

Why is Reuben active in prison ministry?

Let Reuben tell his story:

I was a sincere father of a young family and served in my church as a deacon. I was driving people in my taxi and was well known in my community. One of my regular customers was a drunkard, but even if he did not always pay right away, he paid later. One morning I had a phone call from my colleagues that the police is looking for me. So, I went to the police station to find out, what the reason is. I found an acquainted couple sitting outside the police station and greeted them. The couple had bandages on their hands and bodies. I went in and introduced myself to the officer. As waiting outside the couple didn't talk to me. As the officer called all of us in, he asked the couple: "is he the one?" and they responded: "YES!" I still didn't know, what happened. The police officer said: "You are accused of robbery with violence – capital offence!" That was the last time that I saw freedom. I left home telling my wife I went to work and never came back. She was left with 2 little children, pregnant with the third.

After three days in a police cell I was taken to court. The pledge was read that I had robbed Mpiraro Ole Rayo of 1000 KES, a Rungu, and a knife (actually, I lent him 2000 KES). Found guilty, the sentence was death by hanging. From there, I was at the kamiti maximum prison remand. From there I went to court every two weeks. The magistrate of Kibera law court found me guilty and I was sentenced to be hang to death, but with an option of appealing against sentence and conviction. So, I appealed and had to wait for another one and a half years to appear in a higher court. I remained in a death raw with all the other people sentenced to death. It was like this: about 10 people in a cell of 9m² where we were sleeping. If one wanted to turn, everybody had to turn. Over time people were sore on some body parts of sleeping on the floor. People were allowed outside for max. of 15 minutes, but not on weekends and holidays. The food was served under the door. It was ugali (maize mash), uji (porritch) and some beans. Toilet times were twice a day. During that time, Reuben's heart was so hart towards God, because he, his family and his church knew that he was innocent. He cursed God and was so angry with him. But the good thing was, he also found some other believers in prison. Over time he started thanking and appreciating God, because God knows him and he knows, why he is there. That made him have peace in his heart. Joy came and Reuben started telling other people about his faith in Christ. Most criminals would mock Christians: "You are innocent. You need to revenge after being freed." But Reuben answered: "I will wait for God to revenge for me." Their response was: "If you wait on God, it will take longer. If we revenge, it will be instantly. Just go and kill them." But God started opening doors for believers: they were allowed to have bible study. Sometimes they were allowed to visit other believers in different cells. After a while, they were allowed to preach in the inner court, where people spent time during their 15 minutes outside. People were in rags or even naked. They were only allowed to have one pair of clothes. When the clothes were washed, people remained naked. Lice were everywhere. Prisoners responded to the preaching in a different way. Some changed and repented. Other mocked them and said: "Prison is not a place for preaching. Criminals never change. And who are you? You are one of us anyways."

One morning I was called for high court for his appeal. When I went, he was supposed to meet two judges bendge. The hearing could not take place, because one of the judges just recently passed away. And there was no chance to case with one judge. Therefore I was sent back to wait for the dead judge to be replaced. After three months I was called again. Another judge died. So, I had to

wait for further several months. When I was called again, my case was heard. Something very unusual happened. Around 20 cases were listened to, some were dismissed to a higher court, some were given 14 years or life sentence instead of being hung, some had to come for their judgment. But for me and some few others we were released that particular day. This is how it was: The prosecutor stood and gave his ruling. Some of the points he raised were: "Why did the attacked person only reported three days after the attack? And he said that the robber had a very bright spot light and wore a hood. How could the victim identify the robber? And why was there not an identification parade done? And he said: This prisoner (Reuben) should not have stayed in the police cell for even one day!" Therefore, since the prosecutor should not have fixed me in prison, the judge stood and asked the defense lawyer: "What do you have to say now? What are you arguing about?" The defense lawyer had nothing to say. So, I was released before the my lawyer could even speak. That was not normal! Many of my supporters where there: my wife, friends, and church members. I was set free by the court, but had to go back to prison to clear my belongings and be discharged. Therefore I had to spend the night but I never slept because of joy of being set free. Somehow, I was torn: though I was relieved by being set free, I had sympathy towards the believers and other friends, whom I had to leave behind bars. Next day so many of my supporters came to pick me at the gate. At home a big celebration awaited me. I was invited to so many churches to speak and give my testimony. So many, who had prayed for me in the time of imprisonment.

