

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PAROLE AND FINAL DISCHARGE

Most people who visit in prison do not understand the meaning of parole and probation, but there is an important difference. Probation is really a *stayed* prison sentence. If the convict under a prison sentence does certain things as prescribed by the court such as obey the law in the future and make restitution for a specified period of time, he will never actually have to go to jail.

Many inmates that you will minister to in prison are there because they “failed” probation. Their prison sentence is no longer “stayed” and they are now in jail to serve their actual prison sentence. There is usually no daily credit for time served in probation and the full sentence is ahead of them starting from day number one. Men who have gone through this and failed probation are also afraid they will “fail” parole.

Parole status is prison time, so to speak. Some inmates call it “easy prison time,” but not all prisoners regard it that way. Inmates do not trust the system and they simply do not want to serve time on parole. This feeling is so intense in many prisoners that they will actually sit in prison a year or two longer to avoid any parole time. They simply do *not* trust themselves or their ability to serve parole time successfully. Each day served on parole is one day of prison time and usually counts (in most states) as such. If the parole is violated the inmate is returned to jail, but the “clock is still running,” as prisoners say, and the original sentence is reduced by all of the time served including the parole time that was successful.

It is important to know this because your prisoner is thinking about these things and your approach to him has to reach him through the system that controls him. His thinking is affected by probation, probation violation, incarceration and eventual parole plus the possibility of a parole failure. If you consider this fact with the uncertainty for the future that he has, you actually have the formula for failure on the street unless he has Jesus Christ in his life.

There are *two* important facts about parole and release that every prison minister should know.

FIRST: There is no day that is lower in your life than the day that you go to jail and no day that is more joyous or happier than the one when you get out of prison. Take it from the author of this book who is an ex-offender.

SECOND: Few inmates ever go back to jail if they know Jesus Christ as their Savior. This is a fact! In one prison after another across the United States, the author finds that sincere adult Christians have a nearly perfect record for staying out of jail. This is your number one selling point (after salvation) as a reason for believing in Christ. Inmates are traditionally afraid of release although they may not say so, but will accept release and successfully complete parole if they are Christians.

Your ministry in prison will have a three-fold result. It will save a soul. It will change a lifestyle inside and outside the prison wall. It will save your state or federal government a lot of money for future imprisonment. This is how important your work as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be inside the prison walls.

Be aware of the trauma of arrest, incarceration, the joy of release as well as the uncertainty of parole from the point of view of an inmate, and minister to him with confidence and love. After all, our Lord died that we might live for Him—even on parole!