ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: **"PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD": A MIXED-METHODS EXPLORATION OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY WITHIN FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLES' DESISTANCE PROCESS**

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Research on the relationship between religion and spirituality in promoting desistance among the formerly incarcerated remains mixed. Certain studies indicate a negative correlation between religiosity and criminal behavior (Johnson, 2011; Levitt & Loper, 2009), whereas others report no significant link between religion and post-release conduct (Giordano et al., 2008; Stansfield et al., 2017). To advance this body of literature, the present mixed-methods cross-sectional study examined the association between religion and spirituality on self-reported instances of almost re- offending among formerly incarcerated individuals utilizing secondary data analysis. Additionally, perceptions on how religion and/or spirituality contributed to formerly incarcerated individual's desistance process was explored, sensitized by Family Systems Theory. The sample

consisted of n = 191 formerly incarcerated individuals who were released from a carceral setting two or more years ago, and reported successfully desisting from further criminal behavior.

Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and logistic regression to examine the relationships between religion, spirituality, and self-reported reoffending. Thematic analysis was used to analyze participants' qualitative responses of how religion and spirituality contributed to the desistance process. The present study contributed to the advancement of knowledge in desistance processes, with implications for criminal justice rehabilitation to guide efforts in supporting the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into society.

“PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD”: A MIXED-METHODS EXPLORATION OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY WITHIN FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLES’ DESISTANCE PROCESS

BY

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List of Abbreviations

FIP (Formerly incarcerated person/people)

SMI (Severe mental illness)

BIPOC (Black, Brown and Indigenous Communities)

FST (Family Stress Theory)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Chapter I: Introduction

Mass Incarceration and Recidivism

Mass incarceration presents a significant societal challenge, one that holds profound public health implications such as a surge in prison suicides by 85% from 2001 to 2018 (Carson et al., 2021) and dehumanizing conditions, such as solitary confinement, contributing to adverse mental and physical health outcomes (Cloud et al., 2023). In 2001, Garland (2001b, p. 2) introduced the concept of "mass imprisonment" to draw attention to the unprecedented growth in the number of incarcerated individuals in the United States (U.S.), particularly the systematic imprisonment, and subsequent overrepresentation, of entire demographic groups in carceral settings (Beckett & Francis, 2020). Garland (2001) defines mass incarceration as a historical and comparative phenomenon characterized by extremely high rates of imprisonment that disproportionately impact specific segments of the population, such as black, brown, and indigenous (BIPOC) communities (Wildeman & Wang, 2017). In addition to mass incarcerating people of color, correctional facilities overwhelmingly incarcerate people with severe mental illnesses despite being under-resourced (Prins, 2014).

The U.S., with less than 5% of the world's population, incarcerates around 20% of the global prisoner population (Haney, 2012). Research indicates a high recidivism rate, with two-thirds of released individuals re-arrested within three years, and about half re-incarcerated (Durose et al., 2014). The D.C., Maryland, and Virginia metro areas (DMV) have some of the highest incarceration rates and minority overrepresentation in the U.S. (Prison Policy, 2018). Recent developments, like President Biden's designation of April 2021 as "Second Chance Month," highlight the need for societal reintegration and emphasize benefits to curb recidivism (Biden, 2021). Policies such as "Second Chance Month" and the "First Step Act" signify a shift

towards rehabilitative efforts for recidivism reduction and reentry success (Federal Bureau of Prisons, n.d.).

Given the elevated rates of reoffending, impact of imprisonment on mental health and the acknowledgment of policies aimed at understanding factors conducive to desistance, there exists a compelling need to investigate protective factors against recidivism that facilitate enduring positive change to develop targeted interventions, improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, and address the broader social and economic consequences of mass incarceration. Consequently, examining desistance factors can contribute to the formulation of evidence-based policies that prioritize rehabilitation, reduce disparities, and enhance public safety. It is beyond the scope of the present study to examine the broader consequences and systemic changes associated with the criminal justice system. However, the focus of the present study was to initiate an exploration into 'humane' perspectives towards individuals released from prisons, with a specific emphasis on examining the role of religion and spirituality in fostering desistance. The objective of the present study was to elucidate how religion and/or spirituality may shape desistance, thereby influencing sustained, long-term transformation in an individual. The present mixed-methods study endeavored to assess the potential association between religion, spirituality, and self-reported instances of almost reoffending. Furthermore, the goal of the study was to delineate the subtleties in how formerly incarcerated individuals perceive the contributions of religion and spirituality to the desistance process.

Recidivism

To understand the term reoffending, it is pertinent to define recidivism as reoffending and recidivism can be used interchangeably. In the present study, the term "re-offending" was

employed, as it corresponds to the terminology utilized in the original data collection (i.e., survey). The choice to use the term “reoffending” was based on its perceived ease of comprehension for the study participants in contrast to the term "recidivism." Recidivism, as described by Alper et al. (2018) is a concept used to measure an individual's return to criminal activity after their release from prison. It involves three distinct criteria: the release from prison, the subsequent reentry failure or returns to criminal activity, and observation of the recurrence over a defined period, ranging from six months to several years. The term "reoffending" refers to an individual's re-engagement with the criminal legal system after being released from prison. This can occur through the commission of a new crime or the continuation of criminal activity. Nguyen et al (2011) defines a type of recidivism (penitentiary recidivism) as re-entry into prison as a consequence of the same person committing a new criminal offense. The commonality among these definitions remains the notion of returning to prison after committing a crime post release from prison, either as a new crime or continuing the previous crime for which one was imprisoned.

Criminal behavior and the likelihood of recidivism are influenced by a combination of individual, societal, and environmental factors (Redondo, 2015). Research has highlighted contextual elements, including economic disadvantage, racial segregation, and proximity to other individuals with a history of recidivism, as significant contributors to individual recidivism (Clark, 2016; Stahler et al., 2013). Mental health factors such as antisocial tendencies and an early onset of criminal behavior are predictive of recidivism (Staff et al., 2015). Additionally, neuropsychological challenges, such as learning difficulties and reasoning problems, coupled with academic struggles during childhood and adolescence, interact with criminogenic environments, potentially leading to persistent or recurring criminal conduct

(Međedovi et al., 2012; Savage et al., 2013). Furthermore, to address the factors influencing recidivism and cessation of risky behavior, the Risk, Needs, and Responsivity (RNR) model, the prominent model in forensic practice identifies eight central areas that predict recidivism. These areas include antisocial history indicating past criminal activities (due to deficient self-control), antisocial personality reflecting traits such as deceitfulness and irresponsibility, associations with antisocial peers indicating how social circles in shaping behavior, antisocial attitudes include negative beliefs that support deviance. Additionally, the RNR model includes family dynamics such as dysfunctional structures impacting behavior, substance abuse, employment status, and utilization of leisure time which include activities that may either foster pro-social behaviors or contribute to antisocial actions (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Collectively, these factors provide comprehensive insights into the multifaceted nature of criminal conduct. Evidence-based interventions intended to prevent recidivism, such as the RNR model, further underscore how individual factors may predispose an individual to commit crimes that may or may not be in one's control.

Understanding what predicts recidivism (e.g., RNR) is critical to understanding the contexts in which desistance can occur. Studies have shown that committing a crime is not solely an individual choice, but rather, a contextual lack of access to resources and opportunities that may make crime a more favorable option (Koschmann & Peterson, 2013). Social capital is cultivated within interconnected networks, where individuals establish connections with others capable of offering valuable information and mutual advantages (Bourdieu, 1986). As noted by Koschmann and Peterson (2013) the core issues of what contributes to recidivism lie in the deterioration of relationships, trust, and connections within society (i.e., erosion of social safety net). Social realities are shaped and brought into existence

through communication, meaning that our understanding of the world and our social environment is constructed through the way we communicate and interact with one another (Koschmann & Peterson, 2013). Many ex-prisoners face the challenge of being disconnected from social networks (e.g., religious institutions, communities, etc.) that offer essential social capital, complicating their reintegration into society. For some, the absence of these connections may even contribute to initial involvement in criminal activities, indicating that social breakdowns often precede incarceration rather than solely resulting from it (Koschmann & Peterson, 2013). Accessing one such social network system, religious and spiritual institutions, during and after incarceration may foster social connections that offer the emotional and practical support, such as a social safety net, required to deter recidivism.

Moreover, Weaver (2007) argues that the role of punitive policies emerged as a response to racialized crimes. Punitive policies convey the role of one's racial identity impacting the policies for deciding harsher forms of punishment. Overall, an offender can be viewed from the broader lens of systemic factors such as punitive policies, one's racial identity, access to social resources and so on in contributing to the commission of crime.

Protective Factors against Recidivism

The consequences of incarceration include issues of overcrowding, increased psychological stress for those with mental health concerns, a social and economic impact after release (Turney, 2023). In addition to social and economic barriers post-release from prison, imprisonment can result in former prisoners to face an identity crisis (Maruna et al., 2006). Research suggests that religion and spirituality may serve as a coping mechanism that helps formerly incarcerated people (FIP) deal with this crisis by providing a new sense of self, a sense of purpose, and a reason to avoid past illicit behavior (Stansfield et al., 2019). The study

by Stansfield et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of how the religious community responds to an offender post release, encompasses broad community level religious support influencing the likelihood of reoffending. Thereby, viewing religion not only as an individual form of coping but the influence of community level responses to one's religion post-release.

Spirituality, as defined by Hall et al. (2011), is a more abstract concept that extends beyond tangible behaviors like rituals and religious practices. Spirituality is characterized as a multifaceted and personal concept involving experiences of transcendence leading to greater knowledge and love (Hall et al., 2011). On the other hand, Glock and Stark (1965) have significantly contributed to the understanding of religion and religiosity. They propose that all world religions share five universal dimensions: ideological (comprising fundamental beliefs), intellectual (involving cognitive knowledge), ritualistic (encompassing religious practices), experiential (related to emotional connection and religious expression), and consequential (pertaining to decisions and commitments made by adherents, such as their stance on issues like capital punishment, homosexuality, and animal slaughter). Additionally, while religion is often a source of comfort and guidance, it can also have a dark side characterized by potential for extremism, intolerance, and manipulation. Instances of religious violence, discrimination, and abuse of power underscore the darker facets, emphasizing the need for critical examination and awareness of the negative impacts that can arise from extremist interpretations or misuse of religious doctrines (Smith et al., 2018). Although it remains imperative to acknowledge times in which religion has been weaponized to cause harm, it is equally essential to recognize the potential positive effects of one's faith and its possible implications on desistance. In the present study, faith identity will be used to indicate participant's identification as religious, spiritual or neither.

Numerous criminological studies have delved into the complexities of religion and spirituality, exploring aspects like attendance at religious institutions, familial significance of religion, and personal attitudes towards spirituality (Desmond et al., 2013; Salas-Wright et al., 2014). Despite efforts to investigate the relationship between religion, spirituality, and desistance, the absence of a unified operational definition for these constructs have posed challenges for accurate measurement in research (Abeling-Judge, 2016). For instance, Stansfield et al. (2019) gauge religious support by measuring attendance in humanist, spiritual, or religious (HSR) programs in prison. However, measuring faith by attendance alone may not fully capture an individual's religiosity or spirituality, especially internal beliefs not tied to rituals or HSR program attendance. Indeed, a significant gap in this body of literature is qualitatively exploring faith in participants' own words.

Research evidence has recently begun to substantiate the significant role of religion as a coping mechanism, and the negative association between religion and recidivism (Stansfield et al., 2019). Coping strategies, such as seeking social and emotional support, employing religious coping, and seeking meaning, are recognized as valuable approaches for managing challenging life experiences broadly, and for formerly incarcerated people navigating reentry (Vanhooren et al., 2018). These coping strategies have been identified as important predictors of posttraumatic growth in the general population such as positive reinterpretation, emotional expression and processing and support, as indicated by various studies (e.g., Cho & Park, 2013).For instance, over time a positive relationship was found between self-controllability and perceived growth among former prisoners in Israel (Dekel, Mandl, & Solomon, 2011). In other words, individuals who reported higher levels of perceived control over their own actions or circumstances at the initial assessment were more likely to report a greater sense of

personal growth later on. Given how religious and spiritual spaces may offer social safety contexts, it's important to consider how religion and spirituality function in this communicative process with not just the society, but the relationship, trust and connection to one's faith and social support systems (Koschmann & Peterson, 2013). Religious and spiritual belief systems often provide individuals with frameworks and shared symbols for making sense of their experiences and the world around them. Through religious or spiritual communication, individuals may collectively create and reinforce certain social realities, values, and norms. These belief systems can influence how people perceive and interact with the world, contributing to the formation of their social realities. Likewise, the social control theory, posited by Hirschi (1969), echoes the role of societal engagement and connections suggesting that attachment to conventional activities and conformity to these activities tend to reduce engagement in criminal behavior. Thus, religious institutions and programs serve as valuable avenues for fostering social bonds due to their role as integral "community institutions" deeply interwoven into the fabric of neighborhoods (McRoberts & Omar, 2002). While incarceration can strain family connections (Lynch & Sabol, 2004), religious support such as spiritual guidance, community support, a moral and ethical framework, and alternative sources of assistance may play a critical role in mending and fortifying these relationships while concurrently providing alternative sources of guidance and assistance (Duwe & Clark, 2013). Religious communities offer a supportive network, aiding in personal growth and contributing to the reparation of family connections (Duwe & Clark, 2013; Wright et al., 1999) Overall, religious support plays a significant role in mitigating the negative impacts of incarceration on familial relationships and assisting individuals in their reintegration into society.

