

# Former Football Pro Has Taken the Gospel Into Hundreds of U.S. Prisons

Bill Glass has seen some 35,000 inmates make decisions for Christ each year for the last decade at his outreach events. He never thought he'd go to prison. Certainly not as a minister.

But in 1970, Bill Glass, a four-time All-Pro defensive tackle for the Cleveland Browns, did a friend a favor. He led a ministry team into a prison in Marion, Ohio, enticing them with big-name athletes such as Roger Staubach, then sneaking in a testimony about Jesus.

Today, 33 years later, Glass is still preaching, still reaching and changing the hearts of prisoners across the country. The 6-foot-6 Texan with the baritone voice and slight Southern drawl spoke in 400 prisons last year and has seen 35,000-plus inmates receive Christ every year for the last decade.

"I wanted to be an evangelist like Billy Graham," Glass said. "I thought my ministry was going to be citywide meetings."

Instead, he found it behind barbed wire, bars and locks. Recently, Glass' volunteer ministry team spoke in seven prisons in western Washington, seeing 1,166 prisoners accept Christ during a three-day event Glass called "A Weekend of Champions."

"I had never gotten in trouble with the law," Glass said. "I wasn't a street kind of guy. So for me to end up in prisons was totally unexpected."

But he's not arguing with the results. About 2 million people are behind bars today in the United States. Seventy percent of all prisoners commit another crime after being released and end up back in jail. Glass' program reverses that number. Of the prisoners who make decisions for Christ at Glass' outreach, less than 30 percent return to jail.

"I didn't come to be preached to," Jack Murphy said. "I came to see the football players."

Murphy, in prison for murder and for his involvement in America's largest jewelry heist, went to one of Glass' outreaches at a maximum-security prison in Florida in 1974. Murphy came to see Roger Staubach, then the quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys.

"Bill came with the same program that he has today," said Murphy, now a speaker in Glass' ministry. "Because of that program I asked the Lord into my heart. It started the process. It started the journey."

The ministry has a twofold effect. It shares hope with the prisoners and trains Christians how to share their faith. "Too many Christians want to hide in the church," Murphy said. "They get tied into safe ministries. They make quilts."

Murphy accuses the church of ignoring the prisons, maintaining its distance because of a better-than-thou attitude. Murphy points out that much of the New Testament was written in

prison and that the first Christian was the man hanging on the cross next to Jesus.

“Bill leads the largest group of front-line, hands-on evangelists in the world,” Murphy said. “They’re mobilized to win souls. They learn how to share their faith, how to pray with people to get saved. Ninety-five percent of the people who call themselves born-again Christians don’t know how to lead someone to the Lord.”

A Wheaton College study rated Glass’ ministry among the best of the United States’ 450 prison ministries. It received the highest rating for front-line evangelism to prisoners.

Glass’ ministry has 35 full-time workers and relies heavily on volunteers, people who counsel and share the four spiritual laws with prisoners who have raised their hands during evangelistic meetings, asking for prayer. About 250 volunteers worked at Glass’ outreach in western Washington. The counselors huddle with the prisoners after the program, spending 10 minutes to an hour sharing.

Randy Poe, a dentist in Roseburg, Ore., has counseled at Glass’ ministry since 1981 and often drives a busload of volunteers from his hometown, participating in as many of the outreaches on the West Coast as he can.

“This is an amazing school of evangelism,” Poe said. “One of our missions is to help churches ignite Christians to share their faith in Christ. I believe we probably have the most effective school of evangelism of any organization in the United States.”

Glass, now 68, suffered a slight stroke a year ago and has turned over the administrative duties of his ministry, but he's speaking more than ever. He is scheduled to speak at all 24 of his weekend ministries this year and has no intentions of slowing down. He started a mentor program for juveniles in Corpus Christi, Texas, where Glass grew up. Said Glass, "I'm having too much fun to slow down."

**Gail Wood**