Ministry of Paul Carlin," NOLA.com, Times-Picayune, April 23, 2012, accessed http://blog.nola.com/faith/2012/04/the_ministry_of_dr_paul_carlin.html

explains. "Our unit chaplain, Charles Tyson, wanted to duplicate the concept in the prison setting and gave me the job of restructuring the program to fit the prison and directing the first Lay Witness Weekend ever conducted in any prison in America. That was in 1971."

His own life was changed during the three-day event. "Kneeling on the old wood floor in the prison auditorium during the concluding service, I ask God to allow me to take this concept to every prison in America when I was released," Carlin says.

He was paroled out the Federal System in 1973. He went back to Houston where he met Jeri. After their marriage in 1975, Paul conducted his first prison revival at the Ellis Unit in Texas in 1978. That event ignited the Lay Witness Prison Revival ministry that recruited and trained hundreds of laymen for prison ministry. His dream was coming true!

Ten years after being paroled, he put together the Texas Prison Invasion, December 7-9, 1984. Twenty-eight (28) Texas prisons opened their bars to twenty-eight evangelistic teams of 50 laymen each for three days of one-on-one with inmates, gospel music and evangelistic preaching. The event was called, "The Texas Prison Invasion."

Twelve years after he left prison on parole, in 1986, he saw another part of that dream come true. With the cooperation of International Prison Ministry legend, Chaplain Ray, he orchestrated the National Prison Invasion when 300 prisons and 8,000 volunteers used his Lay Witness Prison Revival program simultaneously. It was reported that the effort reached over 300,000 prisoners in a single weekend.

However, Carlin was not always a prison evangelist. For 10 years before his bout with federal law he was one of the leading local church evangelists in the Southern Baptist Convention. He quit the ministry in 1962 to become a wealthy Houston businessman. He says about his deviation, "I became obsessed with the sin of illegitimate desire. That means I wanted

what God did want me to have. Illegitimate desire led to undedicated ambition." Because of illegal business dealings in his church bond business, a Federal Grand Jury returned an 11-count securities violation and mail fraud indictment against him. The respected former Southern Baptist Evangelist was sentenced to six years in federal prison. During that time he lost his business, his ministry and his wife divorced him.

"God used those hard times to pull my life back together," he says. "It may sound strange, but the judge did me a favor. We are now reaching thousands of men and women few people can reach because of my incarceration. I would not be in prison ministry if I had not gone to prison. Failure is not final unless you quit," Carlin says.¹³³

After Carlin's release from prison in 1973, he worked, remarried, preached when given the opportunity, continued his graduate degree programs, started a church south of Houston and began developing plans for a prison ministry. "Other preachers called me 'the preacher who went to prison,'" Carlin now says with a smile.

He completed his master's degree in 1981 and Doctor of Theology, Magna Cum Laude, at International Seminary, Orlando, Florida, in 1983. In 1989, Carlin received his Doctor of Philosophy in Religion from Christian Bible College and Seminary and a Doctor of Restorative Justice from Therapon University, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. Mrs. Carlin holds a Master's Degree in Psychology and Christian Counseling from Louisiana Baptist University. Jeri's field of expertise is in temperament analysis.

In 1990, Carlin became the father and founder of The Association of X-Offenders. Thirty-five chapters were soon established in Texas state prisons. The idea was to provide peer support that would help reduce prison recidivism.

¹³³ Teena L. Myers, "The Ministry of Paul Carlin."

In 1997, Carlin organized The Therapon Institute, Texas' first faith-based counseling school. He used as his curriculum the recovery and restoration justice model he had developed during his years in his prison ministry. Using the prisons as his laboratory and prisoners as his subjects, Carlin developed a psychological and religious counseling model he called Belief Therapy®. With the passing of the new Texas faith-based agenda under then Governor George W. Bush's leadership, it became legal for people of faith to assist hurting and healing people navigate their way through addictions and other life-controlling problems to spiritual and emotional health.

Belief Therapy became the nation's first faith-based registered and recognized "psychological and religious" counseling model. In December of 1998, then Governor Bush recognized Carlin for his accomplishment with an engraved and signed award. Therapon has graduated over 10,000 Certified and Licensed Belief Therapist in almost every state and many foreign countries.

In May of 2005, Carlin addressed the growing issue of recidivism in the Texas prison system. He and his wife, Jeri, organized and established a pre-release reentry program for long-term offenders of violent crimes on the maximum-security Eastham prison. The program is called The Spiritual Dynamics of Criminal Recovery and Relapse Prevention. Carlin wrote the 528-page curriculum for the two-year course of study.

The CRRP program has grown into what the system now calls The Eastham Therapon Community. In four years, Therapon has already graduated five class with five other classes scheduled for graduation over the next five years.

