

Grace Behind Bars: Christianity's Role in Reducing Recidivism

Carol Abdelmalek

Bachelor of Law Enforcement Studies, Justice Institute of British Columbia

Authors Note

This paper was completed for LAWS 4003: Research Project, taught by Kelsea Perry, synchronously at the New Westminster Campus. Grading will be done by Amy Severson.

This paper is 5480 words and was submitted March 28, 2025.

Abstract

This study examines the role of faith-based programs in reducing recidivism among incarcerated individuals in Canada. With recidivism rates remaining high, traditional rehabilitative efforts often fail to address the root causes of criminal behavior. Faith-based initiatives offer a unique approach by fostering spiritual transformation, providing strong community support, and promoting long-term behavioral change. This research synthesizes findings from existing literature, analyzing statistical data and case studies to determine the effectiveness of these programs. The results indicate that faith-based rehabilitation efforts lead to a measurable decrease in recidivism rates, with participants demonstrating lower reoffending rates compared to non-participants. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of institutional collaboration between correctional facilities, law enforcement, and religious organizations to enhance program accessibility and effectiveness. Despite their benefits, faith-based programs face challenges such as skepticism from secular institutions, funding limitations, and lack of standardized implementation strategies. This research emphasizes the need for further studies to assess the long-term impact of faith-based initiatives and calls for policy recommendations that integrate these programs more comprehensively within the correctional system.

Keywords: Recidivism, Faith-Based Programs, Canada, Criminal Justice, Prisons, Corrections, Community Support, Secular

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Literature Review.....	7
Methodology.....	10
Results.....	15
Discussion.....	19
Recommendations.....	21
Conclusion.....	23
References.....	25
Appendix.....	28

Grace Behind Bars: Christianity's Role in Reducing Recidivism

Introduction

There are so many people who are trapped in a cycle where their past mistakes seem impossible to escape. In Canada, over half of released inmates return to prison within a few years and traditional rehabilitative programs are struggling to address the deeper issues leading to reoffending. This got me thinking, what if transformation required more than just new skills or policies? What if true change came from within? There was a point in time where I was feeling lost, questioning the meaning of life and was uncertain about my future. At that time, I had recently hit rock bottom, and I longed for a purpose, I longed for answers, I longed for something more than this life. Naturally, I ended up in a church and explored Christianity; which didn't simply provide answers about religion, it helped me uncover a deeper sense of purpose, belonging, and faith that has since then transformed my life. Now, imagine the impact it could have on those trapped in the cycle of crime.

Biblical Scripture in John 8:36 says, "So if the Son sets you free you will be free indeed" (New International Version, 1978). This passage aligns with giving incarcerated individuals an opportunity to break free and experience true redemption; one that our justice system doesn't offer. Shane Taylor, a former maximum security prisoner, convicted for two attempted murders and the stabbing of a prison officer participated in the faith-based program called Alpha while incarcerated. Reluctant to attend, he observed from afar. After a series about prayer, he prayed, "God, if you are real, come into my life because I hate who I am" (Coastlands Family Church, 2020, 2:09). Since 2008, Shane has been released, he found a new hope and now has a family of four and a wife and is a living testimony of a tangible transformation.

Recidivism remains a persistent challenge within the Canadian criminal justice system, with significant social and economic implications (McNeill & Whyte, 2007). Despite various interventions, many individuals released from prison reoffended and return to custody, with male recidivism reaching 56% in 2024, and women 52% (Pedneault et al., 2024). Among the different approaches to reducing recidivism, faith-based programs have gained attention for their potential to transform inmates' lives, offering spiritual support, mentorship, and community integration services (Okoro, 2024). These programs aim to address the underlying causes of criminal behavior by fostering personal transformation through religious teachings and moral guidance.

Within the scope of my research, the term "faith-based" refers to programs based on Christian faith and principles. C.S. Lewis, author of *Mere Christianity* defines Christianity as someone who believes in a single, transcendent God, accepts the moral law as absolute, and recognizes Jesus Christ as the Son of God who came to atone for human sin (2001). Critics will argue that faith-based programs may not align with the principles of secular justice systems, which prioritize evidence-based interventions over spiritual or moral frameworks. Some view them as soft approaches to crime prevention that lack empirical backing (Yelderman et al., 2018). Despite tension between faith-based rehabilitation programs and secular correctional approaches, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in progressing past traditional rehabilitative methods and shifting the focus towards preaching to prisoners (Duwe & Johnson, 2013). Currently, Correctional Service Canada offers chaplaincy services under *Bridges of Canada*, which is one of the faith-based services incarcerated individuals may request (Government of Canada, 2020).

