

The White Paper by Dr. Henry Brandt

The InnerChange Freedom Initiative™ : A Christian Prison Community

IFI holds great promise for prisons throughout America and the world. This paper outlines the philosophy and underlying principles of The InnerChange Freedom Initiative™. The program is very different from many other rehabilitative programs that have come before.

On the surface, IFI may look like a type of therapeutic community, but it is not. Both therapeutic and transformational prison programs operate through small groups and seek to equip members for life after prison. A therapeutic model is dependent on the interpretation of life through man's eyes and is based upon understandings of the social sciences.

Therapeutic communities seek to equip prisoners for life after prison by teaching them to manage behavior. Support groups and classes connect prisoners with a loving community of like-minded people who can encourage them and give affirmation. Healing one's relationship with others is the primary focus.

The IFI model, by contrast, seeks to "cure" members by identifying sin as the root of their problems. Members learn how God can heal them permanently, if they turn from their sinful past, are willing to see the world through God's eyes, and surrender themselves to God's will. IFI directs members to God as the source of love and inner healing. Members then build on this new relationship to recast human relationships based on biblical insights.

In summary, IFI and therapeutic models have some similar methodologies, but they have very different goals, and are rooted in quite different philosophies. The therapeutic model seeks first to reconcile the relationship of a prisoner to other human beings. The IFI model, in contrast, seeks to reconcile people through changing their relationship with God.

A key concept in Chuck Colson's writings is that the individual must be born again. As inmates are transformed by the power of God, they learn to turn from a sinful past, recognizing that *"sin is not simply the wrong we do our neighbor when we cheat him, or the wrong we do ourselves when we abuse our bodies, Sin, all sin, is a root rebellion and offense against God (Colson 166¹)*. Admitting sinfulness and asking God's forgiveness is the first step. *"We have the capacity to change anything about our lives...but we cannot change our own sinful nature"*(144). Repentance is a change of mind and heart away from sin and toward God.

Focus on the Bible is essential in this step. Colson learned this process while he was in prison. *"For it was the Bible that caused me to hunger for righteousness and seek holiness; and it is the Bible that continues to challenge my life today. That is radical stuff. It is irresistibly convicting. It is the power of God's Word and it is, all by itself, life-changing"* (39).

¹ All references are to Chuck Colson's *Loving God* (Zondervan, 1983), except quotes from the Bible.

“Christianity must evoke from the believer the same response it drew from the first disciples: a passionate desire to obey God—a willingly entered-into discipline. That is the beginning of true discipleship. That is the beginning of loving God” (38).

Repentance and reconciliation are an ongoing state of mind, which do not simply exist in one moment of time. IFI emphasizes this realization, and fosters humility and a teachable attitude, that in turn creates opportunities for prisoners to break free from old habits. They learn new life skills, rooted in biblical principles and God turns their lives around. *“Repentance is an inescapable consequence of regeneration, an indispensable part of the conversion process that takes place under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. But repentance is also a continuing state of mind. We are warned, for example, to repent before partaking of communion. Also, believers prove their repentance by their deeds. Without a continuing repentant attitude—a persistent desire to turn from our own nature and seek God’s nature Christian growth is impossible. Loving God is impossible” (Colson 109).*

IFI Core Values

Biblical principles are integrated into the entire course curriculum of IFI, rather than being compartmentalized in specific classes. In other words, the application of biblical principles is not an agenda item—it *is* the agenda. IFI is a Christian community, where all members, staff, and volunteers seek to be Christ-like in their honesty, humility, and unconditional love for each other. Members are taught biblical principles in the context of teachable moments. Throughout each day they are provided time for reflection and meditation in order to integrate those principles in their lives. The IFI community serves as the crucible for learning and testing biblical principles. To facilitate this, biblical principles and core values are prominently displayed throughout the facility and promoted through memorization. Though there are many important biblical values to learn, IFI highlights several that are normally deficient in an offenders’ life.

Integrity, Truth. By the use of Bible verses, the member is encouraged to consider and discuss the meaning of integrity and truth. Members are taught to reflect on their actions, words, and beliefs as they relate to biblical principles. The *integrity* of members is central to the success of this prison community. For instance: *Who may dwell in your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, who speaks thy truth in his tent” (Ps. 15:1-2). “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col. 3:9-10). “Keep my soul, and deliver me; Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You” (Psalm 25:20). “Vindicate me, O LORD, For I have walked in my integrity. I have also trusted in the LORD; I shall not slip” (Psalm 26:1). “Oh, continue Your loving kindness to those who know You, And Your righteousness to the upright in heart” (Psalm 36:10).*

Fellowship is another biblical value on which the program focuses. It is rooted in Jesus’ example of unconditional love for His friends and enemies as evidenced in His actions. Members are coached on how to build a loving community within the program. This enables them to create similar relationships within the church when they leave prison. The Bible is permeated with references to the importance of unconditional love

and community. For instance: *“Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works”* (Heb. 10:24). *“Exhort one another daily while it is called ‘today’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin”* (Heb. 3:13). *“therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”* (Philippians 2:1-2). *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7).

