

The FULL Price of Crime

By Buck Griffith

I wish everyone could read some of the letters I receive from offenders. Their loud cries and deep moans rip my heart apart as they graphically describe *real life* scenarios:

I have not heard from my wife in ___ months [or husband, child, parent]

My wife lost her job [or husband]

My wife [or husband] is cheating on me

My father passed away and I was not allowed to attend the funeral

My mother is 82 and in the hospital. I doubt she is going to make it

My son [or daughter] is ill and does not have the money to see a doctor or get medication

My son [or daughter, brother, sister] is going down the same wrong road I traveled

I have nowhere to go when released

I'm going to have a hard time getting a job when I get out

I have burned all my bridges



What can we do? Immediately, all we can do is take it to the Lord. This is what they ask of us. And do not underestimate the power of prayer. But I also want to ask of the man or woman incarcerated . . .

Check your vision – could this be an extended cost of your offense(s)?

You may be serving a five-year sentence or a 25-year sentence or *life behind bars with zero chance for parole*. Confinement is very much one significant portion of the price that must be paid. Being separated and all that it entails causes loved ones to pay as well. In a real sense, when a loved one is arrested, the entire family is impacted.

Have you heard of the *Crime Victim's Impact Panel*? It is a good thing done through local parole offices. They seek "volunteers" (parolees and crime victims) to form this *panel*. Parolees talk openly about their offenses – everything from burglary to rape and murder. Crime victims do the same, describing how the crime has affected their daily lives. This experience results in an increased understanding of ALL. Victims come away with a better grasp of how little attention the offender gave to the crime's *impact* on the victim. The victim had a nameless face. At the time of the offense, the offender was not thinking of the victim at all. The offender comes away with an increased awareness of how his or her offense deeply affected the victim(s).

The following is one example. A man quietly entered a home as the family slept. He entered and left through a window in a baby's room. He saw no one. He spoke to no one. Much later (while on trial), he sat and listened to the mother of that infant describe the deep fear she experienced. She could not sleep for a long time. She kept going back to her baby's room throughout the night to be sure the child was OK. She would check, double-check and triple-check that the window in that room was locked.

And, what about the impact on the children of the offender?

We refer to them as *little angels* because they are totally innocent. They did nothing to deserve the long-term *payment* for the sins committed by one or both parents.

Still, the child suffers immensely. Having one parent (or *both*) incarcerated is not easy to deal with in a healthy way. Hopefully, this will serve as a powerful future deterrent. Our prayer is that it causes us all to stop and consider the real, full, or "total" cost of unwise decisions.

The offender needs to consider the FULL impact of incarceration not just upon himself or herself but upon the *entire* family - spouse, parents, child or children, siblings, grandparents, friends, etc. This includes hardships imposed during confinement but also, long after release. The financial pain is obvious, but the *emotional* pain is deeper. Some offenses carry a *lifetime* of difficult consequences for the offender, the offender's family, and the victim.

Unfortunately, few marriages and families survive having a spouse or parent (or both) locked up. Most aftercare programs are designed for “single” men and women. One may *enter* prison “married” but most end up “single” by the date of release!

How much does a *wasted* marriage cost? What is the *price*? Most leave prison thinking of themselves as *damaged* goods. This damages future relationships. “Damaged” . . . we do not see ourselves as *worthy* of the love of “healthy” or “normal” people so we go digging around in all the wrong places looking for affection.

Before we realize it, we have become entangled in a destructive relationship that almost “destines” us for added heartache and pain. More than a few view prison as a way to escape a disastrous relationship.

Do we truly “pay the price” and move on? Or do we keep on *making regular payments* for the rest of our lives? The “interest” gets tacked onto this *balloon note* and it becomes a deadly albatross.

What constitutes “full payment” for any crime? There are legal definitions to distinguish a *misdemeanor* from a *felony* with worsening consequences. The actual “payment” is looked at in different ways by . . .

- (1) **The victim**
- (2) **The offender**
- (3) **A jury of peers**
- (4) **A judge**
- (5) **Society-at-large**

If we look through **God’s** eyes, what would we see? All “sin” is *the disobedience of God’s will* (First John 3:4). What can “wash away” sin? Twenty-five years or life in prison is not enough. The blood of bulls and goats will not work. The “death penalty” does not do it. The sacrifice of your first-born is insufficient. It required the death of the only begotten Son of God, the innocent Lamb (Hebrews 9:22). Come to Jesus. We sing, “What can take away my sin?” the chorus answers over and over – *Nothing but the blood!*



Yes, God gives new life! Do not mistakenly think, however, that there will not be rough patches. Like Saul of Tarsus, you will have “thorns” to contend with and it will be hard to keep focused on “reaching forth to the things before us” (Philippians 3:13-14).