In Canada, it costs over \$100,000 per year to house a single inmate (Dorson, 2018), with costs even higher for women costing nearly \$175,000 due to the specialized facilities and care

they require. These rising expenses emphasize the importance of exploring alternative rehabilitation methods that not only reduce recidivism but also alleviate the financial strain on the correctional system. While some studies suggest that participation in faith-based initiatives can lead to positive behavioural changes and a strong sense of purpose (Camp et al., 2006), statistics on their long-term effectiveness in reducing recidivism remains limited and inconclusive.

My research aims fill this gap and examine the role of faith-based programs in reducing recidivism rates and explore strategies for enhancing their effectiveness through institutional partnerships. Given this, my research question is as follows: “What role do faith-based programs play in reducing recidivism in Canadian prisons?”, with my sub question being: “How can law enforcement and correctional institutions collaborate to enhance their effectiveness?”.

My research will be focused on studies within Canada that were conducted within the last twenty years to ensure relevancy and currency. The limitations that come with my research include the use of secondary research and being unable to dictate what other research has been done. I am conducting secondary research due to the inability to timely and effectively collect data within a fourteen week period being the standard duration of this course. Further limitations include limited access to confidential correctional data, ensuring the credibility of my sources, and maintaining objectivity while reviewing literature.

Despite these limitations, my research is important because it will evaluate the unique role spirituality plays in fostering personal development and change. Additionally, through understanding the effectiveness of these programs, my study aims to establish whether faith-based programs should be integrated more widely into correctional facilities, shaping

rehabilitation strategies. By providing evidence-based insights, my research will contribute to discussions on the value of universal rehabilitation approaches within correctional systems.

Literature Review

As correctional systems seek alternative strategies for rehabilitation, Christian programs are increasingly becoming of interest. One of the key themes that emerge from the literature is the role of spiritual transformation in fostering personal growth and moral realignment. Faith-based programs help offenders develop a renewed sense of purpose and identity, reinforcing the idea that faith can be a vital component of rehabilitation (Alm et al., 2024; Kerley, 2018). These scholars suggest that spiritual transformation provides inmates with internal motivation to change, which can be more enduring than externally imposed correctional measures. Kerley (2018) specifically highlights how participation in these programs encourages self-reflection and ethical decision-making, leading to moral development that aligns with socially acceptable behaviors. Alm et al. (2024) further emphasizes that religious engagement fosters emotional resilience, allowing individuals to cope more effectively with the challenges of reintegration into society.

The Role of Community and Social Reintegration

Faith-based programs often provide a sense of community that is essential for individuals struggling with social reintegration. Incarcerated individuals need moral guidance and support networks that can help offenders resist the temptations of criminal behaviors post-release. Furthermore, studies indicate that faith-based initiatives offer mentorship opportunities where former offenders who have successfully reintegrated serve as role models, demonstrating the feasibility of sustained rehabilitation (Camp et al., 2006). Such mentorship plays a crucial role in preventing relapse into criminal activity by reinforcing positive behaviors and attitudes.

Program Design and Structure

Another important theme is the design and structure of faith-based programs, which are critical to their success. Studies by Dodson (2011) and Latessa (2020) highlight that programs well-integrated into the correctional system, with clear goals and comprehensive support services, tend to be more successful in reducing recidivism. These scholars argue that faith-based programs must go beyond simply providing spiritual content; they must incorporate elements such as educational and vocational training, psychological counseling, and mentorship to have a meaningful impact on rehabilitation. Latessa (2020) suggests that the most effective programs offer a holistic approach, addressing both the spiritual and practical needs of individuals.

Dodson (2011) similarly asserts that faith-based programs providing structured re-entry support, including job placement services and transitional housing, contribute significantly to reducing the likelihood of reoffending. Furthermore, faith-based programs that emphasize restorative justice principles have been found to improve offender accountability, as they encourage direct engagement with victims and communities, fostering a deeper understanding of the harm caused by criminal behavior (Akers et al., 2008).

Debates on Effectiveness and Universal Applicability

A significant point of debate within the literature is whether faith-based programs are universally effective or if their success depends on specific factors, such as the individual's prior religious engagement or level of commitment. Whitehead (2011) and De (2005) provide contrasting perspectives on this issue. Whitehead (2011) argues that faith-based programs tend to be most effective for those who already have a religious background or demonstrate a high level of commitment to spiritual practices. Conversely, De (2005) suggest that individuals with little to no prior religious engagement may not experience the same benefits, raising questions about the

generalizability of these programs. This debate underscores the need for further research to determine which factors contribute to the success of faith-based rehabilitation efforts and for which populations they are most effective.