Societal tropes lead many of us to believe that life after imprisonment is filled with despair and hopelessness. However, Vanhooren et al (2018) offer intriguing factors that facilitate positive personal changes after experiencing adversity in prison such as shifts in self-awareness, improved interpersonal appreciation, new found life purposes, and better understanding of crime severity and consequences (Vanhooren et al., 2017). Incarceration can even be seen as a significant turning point in the lives of incarcerated persons, with some viewing it as a "blessing" or "God's plan" for their transformation (Johnson, 2011). Therefore, the present mixed-methods study attempted to understand the association between religion and spirituality in self-reported instances of desistance, and captured the perceptions about religion and spirituality in contributing to the desistance process. The qualitative responses allowed to capture the meanings associated with the terms religion and spirituality, strengthening the quantitative findings of the study.

Desistance

A foundational framework in the study of criminal behavior has been the distinction between "termination" (the endpoint, denoting "the time at which criminal activity stops") and "desistance" (the underlying causal process facilitating the cessation of offending; Laub & Sampson, 2002). However, Maruna and Farrall (2004) argue that this framework conflates the causes of desistance with desistance itself. In response, they propose a more nuanced approach, akin to Lemert's (1951) concept of primary and secondary deviance.

In the revised perspective, Maruna and Farrall (2004) identify two discernible phases within the desistance process: primary and secondary desistance. Primary desistance denotes any period free from criminal activity during a criminal career. Conversely, secondary desistance signifies the transition from a pattern of non-offending behavior to the internalization of a non-

offending role or identity (Maruna & Farrall, 2004). More recently, McNeill (2016) introduced the concept of tertiary desistance to capture the social recognition of change and the emergence of a sense of belonging. Importantly, these stages are not meant to imply a strict linear progression within the desistance process. In addressing potential misinterpretations, Nugent and Schinkel (2016) suggest descriptive terms like "act-desistance" for the absence of offending behavior, "identity desistance" for internal acceptance of a non-offending identity, and "relational desistance" for recognition of change by external parties.

Despite this potential connection, there is currently a lack of research evidence confirming the role of religion and spirituality in identity desistance. Weaver (2019) emphasizes that this refined terminology offers a more precise understanding of the complex phenomenon of desistance from criminal behavior. The nuanced perspective on desistance, goes beyond merely marking a cessation of criminal behavior, and encompasses deeper and enduring changes both within the individual and in their external context. Building on this view, scholars like Maruna (2001) have argued that criminal behavior is sporadic, and a single instance of non-offending does not necessarily signify permanent change. Instead, desistance should be viewed as a 'maintenance process,' involving long-term abstinence from crime, especially among those with a history of persistent offending, as posited by Maruna (2001).

In line with the view of more lasting change in FIP's, the concept of "Knifing off" and desistance demonstrate that the changes in personality and behavior can be triggered by drastic changes in one's life circumstances: a change of job, marital partner, geographic location, or ideally all of the above (Maruna & Roy, 2007). Traditionally, long lasting change has been seen with respect to one's employment, marriage and families, belonging to military services, while missing the potential role of religion and/or spirituality in contributing to desistance. The impact

of spiritual and/or religious beliefs on an individual's criminal trajectory may hold the key to understanding what literature terms as identity desistance – a profound internal transformation driven by one's faith. It is imperative to broaden our focus to understand how religion and spirituality can provide a more solid foundation for enduring change, post release from prison. The present study attempted to understand the association between religion and spirituality and the self-reported instances of almost reoffending. Additionally, the study captured the perceptions of religion and or spirituality in contributing to the desistance process, with the hope for exploring what contributed to more lasting change with respect to the FIP's desistance process.

Motivation to Change and Role of Religion/Spirituality

Literature has underscored the importance of long-term change, internal motivation and one's readiness to change in shaping behavior change among FIP (Gideon, 2010; Miller & Rollnick, 2002). Davis et al. (2012) found that offenders who achieved success in their parole journey expressed a strong motivation to change and were committed to adhering to their parole conditions. In contrast, those who were unsuccessful in their parole experiences appeared to lack confidence in their ability to successfully transition and comply with the requirements of their parole. Furthermore, the results of the 10-year follow-up revealed a notable trend: those participants who displayed higher levels of confidence in their capacity to refrain from criminal behavior were less prone to committing new offenses. These findings underscore the importance of FIP possessing a combination of motivation, intent, and self-assurance in their ability to abstain from engaging in criminal activities (Burnett & Maruna, 2004). Consequently, during the reentry period, FIP may benefit from connection to social networks that promote motivation and self-assurance, such as faith based institutions. For individuals incarcerated, particularly those

experiencing significant social isolation, religious services can serve as a crucial form of social support within the prison environment. Additionally, maintaining relationships with clergy, mentors, and volunteers can offer essential support that might otherwise be lacking during an individual's reintegration into the community (Johnson, 2011).

According to Giordano et al. (2002), religion may play a significant role in bringing about change among FIP's. The authors suggest that religion can offer a comprehensive framework for behavior and a highly prosocial replacement self that are essential for cognitive transformations. Moreover, religiosity is positively associated with positive emotions and negatively correlated with negative emotions, facilitating emotional transformations (Koenig et al., 2001). Building alternative interpersonal relationships is a positive outcome of religious conversion that can assist offenders in maintaining cognitive and emotional transformation. One's motivation could also be impacted by coping skills, as defined by Lazarus & Folkman's (1986) that encompass behavioral and cognitive efforts to manage external and internal demands of a situation. FIP have been found to rely more on avoidance-oriented (e.g. denial, withdrawal or wishful thinking) and emotion-oriented coping mechanisms (e.g. meaning making of difficult experiences, turning to religion; Philips & Lindsay, 2011).

Similarly, the role of religion in coping with stress, anger and anxiety revealed that religion and spirituality offer emotional comfort through forgiveness, the promise of a better future, and a sense of companionship with a higher power. This, in turn, fosters positive emotions like peace, tolerance, and love, while mitigating anger, anxiety, and depression for men residing in half way homes (Schroeder & Frana, 2009). Moreover, religion and spirituality served as a valuable distraction from challenging life circumstances and played a pivotal role in

guiding individuals towards a more conventional and focused path, ultimately aiding in their journey towards lasting transformation.

Existing research has primarily concentrated on how offenders cope with reentry challenges rather than on whether coping skills actively contribute to the process of desistance (Koski & Bantley, 2013; Phillips & Lindsay, 2011). While certain studies (e.g. Giordano et al., 2008) have begun to investigate the connection between religion, spirituality, and desistance, they often assess these associations solely through church attendance. Relying on church attendance alone can restrict the range of religious beliefs and values considered and assumes that participation in organized religious activities is the sole means of engaging with one's faith. Thus, literature has omitted the relevant scope of one's coping skills, particularly religion and spirituality, that could offer a means of coping and internal motivation to persist in desisting through qualitative and quantitative measures. Desistance literature has established religion and spirituality serving as a tool for coping in prison and post-prison experiences. Keeping this in mind, the present mixed-methods study utilized the FST framework to define religion and spirituality as resources in the lives of FIPs to examine how FIPs faith identity contributes to the desistance process. The present mixed-methods study aimed to address this limitation by examining the association of religion and/or spirituality quantitatively and exploring perceptions of religion and/or spirituality from first-hand accounts of FIP's.

Social Support and Desistance

Research consistently emphasizes the pivotal role of social support in the desistance process. Strong social ties and stable relationships, as highlighted by prior studies (Colvin et al., 2002; Denney et al., 2014; Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Naser & Visher, 2006), prompt offenders to adopt new identities and seize opportunities for transformation. The significance of social

support on one's identity and providing opportunities for more lasting change in an individual aligns with past findings, influencing an offender's decision to refrain from criminal activities. Notably, research has explored the significance of intimate and family relationships, friendships or peer groups, spousal relationships, and religious communities as valuable relationships for offenders (Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Phillips & Lindsay, 2011). In the prison environment, inmates are exposed to direct and indirect forms of coercion such as force, threat, intimidation (direct) or witnessing other being victimized (indirect) impacting, which creates psychological distress and is often traumatic (Colvin, 2000).

Research has established the role of social support in increasing psychological well-being among prisoners (Johnson et al., 2010). Therefore, social support has been viewed as a tangible resource in the form of community support, peers, family members and tends to neglect the potential role of one's perception of religious and spiritual internal or private beliefs as a form of support. This is true, particularly with respect to the focus of research on measuring attendance in religious programs such as HSR in prisons, church attendance etc. Evidently, the conceptual understanding of religion through the examination of religious attendance, participation in faith based programs, perceived support from religious participation has been echoed in the research (Stansfield et al., 2018). However, the association between religion and spirituality as an internal support mechanism explored through first-hand accounts of FIP such as one's relationship to one's faith not tied to any rituals or participation in groups, distinct from religious groups and organizations, remains an underexplored facet of desistance.

Rationale for the Study

Pertinent contributions in the field of desistance literature (Abeling-Judge, 2016; Mapham & Hefferon, 2012; Said & Davidson, 2023; Weaver, 2019) and growing evidence for

the role of religion and spirituality as a coping tool for reintegration (Jang & Franzen, 2013; Johnson, 2011) have emerged. Despite this, a research gap persists in comprehensively understanding how religion and spirituality influence reentry and desistance, mainly due to challenges in defining and measuring these concepts. The current body of literature offers insights into how religion and spirituality may affect reentry. Yet, firsthand accounts from formerly incarcerated persons (FIP) are lacking, particularly in cases where they came close to reoffending, yet desisted. The present study addressed this gap by triangulating quantitative data examining faith identity with qualitative data that explored participants' perceptions of the role religion and/or spirituality plays in shaping desistance.

Abeling-Judge's (2016) meta-analysis echoes the difficulty in establishing a unified definition for religion, missing the aspect of spirituality entirely from desistance literature. Consequently, existing quantitative examinations often focus on aspects like church attendance, overlooking the nuanced role of personal spiritual and/or religious beliefs in desistance. This mixed methods study aimed to address these challenges by quantitatively assessing participants' identification as religious, spiritual, or neither in relation to the desistance process and qualitatively capturing their perceptions of how religion and/or spirituality contributes to desistance. The approach in this study sought to explore both overarching patterns and individual narratives, contributing to a robust knowledge base for policymakers and practitioners in criminal justice and rehabilitation.

CHAPTER II: Review of Literature

The present study was based on recent literature that highlighted the emerging relationship between religion and reentry (Jang et al., 2018), spirituality, and desistance from crime (Giordano et al., 2008), and the impact of faith-based beliefs on preventing recidivism (Meade, 2023). However, research on this topic remains mixed, and has largely focused on religion in understanding the desistance process, omitting spirituality or considering both variables in isolation. Further clarity is needed regarding the relationship between religion and/ or spirituality in formerly incarcerated people's desistance process as religion and spirituality often exist in tandem.

The current study aimed to address this gap by employing mixed methods to examine the association between religion and spirituality as it relates to self-reported instances of almost reoffending among formerly incarcerated people. Specifically, the present study had two aims: first, to examine the association between religion, spirituality and instances in which formerly incarcerated people reported almost reoffending but abstained; and second, to understand FIPs perceptions of the relationship between religion and/or spirituality in shaping their desistance process. This research endeavor aimed to enhance the existing body of knowledge by shedding light on the mechanisms that facilitate successful reentry into society while concurrently mitigating the likelihood of recidivism. Further, this study intended to focus the exploration of how religion and/or spirituality as separate variables to address the second the aim.

Factors that Promote Desistance

It is imperative to examine the determinants that could potentially facilitate not only the prevention, but also the realization of profound transformation that diminishes the probability of recidivism. Bushway et al. (2001) redefine desistance as a developmental process, not just a

singular outcome, emphasizing shifts in behavior, motivation, and circumstances over time. This approach recognizes fluctuations in commitment to criminal behavior, influenced by factors like personal growth, social networks, and opportunities.

The fluctuation in the motivation to desist is related to the idea of posttraumatic growth that moves tackling with negative effects of a stressful event, but an opportunity for growth such as search for meaning (Vanhooren et al., 2018), a shift in one's sense of self , higher appreciation for important relationships and a shift in one's approach to life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Posttraumatic growth among offenders exemplifies how identity transformations can take place during rehabilitation and reintegration to the society. Evidence from a study (Mapham & Hefferon, 2012) identified four primary themes (i.e., relationship, emotional intelligence, new identity, and agency) as closely associated with the concept of desistance as proposed by Maruna (2001). Mapham and Heffron's (2012) identified themes illustrate how offenders who are desisting differ from those who do not in three key ways. First, they create a fresh redemptive narrative that forms a new identity. Second, they show a willingness to make reparations and contribute to their families or communities. Third, they experience a sense of "agency," or feeling empowered and in control of their own lives Mapham and Hefferon's (2012). Likewise, prior research has shown notable evidence, regarding rehabilitation of prisoners who engaged in religious activities reported that it had a beneficial impact in developing a positive sense of self-worth and provided them with a supportive community (O'Connor & Perreyclear, 2002).

