



## WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CHILDREN?

It is a well-known fact that the United States has by far the highest incarceration rate in the world, with more than 2.2 million people imprisoned throughout the nation. There are 715 of every 100,000 people behind bars in the U.S. compared to 115 in Canada and 143 in the United Kingdom. When one includes those on probation or paroled from correctional facilities there are over 7.2 million individuals on any given day that are under the supervision of the criminal justice system. These numbers are staggering and unprecedented in any society in history, including the repressive communist regimes of the latter half of the 20th century. These conditions cannot be maintained for long before they will begin to take a heavy toll on our quality of life and standard of living.

The consequences of incarceration extend far beyond the individual that has committed the crime and sits in a prison cell. Like all of us, inmates have a large network of people whose lives are intertwined with their own. Perhaps as much as 10% of the population is affected by the criminal justice system. Every inmate is a son or daughter with parents that are personally devastated by the choices their adult child has made. Prisoners have extended families that are influenced to one degree or another by the circumstances of that person's life. Most inmates have spouses or partners whose lives are thrown into chaos when their loved one is imprisoned. However, those most devastated by incarceration are the children of the offenders who are left isolated and abandoned by the people they need most in their young lives.

Exact statistics are hard to come by, but it is estimated that nearly 1.7 million children have incarcerated fathers and another 200,000 have mothers behind bars. These young ones face a unique set of problems in their lives that the majority of their peers cannot understand or relate to in any way. Because of these challenges the children of inmates have a much higher incidence of becoming offenders themselves in adulthood, about 7 times that of other minors.

To better understand the difficulties faced by the children of inmates we will discuss some specific issues that they are forced to wrestle with by no fault of their own.

### Financial Hardship

One of the first consequences to a family when a parent is incarcerated is the financial impact. If the offender is the main breadwinner the lost income will be particularly devastating. Suddenly the remaining family members are left with considerably less resources and are forced to alter their lifestyle significantly, oftentimes leaving their home and living with other relatives. On top of that there are often very large expenses that are incurred when a person is first arrested. If the individual needs to hire an attorney the legal fees can be staggering and often take years for the family to pay off. There are also the costs of posting a bond if that is necessary. While in prison or jail the family is

responsible for paying for telephone calls from the inmate, which are always collect and the rates for which are usually exorbitant. All this and other expenses can force a family into poverty which creates a tremendous strain on the remaining parent who is trying to raise the children.

### Disrupted Home Life

When a parent is sent to prison the life of the children is significantly altered as well. Granted, in many cases the person arrested may have been living a chaotic and dysfunctional lifestyle, and his presence was a negative influence to the family. However, even in situations such as that, when someone is suddenly removed from the household the routine of the home is disrupted and the impact of the change is often reflected in the behavior and attitude of the child. Any elementary school teacher is aware of how detrimental it is for a child to have his or her normal household activities abruptly altered. They often become angry, uncooperative, aggressive and uninterested in school. Because they are children they



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# KAREN'S KORNER

My God reigns! How about yours? Men and women in prison are often discouraged, depressed and they all need a portion of God's grace. Many of these people have committed numerous crimes and many have not. Only God knows the extent of their guilt.

PMA is a wonderful ministry that opens people's eyes to the understanding of God's Word. I'm so proud to be part of an organization that understands love. You see, love cares about the individual, love encourages, love walks in truth and love even rebukes sometimes. What is our testimony before others concerning love? Are we known for our love for others or only our love for ourselves? "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (Romans 12:10a).

Everyone that works in the PMA office wants to be here, serving to make the ministry work. The correc-

tors are a huge part of helping the inmates see God through the answers they give. Here is a testimony from an inmate named Dave.



"I just finished with the lessons you sent me and I would like to say your teachings are very enlightening and very enjoyable. I found this out for myself after I finished with what you have shown me. I have a sense of peace and purpose in understanding that my commission isn't the same as the twelve, that Christ is in me, and that I'm a member of His Body always and forever. I would like to thank you for finding it in your kindness to send this material that I truly feel is a blessing from the Lord. You are a true gift and blessing."

Need I say more?!

by God's grace,

*Karen*

## Reaching Out by Reaching In

*Editor's Note: The following report comes from Pastor Cal Lowder the pastor of Valley Bible Church in Winchester, Virginia*



**Northwest Community Corrections Center Chaplains. Josh Bowen, Cal Lowder and Mark Ransom**

In 1985 I was greeting people at the close of the morning service in Mobile, AL and someone told me I had a collect call waiting for me. When I took the call, it was an inmate in the local county jail requesting a Bible. That simple request began a continuing interest and love for jail ministry. In Mobile the ministry blossomed into a full Bible Correspondence Fellowship branch operated from the church with 15 volunteers grading an average of 100 lessons a week, serving both the county and city jails. Since coming to Virginia, I assumed the chaplaincy of the Northwestern Community Correction Center in Winchester, VA in 1993. I continue to be active in our 600+ inmate facility along with two other chaplains one of which is my assistant pastor, Josh Bowen. Most of my work is limited to one-on-one counseling. We are blessed to have a facility very open to

the gospel. My greatest joy is to be able to offer the freedom Christ can bring to those who are bound by sin and addiction, especially to the women, 80% of whom carry the scars from sexual abuse during childhood.

# GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

This is the thirteenth in a series that examines the references to prisons and prisoners in the Bible. In this article we will consider the Apostle John, who spent some of his last years as a prisoner on the island of Patmos and from there wrote the book of Revelation.

Most of what we know about John the Apostle comes from the information recorded about him in the gospels, the book of Acts and the history and traditions of the early church. We know that John's father was named Zebedee, that his brother was James the Apostle, they were fisherman and that he followed Jesus when he was called while fishing (Matthew 4:21-22). By putting together the facts related in several passages about those present at the crucifixion it is possible to conclude that John was the cousin of Jesus (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25) which might explain why the Lord requested him to care for Mary (who would have been John's aunt) in her old age.

John was one of the closest disciples of Jesus and was present at some of the most important events in his ministry, such as the raising of Jairus' daughter, the transfiguration and the garden of Gethsemane. He is most likely the one referred to in the gospel of John as the "disciple whom Jesus loved." In his first Epistle John describes himself as an eyewitness to the

events of Jesus life (1 John 1:1-3). Clearly John had a very close and intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ while he was on Earth, and the impact that had on the rest of John's life was profound. If John had not believed with all his heart that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead there is no rational explanation for why he did not simply return to fishing after the crucifixion and fade into obscurity like others that followed the various messianic figures that were common in first century Palestine (Acts 5:36-37).

We know that John, like the other Apostles, was willing to suffer all kinds of hardship rather than renounce his faith in Jesus Christ as the savior and king of Israel. We read of his first encounter with imprisonment in Acts 4, when he and Peter were put in jail by the Jewish leaders because they healed a lame beggar in front of the temple gates and then proclaimed the truth about Jesus Christ to the Jewish people assembled there. After that John and the other believers experienced intense persecution for many years because of the Jews opposition to the message of Christ. John continued to faithfully proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God in Jerusalem and was described by Paul as one of the "pillars" of the Jewish church (Galatians 2:9).

In Revelation 1:9 John says that he was on the island of Patmos when he received the visions which were re-

corded in the book of prophecy. Early church history tells us that John had been exiled to this tiny island in the Aegean Sea which was probably a Roman penal colony at the time during a period of persecution of Christians under the emperor Domitian who ruled Rome from 81-96 AD. God chose to reveal the final words of scripture to a man that was sitting in a Roman prison.

Prison and bondage is a scriptural metaphor for man's condition outside of Christ in which everyone is enslaved to sin and the flesh. When the gospel is preached and people believe the message of salvation, suddenly the chains fall off and the prison doors are thrown open and for the first time a person can experience true freedom. For that reason it is appropriate that the portion of the Bible that describes the ultimate triumph of God's good over evil was revealed to a person that was himself in prison. Given those conditions, it is likely that the message of Revelation was that much more powerful to John. John's final vision for the world is one in which perfect fellowship between God and creation is restored, sin and death have been destroyed and God will wipe away every tear from the eyes of His people. Being a prisoner, as John was, would only make the reality of God's triumph that more glorious and awe inspiring.

## Have You Visited the PMA Website?

[www.pmabcf.org](http://www.pmabcf.org)

- **Download lessons**
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don't have the ability to rationally process what is happening to them and they express their confusion and exasperation through inappropriate behavior. By losing focus on the typical rudiments of normal development they start to develop negative patterns of behavior that stay with them and set them up for failure in adolescence and adulthood.

### **Limited and Unnatural Contact with their Parent**

When children are taken away from their parents because of incarceration the regular personal contact that is necessary to properly build loving and significant emotional bonds is eliminated. When parents are in prison the amount of time that children spend with them is extremely limited. Because of the high cost of telephone calls from prison, conversations often have to be cut short or don't happen at all. When parents and children are able to have direct contact it is usually after a long trip from home to the correctional facility, over 60% of parents are incarcerated over 100 miles from their home. The visiting experience can be a traumatic event for these children as well. They are subjected to body searches like everyone entering the facility and then forced to see their parent in prison clothes as a constant reminder to the child of his parent's mistakes.