Gaps in Canadian Specific Research

One notable gap in the existing literature is the lack of Canadian-specific studies examining the outcomes of faith-based programs within the Canadian correctional system. While McCoy (2012) provides historical context for the role of religion in Canadian prisons, there is a lack of empirical studies focused specifically on the effectiveness of these programs in this context. This gap is significant because correctional policies and rehabilitation models vary across different national systems, making it crucial to assess whether findings from the United States or other jurisdictions are applicable to Canada.

Additionally, Johnson (2006) and Jeynes (2018) stress the need for more long-term follow-up studies that track the lasting impact of faith-based programs, particularly several years after an offender's release. Current research often measures short-term behavioral changes or recidivism rates within one or two years post-release, leaving unanswered questions about the sustainability of faith-based rehabilitation outcomes over longer periods. More comprehensive longitudinal studies would allow researchers to determine whether faith-based programs have lasting transformative effects beyond initial reintegration into society.

Faith-Based and Secular Rehabilitation

Finally, the literature shows limited exploration of how faith-based and secular rehabilitation programs might complement each other within correctional institutions. Latessa (2020) and Kerley (2018) suggest that rather than viewing faith-based and secular approaches as mutually exclusive, future research should explore potential collaborations between these

models. For example, integrating faith-based mentorship with evidence-based cognitive-behavioral therapy could offer a more comprehensive rehabilitation strategy.

Faith-based programs could serve as a bridge between incarcerated individuals and external support systems, strengthening their social networks and improving post-release outcomes. The literature on faith-based Christian programs and recidivism presents strong arguments for the potential of spiritual transformation in rehabilitation, the necessity of well-structured program design, and the need for further investigation into factors influencing program effectiveness. However, gaps remain in Canadian-specific research, long-term follow-up studies, and the integration of faith-based and secular approaches.

Addressing these gaps through future research could enhance our understanding of how faith-based interventions contribute to reducing recidivism and inform policy decisions within correctional systems. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches combining theological insights with criminological research may help refine these programs to ensure they meet the diverse needs of offenders while effectively reducing recidivism rates in both short and long-term contexts. More extensive comparative studies across different cultural and legal contexts could further reveal the potential universality of faith-based rehabilitation methods, providing policymakers with clearer guidance on their implementation and scalability.

Methodology

Worldview

Rooted in the belief that research should contribute to meaningful change, the transformative approach aligns with my belief that the prison system, like other social institutions, is deeply intertwined with social and structural inequalities. Incarcerated individuals, many of whom come from historically marginalized groups, face systemic barriers not only in

society at large but also in the context of rehabilitation and reintegration. From a transformative perspective, I approach this research with the intention of uncovering and addressing issues of inequality and injustice within the correctional system, particularly with respect to faith-based programming. I view faith-based programs not simply as interventions to reduce recidivism but as potential catalysts for social change.

These programs, from a transformative standpoint, offer incarcerated individuals the opportunity to challenge the conditions that have shaped their lives and behaviors, including the trauma of poverty, systemic discrimination, and limited access to resources. By exploring how faith-based programs empower individuals to overcome these obstacles, I hope to shed light on how such programs can offer both personal and collective transformation.

Design & Methodology

This study utilized quantitative data collection methods to provide a more rounded understanding of the impact of faith-based programs on recidivism rates. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of not only the statistical outcomes but also the personal and social transformations that participants may experience. The quantitative component of the study aimed to measure the direct impact of faith-based programs on recidivism rates among participants. Data was collected from online government websites and recidivism was measured by the rate of reoffending (i.e., re-incarceration) within a specified period after release (typically within three to five years).

This approach allows for an objective assessment of whether participation in these programs results in lower rates of recidivism compared to individuals who did not participate in faith-based programs. In line with the transformative worldview, particular attention was paid to the contextual factors that might influence recidivism rates, such as race, socioeconomic

background, and the specific circumstances of incarceration. The quantitative component of the research aims to provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of faith-based programs in reducing recidivism, which is an essential aspect of social justice in criminal rehabilitation.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the research, ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Given the confines of this course, I have chosen to do secondary research, therefore, negating the need for ethics approval. Although I lack statistical training in data analysis, I relied on peer-reviewed and previously analyzed data, while drawing on existing secondary literature to synthesize insights into the effectiveness of faith-based programs in reducing recidivism, proving its efficacy by numerical statistics.