Supporters of The Ministry have contributed enough funds to completely remodel 3,000 square feet of unused classroom space in Eastham's old North gymnasium. The CRRP program

not only has its own dormitories, but its own beautiful air-conditioned ministry learning center and one-on-one counseling rooms. The study lab is equipped with oak-top round tables and accented with comfortable padded chairs. The men have access to single DVD players for individual study. The classroom, which will seat 48 men in a classroom style arrangement and 120 men in a theater format, is equipped with a sound system and a 54" television for group DVD classes.

In 2006, Paul and Jeri Carlin were recipients of the prestigious Texas Governor's "Outstanding Innovative Program Development Award" for their creation of the CRRP program in the Texas Prison system. In 2007, they were presented the "Volunteers of The Year Award" for their sacrificial service in the creation and development of the Eastham Therapeutic Community program.

However, awards are no strangers to Carlin. In the early days of his prison ministry, both Governors Price Daniels and Mark White recognized him for his work with the Texas Youth Commission. Carlin says, "One of the pictures I am most proud of is the one of Governor Daniels and me. He was a great man." In 1996, he received a special award from the Baptist General Convention of Texas for "outstanding work in prison ministry communications." In 1987, he received the Paul and Silas Award as the top prison ministry in Texas. In 2002, He was named an Honorary Colonel in the Militia of the State of Alabama for his assistance in establishing faith-based programs in their state prison system.

In 2006, Carlin developed another counseling model called Reentry Crisis Counseling. "My idea was to train faith-based counselors in the art of helping parolees suffer from reentry crisis issues," Carlin says. "A crisis can be the trigger that leads to a parole violation and re-incarceration." He has trained sever hundred laypeople in the modality with the goal in mind of

helping to alleviate the parolee's stress of rejection and emotional trauma. The goal is to prevent relapse and recidivism.

He and his wife, Jeri, host the one-hour radio broadcast, Prisoners of Hope Bible Broadcast, every Sunday evening over KIVY radio in Crockett. The program reaches into 23 State prisons that house over 47,000 prisoners. The program reaches hundreds of prisoners and their families.

Paul Carlin is also a prolific writer. He has authored such titles as Prisoners of Hope, Treasures of Darkness, The Second Peter Principle, How To Start Over, Satan and The Saint, Change Your Beliefs --- Change Your Life, His Steps, Living Free: Reentry Crisis Counseling, Setting Captives Free, Mastering Life Through Belief Therapy, His Steps, The 12 Keys To Developing and Maintaining Mature Relationships, Success Secrets That Have Never Failed, Thinking Errors and Vomiting Dogs and Wallowing Hogs.¹³⁴

Carlin's training materials are implemented into all of his various programs. As stated earlier, in May of 2005, The Therapon Institute began the award-winning Spiritual Dynamics of Criminal Recovery and Relapse Prevention program for the offender population at the Eastham Unit. The Senior Warden was David Stacks. The chaplain was Vance Drum. The program was endorsed and approved by Doug Dredke, who was at that time Director of the Institutional Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. The TDCJ Rehabilitation and Reentry Department via Marvin Dunbar approved their curriculum and programs...Two years later, the Texas civil case styled H.E.B. Ministries vs. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 235 S. W. 3d 627 was settled in the Texas Supreme Court with the Court ruling in favor of H.E.B. Ministries and against the THECB, thus giving non-regionally accredited religious educational

¹³⁴ Teena L. Myers, "The Ministry of Paul Carlin."

institutions of higher learning permission to offer undergraduate and graduate degree programs exclusively in Bible and/or ministry.¹³⁵

Therapon Theological Seminary and Bible College requested teaching and degree credentialing from both the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and The Texas Workforce Commission and received both. At that time, with those approvals or certificates of authority, TTSBC began offering undergraduate and graduate courses of study to long-term offenders of violent crimes to the men on the maximum-security Eastham prison in Lovelady, Texas. Since that time, TTSBC has graduated 240 men with Associates Degrees in Biblical Studies, 120 men with bachelor's degrees in biblical studies, 60 men with master's degrees, and 12 men with Doctor of Ministry degrees. Each degree curriculum is in a Biblical and ministry discipline. This case law legitimized non-regionally accredited Bible education and brought a higher calling and new level of higher education into existence in Texas, i.e., Correctional Christian Higher Education.¹³⁶

Carlin emphasizes the thesis of the seminary: "Higher education, at any level, for incarcerated felons is always good and contributes greatly to the reduction of recidivism. The higher education an inmate achieves, the less likely he/she is to return to prison. Therapon is committed to what we believe to be "a higher calling"—teaching and internalizing the Word of God."¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Paul Carlin, Jeri Carlin, and Gregory Gobin, "Correctional Christian Higher Education: A Higher Calling Discipleship and Degree Training," *2017-2018 Curriculum Guide*, Therapon Theological Seminary and Bible College.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 3.