Impact of Age and Gender on Desistance

Examining desistance from a process perspective reveals the pivotal role of age in the likelihood of committing crimes (Weaver, 2019). Studies on criminal careers suggest that

individuals usually commence involvement in criminal activities in early adolescence, with peak frequency occurring during late adolescence or early adulthood. Interestingly, a significant proportion of individuals discontinue their engagement in criminal behavior prior to reaching the age range of 30 to 40 years. The age-crime perspective thus characterizes criminal offending as strongly influenced by age-related factors (Blumstein & Cohen, 1987). Research points to the significance of gender-related factors, for instance, among males who were actively involved in offending, their frequency of criminal activities closely adhered to the typical age-crime curve (Ahonen et al., 2016). The aggregate age-crime curve, created by dividing the total number of arrests for individuals at a specific age by the total population of that age group, indicates that there is a sharp increase in arrest rates during the early teenage years. These rates peak during late adolescence or the early adult years and then gradually decline as individuals age. Studies consistently demonstrate an inverse relationship between the age distribution of a population and its crime rate (and Hayes, 2017; as demonstrated, for instance, in the work of Hirschi, 1969).

Researchers have identified three distinct trajectories with regards to criminal behavior among females: those who refrained from offending altogether, those who exhibited a low rate of offending, and those who exhibited a high rate of offending. Among the females classified as high-rate offenders, the frequency of their criminal activities displayed a gradual increase between the ages of 11 and 15, followed by a subsequent gradual decline. Notably, this group demonstrated a high level of versatility in the types of offenses they committed. Unlike the low-rate category, high-rate female offenders engaged in a variety of criminal acts, including those that caused physical harm (violent crimes) and those aimed at acquiring material gain (acquisitive crimes; Ahonen et al., 2016). It is worth noting that women and gender minorities

are historically overrepresented in carceral settings for sex work, which can contextually be understood as a poverty-related coping mechanism rather.

Social Processes and Desistance

Age and maturation theories, while emphasizing a process-oriented desistance approach, neglect the diversity in individuals' paths to ceasing criminal behavior. Crime theories based on age and maturation propose that the physical and mental development of offenders naturally diminishes criminal engagement. However, these theories overlook the impact of relational, cultural, social, and structural factors, minimizing influences like variations in social bonds and transitions such as entering a stable marriage or securing employment indicating that desistance is influenced by more than just age and maturity (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Additionally, cognitive transformations occur earlier for women, complicating the age and maturation perspectives on desistance (Giordano et al., 2003).

Desistance is influenced by various factors, notably the interaction between social support and the desistance process. A supportive network reduces the likelihood of returning to crime, especially when free from individuals with criminal histories (Ullrich & Coid, 2011). Rational choice theorists (Bottomley, 1988; Cornish & Clarke, 1986) recognize that stopping criminal activities involves broader social interactions but lack details on how this impact decision-making. They overlook factors like religion and spirituality contributing to desistance. Additionally, the theory omits considerations of personal spirituality (Giordano et al., 2008) beyond individual and societal aspects that may not be tied to a religious affiliation. The present mixed-methods study investigated the association between religion, spirituality, and desistance, using quantitative and qualitative approaches to uncover trends and explored their contributions to the desistance process.

Social Factors and Crime

Recent empirical investigations into desistance have unveiled distinct social factors that play a pivotal role in determining the probability of transitioning away from criminal engagement and general offending conduct (Abeling, 2016). Key life events such as marriage, parenthood, and stable employment have demonstrated significant impacts on deviant behavior (Kerr et al., 2011; Laub & Sampson, 2003). Additionally, desistance has shown correlations with military involvement (Laub & Sampson, 2003) and affiliations with religious institutions and personal spirituality (Giordano et al., 2008). Laub and Sampson (2001) have emphasized the influence of salient life events, particularly marriage, employment, and military service, in driving desistance through the cultivation of social bonds and informal social controls.

Furthermore, Giordano et al. (2003) describe the social dimensions of desistance, referred to as "hooks for change," and have pinpointed the significance of marriage, parenthood, and the development of religious ties as noteworthy influences on desistance across the lifespan. Joining a religious community offers offenders an opportunity for identity transformation, a moral compass, and a potential source of social control (Agnew, 2006). Religious teachings emphasize pro-social behavioral alternatives and contribute to shifts in both attitudes and behaviors related to criminal activity (Chu, 2003). In recent years, the understanding of factors contributing to the transition away from criminal involvement has evolved. Initially, the focus was primarily on individual characteristics such as age and personal choices, for instance, the age-crime curve that highlights crime reducing as one ages (Ahonen et al., 2016) and rational theories that suggest how individuals do a cost-benefit analysis that determines their decision to be a non-offender if it seems more advantageous. However, contemporary research now acknowledges the significant impact and interplay of broader societal systems, including

religion, access to employment, and opportunities for companionship (Laub & Sampson, 2003). However, there remains a notable gap in the examination of concerning one's spiritual and/or religious beliefs during adulthood. This oversight is noteworthy because an individual's faith or spirituality may not manifest solely through traditional indicators such as church attendance or participation in religious group activities or rehabilitation programs. Consequently, the evaluation of faith-based interventions (which has been the pre-dominant focus in literature understand how religious participation influences desistance, e.g. Edwards & Kewley, 2018) only provide a partial understanding of the complex relationship between religion, spirituality and desistance.

Recently, a growing body of research has categorized four primary theoretical frameworks of desistance: individual and agentic, social and structural, interactionist, and situational (Weaver, 2019). The individual perspective considers personal attributes like age and cognitive decision-making in desistance. Social interpretations emphasize external factors such as employment, education, family, and peer connections. Interactionist theories highlight the dynamic interplay between an individual's self-identity and the social context. Situational theories explore how habitual activities and social environments influence behavior. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of desistance.

Considering the categorization of desistance factors, religious beliefs emerge as a comprehensive element that encompasses various dimensions, including individual, social, interactional, and situational aspects. Religion provides a sense of purpose that could be related to one’s personal choice of engaging with a religion, in addition to access to religious communities, families and peers. Simultaneously, post release from prison, one’s identity and sense of self may evolve with respect to one’s relationship with religion, situational aspects of

access to resources etc. In contrast, spiritual beliefs are influenced from a broader perspective, however remain a more private affair at the individual and agentic level as it has been identified as a more personal experience (Fuller, 2001).

Similar to Weaver's (2019) desistance categorization, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) addresses autonomy, desistance, and correctional rehabilitation. Petrich (2020), applying SDT, found that discontent among former offenders stemmed from unmet competence, relatedness, and autonomy needs. Some lacked skills and felt incompetent to change, while others faced weakened relationships with children, siblings etc. due to their criminal involvement. In line with SDT, as participants fulfilled these psychological needs, they became autonomously motivated to desist, leading to increased persistence and positive life perceptions. SDT underscores the multifaceted nature of competence, relatedness, and autonomy in desistance. However, the theory omits the potential relationship between religion and spirituality can play in the complex process of desistance (Weaver, 2019). Relatedness is often viewed in terms of interactions with humans, however, the SDT theory offers the exploration of an individual's relationship with one's religious or spiritual figure and how competent or free an individual may feel post-incarceration to desist from committing a crime. The present study filled this gap by exploring perceptions of how religion and spirituality contribute to desistance, along with a quantitative analysis to examine the association between religion, spirituality and self-reported instances of almost reoffending.

The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Re-Entry

According to Fuller (2001), spirituality is generally understood as pertaining to personal experiences, whereas religion pertains to the institutional and organizational aspects of faith. It is noteworthy that a majority of Americans identify as both spiritual and religious (Stansfield et

al., 2019), illustrating the typical compatibility of these dimensions. In contrast, spirituality without religion places a stronger emphasis on personal experiences of meaning-making and transcendence, prioritizing these aspects over formal involvement in a religious institution or adherence to religious doctrines and beliefs (Ammerman, 2013). Frequently, the spiritual transformation can yield positive outcomes, as research indicates that individuals often undergo spiritual or religious growth following adverse experiences, providing them with a framework to discover meaning in their lives and incorporate constructive changes (De Castella & Simmonds, 2013). Narratives of transformation, frequently observed in criminology studies, encompass accounts of religious conversion, shifts in identity, and instances of "quantum change" in spiritual attributes like empathy, altruism, and hope for the future (Hallett et al., 2016; Rigsby, 2018).

Incarceration often strains familial connections (Lynch & Sabol, 2004), but religious support may play a pivotal role in restoring and strengthening social support connections while providing alternative sources of guidance and assistance (Duwe & Clark, 2013). Personal narratives mapping out the relationship between religion and reentry have been explored through qualitative approaches, but have primarily been examined through rehabilitation programs. For instance, Morag and Teman (2017) found that religious beliefs and practices helped prisoners cope with the harsh prison environment, provided a sense of community and support, and motivated them to change their behavior. Particularly, the authors highlighted different levels of impact, which included, the first level, spiritual, which included beliefs in a higher power, moral compass, and ethics books, giving the participant spiritual goals and hope. The second level, the practical, included religious doctrine and rituals to navigate everyday life. The third level, psychological included anger management, group therapy, and community

support, giving a sense of calm and security, and a manual for life. Overall, religion offers a purpose and direction in life, community support and moral guidance that influence the choice of abstaining from criminal activities. While Morag and Teman (2017) shed light on how religion and spirituality offer solace amidst the challenges of a harsh prison environment, an understanding about the potential impact of religion and spirituality on crime reduction is limited. Furthermore, the reliance on a small qualitative sample (particularly through faith-based interventions) in Morag and Teman's (2017) study hindered the generalizability of their findings, both in terms of coping mechanisms and their potential influence on the process of desistance. Employing a mixed methods approach can address some of the limitations of defining and understanding constructs such as religion and spirituality. Through quantitative analysis, the study examined the association between religion, spirituality, and self-reported instances of reoffending. Simultaneously, the qualitative inquiries delved into the ways in which religion and/or spirituality influence desistance, shedding light on potential commonalities and differences in FIP's faith identity and contribution to desistance. Thus, the aim of the mixed-methods study was to provide a comprehensive understanding of faith identity and its role in promoting desistance, which are often challenging constructs to measure in research.

The Relationship Between Religion and Crime

In carceral settings, the profound challenges of imprisonment, as delineated by criminologist Gresham Sykes (1958), encompass the loss of privacy, autonomy, contact with loved ones, psychological degradation, and an underlying fear for personal safety which constitute the incarcerated experience. Religion emerges as a significant counterbalance within carceral institutions, providing a lifeline for incarcerated individuals to preserve their sense of

humanity amid the dehumanizing prison environment (Ellis, 2023). In a recent examination of the relationship between religion and crime, Adamczyk et al. (2017) highlighted the prevalence of social control theories in linking religious engagement with reduced criminal behavior. Drawing from this conceptual framework, researchers have posited that forming affiliations with religious institutions, fostering attachments to positive peer networks, and engaging in structured conventional activities collectively act as deterrents against criminal involvement.

Early insight into the emerging relationship between religion and crime began with understanding the complex relationship between religion, beliefs in a punishing God, and delinquent behavior among adolescents. A landmark study 'Hellfire and Delinquency' study (Evans et al., as cited in Johnson, 2011) examined the relationship between beliefs in a punishing God, and delinquent behavior among adolescents. The findings revealed that adolescents who believed in a punishing God were less likely to engage in delinquent behavior, possibly due to the fear of punishment and the belief that God is watching. However, this relationship was only significant for adolescents with low self-control. The study served as an impetus to further research and interest in understanding why religion matters in preventing crime or acting as a protective factor.

Johnson (2011) argued the notion that religiosity can enhance an individual's ability to persevere and overcome challenges, particularly in the face of poverty, unemployment, and other social adversities that entail the systemic factors increasing. Scholarly discourse has indicated that religion facilitates access to prosocial connections and support systems, thereby diminishing the likelihood of reoffending (Giordano et al. 2008; O'Connor et al. 2006; Stansfield et al., 2017). For instance, initial research conducted by Baier and Wright (2001) examined the effect of religion on crime by examining 60 studies and found that religion had a

significant moderate inverse effect in reducing crime, however, among the studies included in the Baier and Wright(2001) analysis contained different conceptual definitions and methodological approaches. In the subsequent year, a study found a decrease in in-prison infractions with the increase in religious involvement, in turn, reinforcing the role of religion in rehabilitation of incarcerated persons (O'Connor et al., 2002). The findings indicate the potential for religion to have a deterring effect on the commission of crime. Control theory offers a theoretical framework to understand this relationship, positing that religion functions as a significant socializing institution that fosters adherence to the law (Cochran et al., 1994).