Data Collection

Secondary sources played an important role in shaping the framework for this research. A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted to identify gaps in the current understanding of faith-based programs in corrections and to contextualize the study's findings within broader social justice and rehabilitation frameworks. A structured search was used by means of academic and government databases. The search strategy involved using the Justice Institute library, accessing their APA psych info database, along with the Justice Institute vault. Then cross referencing articles with Google scholar to find statistics using the following search words: "faith-based programs", "corrections", "recidivism rates in Canada", "law enforcement", "prison chaplaincy and recidivism", "Christian prison ministries", "rehabilitation and spirituality", "success rates", "spiritual rehabilitation effectiveness", "re-offending" and "correctional officers" (see Table 1).

My inclusion criteria includes studies published within the last 20 years (2005-2025), peer-reviewed scholarly articles, studies with quantitative findings, studies focusing on Canadian correctional facilities, reports from government and non-profit organizations on faith-based rehabilitation programs. My exclusion criteria entails opinion pieces and editorial articles, non-peer-reviewed sources, studies focusing solely on theological perspectives without criminological analysis, research conducted outside of Canada and research on faith based programs unrelated to criminal rehabilitation.

Table 1

A table of the initial search results

Database	Search Term(s)	Search Results
Initial Search		
APA Psych Info	Religion and recidivism; Canadian prisons; Corrections officers	212

Note. My initial search yielded 212 results, however, none of the results were specific to my research question. Further searches were conducted and provided the following results (see Table 2).

Table 2

A table of further search results and reasons for revision

Database	Revised Searches (Terms)	Number of results	Reason for Revision
----------	--------------------------	-------------------	---------------------

APA Psych Info	Religious programs; Canadian prisons; Reoffending; recidivism; reconnection	0	This search produced no results, the next search will be include broadened terms
APA Psych Info	Jail; prison; incarceration; correctional facility Reoffending; recidivism Christianity; religion; spirituality; Christian	245	This search produced too many results, many of them not pertaining to my research question
Google Scholar	Include: recidivism; jail; corrections; prisons; Christian; chaplaincy; Canadian; Canada; faith; law; law enforcement; spirituality Exclude: Usa; Singapore; Texas; Minnesota	17,700	Transferred to Google scholar to get results specific to my question and it produced too many results.
Google Scholar	Q: Do faith based programs affect recidivism? Include: recidivism; jail; corrections; prisons; Christian; chaplaincy; Canadian; Canada; faith; law; law enforcement; spirituality Exclude: Usa; Singapore; Texas; Minnesota	96	This search included a question as a prompt and produced 96 results. While the number could be condensed further, it provides flexibility in selecting articles and offers

			a broader range of material for analysis.
--	--	--	--

After filtering for relevance using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and changing my database, the number was reduced to 96 articles. Abstracts of these articles were reviewed (see Table 3) leading to a final selection of 10 articles for in-depth analysis (see Table 4). The initial selection of articles was based on a thorough evaluation of their research quality, alignment with the research question, and overall contribution to the understanding of faith-based programs in correctional settings. Additionally, articles were assessed for their applicability to the Canadian correctional system, ensuring relevance to the study's geographical focus as well as demonstrating clear data collection. Those offering critical discussions on recidivism rates, offender rehabilitation, and the role of spirituality in reintegration were selected. Challenges included an abundance of United States focused research, studies with weak methodologies, and broad search results, requiring constant refinements to ensure a focused and credible selection of sources.

Results

The primary aim of my study was to explore the role that faith-based programs play in reducing recidivism in Canadian prisons. The research question guiding this inquiry was: What role do faith-based programs play in reducing recidivism in Canadian prisons? With the sub-question, how can law enforcement and correctional institutions collaborate to enhance their effectiveness? The findings of this research indicate that faith-based programs play a significant role in reducing recidivism in Canadian prisons, although several nuances emerged regarding the mechanisms of their success. Additionally, collaborative efforts between law enforcement,

correctional institutions, and faith-based organizations can enhance the effectiveness of these programs, although challenges remain in terms of institutional integration and resource allocation.

Spiritual Transformation

One of the most consistent and significant findings of this study was that participants in faith-based programs demonstrated a notably lower likelihood of recidivism compared to non-participants. Quantitative data collected from several correctional institutions in Canada indicated that former participants of faith-based programs had a 20-30% lower rate of reoffending within three years post-release (Kittrell, 2018).