One of Carlin's more recent books, *Barriers to Reentry: The 10 Seeds of Failure* is an excellent training book for both prisoners and prison ministry leaders. Carlin shares the harsh reality of reentry for offenders and casts hope for overcoming obstacles leading to recidivism. For the individual desiring to disciple a releasee, this information is invaluable. Carlin describes the difficulty of starting over, when faced with the consequences of the crime (sin), which caused the offender to become incarcerated. The consequences of their crimes follow the inmate or parolee back into society and biblically follow the law of sowing and reaping.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap (Gal. 6:7).

Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6).

For they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads; It yields no grain. Should it yield, strangers would swallow it up (Hosea 8:7).

It is important for releasees to know that society does not "owe" them anything; it is the releasee's responsibility to start over.¹³⁸ There are no reentry "perks" to be expected; it is a choice to live an obedient Christian life, according to Deuteronomy 11:26-28, "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known." An "entitlement mentality" will lead a releasee right back into prison; an entitlement mentality believes society owes the individual whatever it takes to start over. Starting over is an uphill climb and sometimes the climb is made alone.

¹³⁸ Paul W. Carlin, *Barriers to Re-Entry: The 10 Seeds of Failure* (Crockett, TX: Paul W. Carlin, 2013), 1.

Most releasees do not start over at the same level where they left off. Thankfulness for the basic necessity of just having shelter is a blessing. Carlin encourages releasees to find good people, services, and organizations, which can provide mentorship. Good counsel and wisdom are found in Christian groups and organizations; looking for advice on the streets is unhealthy and most often leads to trouble. Successfully reentering, readjusting, and reintegrating into society is a challenging undertaking, which requires commitment, sacrifice, seriousness, and resolve. If an ex-offender embraces these intangibles and they mean more to him/her than getting other satisfactions, such as: a job, a place to live, a car, new clothes, or a sexual relationship; the barriers causing recidivism can be visualized.

Paul and Jeri Carlin have spent over forty years making prisons their research laboratories, and prisoners their subjects. Paul Carlin's personal experience of starting over was harrowing even with strong family support. The Carlin's and their associates have walked with releasees "through many dangers, toils, and snares," and they have seen a few of their graduates return to prison... but only a few. After countless hours of counseling, mentoring and assisting offenders navigate through prison and reentry issues, Carlin compiled the list that led to the creation of his book, *Barriers to Reentry: The 10 Seeds of Failure*. Each releasee may be infected with one or all of the seeds, but almost without exception, Carlin states, "...each parolee is unaware of the seeds and their potential negative effect on his life. These hidden seeds wait to germinate into self-defeating failure issues for the parolee."¹³⁹

Once again, this writer is most familiar with the ministry of Paul and Jeri Carlin and the forthright clarity of their materials and programs, which is resulting in dramatic drops in the

¹³⁹ Paul W. Carlin, *Barriers to Re-Entry*, 3.

recidivism rates of the Therapon graduates. Data is constantly being gathered to fully disclose the low rate of recidivism of Therapon graduates. The significance and impact of *Barriers to Reentry*, as a training manual for inmates, faith-based volunteers, churches, and prison ministries is yet to be totally envisioned. Carlin's perspective stems from his background as a Reentry Crisis Counselor (RCC) and it is important to understand the processes.

Where do the seeds of failure begin? They germinate and grow within the corrupt soil of prison culture and the roots of these seeds become deep and solid. While some of the roots are generational, when a parolee is released into the fruitful soil of freedom, exposed to bright sunlight of independence, and watered with the option of choice; the seeds bloom into full-blown issues and begin to bear negative fruit. Carlin insists, "it is important that you, whether prison or parolee, identify these seeds, understand them for what they are, process them, and be delivered from them."¹⁴⁰ If you are the mentor, ministry leader, or faith-based volunteer, this information will make you a much more effective helper (parakleses) or comforter, as described in 2 Corinthians 1:4.¹⁴¹

All people working with prisoners and releasees should recognize the unstructured, undisciplined, and shoot-from-the-hip approaches are ineffective and proper training and study is invaluable (2 Tim. 2:15). "Study to shew yourself approved" applies to anyone involved in prison or jail ministry. Faith-based prison volunteers need to be equipped in the Word of God, growing in spiritual maturity, and emotionally healthy, to lead disciples into the same level of Christ-centered relationship.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Paul W. Carlin, *Barriers to Re-Entry*, 3.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 4.