Religion can play a critical role in fostering resilience by equipping individuals with the necessary strategies such as seeking support from a higher power to remain steadfast amidst the negative influences of varied stressors such as poverty, unemployment, illness (Pargament et al., 2013). Likewise, religious communities may offer guidance and instruction in the form of religious teachings and values that can be internalized and applied to facilitate positive decision-making and overall habits and lifestyle choices among both young and mature individuals (Anshel & Smith, 2014; Ellison et al., 1998). Religious involvement can enhance social support and promote positive coping strategies in older adults, which in turn, may bolster their resilience and well-being (Krause, 2006). The relationship between religion and social support aligns with the social control theory ideas of an individual bonding with society or conventional or normative behaviors preventing an individual from taking a deviant path to committing crime (Hirschi, 1969). However, despite the recognition of the potential relationship between religion and crime, religion has often been referred to as the "forgotten factor" (Johnson, 2004) in research, which has transformed over the years to explain the

complexity of the definition and the function it serves in criminology. Further research is needed to elucidate the murky body of research in this area.

Spirituality, Desistance, and Crime in Adults

Criminologists have seldom explored spirituality as a distinct concept from religion or religiousness, and which could be attributed to the limitations of available data, thus marking the importance of the present study to explore perceptions of religion and/or spirituality concepts distinctly through qualitative responses. Standard crime surveys usually include only a limited number of religion-related items, such as attendance at religious services and the importance of religion, besides denomination, and rarely incorporate items that reflect spirituality (Johnson & Jang, 2010). Recent literature has explored spirituality and broader factors like masculinity, race, and ethnicity in desistance. Spirituality has been found to influence gang disengagement, promoting broader masculinity, improved mental health, and commitment to desistance (Morag & Teman, 2017). Another study linked race and ethnicity to faith preventing recidivism but risks perpetuating stereotypes about African American/Latinx reliance on religion and highlighted mass incarceration's disproportionate impact on people of color (Jeffers et al., 2019).

Moreover, research indicated that religiosity significantly predicts reduced criminal offending and substance use among White youth post-conviction, even when controlling for changes in employment, social support, and delinquent peer association. However, this association is not observed among Black or Hispanic youth, highlighting disparities in the effectiveness of religiosity as a protective factor across racial groups (Stansfield, 2017). Questions persist about who shapes policies, impacting research perspectives. While recognizing race and ethnicity's role in criminology, caution is needed against misconceptions.

Research should comprehensively understand diverse ethnicities, religion, spirituality, and recidivism without singling out groups. The present mixed-methods study focused on religion and spirituality, avoiding specific links with race and ethnicity, though they are essential demographics in the study.

Research on religion and reentry often focuses on how inmates' faith affects behavior in prison, neglecting spirituality's role in post-release reoffending. For example, a study in Angola, one of the largest U.S. prisons, explored religious self-identity transformation's mediating role in religion-misconduct relationships (Johnson et al., 2018). Results showed religion correlated inversely with misconduct, transforming cognitive, emotional, and existential dimensions of identity. However, congregational participation showed no significant relationship with these variables. The study emphasized religion's positive impact on rehabilitation, especially for committed believers. Despite the emphasis on religious identity transformation, spirituality concepts were overlooked, possibly due to the ease of quantifying religious involvement compared to personal spiritual beliefs (Koenig et al., 2001). The oversight of spirituality in studies limits understanding its influence on post-release reoffending.

Attempts to explore spirituality and its connection to criminal behavior, have been conducted by employed a two-by-two typology to differentiate between individuals who were religious and spiritual, solely religious, solely spiritual, and those with neither religious nor spiritual inclinations (Jang & Franzen, 2013). Classifying faith beliefs in this way enabled the researchers to explore how various combinations of religious and spiritual orientations relate to criminal behavior in emerging adults. Jang and Franzen’s (2013) findings revealed that individuals who possess both religious and spiritual inclinations exhibit diminished

engagement in violent and property crimes, in contrast to those who are solely spiritual or solely religious, who do not manifest a comparable protective influence. Therefore, the typology allows for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between religiosity, spirituality, and criminal behavior, which is the focus of the present study. The intention of including a typology allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how FIP's may identify as being religious, spiritual or neither, examined quantitatively and qualitatively to capture nuances of how religion and/or spirituality contribute to desistance.

Protective factors in violence research have primarily focused on youth, including meta-analyses of studies on this population. For instance, among at-risk youth, spirituality has served as a protective against involvement in delinquent behavior in El Salvador more significantly than religious coping (Salas et al., 2013). The term "religious coping" was defined in the study as using religion to manage stressful life events while spirituality is the connection between an individual and god (i.e., "perceived transcendence") that may not involve any community or institutional practice.

Subsequent research addressed the gap in the literature for including adult samples, with prior emphasis on the youth and adolescent population. For instance, Giordano and his colleagues (2008) aimed to investigate the relationship between spirituality and desistance from crime using a life-course perspective. The findings revealed that spirituality can be a contributing factor to desistance from crime among adults. Specifically, it was found that adults who reported higher levels of spirituality were more likely to desist from criminal behavior than those who reported lower levels of spirituality. Spirituality was particularly effective in facilitating desistance from crime when it was integrated into the individual's overall sense of self, identity, and life narrative. Similar studies have echoed the findings of

viewing the impact of cognitive transformation, viewing desistance across different life stages (Giordano et al., 2002; Laub & Sampson, 2001). Giordano's study (2008) provides insights to the trajectory of how spirituality contributes to desistance, and similar to other studies examined variable of spirituality and religion in isolation. Similarly, a recent mixed-methods study by Said and Davidson (2023) evaluated the relationship of religion in desistance and re-entry, however, it omitted spirituality as a variable. The findings demonstrated that religion can provide participants in a prison-based reentry program with spiritual goals, a moral compass, and a sense of hope. Religion can encourage a change in perception and morality, leading to desistance from crime. The study acknowledged a limitation concerning the intricacies of distinguishing between religiosity and spirituality, and highlighted the challenges posed by the recent surge in individuals identifying as spiritual without a religious affiliation. The current objective of the mixed-methods study was to advance existing research by comprehensively and concurrently consider religion, spirituality, and self-reported instances of reoffending together, providing a more holistic perspective on the role of faith within desistance.

Conceptual Challenges in Researching Religion and Crime

Extensive research on different aspects of religion and crime, such as the type of religious affiliation, the strength of belief in one's religion and so on has demonstrated the need to have more conceptual rigor in studies that examined religion and influence on crimes (Adamczyk et al., 2017). Macro-level studies often focus on specific religious affiliations, while micro-level studies delve into factors like religious involvement and belief intensity. Consequently, those examining specific religious affiliations offer a broad overview of various religious groups and their influence on crime, while micro-level studies provide a nuanced

perspective on how the strength of faith correlates with criminal propensity. It was inferred that at a macro level, it could be challenging to obtain data regarding the strength of religious belief (Adamczyk et al., 2017). This presents several challenges in studying a topic that can vary in strength, type, and definition of terminology. The current study acknowledged conceptual challenges of defining these concepts yet endeavors to delve beyond mere exploration of trends in the relationship between religion, spirituality, and self-reported instances of reoffending. The study aspired to investigate participants' perceptions about religion and/or spirituality contributes to the desistance process. The present study attempted to utilize the quantitative responses to understand the association between religion, spirituality and self-reported instances of almost reoffending, and further explore nuanced differences in faith experiences that contribute to desistance.

Recent arguments about using religiosity as a study variable in quantitative studies have emerged, conveying the historical role of religiosity in reducing misconduct in prisons and emphasizing how past research has only focused on religiosity as an independent variable on various outcomes such as psychological well-being (Petersen & Roy, 1985), prison misconduct (Steiner et al., 2014), substance use (Jang et al., 2008), and recidivism (Johnson et al., 1997).There have been mixed findings about the relationship between religion and crime. There is considerable research that has reported that religiosity is negatively correlated with the number of infractions committed while incarcerated (Levitt & Loper, 2009; O'Connor & Perreyclear, 2002) and recidivism (Johnson 2004; 2011). Studies have found no significant association between religion and criminal thinking or post-release behavior, and any observed effects are noted to diminish over time. For example, Stansfield et al. (2017a, 2017b) found no significant association between religion and post-release behavior. Giordano et al. (2008)

noted that any observed effects of religion on recidivism diminish over time. The multifaceted nature of mixed research findings underscored the importance of investigating the variables of religion, spirituality, and desistance. This blend of mixed-methods examination provided comprehensive insights into the association between religion, spirituality and self-reported instances of reoffending and the specific experiences that influence desistance outcomes.

Theoretical Framework: Family Stress Theory

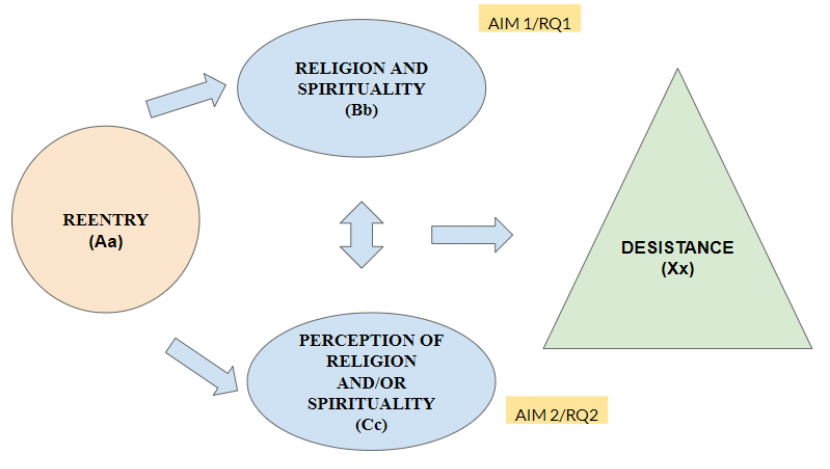
Family Stress Theory (FST) guides the present study and offers a structured framework that considers stressors, available resources, and perceptions. The simultaneous consideration of stressors, resources, and perceptions facilitates an in-depth exploration of how individuals leverage coping resources rooted in religion and spirituality to address challenges arising from incarceration and reentry.

Although FST has historically been applied to traditional family science endeavors, the framework offers useful assumptions and concepts for understanding the interaction between stressors, resources, and perceptions of stress in shaping outcomes. As such, this study extends beyond FST's traditional application and employs FST to gain deeper insights into desistance and recidivism dynamics among individuals. McCubbin and Patterson's (1983) double ABCX model, an iteration of the FST framework, captures the accumulation and exacerbation of stressors, introducing new resources (bB), including religion or spirituality. The study focuses on how individuals navigate these additional demands (aA) and assess the availability of resources (bB), influencing the crisis's meaning-making process (cC). Post-crisis adjustment phases (xX) range from positive adaptation (bonadaptation, indicating desistance) to adverse adjustment (maladaptation, representing an increased likelihood of self-reported instances of reoffending).

Aligned with FST, the mixed-methods research pursues two objectives: first, examining the association between religion and/or spirituality (bB) and self-reported instances of almost reoffending using binary logistic regression analysis (Aim 1). This statistical approach revealed the interplay between individuals' perceptions of coping resources (cC), i.e. religion and spirituality and outcomes (xX) i.e. self-reported instances or reoffending during the post-incarceration period. Second, the study explored the subjective significance individuals attribute to their religious and spiritual beliefs in their journey toward desistance or potential maladaptation (Aim 2). Operationalizing outcomes as "bonadaptation" (successful cessation of criminal behavior, xX) and "maladaptation" (indicating a near return to criminal activities, xX), the study aimed to illuminate the intricate relationship between religion, spirituality, and the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into society within the context of Family Stress Theory, as shown in Figure1.

Figure 1

Family Stress Theory applied to the Present Study



Note. The figure has been adapted to fit the objectives of the study, from the double ABCX model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).

Rationale

Prior research underscores the vital link between spirituality, religion, and coping during incarceration, aiding individuals in overcoming challenges, fostering purpose, personal growth, and promoting adaptation to prison life and rehabilitation (Deuchar et al., 2016; Morag & Teman, 2017; Said & Davidson, 2023). However, most existing studies have primarily assessed religion and spirituality independently, and in the context of programmatic interventions, with a predominant focus on their influence on adjusting to prison life and rehabilitation. Importantly, the quantitative exploration of their combined contribution in the process of desistance from criminal behavior remains an underdeveloped area of inquiry. Moreover, spirituality has historically received limited attention in research, with a recent acknowledgment of the need to distinguish between religion and spirituality by including two by two typologies such as religious not spiritual, vice versa etc. (Jang & Franzen, 2013).