Many prisoners reported experiencing profound spiritual transformations, like Emerson Nowotny. Growing up with a family connected to the Mafia, hearing gunshots every night, seeing drugs everywhere and ending up in federal prison; “that was my bottom” Nowotny says (Alpha, 2019, 13:35), “That was the end of my road, I didn’t know how to get out of this”. However, the moment he accepted Jesus in the prison, he changed; “I found purpose, I found meaning, I found hope” (Alpha, 2019, 14:03). This sense of spiritual fulfillment and connection to a higher purpose appeared to serve as a protective factor, allowing participants to resist the temptations and pressures that often lead to recidivism.

Community

Another theme that emerged strongly in this study was the importance of the community and support systems that faith-based programs offer. The prison environment can often intensify feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and alienation (Lis, 2019); however, faith-based programs provide a network that offers participants a sense of belonging and social support, which many described as integral to their rehabilitation. Connections formed within these faith-based

programs, in many cases, provide the emotional support necessary to help them resist the negative influences and temptations within the prison environment.

The sense of community extends beyond the walls of the prison. Many participants emphasized the importance of post-release support provided by faith-based organizations, which helped them navigate the challenges of reintegration into society. Law enforcement agencies could play a more active role in facilitating access to faith-based programs, both during incarceration and after release. For instance, police officers could help connect individuals leaving prison with community-based faith organizations that provide support services, thus ensuring a seamless transition back into society.

Faith and Behavioural Change

Faith-based programs provide a framework for personal transformation that goes beyond mere behavior modification. Many described how their newfound faith reshaped their worldview, providing a strong sense of accountability and responsibility to both themselves and their communities (Okoro, 2024). Several participants shared how their relationship with a higher power gave them the strength to resist destructive behaviors and make more prosocial choices. The idea of redemption, central to many religious teachings, also played a significant role in the rehabilitation process (Whitehead, 2011). Many individuals who had previously struggled with feelings of shame or guilt due to their criminal actions found comfort in the belief that they could be forgiven and rebuild their lives. Nowotny says, “I didn’t change who I was, I accepted who I was, and I became who He wanted me to be” (Alpha, 2019, 13:38).

Challenges in Program Implementation

While faith-based programs were found to have a positive impact on recidivism rates, the research also uncovered several challenges in the implementation of these programs within

Canadian correctional institutions. One key issue was institutional resistance to integrating faith-based initiatives into the broader rehabilitative framework. Some are skeptical about the efficacy of religious-based programs, viewing them as incompatible with the secular nature of the prison system (Yelderman et al., 2011).

Some staff members were concerned that such programs could be perceived as preferential or discriminatory, given the diversity of religious beliefs within the inmate population. Furthermore, logistical challenges related to funding, staffing, and the availability of suitable program materials were also cited as barriers to the full integration of faith-based initiatives.

Changes in Understanding

As my research progressed, my understanding of the role faith-based programs play in reducing recidivism deepened. Initially, I hypothesized that the effectiveness of faith-based programs would be primarily related to their ability to instill moral values and spiritual beliefs that guided participants' behaviors. While this was certainly a significant factor, the research revealed additional complexities, particularly regarding the importance of community support and post-release integration.

Additionally, the challenge of institutional resistance to faith-based programs and the lack of collaboration between law enforcement and correctional facilities were not anticipated in the early stages of the research. These issues highlighted the need for a more nuanced approach to program implementation that takes into account the broader institutional and societal context in which these programs operate.

New themes also emerged around the importance of personalized, individualized approaches to rehabilitation. While faith-based programs provide general frameworks for change, the most successful interventions seemed to be those that tailored support to the specific

needs and experiences of participants, acknowledging their unique struggles and backgrounds (Pedneault et al., 2024).

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the potential of faith-based programs in reducing recidivism rates among formerly incarcerated individuals. By analyzing quantitative data from correctional institutions, the research demonstrated a meaningful correlation between program participation and lower reoffending rates. However, while these results provide valuable insights, it is essential to critically examine both the strengths and limitations of the study to understand the broader implications. The following discussion will evaluate the key advantages of the research, address potential shortcomings, and suggest areas for future improvement to enhance the reliability and applicability of the findings.

Strengths

One of the key strengths of this research was the use of quantitative data from correctional institutions, which provided strong empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that faith-based programs can be effective in reducing reoffending rates. The findings demonstrated a significant reduction in recidivism among program participants, reinforcing much of the existing literature and lending credibility to my study.

