

PRISON EVANGELISM

Successful oil industry businessman discovers 'the wonderful harvest ground' of America's prisons

David Howell's graphic guidebook is helping transform the lives of incarcerated men and women, and reduce the numbers of those behind bars

HOUSTON—Though he had personal experience of both the misery of jail and the impact of prison evangelism, for years David Howell had no interest in helping reach prisoners with the good news of Jesus Christ.



"I went into prison ministry kicking and screaming," admits the businessman and long-time member of Second Baptist Church in Houston, who jokes, "My idea of full-time ministry would be maybe a chaplain on a cruise ship."

But at 77, when many of his peers are settling down on the sundeck, Howell is now pouring his energies into Prison Evangelism (www.prison evangelism.com), the nonprofit he founded to distribute evangelistic and discipleship materials to as many of America's two million-plus incarcerated men and women as possible.

He discovered his new direction in 2010, after creating a 52-page style presentation of the gospel to share with people he met. He planned to print a hundred or so copies of *How to Be a Child of God* when a friend suggested he print 15,000 copies to distribute to prisons in Texas.

Howell agreed, and was amazed by the response. He began to get many letters from prisoners touched by the book and pledging to turn their lives around. Since then he has distributed 110,000 copies of the book, 25,000 of them in Spanish. It has been translated into more than a dozen languages and turned into a 20-minute online video.

Now Howell is planning a massive distribution of 600,000 copies to prisons across the country. With Prison Evangelism research showing that one in ten people who read the book makes a commitment to Christ, if the national campaign saw a similar response and those impacted did not return to prison, the annual saving to taxpayers would be \$2.1 billion. Additionally, the reduced inmate population would be equivalent to closing 60 prisons.

"I have realized that this is what God has called me to do," says Howell. "I believe he is keeping me alive, healthy and prospering for this ministry."

Howell's passion to see those without hope find new life and purpose springs from personal experience. Having started work in the oil and gas industry as a 14-year-old roughneck, he had gone on to develop a successful business, but his personal life was in disarray. Before he became a Christian in 1984, he had been locked up on several occasions because of his excessive drinking.

His turn to faith was in part due to reading *Born Again* by Charles Colson, the Watergate figure who went on to found Prison Fellowship. Once established as a believer, Howell even explored the possibility of working with the ministry, but decided it was not for him. 'I just didn't like it.'

Then, years later, he found prison cell doors opening to him through *How to Be a Child of God*. He has since invested more than \$300,000 of his own money in art, editing, writing, printing and making the book available, more recently establishing Prison Evangelism — "changing hearts, transforming lives" — as a nonprofit to extend its reach.

Howell credits the impact of the book and similar-style follow-up titles to their simple language and visual appeal, and more importantly to the clear message that true life change is only possible through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ.

"Before you can be born again, the old person has to die," he says. "This is why prison is such a wonderful harvest ground—people there have come to an end of themselves, and that is where we all of us must come before we are willing to accept a power greater than ourselves. We have to say, I am out of ideas, now what am I going to do?"

He discovered the reality of Galatians 2:20 -- "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." -- in a personal encounter with God. "Truly realizing that somewhere the old David had died, that I was a new creation, totally changed my life," he says. "I have never questioned God on anything since. I have been through bankruptcy, marriages, and the death of a child, but I have never questioned the authority of or my trust in God."

Howell leads Prison Evangelism while continuing to work as a pipeline consultant and appraisal specialist through his Pipeline Equities. During his career, he has traveled to more than 30 countries and worked throughout the United States. The founder of the Pipeline Appraisal Institute, he is also a senior member of the International Right of Way Association and the Pipeliners Association.

Howell's drive to further the impact of Prison Evangelism at a time when many others his age are slowing down—he has three granddaughters and a great-grandson—is reflective of his positive personality. He went back to school full-time for a year at age 60 to finish up the degree he had never gotten around to completing while working, graduating with a major in political science and a minor in history and economics.

That schooling gave him the confidence to start writing industry articles, and later *How to Become a Child of God*. "I get letters all the time from people who tell me they have loved the book and would I send one to their husband or wife or daughter or son," he says. "You can be sure I do; I can't resist that. When you truly discover that God loves you, you can never be the same."

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Prison Evangelism (www.prisonsevangalism.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.

To schedule an interview with David Howell, contact:

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