To reduce recidivism, it must begin during incarceration. Prisoners are not all the same; although, they are generally all treated the same. Many inmates are oblivious to their talents and spiritual gifts...until they are discovered in prison. Society often fails to recognize that there are talented legal minds, artists, musicians, carpenters, public speakers, leaders, writer, and computer geniuses, etc., locked up. The philosophy of Therapon prison ministry is not to make men better, but to make better men; better men will make men better.¹⁴³ Many of these talented men need core belief changes and skills development, which equals discipleship. Carlin believes the prison systems should develop a classification program based upon the giftedness and skills of the offender and focus on those positive strengths.

Paul Carlin explores several areas of prison life, which can diversely affect an inmate and continue to have implications long after he is released. While the influences are negative, by understanding and acknowledging their existence, prisoner and releasee supporters are provided with necessary information to further on-going discipleship techniques. "Prison is not a pretty place" and the informed ministry leader or volunteer must understand the hard facts of reality, to be able to effectively overcome obstacles and disciple men affected by prison culture.¹⁴⁴ Many inmates believe that prison is the reason they are still alive today, because they clearly understood they were on a "short highway to death," by living a sin-filled and corrupt lifestyle before they were incarcerated. Jesus did not call His disciples to a level, slightly higher than corruption, but to a more abundant life (John 10:10).

¹⁴³ Paul W. Carlin, *Barriers to Re-Entry*, 5.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

A combination of components within prison culture can contribute to seeds of failure development. Carlin has counseled offenders for over forty years and he has coined the term Posttraumatic Prison Stress Disorder (PTPSD). Carlin utilizes Luke 4:18 to describe the prison population and highlight the five-fold ministry of Christ, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captive, and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (KJV).

The “poor” or broke from this passage identify the majority of adults in prison. Most prisoners were at poverty level or below, before incarceration. They had to learn to “work the system” to survive on government subsidies, charity, and sporadic jobs. Most of the inmates have developed a welfare mentality and many were so poor that they feel rescued by coming to prison. Poor people can be found in prison.

The second group in the passage is “broken.” A large section of the adult prison population is bearing the scars of psychological, physical, emotional, character, and verbal abuse. It is not unusual for prisoners to come from generational crime families. Many of the men are angry and it is a driving anger that stems from years (or a lifetime) of abuses. These inmates represent the broken lives described in Psalm 34:18 and John 14:1. Broken people can be found in prison.

The third group in Luke 4:18 are the “bound.” Addictions and substance abuse is a controlling factor behind many of the crimes committed, which brought the men and women to prison. Many prisoners have an obsessive-compulsive mind, because some life-controlling substance of their choice binds them. Bound people can be found in prison.

The fourth group is the “blind.” The majority of the prison population is educationally blind; the average education level is around 6th grade and most have no job skills and very few life skills. Relationship skills, social values, and character traits are lacking or non-existent; they are blind to the compensations of a civil lifestyle. Blind people can be found in prison.

The final group from Luke 4:18 is the bruised. The majority of prisoners have been “beaten-up” emotionally, verbally, physically, and socially and they carry a plethora of scars and bruises. Over time, they have learned to strike back. Bruised people can be found in prison.

One would like to envision prison, as a healthy, rehabilitation type facility; a place where an individual can learn life skills, replace bad behaviors and thoughts, and be challenged to become more wholesome and well rounded, but sadly, it most often is not. According to Carlin, “Prison is a dysfunctional, unnatural subculture with its own language, monetary exchange, class system, government, work ethic, structure, religious ideologies, gangs, gambling, and out-of-control sexual perversion.”¹⁴⁵ What hope exists for change?

The most common denominator among inmates is the deficiency of emotional intelligence (EI).¹⁴⁶ Carlin terms EI as “wise emotions” in his Belief Therapy® model. Research reveals that half of all inmates in the United States, including Texas, have mental health issues, which have gone untreated. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), more than 350,000 offenders with disorders are annually released to society untreated.¹⁴⁷ One can imagine the problem this creates for society, but it also is a major problem within the prison system. Prison correctional officers are not trained to perform the job of a mental health administrator.

¹⁴⁵ Paul W. Carlin, *Barriers to Re-Entry*, 7.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

The environment created between disordered inmates and those without mental disorders are volatile. One finds a neighborhood of sorts encompassing people with immoral habits that affect the entire atmosphere.

Prisoners become like the environment and since their environment is prison, Carlin labels them as “prisonized.”¹⁴⁸ The result of being “prisonized” is a “convict mentality.” The mentality is multifaceted and mentally unhealthy; characteristics include: unreceptive to responsible options, denying destructive behavior, blaming others (instead of personal responsibility), disrespecting authority, and having a distorted view of people and things.¹⁴⁹ In a reversal of values, people are used and things are loved.