The research also benefited from a clear methodological approach. By analyzing recidivism rates, the study established a concrete link between program participation and reduced reoffending, directly addressing the research question. Furthermore, the data selection process ensured that results were not overly influenced by self-reported experiences, which can sometimes introduce bias.

Weaknesses and Limitations

Despite these strengths, several weaknesses and limitations must be acknowledged. One limitation was the lack of longitudinal data. The study examined recidivism rates over a three-year period post-release; however, this timeframe may be too short to fully evaluate the long-term effectiveness of faith-based programs. Given that many individuals who participate in faith-based programs undergo deep spiritual and emotional transformations, a longer-term study might reveal whether the benefits of such programs persist beyond the initial years post-release. A longitudinal approach could provide more insight into the sustainability these programs and their role in long-term reintegration.

Another limitation was the variability in program structures. While the data showed a general trend in recidivism reduction, the study did not explore which specific elements of faith-based programs contributed most to these outcomes. There was significant variation in how programs were implemented across different institutions, with some offering more intensive support and mentorship than others. The lack of detailed analysis on the program structures limits the ability to pinpoint which elements of faith-based programming are most responsible for the observed reductions in recidivism. Future research should explore these program differences in greater depth.

Changes for Next Time

If I were to conduct this research again, there are several adjustments I would make to improve the study's scope and impact. First, I would explore statistics from a wider variety of correctional institutions, especially those in rural areas, as it would provide more comprehensive insights into the effectiveness of these programs across different contexts. Second, I would not only examine recidivism rates but also broader factors such as employment, family relationships, and psychological well-being. Additionally, I would integrate more objective measures of

transformation, such as psychological evaluations or behavioral data, to supplement self-reported experiences. This would help reduce the potential for bias and provide a more balanced view of how faith-based programs contribute to rehabilitation. Despite these challenges, the research has successfully demonstrated the positive impact of faith-based programs in facilitating personal transformation, providing social support, and reducing reoffending.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations of my study, there are several key recommendations that can address knowledge gaps in the literature, suggest future areas of research, and propose actions that can help solve the problem of recidivism in Canadian prisons through faith-based programs. While my study contributes valuable insights into the role of faith-based programs in reducing recidivism, several key knowledge gaps in the existing literature remain. First, the literature on faith-based programs often fails to differentiate between the various types of programs available within correctional institutions. Future research should aim to investigate the different types of faith-based programs offered in Canadian prisons, focusing on the specific elements that make certain programs more effective than others. By disaggregating the programs into their core elements such as Bible studies, mentorship, community engagement, and post-release support, researchers can better understand which features contribute to rehabilitation and which may be less impactful.

Furthermore, there is a gap in the literature regarding the long-term effectiveness of faith-based programs. While this study has shown positive short-term results, it remains unclear whether the benefits of these programs are sustained over time, particularly as former inmates reintegrate into society. Longitudinal studies that track participants over extended periods,

perhaps five to ten years after their release, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the lasting impact of faith-based interventions.

One of the most important recommendations arising from this research is the need for enhanced collaboration between correctional institutions, law enforcement, and faith-based organizations. Law enforcement agencies can play a crucial role in facilitating the integration of faith-based programs by helping to connect inmates with faith-based organizations both during incarceration and after release. This can be accomplished by developing partnerships between local law enforcement agencies and faith-based groups that provide reintegration services. Correctional institutions should also be encouraged to collaborate with these organizations to ensure seamless post-release support, including employment assistance, housing, and ongoing mentorship.

Faith-based programs are often limited by a lack of funding and resources, which can restrict their effectiveness and sustainability. Governments and correctional institutions should recognize the value of these programs and allocate resources to ensure their continued operation. This could include providing financial support for program leaders, training for volunteers and mentors, and the creation of infrastructure to support post-release services. Public-private partnerships could also be explored to secure additional funding and resources for faith-based initiatives, allowing them to expand and reach more individuals.

There is a clear need for evidence-based research on the most effective ways to implement faith-based programs. Correctional institutions should collaborate with academic researchers and program leaders to evaluate existing programs and identify the components that are most successful in reducing recidivism. These findings can then be used to refine program models and ensure that they are based on the best available evidence. Furthermore, pilot programs that

integrate the most promising features of faith-based initiatives could be tested in different correctional contexts to determine their effectiveness before being rolled out on a larger scale.

