

Can We Bring Revival to Our Nation's Prisons?

Last week, I commemorated Black History Month by interviewing friends of mine who are leaders in the black community. In the process, I've discussed a wide range of topics with these men of God. Today, I want to share with you the incredible insights I learned from an interview with my friend Garland Hunt, who is an expert in prison reform and senior pastor of the Father's House in Norcross, Georgia.

Hunt has a passion to see revival break out in American prisons, but for that to happen, the U.S. must make some important changes to its criminal justice system. President Donald Trump put an emphasis on prison reform throughout his first three years in office, and he's accomplished quite a lot. It's a good thing that our nation has made strides in this issue. After all, Hunt says, the prison system can tend to function like a revolving door. Within three years of release, up to 60-70% of prisoners are back in jail, Hunt says.

"How does God deal with that?" he says. "That became very important. We've pushed through the state to have a whole faith-based movement where the church would open their doors willingly. It was a stark reality that, in most cases, the church was very resistant to have anyone who was in prison invited in the church. They will go into prisons and have a revival service, but they're very hesitant to support any real restoration movement with those coming out of jail."

The reason many churches are hesitant to invite ex-prisoners into their churches is likely because there is a certain risk that comes along with it. When going into a prison to minister, you usually don't bring your young children with you as you would in a church service.

But Hunt believes that the church can do better. He believes the body of Christ can go beyond tolerating ex-criminals coming to church and instead start celebrating it. But how do you take a church past fear so they can celebrate bringing prisoners into their congregations? Hunt says it requires envisioning God's people with His heart for criminal justice reform.

"We try to do something to at least have an appreciation for what can happen to really restore the criminal justice system," he says. "It's made me very sensitive to the whole idea of justice in general, because as you know, justice and righteousness have to work together. And people are crying out for justice, but in fact, they don't really love justice in the sense that God loves justice. They have it based upon what they believe is right for them. So they advocate a certain position but not necessarily advocating for God's position for His justice."

Whereas human justice is subjective, Hunt says God's justice is objective. A corrupt criminal justice system is far from objective—it's rife with unfairness and subjectivity as people push their own personal agendas.

This exactly what Hunt saw in the criminal justice system in Georgia. Things seemed as though they would never change until former Gov. Nathan Deal took a huge step toward reshaping the way the state releases prisoners. That step helped the state transition from an old-fashioned penalizing system to a restorative system.

"Restorative justice is where you can bring people out of a prison," he says. "And the goal is that they can live and have a chance of making it a lifestyle. So I do appreciate and applaud [Trump] because he has taken that chance and that risk to make a system that is more rehabilitative as opposed to criminalizing—and that makes a big difference in a broader context."

“... I think our prisons should actually be a revival center. Some people may have heard about the Angola prison [the Louisiana State Penitentiary], where they had churches that were established, and then inmates were established as elders. So it moved from being one of the bloodiest prisons to really being one of the most right-standing prisons in the country.”

Seeing a similar transformation here in U.S. prisons might seem like a fantasy, but Hunt has faith. He’s working hard to see this transformation happen—and I, for one, am praying he succeeds!

I encourage you to listen to my full interview with Hunt and share this article if you want to see revival break out in our nation’s prison system.