

**Essay from the bold pastor
#226 - College Behind Bars -**

“College Behind Bars” is garnering attention in the United States. When Noel Caldellis was sent to prison in Monroe, Washington, for murdering a college student, his objective was to make his 20-plus years in prison pass as quickly as possible. He would often watch TV or take a stroll in the prison yard. But a few years into his sentence, he started attending a college program within the prison. “It’s helped me tremendously to grow as a person,” said Caldellis, who is working toward a bachelor’s degree in history.

Rudy Madrigal, who is serving a 24-year sentence for murder, is also enrolled in Washington’s prison program to study mathematics. He used to get into fights in prison, but his life has changed. What started as a simple activity to kill time has inspired him to make connections with various college staff, and he intends to help others as a social worker when his sentence is over.

“Education in prison is transformative. It leads to safer communities, and that’s to the benefit of everyone” says Fred Patrick of “Vera Institute of Justice”, a New York based nonprofit. Prison is often filled with people who have repeatedly committed crime. A study by the Indiana Department of Corrections found that inmates nationwide have a 68% chance of returning to prison within three years after release, compared to less than 5% for those who enroll in classes. Currently in Washington, 11,000 of the 16,500 inmates are receiving an education with the help of colleges, independent volunteers, and nonprofits. Courses even include topics like auto mechanics and coding. Forty-seven states have applied for federal scholarships to provide education to its inmates.

**“Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding;
those who complain will accept instruction.”
Isaiah 29:24**

These words were directed at Israel at the time it was going against the will of God. Even in such a time, there is kindness in God’s word. It’s common sense that the wise will gain understanding, but the Bible claims otherwise. The weak and the failed are also able to learn and be blessed. This is the essence of the Gospel, and the reason why Christ died on the cross. Anyone can be born again to start over, with the help of Jesus.

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