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CONTACT:  
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Darin Campbell at (512) 785-8350  
[dcampbell@inchristcommunications.com](mailto:dcampbell@inchristcommunications.com)

Press kit available @  
<http://inchristcommunications.com/prisonevangelism>

# PRISON EVANGELISM

## **‘Changing hearts and closing prisons’: oil industry veteran finds rich new field to harvest**

***Through graphic guidebook, David Howell is helping transform lives of incarcerated men and women and reduce numbers of those behind bars***

HOUSTON—Oil industry veteran David Howell is working a rich new harvest field—saving souls and reducing the prison population through a graphic guidebook, allowing public funds to be diverted to other pressing needs.

Mailing copies of his *How To Be a Child of God* to prisoners for just 54 cents a copy offers a remarkable 7,000-to-1 return on investment, according to Howell. That’s because keeping someone from returning to prison by helping them find new life and hope as a Christian saves around \$31,000 a year in incarceration costs.

With a record 2 million-plus people currently behind bars in the United States, Howell now wants to expand the reach of his Prison Evangelism project by distributing an additional 600,000 free copies of *How To Be a Child of God* to prison chaplains nationwide. Doing so responds to Jesus’ admonition in Matthew 25 for his followers to remember those in prison, who have an extremely high conversion rate when presented with the gospel.

“Imagine the impact we can have, not only on individuals and their families, but on society as a whole, as they find new purpose and power for living and put prison behind them,” Howell said.

Prison Evangelism research on distribution to date shows that one in 10 people who reads the 52-page booklet makes a commitment to Christ. That means if the national campaign saw a similar response and those impacted did not return to prison, the saving to taxpayers would be \$2.1 billion annually. Additionally, the reduced inmate population would be equivalent to closing 60 prisons.

The owner of Houston-based pipeline consulting firm Pipeline Equities, who began working in the oil and gas fields as a 14-year-old “roughneck,” Howell has been active in sharing his faith since becoming a Christian in 1984. That decision “turned my life around,” forsaking drinking and wayward living, he said

Involved in a wide range of other ministries at Houston’s Second Baptist Church, Howell created *How To Be a*

*Child of God* in 2010 to pass out to people he met. Asked to provide some copies for use in prisons, he was amazed by the response. Letters began to come in from prisoners transformed by what they read. Among them was a man in jail in Midway, Texas, who wrote how the book touched his heart. "This book has been an inspiration to me. It opened my eyes to some great things and I soaked it all up like a sponge. I've finally put my life in His hands after all I've been through. Now I'm growing spiritually every day," he said.

Since then, Howell has printed and distributed more than 110,000 copies to prison chaplains across the country, including 25,000 in Spanish. The book has been translated into a dozen languages, and turned into a 20-minute online video ([www.howtobeachildofgod.com](http://www.howtobeachildofgod.com)). He has also produced two popular follow-up books in similar style, *Seeking God Through Prayer & Meditation* and *Fully Alive and Finally Free*.

Howell credits the impact of the publications, written at a sixth-grade reading level, to their simple language and the emphasis on being transformed by the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Additionally, as a standalone piece that can be reread and studied by prisoners who may be isolated or have time on their hands, it self-directs the reader into making a commitment to Christ without requiring others' involvement.

"These are people who have come to an end of themselves, and that is where all of us must come before we are willing to accept the need for a power greater than ourselves," said Howell.

John Salmon, chaplain at Diboll Correctional Center in Diboll, Tex., said that *How To Be a Child of God* had been "very popular" with the men there. "They actually read it," he wrote. "And you know what happens when people expose themselves to the Word of God."

George Hanson put copies out for chapel services at the Price Daniel Unit in Snyder, Texas, "and they flew out of the door," he said.

Having poured more than \$300,000 of his own money into the project, Howell formed Prison Evangelism as a nonprofit a couple of years ago. Now 77, with three granddaughters and a great-grandson, he said, "I know that this is the reason God is keeping alive, for this project. It is what he designed and created me to do."

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*Prison Evangelism* ([www.prison evangelism.com](http://www.prison evangelism.com)) is a faith-based nonprofit committed to transforming and rehabilitating offenders through the distribution of "How to Be a Child of God" and other evangelistic and discipleship materials designed to help prisoners find new purpose and power in life through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

**PHOTO OUTLINE:** David Howell in front of the pipes he salvages.

**PHOTO OUTLINE:** David Howell's revolutionary prison evangelism book, *How To Be a Child of God*.

**To schedule an interview with David Howell, contact:**

Darin Campbell

InChrist Communications

(512) 785-8350

[dcampbell@inchristcommunications.com](mailto:dcampbell@inchristcommunications.com)