It is not surprising that inmates can experience a social death. Social death takes on the form or condition of society not accepting inmates as fully human. When inmates are released, they can no longer work or live in certain places and they cannot hold certain credentials, certifications, and state licenses. Relationally, many of the inmate’s families consider them forgotten or dead. The value of 2 Corinthians 5:17 cannot be overstated, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

The convict theology mind-set can become a problem for offenders, when they are given a vast array of religious and faith-based belief systems. The sensationalism and performance-based ministries offering spiritual assistance is often unaware or unprepared for the realistic needs of the prisoners. The inmates are barraged with a hodgepodge of beliefs and rarely to they reflect the truth of solid Bible-based theology. While faith-based volunteers and ministry teams are well-intentioned and well meaning, the reality of the situation is the need for consistent, solid

¹⁴⁸ Paul W. Carlin, *Barriers to Re-Entry*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Biblical truth. Most inmates will be returning to society and they need spiritual food that will sustain them throughout life.

The Seeds of Failure

Paul Carlin has listed ten seeds of failure, which are all symptoms of Posttraumatic Prison Stress Disorder (PTPSD). Ninety-eight percent of the men, over two million adults, and over 600,000 annually, will be released from prisons and Carlin offers his clinical diagnosis for the benefit of the inmate and society at large.

1) Low Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem or a low self-acceptance tends to conceive God as being critical, resist and distant. Paul Froese and Christopher Bader would suggest that the inmates with low self-esteem, as documented by Carlin, would perceive God as critical.¹⁵⁰ The number of inmates and releasees with a critical view is substantially higher than the general population of the United States.

¹⁵⁰ Froese and Bader, *America's Four God's*, 26.

The number of inmates and releasees with the critical view is substantially higher. The following diagram displays the percentage of American's, which believe God to be critical.

Figure 1.2

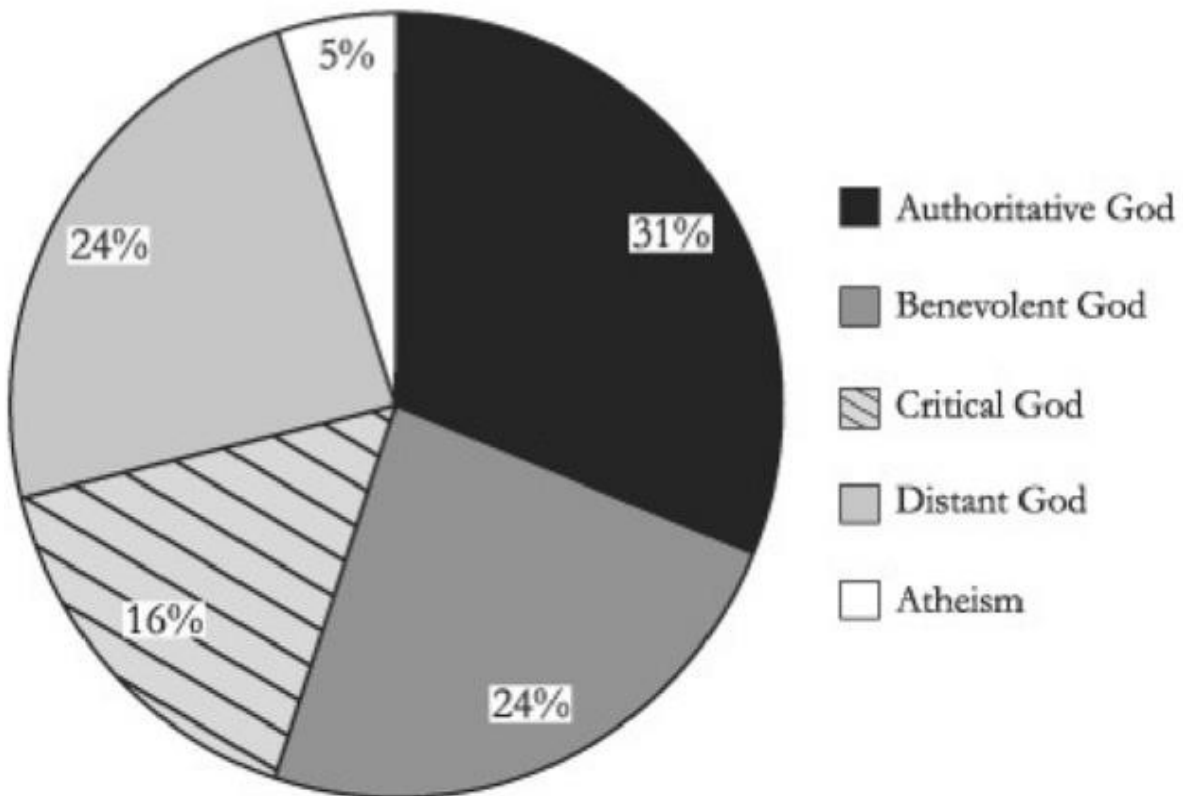


Figure 1.4. God's Popularity

The biblical truth is that Christians find their value in Christ. A healthy self-esteem is completely centered upon the value God places on a person's life. In salvation, an exchange is made; a sinner, who is redeemed by the blood of Jesus, exchanges his/her life for the life of Jesus.

