

WHY WASTE YOUR TIME?

By Buck Griffith

Ministering to prisoners and drug addicts hits most folks “hot” or *cold!* A few think it is wonderful and praise it but most often, the response is not encouraging. In fact, we are discouraged by statements such as . . .

- Why do you waste your time?
- It’s “jailhouse” religion.
- We will never see them in church.
- Sure, they will listen—*captive audience!*
- It is casting pearls before pigs.
- Lock them up and throw away the keys.

Such thoughts motivated me to develop a lesson entitled: “I Hope It Never Happens to YOU.” When a family has a loved one arrested, it is amazing how soon the attitude changes. If it is someone else’s child, I could care less. But if it IS *my* child . . .

prison ministry is well worth the time, energy, and money!

In response to naysayers, I have a list of men and women whose lives have been changed by the Gospel. Later they were released and have done well. The list grows longer and longer. It contains names of preachers, missionaries, elders, deacons, Bible School teachers, song leaders and even full-time prison ministers. ***Praise the Lord!***



Numbers do not lie. One in every 31 citizens in the U.S. is part of the *criminal justice system*. This includes juveniles and adults, detention centers, county jails, treatment facilities, state or federal prisons, halfway houses, probationers, parolees, etc. If you add chemical addiction to the equation, one in every three is affected.

One in four females and one in six males, will be sexually assaulted by age 17

(reported cases only). Alcohol and drugs are used in a vain attempt to numb emotional pain or briefly forget it happened. Stuffing emotions creates anger and *under the influence*, crimes are committed.

Some have tried to calculate funds saved by one person NOT returning to prison. State-by-state costs vary but average \$25,000-\$50,000 per inmate per year. We may not always succeed in turning a prisoner into a faithful Christian for the rest of his life but he may leave prison and stop drinking, drugging, stealing, and beating his wife and kids.

How much is that worth?

One of our most generous supporters owns a business that helps catch and convict lawbreakers. But they understand that *help on the inside* is essential so they will not return. Otherwise, all we have applied is minimal grease to a “revolving door.”

Who pays the highest price for crime?

The victim and offender pay the most but followed closely by family members and society. With crimes involving theft, fraud, burglary, arson, vandalism, etc., businesses and insurance companies get left with huge financial losses. They ought to be big supporters of this ministry.



We are not suggesting that support of this ministry should primarily come from *outside*. Evangelism is the work of the Lord and His family. The churches of Christ and individual Christians shoulder this load.



It is true that many prisoners respond positively to God's message. Why wouldn't they? What have they got to lose? The offer of a *new birth* and "forgetting the things behind" is hard to turn down when *down and out*. Jesus offers a *new beginning!*

This is what is behind 10,000+ prisoners who are immersed each year in U.S. jails and prisons as a direct result of churches of Christ and individual Christians involved. This is a highly effective outreach. Churches on the *cutting edge* are engaged. We try to *strike while the iron is hot*. Efforts include Bible classes, worship, one-on-

one study and extensive use of Bible teaching by correspondence. We have 35,000+ students studying by mail. This means lessons to be graded, processed, and sent back in a timely manner. If a person knows he is lost and asking, "What must I do to be saved?" (like the Philippian jailer), he can be provided with a Bible and study for \$10. This will allow him to make an informed decision about Christ.

How much is this worth? What a deal!

This how we receive 2,000 requests for baptism annually just through this office. What helps is prayer. There is great power in prayer. The spiritual growth process is simple: plant and water and God does the rest. Those going behind bars and planting the "seed" are essential. A willing few do the "going" while many others "send" (by praying and financially supporting them). Prayer helps "water" the planted seed.

How much is that worth?

It is GOD that we seek to please. It is GOD who asks us to be like His Son and "visit those in prison." It is GOD who will judge us and find us *faithful*. It is GOD's voice we want to hear: "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord!"

How much will this be worth?

You see, we are not "wasting our time, energy and money" taking the Gospel to "every creature under heaven." If you are involved or become involved this dynamic, fruitful and growing mission field, you will not be . . .

"wasting your time, energy and money" either!