Affirmation is a value in both IFI and therapeutic models. However, affirmation within an IFI model is defined as God’s affirmation, rather than man’s affirmation of us. Prisoners learn that it is important to affirm and encourage each other consistent with God’s principles. Some members have never experienced affirmation by another person and do not know what it means to be valued. Others have been affirmed for wrong attitudes or behaviors. In IFI, members learn that biblically based affirmation is different from humanistic affirmation. In other words, affirming one another must be consistent with biblical standards. For instance: *“Not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends”* (2 Cor. 10:18). *“Let each examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another”* (Gal. 6:4). *“It is a very small thing that I be judged by you...He who judges me is the Lord”* (1 Cor. 4:3-4). *“My soul waits silently for God above. My expectation is from Him”* (Ps. 62:5).

Responsibility is a critical value of the IFI program. In IFI there is heavy emphasis on taking responsibility for our choices, both past and present. Members are taught to be accountable for their actions, and to take responsibility for initiating acts of healing and reconciliation with those they have alienated and hurt. In this way, they are restored to their Creator, families, and communities. These verses illustrate the point: *“We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done whether good or bad”* (2Cor. 5:10). *“Let the wicked forsake his way; and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon”* (Isaiah 55:7). *“For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God”* (Romans 10:2-3). *“And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,”* (Philippians 3:9-10).

Restoration. We use the word restoration to mean the process of restoring members to more productive relationships with their families and communities—the horizontal relationships we mentioned. Other words that describe this process are mending, overhauling, healing, making like new, and reassembling.

Like transformation, restoration involves change, often incremental. God’s love experienced by IFI members in the transformation process is in turn displayed to others—restoring and reconciling relationships. In Luke 19, the story of Zacchaeus is a wonderful

example of biblical restoration. Here Zacchaeus came to Jesus, confessed his wrongdoing, and decided to pay back what he had stolen. In addition, he said that he would give generously of his wealth to the needy. This showed that he was restored to God, himself, and to the community.

Productivity is an important value anchored in biblical principles, and one that most inmates lack. In IFI, productivity is defined as the effective use of one's time in line with God's principles. Ephesians 5:16 refers to, "*redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*" In this context, prisoners are taught to be good stewards of their time, investing in priorities that are in line with God's will. IFI trains prisoners to engage in productive work, so they may become productive, contributing members of their community after their release. The Bible instructs us: "*because of laziness the building decays and through idleness of hands the house leaks*" (Ecc. 10:18), and "*whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus* (Col. 3:17). "*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,*" (Col. 3:23). Additional references include: Eph. 6:5-7; Mark 10:45; 1 Thess. 3:10.

Staff and Volunteers at IFI

Staffing a transformational model requires leaders who facilitate the application of biblical truth in the lives of members rather than provide intensive therapy. It requires that all staff and volunteers are Christians who are living vital, empowered lives. IFI staff and volunteers seek to model Christ through being controlled by the fruit of the Spirit—"*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Conclusion

IFI seeks a radical transformation that is only possible through the power of God, Who created us in His image for His purpose. Jesus came to "*heal the brokenhearted and proclaim liberty for the captives, open the eyes of the blind, and set at liberty the oppressed.*" (Isaiah 42). Only through the power of God can anyone truly change their heart.

The following chart provides a comparison of the two models.

TRANSFORMATION VS. THERAPEUTIC MODEL

➤ Transformed persons seek to appropriate God's ways as revealed through biblical truth.	➤ Therapy seeks to manage symptoms according to human understanding.
➤ Criminal behavior is a manifestation of alienation between the self and God.	➤ Criminal behavior is a result of an alienation of self from society.
➤ Transformation enables prisoners to see the world and others as God sees them.	➤ Therapy seeks to help prisoners see how the world can meet their needs.
➤ Acceptance of God and biblical principles results in cure through the power of the Holy Spirit.	➤ Relief of symptoms is dependent on the power of human love and commitment through support groups and community.
➤ Transformation emphasizes the change in behavior as a result of encountering Jesus Christ	➤ Therapy emphasizes the management of behavior as it impacts on others.
➤ Insight into one's problems is gained from reading, understanding, and applying biblical principles.	➤ Insight into one's problems is gained through group and individual interaction.
➤ All problems in life arise from a condition of sin.	➤ Problems in life arise may arise from past inability to have one's needs met.
➤ Focuses on honesty with self and God first; honesty with others will follow.	➤ Focuses on honesty with self and others.
➤ Focuses on the power of the Creator. It holds up Christ as the source of that power and the work of the Holy Spirit as the way to true change.	➤ Focuses on the power of Creation. Therapy may or may not point to some higher power.
➤ The quality of our relationships to each other is conditioned by the quality of our relationship to Jesus Christ and His love as reflected in others.	➤ Mental health and healthy relationships are dependent on the expression and affirmation of our needs.
➤ Transformation happens through an instantaneous miracle; it then builds the prisoner up with familiarity of the Bible.	➤ Therapy seeks gradual change of self as one interacts with one's environment.