2) Little Direction

An inmate makes very few decisions for himself in prison. The prison system determines most of the decisions to be made and inmates are required to conform. When released, all of their big dreams and plans are quickly faced with a society that is not as forgiving, receiving, and

generous as the ex-offender envisioned. If a releasee does not start immediately propelling upstream and placing everything he has into his freedom, he will quickly be pulled downstream. A parolee desires to do what is right, but he must come to terms with his limitations.

3) Impatience

Patience is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5). Many releasees have “illegitimate desires” or they try to get too much too quickly. Jesus said in Luke 21:19 (KJV), “In your patience possess ye your souls.” Just as Peter began to sink, when he took his eyes off of Jesus (Matt. 14:30), a parolee must not put himself in the position of standing on sinking sand or water through impulsiveness. Every choice has a consequence and the options need to be weighed carefully.

4) The Victim Mentality Stigmatization

Prisoners hear the old cliché, “Once a convict, always a convict” and some releasees have a hard time breaking free from a victim mentality. A prisoner is a victim, but it is because of his poor choices. It is important to make wise choices and anticipate positive results. The State’s motivation for reentry programs to reduce recidivism is: 1) to keep a person out of the crime cycle for public safety and 2) breaking the crime cycle will reduce in-prison expenses.¹⁵¹ The Christian community can make a dramatic difference in the area of reentry.

5) No Financial Resources

Most prisoners come from low-income families and low finances can continue to be an issue, until the releasee finds steady employment. It is important for a releasee to develop self-discipline over their needs and wants and to rely upon the Lord for His provision, through prayer.

¹⁵¹ Paul Carlin, *Barriers to Reentry*, 19.

6) Paranoia

“Paranoia is a cognitive disorder which primarily distorts perspective as opposed to thinking.”¹⁵² In prison, a certain level of paranoia helps keep them alive, but an over exaggerated level of paranoia will cause the individual to think, “everything happens to me.” Occasionally paranoia is confused with sensitivity; developing sensitivity and awareness is valuable, when it is a response to others.

7) Indecision

Prayer is essential for making good decisions. Bad choices bring bad results and utilizing sound biblical values for making right choices is clearly the right decision.

8) Fear

Parolees share three common fears: rejection, performance anxiety, and parole violation.¹⁵³ Negative fear can cripple maturity and progress.

9) Low Expectations

Low expectations can produce a feeling of hopelessness, helplessness, and pessimism. Focusing on realistic expectations and avoiding anxiety over having to wait is essential. Carlin states, “Realistically, the ex-convict will have to wait, work, and worship the Lord to get back on his feet.”¹⁵⁴

10) Limited Public Resources

¹⁵² Paul Carlin, *Barriers to Reentry*, 19.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

Jobs, places to live, and social services are not always available and they can be limited. An ex-offender should seek support groups, community-based groups, and local church groups.

Each of these groups can assist the releasee by:

- 1) Teaching and educate them on how to build and nurture relationships
- 2) Arrange their schedules to meet with those who will encourage them
- 3) Give instruction on how to be service oriented
- 4) Coach them to attentively listen
- 5) Train them to become dependable and responsible
- 6) Guide them to building bridges---not burning them

The above listing of the advantages of support groups is not exhaustive but represents a select few of the many benefits.

Summary

Transitioning programs are available for disciplined inmates, when they are released. There are many choices, but they all bear one commonality; there is a need for the Christian community to become actively involved in order to staff the programs and supply for the needs of the releasees. The disciplined inmates, who took part in the surveys, are eager and willing to receive assistance and continue their discipleship training. Each of the highlighted prison ministry groups, Humanity for Prisoners, Prison Fellowship, and The Therapon Program, is contributing to the transitioning releasee population, and there are many others with similar successful programs. The strengths of each of these programs can be combined to provide a comprehensive training program for the Christian community, inmates, and releasees.

The short final chapter of this paper will suggest the future of transitioning disciplined releasees into Christian communities and utilize the strategies based upon the information

documented in this chapter. A Weathers' model will be presented as a general overview of how the church and Christian community can assist in the effort. A future comprehensive guide for church and Christian ministry leaders will be forthcoming, designed for specifically training.

