

Why Mentors Are Important

When God created mankind beginning with Adam, He recognized that “people need people.” And so He created Eve and ordained the institution of marriage. Then Adam and Eve had children, and the institution of the family was ordained.

The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy provided instructions on how God’s laws were to be taught within the family and faith community:

“Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deut. 6:6-9)

In today’s society, we generally do not have the kind of relationships God ordained – relationships that foster our growth, hold us accountable, and encourage us to press toward healthy goals. The primary reason Christian mentoring is desperately needed today is to supply positive relationships lacking in our culture.

A very high majority of prisoners and ex-prisoners come from fragmented families. Consider these general statistics about the family background of men and women in prison:

- For the majority of their childhood, 50 percent were raised by a single parent – usually the mother.
- An additional 15 percent were raised by another relative, in a foster home, or in an institution.
- At least 25 percent were raised by a parent or guardian who was a substance abuser.
- Approximately 15 percent of male and 55 percent of female prisoners were physically or sexually abused as children; for those raised in foster homes, the numbers rise to 44 percent of men and 87 percent of women.

In *The Father Heart of God*, missionary Floyd McClung, Jr. states: “So many people are orphaned, not just from their physical parents, but from any kind of healthy spiritual or emotional heritage.” He also points out that a large part of our society has no church home or spiritual family. This is especially true for thousands of men and women who have found Christ in prison and are returning to our communities each year.

There is an obvious need today for the Body of Christ to be committed to mentoring prisoners and ex-prisoners. Other factors that point to the dire need for mentors are:

- The high level of dysfunctional families within the ex-prisoner population due to rising rates of divorce, addictive behaviors, violence, and abandonment
- The substance abuse history of 70 to 85 percent of those convicted of crimes
- The low level of education and lack of job skills of those coming out of prison
- The long-term effects of isolation and institutionalization upon prisoners

Prison Fellowship’s in-prison programs help men and women learn biblical principles and gain knowledge of God. Many enter into joyous faith in Christ and are genuinely transformed. But this doesn’t solve all the complex issues ex-prisoners face upon release.

Those who are preparing to return to society need loving Christian mentors who will demonstrate Christ-like living, help them break the strongholds of their former lifestyles, hold them accountable for their actions, and walk with them as they rebuild new lives. For information about mentoring opportunities in your area, call 800-251-7411 to speak to Prison Fellowship staff.