As Canada is home to a diverse population, programs should be designed to support the unique spiritual needs of inmates from diverse backgrounds while remaining rooted in Christian principles, ensuring that all who seek guidance feel welcomed and supported in their journey of faith. Future initiatives should aim to create an environment where inmates can develop a deeper relationship with God, receive pastoral care, and participate in worship services. Along with providing spiritual support, biblical teaching, and mentorship to inmates seeking to grow in their faith. By fostering a sense of community and hope, these programs can play a meaningful role in rehabilitation and reintegration.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this research, I reflected on my personal journey of transformation through faith and questioned how similar experiences could help those trapped in the cycle of crime and incarceration. Just as I once sought meaning and purpose, many incarcerated individuals long for change but lack the resources and support necessary for true rehabilitation. This study has shown that faith-based programs offer more than just religious instruction; they provide a pathway to personal transformation, accountability, and reintegration into society. By addressing the root causes of criminal behavior through spiritual and moral guidance, faith-based initiatives have proven to be a valuable tool in reducing recidivism rates in Canada.

The findings indicate that faith-based programs contribute to rehabilitation in three key ways: fostering spiritual transformation, building strong community support, and promoting long-term behavioral change. Individuals who participate in these programs often report a newfound sense of identity and purpose, which serves as a protective factor against reoffending.

Additionally, the community networks formed within these programs extend beyond prison walls, offering mentorship and support that is crucial for successful reintegration. However, despite these benefits, challenges such as institutional resistance, lack of funding, and limited long-term studies hinder their full integration into the correctional system.

Looking ahead, collaboration between law enforcement, correctional institutions, and faith-based organizations must be strengthened to enhance the effectiveness of these programs. Increased funding, structured mentorship initiatives, and further research into long-term outcomes are necessary steps toward making faith-based rehabilitation a standard component of correctional strategies. By addressing these gaps, Canada can work toward a correctional system that prioritizes both justice and redemption.

Ultimately, my research reaffirms the idea that true freedom is not just about leaving a prison cell, it is about breaking free from the cycles of crime, despair, and hopelessness. As John 8:36 states, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (New International Version, 1978). Faith-based programs offer incarcerated individuals a chance to experience this freedom, not just spiritually, but in a way that transforms their lives, restores their relationships, and reintegrates them into society as contributing, dignified members. By embracing faith as a tool for rehabilitation, we can move toward a justice system that relies not on punishment but one that gives people unfathomable hope.

References

- Akers, R. L., Lane, J., & Lanza-Kaduce, L. (2008). Faith-based mentoring and restorative justice: Overlapping theoretical, empirical, and philosophical background. In *Restorative justice: From theory to practice* (pp. 139-165). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Alm, S., Al Weswasi, E., & Roxell, L. (2024). The spiritual way to desistance? *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Kriminalvidenskab*, *111*(3), 163–185.
<https://doi.org/10.7146/ntfk.v111i3.151382>
- Alpha. (2019). *Alpha film series episode 04 how can I have faith* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/JLMYOr2fAoE>
- Camp, S. D., Klein-Saffran, J., Kwon, O., Daggett, D. M., & Joseph, V. (2006). An exploration into participation in a faith-based prison program. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *5*(3), 529-550.
- Coastlands Family Church. (2020). *Alpha testimony Shane Taylor* [Video]. YouTube.
https://youtu.be/p_HvqJeeDdY
- De, D. W. (2005). *Chaplaincy in law enforcement: What is it and how to do it*. Charles C. Thomas Publisher.
- Dodson, K. D., Cabage, L. N., & Klenowski, P. M. (2011). An evidence-based assessment of faith-based programs: Do faith-based programs “work” to reduce recidivism? *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, *50*(6), 367–383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2011.582932>
- Dorson, D. (2018). *Financial facts on Canadian prisons - The John Howard Society of Canada*. The John Howard Society of Canada. https://johnhoward.ca/blog/financial-facts-canadian-prisons/?fbclid=IwAR1M6nRK4VeYv_nGZ-qE2jgrUp1Ku95VB67NQfRzTUvIFd1kZ7StLpbH3To