This research gap warrants attention, particularly as spirituality may be significant for individuals diverging from or not aligning with organized religious practices. Overlooking these aspects risks missing opportunities to leverage valuable resources crucial for lasting transformations and promoting desistance from criminal behavior. This shift should not solely be driven by external punitive measures such as longer sentences, capital punishment etc. but also by self-motivation. While punitive measures may play a role in shaping behavior, sustainable changes are more likely to occur when individuals are internally motivated to transform their lives. Fostering personal responsibility and intrinsic motivation can significantly contribute to the process of desistance from criminal behavior, by recognizing and nurturing an individual's internal drive towards reform and guiding them to constructive pathways for enduring, self-driven positive change. Within the traditionally stigmatized population of formerly incarcerated

individuals, often perceived as heartless and associated with undergoing punitive measures, understanding their perceptions of religion and/or spirituality in instances of almost reoffending becomes crucial. This understanding would illuminate the impact through exploring internal experiences and quantitatively assessing how these factors influence desistance or recidivism outcomes.

In light of these considerations, the present study was guided by FST to shed light on how the experience of incarceration and reentry (aA), coupled with one's coping resources (i.e., religion/spiritual identity) (bB) and the meaning attached to religion and spirituality (cC), influence the outcomes of desistance (i.e., bon/maladaptation) (xX) among FIP, as depicted in Figure 1. This approach provided an understanding of the complex dynamics at play, and contribute to the broader understanding of desistance and recidivism. Therefore, the primary objective of this mixed-methods research was to investigate the association between religion, spirituality and self-reported instances of almost reoffending among this population. Furthermore, the goal was to explore qualitative responses to explore FIP perceptions, in their own words, how religion and spirituality fosters desistance among formerly incarcerated individuals.

CHAPTER III: Methods

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Research on the relationship between religion and spirituality in reentry from prison has revealed mixed findings, indicating the positive impact of religion and spirituality in reducing recidivism while showing no significant relationship between religion, spirituality and recidivism (Giordano et al., 2008; Levitt & Loper, 2009). Mixed-methods desistance literature has emerged (e.g. Said & Davidson, 2023), pointing to how religion can be a protective factor for recidivism during prison and reentry. However, as identified by the authors themselves a prominent limitation was excluding spirituality, which omits the people who may identify as spiritual but not religious (Said & Davidson, 2023). Broadening the categorization of one's identification with religious and spiritual beliefs is critical in desistance research, to account for individuals who may not follow or be a part of organized forms of rituals and practices. To address this gap and advance the desistance literature, the present study employed a mixed-methods approach to examine how a formerly incarcerated person's religion and/or spirituality shapes their desistance process during reentry.

The study's aims and research questions are outlined as follows:

Quantitative Aim 1: Examine the association between faith identity (i.e., religion, spirituality, etc.) and self-reported instances of almost reoffending among formerly incarcerated individuals

RQ1: Is religion and spirituality associated with self-reported instances of almost reoffending among desisting, formerly incarcerated people?

H1: There is a significant negative association between religion, spirituality, and self-reported instances of almost reoffending among desisting formerly incarcerated people, in that identifying

as religious or spiritual will be associated with lower self-reported instances of almost reoffending.

Qualitative Aim 2: Understand perceptions of the role that religion and/or spirituality plays in formerly incarcerated individuals' desistance process.

RQ2: How do formerly incarcerated people understand the role that religion and/or spirituality plays in their ability to desist during reentry?

Research Design

The present study was a secondary data analysis of cross-sectional, mixed-methods data collected in 2022. In the context of a secondary data analysis study, observational design is often used since the data has already been collected by someone else for a different purpose. Secondary analysis refers to the use of existing research data to find the answer to a question that was different from the original work (Szabo & Strang, 1997). The use of secondary data yields benefits, such as the cost-effectiveness and convenience it provides as the researcher is able to skip highly time-consuming aspects of research (i.e., data collection; Doolan & Froelicher, 2009; Glaser, 1963).

However, some recognized limitations of secondary data analysis include not knowing how the data was collected as the researcher is not a part of the data collection process and not having the ability to modify the data. Consequently, to address this disadvantage, information is gathered through other means such as the documentation of data collection procedures, and technical reports (Dale et al., 1988). Using secondary data provides ease of access to survey questions, ethical considerations, and participants' responses. Simultaneously, collaborating with the researcher who originally collected data, as was the case in the present study, provided a better understanding of the data collection process, improving the quality of the analysis.

Data Source

In this mixed-methods study a secondary data analysis of primary data (i.e., survey and interviews) was conducted. Data broadly explored reentry experiences of desisting formerly incarcerated people, examining specific constructs of mental health, substance use, adverse childhood experiences, resilience, social support, and religion and spirituality. Mixed methods data was collected via a survey (n = 191) and follow-up qualitative interviews (n = 19). Exact data procedures were as follows.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited via community partnerships with organizations such as the Montgomery pre-trial and pre-release center, the Maryland and Virginia Departments of Corrections, and the Maryland Population Research Center. Paper and electronic flyers were distributed to potential participants, along with informed consent documents. Snowball sampling was used to recruit additional participants by asking community partners to forward the study information to their networks. Recruitment emails yielded a national reach. Participants were eligible if they met the following criteria: aged 18 years or older, released from an incarceration setting at least two years ago, living in the U.S. at the time of data collection, and self-reported successfully desisting from further criminal behavior from the most recent release. Incentives in the form of tiered monetary payments were provided to participants for their contribution to the study. Survey participants received an e-gift card for $20.00, and follow-up interview participants received an e-gift card of $20.00 for a total of $40.00 in e-gift cards.

Data Collection

An anonymous online survey was administered through Qualtrics to gather data on constructs of resilience, mental health, substance use, adverse childhood experiences, social

support, and other key demographic variables (e.g., religion and spirituality, age, education, income, family relationships, employment, etc.) of formerly incarcerated individuals (n = 191). The survey included various measures related to psychosocial health, social and relational support, and resilience that have been tested with incarcerated populations but not yet with formerly incarcerated individuals. After concluding the survey, participants were asked about their willingness to participate in an additional optional qualitative interview. Eventually, a total of 19 qualitative interviews were conducted. Participants were requested to self-assign pseudonyms during the study, and for those who didn't, gender neutral names were generated. These pseudonyms will be utilized to refer to them in the results section**.**

Measures

Independent Variable

To investigate the association between religion and/or spirituality, the independent variable was categorized based on participants' self-reported affiliation with various religious or spiritual categories. Participants were asked to specify their faith identity (religious or spiritual or neither) by choosing from response options such as *Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox (e.g., Greek or Russian Orthodox), Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Atheist, Agnostic, Spiritual (generally), Not religious or spiritual, and Something else (with a fill-in-the-blank option).*

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable aimed to assess participants' experiences of almost reoffending post-release. Participants were presented with a binary response question: "Have there been instances where you came close to reoffending?" The responses were recorded as either "Yes" or

"No." This variable served as an indicator of participants' proximity to engaging in criminal behavior after their release and their ability to resist such impulses.

Covariates

In addition to the primary variables of interest, covariates utilized in the study included age, gender, marital status, lifetime incarcerations, and children (participants indicated their parental status in response to the binary question: Do you have children?). These covariates were selected based on significantly correlated bivariate associations. Moreover, in criminological research, gender and age, are commonly recognized as significant factors in desistance (Ahonen et al., 2016; Blumstein & Cohen, 1987). Notably, recent research on desistance has pinpointed social factors influencing changes in criminal involvement. Marriage, parenthood, stable employment, and military involvement have been identified as significant influencers of desistance (Kerr et al., 2011; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Uggen, 2000; Bouffard & Laub, 2004).

The decision to exclude some co-variates such as employment and social support was done as the association of employment with the dependent variable of self-reported instances of reoffending was not significant. Additionally, military involvement was excluded as a covariate since it wasn’t measured in the study. The covariates in the analysis allowed a focused investigation specifically on the relationship between religion, spirituality, and desistance from reoffending. Excluding these covariates allowed for a more direct exploration of the impact of religious and spiritual factors without potential interference from other social influences on desistance, as established in recent research (Kerr et al., 2011; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Uggen, 2000; Bouffard & Laub, 2004). The study intentionally centered on the exploration of the often overlooked concepts of religion and/or spirituality, with a deliberate decision not to delve into

additional covariates such as military involvement, which move beyond the defined scope of this research.

Data Analysis

In the present study, a mixed-methods approach was employed to enhance our comprehension of two distinct aspects: first, the examination of the association between religion and spirituality in nearly reoffending among formerly incarcerated individuals (Aim 1), and second, the exploration of participant perceptions regarding the influence of religion and/or spirituality on the desistance process (Aim 2). The mixed-methods approach involves the deliberate integration and triangulation of data from interviews and survey response to enhance the robustness and credibility of our findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The present study aligned well with the principles of mixed-methods research, wherein multiple data sources were intentionally combined to comprehensively address various research inquiries within the same phenomenon (Dolbin-MacNab et al., 2014).

Aim 1

The first research question sought to quantitatively investigate whether religion and spirituality are negatively associated with self- reported instances of almost reoffending among desisting formerly incarcerated people. To investigate the likelihood of reoffending among the participants, a specific query within the survey was designed to solicit a binary response—'yes' or 'no'—to the question, "Have there been instances where you came close to reoffending?" to assess for responses that indicated whether participants were able to successfully desist or not post their release from prison.

The survey data collected via Qualtrics was transmitted to SPSS (Version 23) for data management and statistical analysis, based on the secondary data analysis. Various statistical

procedures were employed to comprehensively analyze the data. First, descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and variances, were calculated to assess the univariate normality of the data. Additionally, bivariate associations between religion, spirituality, and self-reported instances of reoffending were analyzed using a *t*-test with a significance level of 0.05 to determine the direction and magnitude of the relationships. Finally, logistic regression was employed to examine the association (i.e., odds ratios) between faith identity and self-reported instances of almost reoffending.

Aim 2

Qualitative interviews were conducted to explore participant perceptions of their faith identity within the desistance process. To address the second aim, participants were asked the following qualitative interview question, "What role, if any, does religion or spirituality play in your desistance?" Subsequent probing inquiries included: 'Would you say you became more or less religious after prison? Or stayed the same? and 'How do you think religion helps people, in general?' Furthermore, for the purpose of secondary data analysis, responses to other interview questions that discussed the influence of religion and spirituality on desistance were also included.

The qualitative data analysis for this study was conducted in Dedoose (version 9.0.17, 2021) using Thematic Analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. As a rigorous methodological approach for analyzing qualitative data, thematic analysis allows researchers to explore themes within the data by identifying repeated meanings, which are represented as codes that are subsequently organized into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ultimately, the insights gained from thematic analysis can have practical

applications, informing decisions and contributing to a deeper understanding of real-world phenomena.

The six steps as laid out by Braun and Clark (2006) were followed, starting with the process of becoming familiar with the data. This was done by reading the transcripts and paying close attention to the responses related to the perspective of FIP's religion/spirituality role on desistance or any other questions that aligned with similar responses. Thereafter, preliminary codes were generated, in addition to initial codes generated by other research members to start observing patterns in the codes. Next, discussions about the existing emergent themes and refining the themes was done to ensure they reflect the responses of the participants. Participant profiles were developed to further refine themes (refer Appendix A). In the second to last phase, the thematic map was revised, and in the sixth and final phase, the refined thematic map was used, along with associated themes and codes, to construct a persuasive argument in alignment with the research question.

Trustworthiness & Rigor

One mechanism of trustworthiness in the present study was reflexivity. In exploring the intricate dynamics of the desistance process among formerly incarcerated individuals, my personal background and beliefs are inextricably intertwined with the research context. As a woman with a Hindu upbringing, where the private connection to a higher power serves as a source of strength during challenging times, my understanding of the transformative power of religion and spirituality extends beyond visible aspects of faith. Having engaged with research among parents of juvenile delinquents in the Indian context, I witnessed diverse coping mechanisms, particularly the role of religion and practical strategies. This personal insight informed my mixed methods research on the "Personal Relationship with God," delving into the

nuanced interplay between religion, spirituality, and the desistance process among formerly incarcerated individuals. My positionality, shaped by these experiences, guided the need for a comprehensive understanding of diverse coping mechanisms within families, acknowledging the potential impact of faith on the journey toward desistance. Through this research, the goal was to shed light on the multifaceted nature of personal relationships with a higher power and their significance in the desistance process, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the relationship between religion and spirituality in individuals' desistance process.

To further enhance trustworthiness and rigor in the qualitative analysis, guidelines set forth by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) were adhered to throughout the research process. Doing so enhanced the credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data. Several key strategies will be implemented to achieve this, such as memoing, which involved taking detailed notes during data analysis, facilitating a systematic and comprehensive documentation of the analytical journey.

Additionally, there was prolonged engagement with the secondary data for over a year, via ongoing discussions and correspondence to deliberate upon ways to effectively engage with the variables under investigation. These deliberations served to enhance the quality of data analysis and interpretation. Continuous and reflective dialogues were maintained with the advisor and research committee members throughout the study. This practice allowed for critical discussions about the findings, encouraging a deeper understanding and interpretation of the data from a fresh perspective. To bolster credibility, emerging patterns within the data were recognized and documented meticulously. This step ensured that the research findings were rooted in a robust and accurate representation of the data. Additionally, the data had previously been coded by other research collaborators, and incorporating multiple perspectives allowed a

more comprehensive understanding of the data was achieved. Moreover, the study employed mixed methods approach using quantitative and qualitative analysis and collaborated with multiple investigators, including the primary researcher, and research committee members who were not directly involved in the original research. A combined approach of multiple investigators and gather mixed-methods data served to validate and strengthen the research findings by cross-referencing and corroborating evidence from multiple angles.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The overarching purpose of the present mixed-methods study was to examine the relationship between one's faith (i.e., religion,, spirituality, etc.) and self-reported instances of almost reoffending among formerly incarcerated individuals. Toward this end, the following research questions and hypotheses were tested to examine the quantitative and qualitative aims of the mixed methods study.