My joy was that people received me: my wife and family, my friends and church members. They did not reject me. But life was hard for my family in the meantime, since I was the only bread winner and had to sell everything, including my car which I used to work with, in order to pay the lawyers. I started life from scratch!

It was not easy to find a job. Therefore I felt to go back to taxi driving. Friends and church people helped me to raise money for an old car. I took it to the garage for repair. It was well repaired and looked nice, waiting for my pick up and start the work. Funny enough, I was supposed to go to pick it up the following day. The night before it rained heavily, so much that the water covered the whole garage completely and vehicles in it, including mine. I was so much discouraged and some people said: "This man must be cursed! He is coming from one calamity to another." But my wife stood by my side and some friends. So, I felt encouraged to continue with life.

After some time one of my friends called me and gave me a job to be a long-distance truck assistant (tan boy), where I worked diligently. But it was just enough to feed my family. It was during that time that an old friend of mine, an elderly man of God, Vick Paul, the founder of Diguna Mission (we had known each other for a long time) came looking for me. He told me about a group of missionaries, who wanted to start prison ministries in Kenya. They were looking for a godly married man with prison experience, if possible. He encouraged me to think and pray about it, since he knew I had all these qualifications. I was hesitating, because I started a secured job recently, and was not ready to risk my life and expose my family to uncertainty again. We agreed to both pray about it. After three months or so, German missionaries came to Kenya and invited me for a meeting, Vick being amongst them. We agreed to start a prison ministry in Western Kenya (CrossRoads in Songor), where they could buy a big piece of land to support the ministry through agriculture. That's how I found myself getting fully engaged in prison ministry. It started around 2005. Ever since I have been involved in this field.

Through CrossRoads God opened my eyes to realize, why I had to be in prison and the purpose for my life in serving God. Through CrossRoads we could visit prisons in Western Kenya and especially those for young men (B.I – bostol institution), whereby we gave a chances to young offenders to stay with our families (extended family) to experience family love and life. We also gave them a chance to learn skills according to their talents, enabling them to tackle life in future. We took some of them to the polytechnic. Other opted to stay on the farm. Some have done very well in their lives and we are still in contact with each other.

As my contract was over with CrossRoads, I came back to my home place. The passion for prison ministry remained within me. I started visiting the prisons around my county. In this case I have adopted two prisons, where I visit once per month ever since. At first it was not easy to convince other believers to join me to visit. For many years I went alone or with inconsistent fellows. But with time I have managed to form a group of about 20 people from different churches.

What do we do there? – We bring God’s love! Apart from God’s word (in form of bibles, Christian literature and preaching) we try to meet their personal needs, once in a while – for example for the women we take sanitary pads, toilet papers, soaps, tooth paste etc. If they are children, we take clothes and sometimes toys. Also men are supplied for their needs. In addition we reintegrate people into their families and society (those who ask for it) through the help of chaplains and prison welfare offices respectfully. Sometimes we give fare or take released prisoners home. We have never lacked of supply. God has been very faithful!

God really prepares people in his special way. I had never had in my mind that I one day be a prisoner in death row. And I had nothing to do with prisoners or even having compassion for them. Anybody behind bars was a criminal to me. They deserved fair judgment and punishment. God had his own way to change my mind, my heart and my thinking towards them. Those, whom I despised have turned to be my heart beat. When I see them, I see God in them.

Future plans look like this: Some young men asked me: “What do I do after getting out of prison? Would you employ me?” That makes me restless. With my team we have started to put up a workshop, where former prisoners can utilize their skills by welding and carpentry, hopefully also computer skills to start with.

God removed me from my comfort life (happy marriage, recognized taxi driver, known in society and church) to a place full of darkness in order to bring hope and light to rejected people.

Some people called me to the police station, but Vick Paul called me into ministry. Both of them were destiny makers!

God does not call you for a day or two. He has a calling for life for each one of us. He makes sure that he provides for your calling. For the last more than 10 years he has provided and we have never lacked or skipped one day to bring good news to the prisoners.

Romans 8, 28: So we are convinced that every detail of our lives is continually woven together for good, for we are his lovers who have been called to fulfill his designed purpose.