

Tuesday, December 15, 2015

...I was in prison and you came to visit me. Matthew 25:36b

The first of three steel doors slammed shut behind me.

I was momentarily overcome with a feeling of nausea and anxiety.

My four days in a maximum security prison west of Stuart was beginning. My first Kairos weekend.

The acres of closely mowed untrodden grass spread out in front of me.

This was the Warden's grass and the inmates know better than to step on it. Instead they walk in single file around it.

As I walked up to the steel door of the prison chapel, it was opened by a trusted inmate in his blue uniform and I signed in. The Administration had to know where we were at all times, and attached to my belt was my panic button for any emergency.

Within this place of confinement, this hideous environment, I found peace in that prison Chapel. There were no windows to see outside, so my view focused on a large, dark stained wooden cross situated at the back of the chancel.

I sat that weekend between two inmates, and opposite at my table were two more who I found were serving life. On my right was a six feet five giant of a man who must have weighed 300 pounds. If he became my friend, I thought, I might be safe.

I don't think that my ten weeks of training had prepared me for this.

On Sunday evening, as we left the prison after three days of fairly intense encounter with our six table guests, I had no idea if the giant on my right had opened his heart to Jesus. I was able to assure the man on my left that he could pray to Jesus any time of the day or night, when he had been brought up thinking that God was only available to him for a few minutes when he went to bed.

I prayed every day for all those men but particularly for the one on the right, that God might open his heart. He had disappeared from my sight but not from my thoughts.

You cannot imagine my senses, several months later, when he walked into one of our monthly reunions carrying the Bible that we give to all of them when they graduate. He walked up to the lectern and began to lead the program. He read several verses and continued to lead the afternoon worship, prayer sharing and fellowship.

Since that time, I have seen many men turn around their lives in that prison through the Kairos program and recidivism for those who have attended is cut by more than forty percent.

One Church pastor said about Kairos, "I have never seen the Gospel impact a group with such power and so quickly in such a short time. I have never laughed, cried and prayed so much in a four day period."

Heavenly Father, Though the Christmas celebrations that we know with trees and colorful lights, families and gifts are absent in these prisons, You are not. Let Your presence and the arrival of Your son Jesus be felt by all of those incarcerated and may their spirits be lifted towards Your light. Amen.

Colin Wright

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