Quantitative Aim 1: Examine the association between faith identity (i.e., religion, spirituality, etc.) and self-reported instances of almost reoffending among formerly incarcerated individuals

RQ1: Is religion and spirituality associated with self-reported instances of almost reoffending among desisting, formerly incarcerated people?

H1: There is a significant negative association between religion, spirituality, and self-reported instances of almost reoffending among desisting formerly incarcerated people, in that identifying as religious or spiritual will be associated with lower instances of almost reoffending.

Qualitative Aim 2: Understand perceptions of the role that religion and/or spirituality plays in formerly incarcerated individuals' desistance process.

RQ2: How do formerly incarcerated people understand the role that religion and/or spirituality plays in their ability to desist during reentry?

The following sections will present the quantitative and qualitative results, respectively, before providing a synthesis of the mixed methods findings.

Quantitative Results

Descriptive statistics were employed to examine the data and specify the logistic regression model. Binary logistic regression was used to examine the quantitative aim of this mixed-methods study. Based on the FST model, the binary logistic regression contributed to understanding the association between existence of resources such as religion and spirituality, in contributing to the outcome, almost reoffending (maladaption) or desistance (bonadaptation).

Descriptive Statistics

Covariates. The sample (n = 203) consisted of n = 121 males (58.5%) and n = 82 females (39.6%). A total of n = 105 (50.7%) were being married, n = 69 (33.3%) were single and had never been married, n = 3 (1.4%) had been separated, n = 1(0.5%) indicated as a widow and n = 1(0.5%) as something else. About half of the participants (n = 108; 52.2%) participants reported having children, as shown in Table 1. Participants' average age was 39.11 years (SD = 10.43), and they had been incarcerated an average of 2.3 times (SD = 2.35), as shown in Table 2.

Independent Variable. Participants were asked to identify their faith identity. Participants were able to select one option that they most closely identified, with options including specific religions, spiritual, or neither. Demographics regarding the independent variable (i.e., religion and spirituality) were as follows: *n* = 24 (11.6%) of the participants identified as spiritual only, *n* = 27 (13%) identified as neither religious nor spiritual, and *n* = 153 (73.9%) identified themselves as religious, as shown in Table 3. Additionally, responses in the 'something else' category indicated Religiosity based on write-in text responses (e.g., Lutheran).

Dependent Variable. Participants were asked to self-report if they experienced instances of almost re-offending following their most recent release from a carceral setting. The

participants who reported ‘no’ for almost re-offending were *n* =108 (52.2%) and the participants who selected ‘yes’ for almost re-offending were *n* = 83 (40.1%), as shown in Table 1

Table 1

Description of Data

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Male	121	58.5
Female	82	39.6
Marital Status		
Married	105	50.7
Single, Never Married	69	33.3
Separated	3	1.4
Widowed	1	0.5
Other	1	0.5
Children		
Yes	108	52.2
No	96	46.6
Almost re-offended		
Yes	83	40.1
No	108	52.2

Note. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding..

Table 2

Description of Data

Variable	M	SD
Age	39.11	10.43
Lifetime Incarcerations	2.3	2.35

Table 3

Description of Faith Identity

Religion	n	%
Protestant	40	19.6
Roman Catholic	41	20.1
Mormon	10	4.9
Orthodox such as Greek or Russian orthodox	11	5.4
Jewish	9	4.4
Muslim	9	4.4
Buddhist	7	3.4
Hindu	9	4.4
Atheist	10	4.9
Agnostic	7	3.4
Something else	17	8.3
Spiritual	24	11.8
Not religious or spiritual	10	4.9

Bivariate Analyses

Bivariate correlations were used to examine data normality and specify covariates in the regression model. Covariate correlations are presented in Table 4. All covariates were significantly associated with one another, justifying inclusion as covariates in the regression model. One notable exception was participants' parental status, which did not yield a significant correlation. However, this covariate (i.e., having children) was included based on theoretical

justification within the extant literature (Abeling-Judge, 2016; Walker et al., 2013). The bivariate analysis yielded a significant negative association between faith identity (i.e., religion and spirituality) and desistance r(191) = -.17, p = 0.005. Bivariate analyses confirmed no multicollinearity in that all correlational values were below .07.

Table 4

Variable Correlation Matrix

N = 191

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	1.00					
2. Gender	.11	1.00				
3. Marital Status	.38**	.08	1.00			
4. Lifetime incarcerations	.09	.24**	.22**	1.00		
5. Children	.31**	.25**	.24**	.18	1.00	
6. Religion and Spirituality	-.17*	-.15*	-.18**	-.16*	-.11	1.00
7. Almost re-offending	-.35**	-.24**	-.27**	-.17*	-.23**	.30**

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Regression Analysis

A binary logistic regression was performed to examine the association between faith (i.e., religion and spirituality) and the likelihood that formerly incarcerated individuals will self-report instances of almost reoffending, as shown in Table 5. To address the issue of missing cases the n = 16 (7.7%) missing cases listwise deletion was used, resulting in a final sample of n = 191. Listwise deletion was used as statistical analyses are not likely to be biased when less than 10% of data are missing (Bennett, 2001)

Table 5

Logistic Regression Table

N = 191

β	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	OR	95% CI	
						LL	UL
.735	.26	7.68	1	.006	2.09	1.24	3.50

The logistic regression model was statistically significant, X^2 (5, N = 191) = 47.51, p = .001, as shown in Table 5. The model explained between 22.2 (Cox & Snell R^2) and 29.7% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in self-reported instances of almost reoffending and correctly classified 73.8% of cases. The logistic regression odds ratio of 2.09 suggests that the participants who self-identified as religious or spiritual were twice as likely to self-report instances of almost re-offending (OR=2.09, 95% CI [1.24, 3.50]).

Qualitative Findings

To better understand the association between faith status and desistance, the second aim of the study was to qualitatively capture the nuances of faith within desistance in participants in own words; an area of research in need of elucidation. Based on the Family Stress theory, the perception of the resources, i.e. religion and/ or spirituality, provided a framework to what contributed to Bonadaptation, i.e. desistance during the reentry period. Toward this aim, the present study qualitatively explored first-hand accounts of formerly incarcerated individuals. The associated research question was as follows: How do individuals who have been previously incarcerated perceive the influence of religion and/or spirituality on their ability to desist from criminal behavior during the reentry process?

Broadly, the qualitative data was represented across the following themes: Faith identity, Transformative influence of religion in the desistance process, Spirituality provides core values for transformation, and Doubts/struggles around faith. Each theme was comprised of smaller subthemes, each of which will be detailed below.

Faith Identity

Religious

Most of the participants identified as belonging to religious organizations, with the majority identifying as Catholic and Christian. Religion seemed to offer a different perspective of how participants viewed themselves post-incarceration via the positive influence of having a deeper connection with God and abiding by morals learned at church. One illustrative example of this was George who viewed himself as a "very bad person" who was "violent", a "thief" and "used drugs" but changed significantly post-incarceration. He described himself as a "staunch Christian" who attended church regularly and internalized religious teachings. George perceived going to church as a means to follow the Ten Commandments given to Moses, believing that abiding by them allows one to follow a righteous path. George shared:

> I think it has played a very major role. I'm a staunch Christian and I go to churchship each and every Sunday and also sometimes during the weekdays I do have them. And once you go to church, your thoughts are now how to abide to the ten commandments that God will give to Moses. And once you abide according to them, you'll never go wrong. So for me, religion has played a role.

George emphasized the positive influence of religious teachings, suggesting that the lessons learned in church contributed to the development of good morals. The teachings, particularly those on Sundays, were seen as guiding individuals away from wrongdoing and

encouraging George to treat others with respect and kindness. George connected these principles to the idea of living a good life and avoiding negative behaviors, evident through his response:

> Because when you go to church, you are taught on how to live. They are like those daily, those Sunday's teachings. Those teachings can never teach you to do any wrong, once you follow and want to read the Bible, the Bible teaches you to be a good person live a good life and you won't be able to engage in weird behaviors.

Here, George seems to be, suggesting the belief in positive change that religion provided post-incarceration and a new perception of one's identity associated with the crime they committed.

Religious identity emerged as a dynamic, iterative process throughout prison time and after release, as described by Dylon. Over the nine years since Dylon's release, he reflected on their journey, particularly the initial challenges faced upon reintegration, including difficulty securing employment within the first month and a half. Dylon, along with a sibling, had experienced incarceration due to committing a crime by murdering their abuser. While in prison, Dylon experienced the death of multiple family members. Despite these hardships, Dylon emphasized the significance of faith as a core value and noted a profound spiritual transformation during their time in county jail where they powerfully encountered God. This encounter fundamentally shifted their perspective on life, instilling a belief in God's love and changing the trajectory of their life. When describing the role of religious upbringing, Dylon conveyed:

> My core value is definitely faith…I grew up in the church, but it's kind of like I knew about God, but I didn't know God and it wasn't until I was in the county jail where I had that contact with God in a mighty powerful way and that really just changed my

> whole thinking and the way that I viewed life. And I could now say that God was loving because of the different things that he saw me through.

Similar experiences were shared by Samantha, who after several incarcerations, underwent a transformative period following her last incarceration in 2018. Reflecting on her younger years, Samantha conveyed her disbelief in God through her statement: “I didn't believe there was a God when I was younger. I felt like if there was a God then I wouldn't be going through this”. Samantha’s religious inclinations evolved in prison, appreciating the informal and personal approach of the Jehovah Witnesses' group, in contrast to the more structured and formal atmosphere experienced in Catholic settings. Samantha shared:

> Well, when I was in jail, my mom, when I came home, I didn't keep up with religion. I did for a while. But even though I was baptized Lutheran, I had gotten really into a lot of the things that the Jehovah Witnesses had to say. And I liked the way the way they handled their group in jail. Like it wasn't like the Catholic where everybody's like, oh, you know, be quiet. And this is that. It was more down to earth. Felt more personal, you know?

This shift in belief systems marked a significant transformation, with Samantha attributing newfound purpose and structure to her engagement with religious practices and principles.

Another participant, Amanda, shared that when she was first incarcerated, she described herself as a total mess, struggling with drug addiction, neglecting her children, selling drugs, and experiencing homelessness. Amanda credited her transformation to God, acknowledging that her life was spared multiple times, particularly on a specific date in 2007, when she believed she was supposed to die but was saved because God had other plans for her. Raised in a religious

environment with her grandmother, mother, and grandparents all connected to the church, religion played a significant role in her life. She expressed:

> So religion is really my God-my father-is a big part of my life. 2019. I was in my prison cell. January. On December 31st, bringing in the New Years. And I remember laying on my stomach, praying to God to forgive me for all my sins and asked him begging for one more chance. Please let me get free. Please give me my freedom. I promise you I won't let you down. I remember laying there, I mean, I was praying, praying, praying And I know he heard me because that year, things just started happening. And I knew I was like, I'm going home, I'm getting out of prison. I'm not gonna be here for the rest of my life. Because when I went to prison, I had 18 to life. And I would not even be going to the parole board until 2026. So God saved me once again. And now I have to fulfill my purpose for Him.

Self-Identification as Spiritual

Identification with spirituality emerged as participants defining their own set of beliefs despite a religious upbringing, having a universal connection among people, practicing yoga, meditation, reading self-help books and experiencing transformation through spirituality. For instance, Sarah reflected on her past experiences acknowledging that, unlike some who find God in incarceration, her relationship with spirituality remained consistent. Sarah acknowledged having a fear of God due to her upbringing. This is illustrated by the response:

> Um. I don't really I'm not really sure that there was any religious role in my ability to desist. I think that I mean, I have my own beliefs and in my own faith, I was raised Catholic. But, you know. I wouldn't say I'm a devout Catholic. I'm just independently thinking. I have my own faith, my own set of you know, spiritual beliefs, I guess.

Although Sarah did not further explain the role of spiritual beliefs, she does highlight the greater influence of her kids in the desistance process in terms of being a "mom" and being a better individual for her kids as she conveyed: "I think the thing that really prevented me from going back to prison again were my kids, being a mom to them meant more to me than anything."

Melissa described how her spiritual journey began during their incarceration, in the form of practices such as yoga, meditation, and reading self-help books, attempting to understand the events leading to her crime. Melissa's self-reflection period marked a significant impact on her belief system, leading her to explore various spiritual avenues. Melissa expressed spiritual beliefs in the form of a universal connection among people and narrated having gratitude for the pain and describing her trust in God. Melissa valued a personal relationship with God, transcending rituals and emphasizing a spiritual connection beyond words. This deep, intuitive knowingness sustains them, providing confidence in the divine. In describing herself, Melissa mentioned being a spiritual person, in addition to other identities in her life:

> Describing myself, I think that. I'm a hard worker. You know, I'm a mother. I'm a grandmother. I'm a great grandmother. I just persevere. You know, I'm a spiritual person. I consider myself a spiritual person. Um. So I just take one day at a time. It's hard to describe me because I feel like I'm just in survival mode. So I'm doing the things that I have to do more so than focus so much on self.