Chapter Five: The Future of Transitioning Disciples into Christian Communities

The Weathers Model

Amos 3:3 says, “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” Confession of sin means we agree with God. (1 John 1:9) To walk in obedience means to agree with God. (Galatians 5:16) to be filled with the Holy Spirit means to agree with God. (Ephesians 5:18) To stay straight and stay out of prison means to agree with God and the “high powers.” (Romans 13:2) To experience daily love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness and temperance we must agree with God. (Galatians 5:22-23) To walk in fellowship with other believers we must be in agreement, i.e., have the same mind one toward another. (Romans 12:16) The secret to a good marriage, a seriously healthy local church and an effective prison ministry is agreement with God. We must learn to think like God.

—Paul Carlin, *Barriers to Reentry*¹⁵⁵

Every transitioning program for releasees will have variances and unique strategies of implementation, but key successful practices can be employed by all. Understandably, anyone working with the prison population or ex-offenders needs to have solid biblical discipleship training. Training needs to be standardized; thereby, a volunteer from one organization can assist another organization without the need to be trained again. The prisoners are only given limited choices in prison; a conflict of choices, when they transition, can be overwhelming and un-conducive to their ability to transition into society. The expectations of a volunteer and an ex-offender should be clear and communicated in love. Deviations from normal protocol or discipleship should be quickly analyzed and corrected.

The value of a deeply supportive church, ministry group, and trained Christian community is immense. The following section identifies a Weathers’ model, to assist the church and individual believers, as they desire to support disciplined prisoners and to help them transition into society upon release. There are four crucial steps, which will promote a successful discipleship-transitioning program: beginning with an inmate, advancing to their release, and

¹⁵⁵ Paul Carlin, *Barriers to Reentry*, back matter.

ultimately culminating with a productive Christian disciple in society. A brief conclusion will follow and summarize the essential values within this thesis.

Weathers' Model of Discipleship Transitioning of an Inmate/Releasee for the Church

The church has an invaluable opportunity to support disciplined men and women released from prison. Restorative justice has many principles; two of the principles include: requiring prisoners to take responsibility for their actions and the harm they have caused and secondly, it requires the community to help rebuild relationships and assist in an effective integration program. Restorative justice seeks reparation for victims, recompense by offenders, and reintegration of both within the community. A disciplined prisoner is a changed creation in Christ and the church is spiritually challenged to continue mentoring and teaching discipleship principles to any Christian man or woman, who desires assistance and guidance. The call for evangelization remains explicit, but the continued discipleship of Christians is at stake.

There are four steps with varying degrees of intensity and training that can assist the local church, as they work with Christian prisoners and releasees.

Step One – Get Involved

1. It often only takes a visit with a prisoner or the receipt of a letter from a prisoner, to dispel fear and apprehension. Many of the men in prison never receive visits from their families and their association with the “outside world” is often very limited. Visiting and correspondence allows the church member to realize that the inmate is an ordinary human being, who made a mistake. As a new creation in Christ, the Christian prisoner has asked for God’s forgiveness and he should not be labeled for the rest of his life by his crime, but by his service and as a disciple of Christ.

2. The universal connection a church member has with a Christian inmate is the Bible. Many congregations have family members and loved ones serving prison sentences; an open door exists, to encourage the family to visit their incarcerated loved one and to accompany them during visitation. Prior to visitation, contact must be made with the prisoner in order to be placed on his visitation list and approved by TDCJ. An individual church or ministry member can become involved.
3. The local pastor should invite prison ministry speakers to their church. Prison ministry leaders are able to educate the congregation about the various ways to volunteer and contribute within a group setting. Prison ministry is usually under-funded and understaffed and what may appear to be a small contribution could be a very valuable asset to the success of the prison ministry program. The larger churches are capable of forming their own outreach programs for prison ministry. It is not necessary or feasible to start a program from scratch. Many of the successful prison ministry programs, such as: Therapon, Prison Fellowship, Kairos, Humanity for Prisoners, etc., have learned hard lessons to become effective. There is much to be gained from the experiences of other prison ministries.

Step Two – Choose to Become a Mentor

1. Most states have programs available to learn to mentor prisoners and releasees. Prison Fellowship, Kairos Prison Ministry, and Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP) are widely known in the state of Texas for their training programs.
2. Prisoner mentors are desperately needed. One of the inmate survey questions asked if the inmate had a mentor. Approximately half of the responding inmates suggested they did have someone as a mentor, but the ideal mentor is a solid Christian mentor. A

mentor who understands the need to reinforce Christ-like behaviors, devise a successful re-entry plan, and hold the inmate accountable for setting realistic goals for pre-release.

