

YWAM Thailand Bringing Discipleship Training to Prison

It's been around seven years since Sophon was sent to the Ratchaburi prison in Central Thailand. He has almost completed the allotted punishment for the crime he committed so many years ago. His release is due at the end of this year. While he is excited, apprehension also clouds his outlook, as he is no longer certain what life looks like outside of his prison walls.

What Sophon does know, however, is that being in prison has truly changed him—for the better. A number of years ago, soon after he entered the prison, Sophon took a decision to follow the ways of Jesus. His journey of faith in Christ has brought him hope and a new understanding of what his life should be like.

Sophon has been so swept away by the love of God that he has decided to serve God even after his upcoming release. "I want to serve God and have God help me in areas in my life that are not right yet," Sophon says.

It is not by coincidence that in the very same prison, a group of people from YWAM in Ratchaburi started visiting inmates on a monthly basis two years ago. At first, the YWAM team started meeting with a small group of men who were already Christians, and their friends who were interested to hear more. However, the group quickly grew to more than 100 men, each one wanting the hope that they saw in their Christian brothers, like Sophon.

Over the past two years, YWAM Ratchaburi has been facilitating a monthly gathering of believers in the men's area of the prison. The men that are a part of this community have now

started their own church, worshipping together and encouraging one another, all within the confines of their prison yard. The movement seems to be contagious, as YWAM was recently able to start a fellowship in the women's area of the prison too.

After having enjoyed being a part of these gatherings, Sophon is now facing what many of the fellowship have already been through: returning to the outside world. After having changed so much during his incarceration, what will his life outside look like?

YWAM Ratchaburi will be running a three month training program inside the prison for Sophon and his friends. Starting in June, 50 of the inmates will be allowed to join the YWAM team each day for their very own Prison Discipleship Training School (PDTS). Being run within the prison walls limits some of the aspects of a DTS, but the YWAM team believes that for Sophon and his friends, this training could not only change the lives of those who participate, but could also change the face of the Ratchaburi prison forever.

Unlike other YWAM DTS programs, the men attending this particular course will not be able to pay for their own school fees. The YWAM team is working on finding sponsors who are willing to help these men change their lives.