Interestingly, Melissa does mention God, however, explains her identification with spirituality in the form of: "I think I have a more personal relationship with God, you know. I won't say like someone, like following, like a bunch of rituals. But I just think that this is a spiritual connection." Melissa's response captures the nuance of having a connection with "God" while having more

control or agency in terms of how she engages with God, in the form of a spiritual connection rather than rituals.

Identifying as spiritual emerged as the evolving nature of viewing oneself and a strong identification with being a spiritual person rather than religious. Kevin described having a spiritual orientation, noting a transformation from a past involving gangs, violence, and substance abuse to a present guided by strong spirituality. This newfound spirituality played a crucial role in Kevin's commitment to doing the right thing and fostering positive change. In Kevin's response, he highlighted:

> I won't say I'm a religious person, but I'm definitely a spiritual person. So it definitely played a part in me. Like I said before, I'm a person that was involved in gangs and a lot of violence and a lot of drug abuse and just killing my spirituality. And today, my spirituality is very strong. And I try to live my life by my spirituality again and, you know, try to do the right thing, knowing what is the right thing and what is the wrong thing. Before, I did not have a conscience, I didn't care who I hurt or who got hurt or even if I got hurt for that, for that matter as well.

Taken together, participants who discussed spirituality appeared to do so in the context of conscience and doing the "right thing" and emphasizing a spiritual connection with God beyond words and not necessarily following a "bunch of rituals".

Integration of Religion and Spirituality/Personal Relationship with God

When asked about the role of religion and spirituality in desistance or about ways in which they describe themselves, some participants conveyed having a unique relationship with religion and/or spirituality that did not fit clearly into each distinct category of religion or spirituality. For instance, Zack described himself as described himself as not very religious

despite being a catholic. Zack expressed a preference for speaking with someone who can provide hope and support, such as his pastor when feeling down. Despite not identifying as highly religious, he expressed his love for reading the Bible and receiving specific verses from their pastor for various situations, whether it be when he is hungry, emotionally imbalanced, sad, or happy.

> So spirituality has really guided me to be a calm person. And although I'm not that religious, I do love to read the Bible. Like my pastor, I do have some, let's say when you are hungry, he has some like the Bible scriptures you should read. Say when you have some emotional imbalance or I feel sad is some certain bible verses that he sends you the and anything that your even if you're happy and you want to share your happiness with him. Is that a Bible scripture verse that he sends to you and you read it and now understand everything and it's good to understand everything in a religious way. It helps it to become calm the way Jesus wanted; the way Jesus was.

Zack emphasized the calming effect of understanding situations religiously, that were in alignment with the teachings of Jesus. Therefore, the overall response suggested that despite not being overtly religious, Zack found comfort and guidance in his spiritual practices and connections and relied on external support such as the pastor and seeking guidance from reading bible verses.

Not abiding by religious rituals, while maintaining constant communication with Jesus, seemed to emerge in the response of Lisa, who emphasized the positive outlook in life through spirituality while believing God orchestrated events for her good. Lisa, when reflecting on her journey described herself as a responsible, accountable, and intentional woman. She expressed a deep sense of trust in a higher power, believing that everything is in God's hands. Lisa conveyed

the spectrum of having spiritual influence in her life while acknowledging the role of Jesus as she described:

> Spirituality has played a huge role. I don't consider myself religious. I couldn't quote, I couldn't tell you where a Bible verse is located. I rarely attend church, but I talk to Jesus every day, all day, every day, all day.

Likewise, Emily conveyed having greater engagement with spiritual activities and clarified her involvement not being motivated by societal expectations given her belief in the cliché of incarcerated individuals finding God. Instead, engagement with spiritual activities connected Emily with the core values of doing good in the community, influenced by her father's commitment to charity work and giving people chances. She elaborated her response:

> So every part of my life has had some kind of connection to the spirituality, part of Catholicism that may include some values. I don't necessarily agree with everything. I don't necessarily am a practicing or am a very involved individual in the religion. But the spirituality and the. I like to say the good parts of it are really part of my existence. I value. The strength that comes behind it.

As evident from the response, Emily emphasized the importance of spirituality over specific religious affiliations, and focused on the positive and supportive aspects that contributed to her well-being.

Additionally, the role of spiritual experiences despite belonging to a religious group was prominent in the unique aspect of silent worship in Quaker practices,. Quaker practice allowed for ample time for reflection and contemplation. Jack highlighted the value of focusing on Quaker testimonies, such as simplicity as a source of guidance. emphasized the positive impact of being part of a larger faith community outside of prison. In his words, Jack conveyed:

> Well, I guess more Religion is just...the religion I do is Friends, Religious society of friends. Quakers. And. Because it's silent worship…So it allows you a lot of time to think and it allows you a lot of quiet time and time to think because Quakers is silent worship. You know, there's no preacher. There's no one telling you anything. And it's helped me. And then just focus in on the testimonies that Quakers use. Just think about the testimony of, let's say, simplicity. Just being simple with things and that that help. So it's just the little things that help.

The above response indicated how religious identification may not be due to engaging in rituals or groups associated with the organized religious group. Instead, it can include the deeper values or personal meaning-making of the process such as being together in a group yet engaging with faith as private practice. Although Quaker worship involved a religious community, the participant didn't fit clearly as being religious from his perspective and was selective about how he engaged with his faith.

In contrast, one participant, Winston found it difficult to describe himself due to his criminal record of being an arsonist and worked in the education sector and claimed to be an empiricist denying the role of religion in desistance. Winston stated: "I'm an empiricist and without any evidence, I have no belief in any supernatural beings or the beliefs that other people hold that are called religion." Further, he expressed skepticism about teaching children about "paranormal" and equated angels as being a vampire that don't drink blood. At the same time, he acknowledged his mother being religious, enjoying reading the bible, being moralistic, and enjoying reading and teaching about it. Winston mentioned the "complete loss of freedom" turning his life around post-incarceration. Hope was a way to rise above hard times, particularly about the future. It is noteworthy that despite having a religious upbringing, Winston denied the

role of religion in desistance, which could be influenced by several factors which are beyond the scope of the present study. Identification with being an empiricist could be tied to the desire to believe in something that has evidence, or due to bitter experiences concerning religion or spirituality. Winston stood alone among the participants, identifying himself as an "empiricist" and rejected the notions of religion and spirituality. This stance seemed rooted in his yearning to reclaim control over his life after prison, free from the constraints of religious obligations or societal expectations.

Self-reflection. The theme of self-reflection was prominent in the narratives of participants from various backgrounds—some religious, some non-religious, and others spiritual—who found solace and growth through introspection. Participants emphasized the importance of taking time for self-reflection, recognizing it as a crucial aspect of personal development and understanding. Lisa who identified as spiritual, highlighted the significance of self-reflection, noting that through activities like exercising, reading self-help books, and deep thinking, one can gain insights into themselves and their actions. She underscored the idea that ultimately, the responsibility for self-improvement lies solely with the individual. This was evident from Lisa's response**:**

> It came about by spending a lot of time exercising, a lot of time reading self-help books and a lot of time thinking because you can find yourself in any situation and you have to figure out what you brought to that situation. And nobody can fix you but you. Nobody can give you insight into who you are but you

Likewise, Sarah's experience reinforced the notion that self-reflection is essential for personal growth through her response:

> What I really believe, what helps people change and turn their life around is what they do while they're incarcerated….I took that initiative to, you know, try to understand why and how this happened to me, because I wasn't raised this way. And it was shocking to me. And I knew that what was going to happen from that point forward was going to be up to me that I found out very quickly, like I said, that nobody cared if you did anything to better yourself. But I was there and I had the time. There was nothing I could do about it. So I took that initiative at least to use it to better myself.

Despite being confronted with a challenging situation, Sarah took the initiative to understand herself better, acknowledging that her future path depended on her willingness to introspect and improve.

Serena, who identified as religious underscored the transformative potential of self-reflection, and emphasized benefit of self-reflection in fostering self-awareness and facilitating positive change. Serena acknowledged the harm she caused due to a lack of self-awareness but recognized that through introspection, she had the opportunity to rectify past mistakes and grow as an individual. She stated:

> I think the number one thing would be self-reflection if you don't have a good view of who you really are… I thought I wasn't hurting anybody. And the truth is, I hurt every single person that cared about me. And that's the. You, you think that everybody should have that? But they don't. The drug addicts don't. I know that. But even other crimes I'm thinking in my head that I was incarcerated with these people and in their mind, whatever they were doing was out of survival. They were just trying to survive. Like, you know what I mean like. Self-awareness is so important because if you don't see yourself as a problem or the thing that you're doing is a problem.

In contrast, Max, conveyed not identifying as religious before or after prison echoes this sentiment, emphasizing how the ample time afforded by prison allowed him the opportunity for deep introspection. In the absence of external distractions, he engaged in reading and self-reflection, recognizing the transformative power of contemplation. In his words he stated that: “I did a lot of reading and just self-reflection and those kinds of things. So, you know, prison gives you a lot of time to think.

Transformative Influence of Religion in the Desistance Process

Participant Perspectives on Religion

The perception around religion conveyed the notion of religion having a binding obligation, religion as a continuous process, religion providing hope, and recognizing the commonalities across religious principles such as values of love and charity. Melissa put it as follows:

> I was like studying the Zen, the Buddhists, the Muslim, the Christian, you know, it's about love. It's about charity. When you break it down, no matter who you say, you follow them. You just follow those basic principles. And you seek in the truth. Your steps would be directed.

Jack defined religion as the following:

> If I just take religion as what it is, if I define religion as like a binding obligation to something. I think if people have that obligation to follow whatever the religion is and use that same obligation in life to do the right thing. I think that would be the difference. And that will keep you focused.

Jack reflected on his idea of religion that extended to having a binding obligation to religion, which extended to similar obligations in life based on doing what is right and staying focused.

Similar thoughts were echoed by Dylon who described religion as a continuous process that is "constantly building", allowing his relationship to get stronger with God and with others in his life. Dylon stated:

> I've been able to do some different preaching opportunities in some different churches. I was able to go back to my alma mater two years ago or actually last year and preach at one of their chapel services. So, I mean, it's definitely a process where I continue to grow, continue to just allow that relationship to get stronger, known as allowing me to have stronger relationships with other people in my life to

Among several participant responses, the perception of religion was conveyed as a source of hope, especially in the context of prison being a place where there is lack of control or hope and putting faith in God provides relying on something "substantial" and larger them themselves. As described by Dylon:

> Religion helps people because it gives them hope, especially when they're in prison. It's a place where you don't have hope, you know? So reaching out to God or whoever you put your faith in is so powerful, because you now have something substantial that you can trust and that you can believe in, that you can say, okay, I know that I'm no longer alone.

Religion's Role in Personal Growth

Personal growth among desisting formerly incarcerated individuals was identified as a process based on God's impact in shifting one's mindset of viewing life differently and seeking external religious guidance through religious scriptures such as the bible.

God's impact on shifting mindset. Interestingly, the prison experience provided an opportunity to deepen one's faith through contact with God, changing one's way of thinking. Dylon shared:

> I mean, my core values are definitely faith. You know, that's something that, you know, I grew up in the church, but it's kind of like I knew about God, but I didn't know God, you know? And it wasn't until I was in the county jail where I had that that, that. Contact with God in a mighty powerful way, you know? And that really just changed my whole thinking, you know, and the way that I viewed life. And I could now say that God was loving, you know, because of the different things that he saw me through.

The notion of moral discernment through religious guidance emerged in the form of helping to think of what is right and wrong. Riley shared the following:

> I think that religion helps people in. I think most of the time it gives people the ability to see what's wrong and what's right and differentiate it. And it also helps people make the right decisions in life. And just to help them avoid so many issues and troubles, with authority or their friends or family and stuff like that. Hmm.

Likewise, when Samantha was asked about how religion helps people, she stated: “I think it brings order and discipline and morals.” Samantha added that religion provides a sense of discipline and the right path. Additionally, Geroge conveyed how following commandments that God guides to the correct path in life, as conveyed in his words:

> And once you go to church, your thoughts are now how to abide to the ten commandments that God will give to Moses. And once you abide according to them, you'll never go wrong. So for me, it has played a role.

Religious rituals provide guidance. Among the participant responses, rituals such as prayers and reading the bible were seen as a way to see messages from God to guide their life in the right path. For instance, George stated:

> Consistency and prayers, and believing that the hard times are only for a few moments. And after that everything would be fine and also believing that Life is full of ups and downs…..a Bible scripture verse that he sends to you and you read it and now understand everything and it's good to understand everything in a religious way. It helps it to become calm the way Jesus wanted; the way Jesus was.