3. Committed Christian ex-prisoners are excellent mentors. A surprising number of disciplined ex-prisoners are committed to returning to prisons to mentor their friends and other Christians, as they prepare for release. This unique discipling group of mentors can effectively relate to the incarcerated men and give real life experiences of how they can overcome obstacles when released and become an asset to the church and society. Recidivism is substantially lowered, when a prisoner has a Christian mentor.

Step Three – Have a Well-Planned Re-entry Blueprint

1. In Texas, releasees are usually released from one specific prison within the state. This will be the prisoner's first experience of freedom from incarceration. The local church should have someone there or his mentor should be there, to greet the releasee and transport him. Many of the men released will be on parole and they are often required to live in a halfway house for a period of time. By working together with TDCJ, the inmate can be released to an approved family or individual with prior approval.
2. There are many Christian housing facilities in the state of Texas, but not enough. It is crucial to plan ahead, if the releasee desires to live in one of these facilities; long waiting lists are not uncommon. Most of these facilities are well managed and require a commitment from the releasees interested in living in their facility. Often a time commitment of six months to one year is required. The Christian facility will help the releasee in a variety of ways, they assist them by: securing identification, finding employment, transportation, and scheduled Bible study and fellowship. Curfews are

usually in place and the ex-offender is granted additional privileges over time and as they prove to be responsible members of society and the family unit they represent.

3. Many mentors have developed a relationship with an inmate and they feel comfortable paroling them to their home. Once again, a blueprint for facilitating the releasee's physical and spiritual needs must be intact. This is a time-consuming commitment and the mentor should seek the Lord in prayer, prior to committing. It is invaluable for the mentor to attend meetings with other mentors, to receive healthy concepts and innovative ways to help the releasee.

Step Four – Help the Ex-Prisoner Become a Part of the Church

1. Welcome the releasee into the church and get him involved in any area of service needed. Determine which members of the congregation, who can assist him in structuring his day and can support his ability to make wise decisions. The fact that he was a former prisoner cannot out-weigh his ability to serve as a disciple of Christ. Based upon the relationship developed, place him in an area where he enjoys serving. Many of the men have limitations, due to their offenses, and the church needs to prevent adverse situations to occur. The men have usually been in a very structured environment for many years and structure can support his transition.
2. Each of these disciplined men has a special gifting and many are eager to share their testimony and based upon the survey results, they are eager to work with troubled kids. Most of the men in prison grew up in broken homes and prison became a positive life change for them. Many, many of the men acknowledge they would have

been dead, had they not developed a relationship with Christ, while in prison. Seek the Lord for the integral part they play in the body of Christ.

3. Although, many of the releasees do not have formal training or a professional skill, many of the releasees are very talented. The church could benefit from the talents of the musicians and artists released. Most of the men have talents, they have utilized in prison, but as a “free man” they have the opportunity to expand their talents. The church can encourage and assist the releasee, who desires to further his education or learn a technical skill. In many ways, the releasee is an apprentice and he will gladly learn from the example set by the church and his mentor.

Conclusion

The federal government recently recognized the need to assist prisoners prior to and upon their release. According to the Department of Justice, a plan is intact beginning in the 2016-2017 years, the plan will: identify an inmate's individualized "criminogenic" needs from the day they enter prison, build a school district within the federal prison system, support a second chance Pell Grant program for education, and encourage inmates to develop marketable job skills.¹⁵⁶ DOJ is also prioritizing mental health issues of inmates, improving and strengthening federal halfway houses, helping inmates obtain government issued identification prior to their release, and equipping inmates and releasees with information and resources, as they return to their communities.¹⁵⁷

The above referenced actions from the DOJ are positive, but they are specifically designed for the federal prison system and the largest number of inmates resides within the state prison system. Prayerfully, state prison systems will implement similar changes to benefit inmates and their communities; regardless, the church will remain the spiritual leader in their communities, under the direction of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This research paper does not exhaust the answers for transitioning disciplined ex-offenders into Christian communities, but it clearly identifies the needs and desires of Christian prisoners and highlights several ministry programs with successful results. The local church and local Christian community has a clarion call to arise and assist in this transformative work. The harvest is plenty, but the laborers are few. If it takes a community to raise a child and a

¹⁵⁶ United States Department of Justice, "Prison Reform: Reducing Recidivism by Strengthening the Federal Bureau of Prisons." March 6, 2017, <https://www.justice.gov/archives/prison-reform>

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

community to help a doctoral student (like myself), then it takes a community to move into action and assist transitioning releasees. The church and Christian community will see a reduction in recidivism rates, a strengthening in the body of Christ, and an awakening to the benefits of serving all of God's people. "Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body," Hebrews 13:3.

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IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 21, 2017

Joy Weathers

IRB Approval 2684.032117: Connecting the Church Beyond Prison Ministry: Transitioning the Discipled Prisoner into a Discipleship Community

Dear Joy Weathers,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.
Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

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