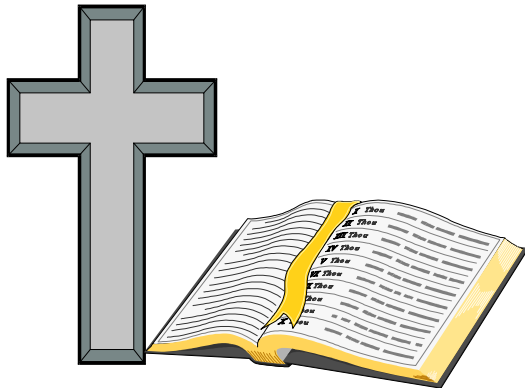


# The Challenges of Reintegrating Ex-Offenders into a Church



**1ST Corinthians 4:1-2**

An Independent Fundamental Ministry Administering the Good News of Christ to those in Bondage

**Faithful Steward  
Ministries  
and  
FSM Women's  
Outreach**

It is Sunday morning and you notice from the pulpit a new face in the crowd. After services you make it a point to meet this new person and welcome them to the church. He or she tells you your name and states they have just been released from prison. How welcoming are you going to be now? What happens if they say they were incarcerated for drugs, armed robbery, murder or rape; will any of those make a difference?

This same challenge is faced regularly across this country in many churches. With 2 million men and women incarcerated across this country, an ex-offender is likely to be at your door soon. How you deal with them is subject of this pamphlet.

First let me define an ex-offender. In this context it can mean any one recovering from a past sinful, immoral and/or illegal lifestyle. Former inmates as well as those recovering from addictions should also be included. I happen to fit the first category, as I spent 7 1/2 years incarcerated and am a registered sex offender. The following information comes from treatment, a great local church and of course a solid biblical perspective.

I have heard a variety of stories and unfortunately it would seem that many churches believe some forms of sinful past behaviors are far more grievous than others. This of course does not hold to the truths of the bible. Jesus said **Matthew 12:31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.**

Only the sin of Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was unforgivable to God. Should we hold men to a higher standard than God does?

No matter the previous offense or addition we must be ready to make a place at our table *For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

That does not mean an open and free reign invitation to do as one pleases. It also does not entitle the church to treat the person as a inmate or addict. Both sides must proceed with caution and without fear.

Again I have heard all kinds of stories about men especially sex-offenders trying to do the right thing, be a productive member of society only to be put out from their local church because of prejudice and fear. How can we overcome these fears and show the love of Christ while acknowledging His redemptive powers in a person. I will share some things that I believe have worked and some that have failed.

## **What can your church do?**

1) Be pro-active. As noted earlier with 2 million men and women incarcerated in America there is a strong likelihood that God is going to send at least one your way. Contact the local and state prison chaplains and let them know about your church. Find out about AA, NA SLA and other addition groups in your area.

2) Clearly communicate your churches' doctrinal beliefs to the chaplain and anyone who contacts you.

3) Answer letters from ex-offenders, even if it to say not interested. (I wrote about a dozen churches in the area I planned on living in about 18 months before I was to be released. Only one church answered my letter)

4) Establish regular correspondence with ex-offenders. If you want to overcome the fear factor get to know the person before hand. Insist on getting a copy of their release/recovery plan.

5) As soon as possible sit down and discuss their release/recovery plan with them.

6) Discuss your churches goals for the present and future and how they may fit in.

7) Set mutually agreed upon boundaries for all ex-offenders.

8) Do not insist upon a written covenant. That is just a cover your backside maneuver that has no business in God's house.

9) Encourage support and accountability partnerships. ***Ecclesiastes 4:9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.***

## **What should the Ex-Offender do?**

1) Be pro-active and plan ahead. At least 12 months prior to their scheduled release (inmates) or as soon as possible for those in addiction programs, should contact local churches.

2) Clearly communicate your needs and expectations. Do not make demands, make requests for assistance and guidance. (Asking for money, or telling a prospective church "I will need you to do \_\_\_\_\_, is counter productive.

3) Be 100% upfront and honest with them. Deceit is a part of every ex-offender's past, keep it there.

3) Create a written release/recovery plan. Establish goals for your release/recovery and a support network that will help you to obtain them. It is probably the single most important tool you can have (outside of faith in Christ's redemptive powers) It helps keep you focused on obtaining you goals and tells others your serious about your recovery.

4) Be patient. It will likely take time for positive things to happen for you. Simple things like getting a drivers license or health insurance can be difficult never mind a good paying job

5) Be accountable daily to someone in your support and accountability network.

## **Summary**

1) Clear and open communication is key to a successful transition into a local church and community.

2) The process requires patient and cautious integration into appropriate church activities.

3) Having accountability at church and away insures a realistic opportunity to stay released/recovered.

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