### **Humiliation and Shame**

When a child has a parent in prison he or she is forced to deal with the stigma attached to such circumstances. Other children can be cruel by teasing and ridiculing the child whose parents are locked away. They are reminded of the tragic reality of their situation at every event where the other kids have their parents present to support, encourage and cheer them on. The shame and humiliation created by this can leave long-lasting emotional scars that will create pain and anger that is often expressed in an attitude of rage that makes it impossible for these young

ones to have normal, positive interaction with others.

### **Lack of a Role Model**

There is an inborn desire in everyone to look up to their parents as positive examples to emulate. When as fathers and mothers we fail to be all we should be, our children often will overlook our shortcomings and see the best in us. Children need to be able to observe adults living productive, normal lives in order to learn how to do so themselves. In most cases, the children of inmates never have had that opportunity, neither before nor after their parents were locked away. Many such chil-

- **1.7 Million Children with Fathers Incarcerated**
- **200,000 with Mothers Incarcerated**
- **On average, parents expected to serve 80 months in State prison and 103 months in Federal prison**
- **A majority of parents in prison were violent offenders or drug traffickers**
- **Over 60% of parents in State prison were held more than 100 miles from their last place of residence**
- **Fewer than half of the parents in State prison lived with their minor children prior to incarceration**
- **76% of incarcerated parents are divorced, separated or never married to the other parent of their children.**

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

children have never known their natural fathers and have witnessed their mothers go through a progression of dysfunctional and destructive relationships. The lack of positive adult role models leaves these children severely handicapped to deal with the realities of life and with a very high propensity to repeat in their own lives the behavior that they have seen modeled throughout their early years.

### **Vulnerability**

The heartbreaking result of the above listed negative factors in the lives of the children of inmates is that they are especially vulnerable to all the life

destroying influences of the world that seek to ensnare the innocent and unprotected. Young men, seeking acceptance and meaning are drawn to gangs that provide the male role models that were lacking in their home lives. Young girls, without the influence of strong, protective fathers become the victims of predatory men who give them a temporary feeling of being loved but leave them broken and disillusioned. Tragically the emotional trauma of having an incarcerated parent leaves young people seeking an escape from the inner pain they feel and often the easiest way to find it is through the use of drugs and alcohol. Once addiction controls an individual's life the person loses the ability to make rational choices and the pathway is set for that child of an inmate to repeat the same self-destructive behavior as his or her parents.

These sad realities may make us discouraged about any hope for these children to be able to overcome the obstacles of their circumstances and live normal, productive lives. While the odds are certainly against these youngsters, we must never forget that God and His Holy Spirit has the power to overcome all the strongholds of Satan and to take hold of anyone's life and bring about transformation. At the same time, there are things that each of us can do to be a positive influence for these highly at risk children and to somehow help to steer them in a direction that will lead them to Jesus and a new life. No matter how small your contribution is, always keep in mind that doing something is always better than doing nothing.

Here are some ways, ranging from impersonal to hands-on, that anyone can help to somehow impact the lives of young children living at risk of destroying their own lives because of the mistakes of their parents.

### **Be Supportive of the pro-Family movement.**

Most of our current social problems are directly related to the breakdown of the traditional family structure of married parents raising their biological children.

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# THE SPANISH SIDE



We continue to have an active outreach to individuals in and out of prison and jail. Arnie teaches two Bible study groups each week in the Pinellas County Jail, one in Spanish and one in English. The Spanish group is small because the county jail no longer holds federal inmates, whereas the English class has blossomed to around 30 students each Saturday. Thanks to the good rapport Arnie has with the chaplain the group now meets in the chapel, not in one of the cell blocks, and thus more men are able to attend.

A young Mexican man who was saved in Arnie's Spanish group is now coming to Grace Bible Fellowship (GBF) in Pinellas Park along with his wife and joining the Hispanic group there.

*(This is a perfect example of how the ministry of PMA and the local church can work hand in hand – editor).* We have also been blessed through our dear friend Brian, who was released a few months ago from a prison in Florida and now is an active and involved part of GBF.

We continue to work closely with the Spanish church that meets alongside the English congregation at GBF. The numbers go up and down but a solid core group is faithful and many are blessed through the worship, prayer and translated sermons. We also continue to teach a Tuesday night Bible study in Spanish. This close knit fellowship has had a powerful impact on those that have been a part of it for more than 7 years. We have seen a number of people saved, several commit their lives to Christ and even a few that have been called into ministry through this weekly outreach ministry.

We would like to share with you a testimony of one of the men in Arnie's Bible study

I would like to tell you what happened to me. I became addicted to alcohol and drugs at an early age. As far back as I can remember I was physically and emotionally abused. I came from a family that was very well to do. Growing up we never went to church or Sunday School like our friends and neighbors. My parents never talked about the Bible or God. I heard of God through our friends and neighbors. I did not like God while I was growing up. I believed that God was cruel.

