

True Transforming Power

Over the seventeen years of my incarceration I have witnessed a huge influx of young Black men coming into the prison system. Through teaching classes on personal development, facilitating workshops on different issues, I have come to know many of these young men. Many of them are in prison for violent crimes and are or at one point were in gangs. The majority of these youth were raised in impoverished neighborhoods riddled with crime, drugs and violence, and grew up without their fathers present or a positive male role model.

Many may say that being raised without a father figure in a crime ridden neighborhood is no excuse for a person to engage in criminal/gang behavior. I agree. However, I ask what role does it play and how is incarceration making these young men better? I know first hand that warehousing a person in a prison for years does not change their criminogenic attitude. Nor are the conditions in the communities they came from. So what really causes a person to change the way they think and live? What makes a person realize their own self worth and that of others?

In my quest to find answers I realized that many of our young people who are in gangs and have committed violent acts against others, are in many ways experiencing a disconnect from their own humanity as well as the humanity of others. I believe that in order for a person to intentionally take the life of another, something inside of them has to die first. Something internal has to be disconnected from one's own humaneness, and one must not see the value in their own life, in order to take the life of another.

Imprisonment does not address the antisocial behavior and crime generative attitudes and behaviors of our youth. What our young people need are people who honestly believe that not even the most heinous acts necessarily separate those incarcerated from the circle of humanity. Our young people need people who have a genuine interest in their lives and want to see them be better to themselves, families and communities. Our young people need mentors, counselors, educators, spiritual leaders to help them navigate a journey of

introspection, so they can re-connect to their humanity and realize their own self worth and the value of others.

It is only through this level of intervention that we will begin to see a change in the attitudes and behaviors of our young people. Interpersonal relationships with quality people who believe in them is where true transformation begins. There is something life changing about someone believing in you when you have never believed in yourself. Receiving validation for doing positive things and not negative ones is what our young people need.

Throughout my journey of incarceration what I've learned is that, incarceration in and of itself does not necessarily cause a person to change the way they think and live. People who care do! When people believe you are more than your criminal act, and do not define you by it, you are inspired to be more. True transforming power lies within the people, the people who care enough to take an interest in those who have made poor choices and are incarcerated.

Hebrews 13:3

Bruce Bryant can be reached
at: Bruce Bryant 96-A-5569
Sullivan Correctional Facility
P.O. Box 116
Fallsburg, New York 12733