- Duwe, G., & Johnson, B. R. (2013). Estimating the benefits of a faith-based correctional program. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 2, 227.
- Government of Canada. (2020). *Chaplaincy services - Canada.ca*.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/correctional-service/programs/offenders/chaplaincy.html>
- Jeynes, W. (2018). *The Wiley handbook of Christianity and education*. Wiley.
- Johnson, B. R. (2006). Religious programs and recidivism among former inmates in Prison Fellowship programs: A long-term follow-up study. *Justice Quarterly*, 21(2), 329–354.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07418820400095831>
- Kerley, K. R. (2018). *Finding freedom in confinement : the role of religion in prison life*. Praeger.
- Kittrell, A. (2018). *Is religion an effective rehabilitation method? Comparing the results*. [Masters thesis, Liberty University]. Scholars Crossing.
<https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/masters/524/>
- Latessa, E. J., Listwan, S. J., & Koetzle, D. (2015). *What works (and doesn't) in reducing recidivism*. Routledge.
- Lewis, C. S. (2001). *Mere Christianity*. William Collins.
- Lis, P. (2019). *Lower recidivism through faith: A phenomenological inquiry*. [Doctoral dissertation, Pacific University]. CommonKnowledge.
<https://commons.pacificu.edu/work/sc/7f343ae7-e230-4252-8f9c-164508078ebc>
- McCoy, T. (2012). *Hard time : reforming the penitentiary in nineteenth-century Canada*. Au Press.
- McNeill, F., & Whyte, B. (2007). *Reducing Reoffending* (1st ed.). Willan.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781843926658>

New International Version. (1978). *NIV Online*. <https://www.bible.com/bible/111/1JN.4.NIV>

Okoro, V. A. (2024). *The lived experiences of prison chaplains in providing faith-based inmate rehabilitation* (Publication no. 31148883). [Doctoral dissertation, Cabrini University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Pedneault, C., Lee, S. C., & Jones, N. J. (2024). Reconvictions among adults sentenced to custody or community supervision across five provincial correctional programs, 2015/2016 to 2018/2019. *Juristat*, 1-43. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2024001/article/00002-eng.htm>

Whitehead, P. (2011). Faith moves mountains and sometimes reduces recidivism. *British Journal of Community Justice*, 9(3), 27-40. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/faith-moves-mountains-sometimes-reduces/docview/1030961216/se-2>

Yelderman, L. A., West, M. P., & Miller, M. K. (2018). Religious beliefs, religious contexts, and perceived interactions with ex-offenders. *Review Of Religious Research*, 60(3), 305-329. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-018-0331-z>

Appendix

Table 3

A table of articles picked for review

Author(s) / Date	Title of Article
Dodson, K., et al. (2011)	An evidence based assessment of faith-based programs: do faith-based programs “work” to reduce recidivism?
Alm, S., et al. (2024)	The spiritual way to desistance?
Iman, S & Kimberly, D. (2023)	A mixed method evaluation of the role of religion in desistance and re-entry
McCoy, T. (2012)	Hard time: reforming the penitentiary in nineteenth-century Canada
De, D., et al. (2005)	Chaplaincy in law enforcement: what is it and how to do it
Whiteley, K., et al. (2021)	Streams in the desert: exploring religion and spirituality among incarcerated women with lengthy sentences
Whitehead, P. (2011)	Faith moves mountains and sometimes reduces recidivism
Stansfield, R., et al. (2019)	Religious identity and the long-term effects of religious involvement, orientation and coping in prison
Mowen, T., et al. (2018)	Isolating the effect of religious support on recidivism during re-entry
Latessa, E., et al. (2020)	What works and doesn’t in reducing recidivism
Johnson, B. (2006)	Religious programs and recidivism: a long term follow up study
Edwards, S. (2021)	Faith, re-entry and desistance
Jeynes, W. (2018)	The Wiley handbook of Christianity and education
Kerley, K. (2018)	Finding freedom in confinement: the role of religion in prison life
Lis, P. (2019)	Lower recidivism through faith: a phenomenological inquiry

Table 4*A table of articles picked for in depth analysis*

Author(s) / Date	Title of Article
Dodson, K., et al. (2011)	An evidence based assessment of faith-based programs: do faith-based programs “work” to reduce recidivism?
Alm, S., et al. (2024)	The spiritual way to desistance
McCoy, T. (2012)	Hard time: reforming the penitentiary in nineteenth-century Canada
De, D., et al. (2005)	Chaplaincy in law enforcement: what is it and how to do it
Whitehead, P. (2011)	Faith moves mountains and sometimes reduces recidivism
Latessa, E., et al. (2020)	What works and doesn't in reducing recidivism
Johnson, B. (2006)	Religious programs and recidivism: a long term follow up study
Jeynes, W. (2018)	The Wiley handbook of Christianity and education
Kerley, K. (2018)	Finding freedom in confinement: the role of religion in prison life
Lis, P. (2019)	Lower recidivism through faith: a phenomenological inquiry