I tried alcohol at the age of eight or nine out of my parents' liquor cabinet. From the very first time I liked it. I liked it for what it did to me, it made the hurt go away. It made me feel good inside. By the age of 13, I was smoking pot and popping pills. That is pretty much how it went for the next 33 years.

In 1984 I married the love of my life, Kathi. We were married for nine years but again I chose drugs and alcohol over her. She was one of the best things in my life and she gave me a son, who is now 21. He was the only person in my life who showed me unconditional love. When Kathi left and moved away she took my son with her. That's when my life went even further downhill. For the next 10 years I have been in and out of prison. The only time I prayed to God was when I was in trouble and begging Him to get me out of it.

When Kathi left with my son I had no contact or knowledge where they were for 10 years. Just before I got out of prison my brother and my son wrote me and asked me to come to Florida to be with them and start a tree trimming company. When I first arrived I was still drinking and it was a problem between me and my son so I went to a detox and then a halfway house. We were doing well.

The tree company was growing fast. I was going to NA and AA and have been off and on since 1984. One thing I always heard in all the self-help programs was that you need to find a God of your understanding and that is one thing I never had. I had never read the Bible. I've only been to church a few times in my life.

I started drinking again and taking some pills. After that I really don't know what happened except for what I read in the police report and the little bits and pieces I remember. My fall off the wagon, as they call it in AA, lasted 39 hours. I was told after I woke up in jail that I stabbed my son in the chest. I doesn't matter what my son did or didn't do, the fact is that I stabbed him, the one person in my life that I love more than anything in life. I wanted to do or commit suicide, but I was too chicken to do it. In jail I went to my first Bible study and then to an AA meeting. I was back where I started, with no God of my understanding. I decided to continue going to Bible study and reading the Bible and now I am in a Bible study correspondence course.

I am starting to understand God. He is loving and caring. I have so much to be grateful for in the last three months in jail. I have been given something inside me that I have never felt before. I believe God is doing for me what I can't do for myself.

Today I believe in Jesus Christ, our Saviour. I believe he died on the cross for our sins and came back to life 3 days later. Even though I am looking at anywhere from 3 to 15 years in prison I am the freest I have ever been and that is due to God's work through me. I also believe I had to go through everything I did to get where I am right now. I pray that my son will find it in his heart to forgive me someday. But even if he doesn't, I will be alright. Last I pray that I can keep the faith when I get out of jail or prison. Right now I am so thankful to God for another chance at life today.



## Prison Mission Association

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### ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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Anything that is done, either politically or privately that builds up, encourages and enhances traditional family life will only be beneficial for society as a whole.

#### **Learn of Ministries that Support Fatherhood.**

While there are 200,000 children with mothers in prison, the problem of men failing to fulfill their responsibilities as fathers is far greater. There are many Christian ministries dedicated to helping men be better fathers to their children. Among the best known are Focus on the Family ([www.family.org](http://www.family.org)) and the National Fatherhood Initiative ([www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)). These organizations work in a variety of ways to help educate and equip men to prepare them for the responsibilities of parenting. A number of these ministries actually have programs that specifically target inmates and provide training and activities to enhance the bond between parent and child while the father is incarcerated.

#### **Participate in Angel Tree or other similar outreaches.**

Because children of inmates

often grow up in extreme poverty they commonly are not able to experience the happiness of receiving nice presents at Christmas. Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree program collects gifts from Christians around the country and distributes them to the prisoners' children throughout the United States. These small tokens of kindness can have profound

**No matter how small your contribution is, always keep in mind that doing something is always better than doing nothing.**

meaning in the lives of the children receiving the gifts and might create an openness to the gospel and to the churches that provided them.

#### **Be Involved in Outreach Ministry to Children in your Church.**

Sometimes it seems hard to see the positive results, but the many and varied ministries carried on by local churches do have a great cumulative impact on children. Sunday School, Weekday club programs (AWANA,

CBC, Pioneer Boys, etc.) and Vacation Bible School all expose children to the Word of God and give them an understanding of God's love for them.

#### **Volunteer with a Child Mentoring Program.**

Ordinary Christians can have a meaningful impact in an at-risk child's life by participating in a program such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters ([www.bbbs.org](http://www.bbbs.org)). You can have an opportunity to be a positive role model that a child may never otherwise have in his life.

As Christians we need to see all people as God sees them, His beloved creations with whom he deeply desires to have a relationship. This is true of the affluent, educated, articulate and successful as well as the poor, destitute, addicted and dysfunctional. Paul tells us to be willing to associate with the lowly and marginalized (Romans 12:16). Among that group are the children of inmates, for whom God has great concern and we likewise should show compassion and to whom we must be willing to reach out.