Participants shared how their engagement with rituals changed during prison due to the initial confusion around what the future holds, after getting incarcerated as evidenced by Emily's response:

> I think at first when I was incarcerated, sitting in jail, not knowing what was going to happen…why is this happening to me? …you don't really understand until you are having to deal with it. And then there was a point where I did, you know. Pick up the Bible. And I was reading some verses and there was something that clearly. Came about that I was dealing with, which was my nerves and my anxiety being incarcerated. And there was a passage about, you know. Giving up your worries. Right. And I'm trying to find a way to move forward. And you can't let those worries, you know, keep you incarcerated even within yourself. And I think after doing that, it really freed me of some of that I learned to

The above-mentioned response, revealed Emily's ability to find hope through reading the verse, helping to regain some sense of control in a situation that seems hopeless and in the hands of the

prison authorities and the law. Although after prison, Amanda shared not using the bible anymore, she conveyed the consistency in her prayers in her response:

> I used to read my Bible every single day in there. I don't do that anymore. So, yes, I have fallen off since I have been out of prison, but I have not forgot him. And I pray to him every single day. I pray every single day. Do I pick up my Bible and go to church like I'm supposed to…No"

Divine intervention contributing to desistance

In addition to actively engaging in seeking religious guidance through engaging in rituals, participants revealed their reliance on God for help and their belief in God being the sole controller in life, God showed signs and expressed how God rescued them to provide another chance in life. For instance, Amanda narrated a time when God showed her signs to save her life and transformed her:

> And God, I mean, he was showing me so many signs. And I was seeing him because I knew, but I would just overlook it. And finally, he was like, enough is enough. I got to sit you down. And I'm hardheaded, very. You see, he has to punish to show his hardheaded children's things very abruptly, very, as I say, in the raw, where there's no in-between, you just know. And I'm one of them. And that's exactly what he had to do with me. And he saved my life in 2007, because I know for a fact I'm supposed to die that day.

Additionally, the reliance on God's hands to protect was indicated in Lisa's response who conveyed an external locus of control as evident from her response: "You know, I'm telling you, God's got everything well in hand. He really does. He knew. He knew I needed a work-from-home position. I didn't see it then, but I see it now." This theme was prominent as it involved more external influence that shaped life events to prevent the participants from reoffending and

continuing the path of desistance, in the form of getting employment post-incarceration and getting another chance in life through God's intervention.

Religious Mentorship: Nurturing Faith and Transformation

In line with the influence of relying on external help in making sense of life during and post-incarceration, the role of religious mentors emerged as a prominent theme to get emotional support as shared by Zack: "I do like engaging a lot with my pastor whenever I feel down, I do like to call him. And we read scriptures, bible scriptures". Serena conveyed the influence of her pastor in her ability to recognize her own identity: " The pastor at Rockville and a couple of the women I was in a program with. You know, challenged me on my beliefs of what I thought Christianity was and didn't give me answers. They made me find it myself." Additionally, Zack shared the role of pastor in gaining employment through network connections: "I got employment through the connection from my pastor. And he's the one who, like, gave a lot about me and said, this guy's a good person and he knows what he's doing. And I really got it from him." Religious transformation helped regain control and hope, through the support of pastor in accepting the situation one is in and strengthening faith of being close to go. As evident in the following response Riley:

> With the help of my religious leader, I found that it was necessary to just pray and be close to God, even when things seem okay or when they don't seem okay. And you just don't have to doubt that. And everything just happens for a reason. And it doesn't have to be a negative reason. Maybe in the human perspective, maybe we think that it's something ugly, maybe. But, you just have to see the positive side of everything.

From the responses, it became clear that the experiences with the pastor began during the time at the prison, however, served as a path for guidance to desistance even post-incarceration as a way

to recognize and strengthen their faith and seek a different perspective in life for the actions they took.

Religion provides a sense of community/acceptance

One of the most prominent themes that emerged for how religion contributed to desistance, and how religious communities bring in acceptance of formerly incarcerated individuals, seeing beyond one's crime. Other themes extended the sense of acceptance to the presence of God helping alleviate loneliness despite being placed in a secluded prison environment and feeling the sense of loneliness post-incarceration. Religious contacts through God provided to rewrite their narratives of how they view themselves, despite the societal view of seeing them through the lens of the crime committed. For instance, Serena shared:

> There was a church that I was very highly connected with that did Bible studies….My intent was to just talk to these people. And they were just so real about. like there's nothing I'm going to say that's going to shock them, which to me, in my mind, walking in like I'm a three time divorcee, a heroin junkie, like I thought they would die right there on the spot. But that's not how they were.

Religious safety net contributing to desistance. Adri expressed their thoughts on how having a sense of community contributes to reducing recidivism. This response corresponds to the social control theory which contends that individuals are less inclined to engage in delinquent behavior when they possess strong social bonds, including affiliations with religious organizations and a sense of community belonging (Hirschi, 1969). In their words they describe Adri:

> I think religion is very useful. One, it brings communities together…to me, I look at churches as a positive thing and I think that folks that get involved, especially those who

have been incarcerated, you know, I get not everyone has the same drive or even the same abilities that I have. And so. You know, connecting with the church, getting involved in those causes, trying to give back to your community, I think is huge for an incarcerated person to connect. You know, I think that helps, you know, potentially reduce recidivism because they're able to use their experience in a very practical way, whether it's helping to run like a food pantry on, you know, one Saturday a month or maybe, you know, running a family or family group. Sarah, conveyed the importance of having a safety net, in addition to family and friends, whether it is through AA and/or church having elements of both religion and spirituality. Sarah expressed: I think having a safety net, a support network, whatever that support is, whether it's church, family, friends, you know, AA and a, you know, whatever, you know. Whatever it is, wherever you feel supported it is, is important. It's extremely important to have that safety net. And that is your safety net that supports.

Divine Presence: Alleviating Loneliness. Oftentimes, we think of social support in the form of family, friends, and other relationships. However, a nuanced understanding of consistent form of social support entailed confidence in the presence of God as stated by Amanda: “I don't know how many times I went to jail and I will pray and say, Oh, God, please help me get through this. I promise you, help me get through this. I'm going to do better. He let me out.” It can be inferred through the response, that omnipresence of God acts as an anchor and hope for getting out of prison and perhaps the continued impact leading to desistance. Lisa further explained experiencing comfort in the idea of being protected by God:

And I see his hand in my life. I see it and I saw his hand in my life when I was incarcerated. I promise you. I heard him talk to me. He talks to me all the time, whether I

sound crazy or not. Dylon, explicitly stated how the presence of God helps alleviate loneliness: “So having that relationship with God or whatever the person believes in, allows them to know that they're never alone, that somebody is there with them. So and then just being able to have faith in something is so powerful.”

Divine redemption script. This theme emerged as a powerful response concerning God’s presence and teachings encouraging a different view of participant’s self, seeing beyond their past view of self as an “offender”. This was evident from Dylon’s response who stated: “In the churches that both my wife and I have attended together, they haven't looked at me or defined me by my past. You know, they define me as a child of God, which is so powerful.” The people introduced through God, such as Church people provided Dylon a sense of acceptance through their church people’s continued faith and investment compared to other friends. In Dylon’s words**:**

> I have some friends out in Washington State who were once at a church that I went to when I was a teenager. And they are the only ones who stood by my whole side while I was incarcerated. I had some friends that I lived with and hung out with…they're like…I'll be there. But as day turns in the week, turns in a month, turns into years- peace out, you know. But these folks at this church, you know, they stood by my side. They accepted phone calls, you know, like every other month. And this was like 25 to $30 for one call. And so they just continued to invest in me. And it was very powerful.

Overall, the support from God, church friends who continued to protect and provide the support helped the participants feel accepted, even when others around them gave up and redefine their narrative of their past selves.

Spirituality provides Core values for transformation

Participant Perspectives on Spirituality

From the participant's perception, spirituality was seen in the form of certain values such as having compassion, an opportunity for growth and freedom, and defining one's relationship with God that is responsible for one's personal transformation. As described by Kevin:

> Spirituality to me or being the best person you can be, not only for yourself, but for your community, for the earth, for the people that are living in your community, living in this earth. Like, being kind and being compassionate to others, finding the good in everybody instead of pointing out the bad. Look at the good and realizing that you know, because of substance use disorder or mental health, you know, people are suffering today and that's not who they really are. And with some help and some care and some love, you'll see you'll see a tremendous transformation come out of them.

Further, Kevin shared that spirituality provided him freedom, and in prison while he engaged with the church found an escape from the prison life, however, post-prison it was the spirituality that provided the freedom and felt without spirituality an individual is empty.

> I want to say in prison…. More or less went to church or whatever I did to kill my time and my freedom, the freedom of getting out of my cell. Whatever the cause may be. I don't think I really took religion that seriously. I think once I got out, I forgot all about religion and went back to my old ways. But I think it's the spirituality part. Like that's what really gave me the growth. The opportunities that remain free. I think, you know, it's great that people are religious, but I think they need that spirituality with it, or have spirituality. Because without spirituality, I think we are empty.

Additionally, spirituality also seemed to be a personal definition of how one chooses to engage with God in terms of maintaining a spiritual connection rather than relying on rituals. Melissa narrated:

> I think I have a more personal relationship with God, you know. I won't say like someone, like following, like a bunch of rituals. But I just think that this is a spiritual connection. That's beyond words. You know, is it's just a knowingness. You know, you feel the wind, you don't see it, but, you know, it's there, you know. So I have that confidence that the you know and the divine. I mean, you know, so I say more. Because it's not easy to walk by faith and not by sight or to be confident in something that you can't see. But, you know that is real, you know? There are things that are happening. You can't put words to it because it just ain't no words for it. So definitely more . And you know, and that sustains me.

Emily considered spirituality to be a part of one's existence: "spirituality and the. I like to say the good parts of it are really part of my existence." Overall, spirituality, as defined by participants, encompassed values like compassion, personal growth, and defining one's relationship with God, leading to personal transformation. It involved being the best version of oneself for the community and the Earth, embracing kindness and compassion while acknowledging the suffering of others. For some, spirituality offers freedom and escape, with a focus on personal growth rather than religious rituals, emphasizing a personal connection with God beyond words or visible manifestations. Overall, spirituality is seen as an integral part of existence, providing meaning and sustenance beyond religious practices.

Community through Spiritual Practices

The theme that emerged from the participant's response was the transformative power of spirituality and the sense of community and camaraderie it fosters. Rather than simply a religious experience, the individual emphasizes how their involvement in spiritual activities during incarceration reconnected them with core values, particularly those instilled by their father's commitment to charity and community service. They described a sense of belonging and understanding within the group, where the focus is not solely on religious discourse but on shared values and the bonds of kinship. This emphasis on camaraderie highlights the importance of human connection and mutual support in the journey towards personal growth and rehabilitation. One participant Kevin, expressed this as:

> While I was incarcerated, I really became more involved. It's always a cliché…everybody who gets incarcerated always finds God. And they're very involved in study groups and the Bible studies groups while you're incarcerated and you come out and nothing. And I didn't do it for that reason. I was very careful. But it was something that connected me back to kind of those core values. I talked about doing good in the community, and my dad was very much into charity work and giving people a chance and he was always doing something. And so we have been volunteering since we were young, you know, and everything. And so it kind of that's the spirituality part of it. So as far as I was involved there, it provided me a group that understood those values…it wasn't so much the religion, it was more the camaraderie or the kinship behind it. The connection.

Spiritual Insights: Shifting Perspectives

The theme that emerged from the participants responses is the transformative power of spiritual insights, particularly in shifting perspectives and guiding individuals through challenging times. Conscience is highlighted as a guiding force, with one individual emphasizing

how it prevents them from doing wrong by reminding them of the right path. As described by Kevin in his words:

> My conscience won't allow me to do the wrong thing, because it let me know that that's not the right thing to do. So. But I think, it comes down to knowledge. Knowing there is another way, that I don't have to lose. I don't have to go back to my old ways.

Another participant spoke to the role of faith and spirituality in altering their outlook, suggesting that it allows them to see alternatives to their previous behaviors. Additionally, there is a sense of gratitude expressed for this shift in perspective, acknowledging the role of therapy, 12-step work, and spiritual beliefs in fostering personal growth and a more positive attitude. For instance, Mark stated:

> Part of it is therapy. Part of it is 12-step work. Part of it is faith and spirituality. Part of it is the reality that I'm far luckier than a lot of people. Yeah, my outlook. And my attitude affects where I am right. Now. Just like it does for everybody. You know, miserable people.

Connection to core spiritual values

Seeking Forgiveness: Self, Others, from God. Forgiveness was revealed as a significant theme in terms of forgiving oneself, seeking forgiveness from others, and seeking forgiveness from God. Amanda conveyed her desire to seek forgiveness from God stated the following:

> praying to God to forgive me for all my sins and asked him begging for one more chance. Please let me get free. Please give me my freedom. I promise you I won't let you down. I remember laying there, I mean, I was praying, praying, praying, praying

In the realm of seeking forgiveness, Melissa reflected on the profound influence of spirituality in granting absolution, a virtue often scarce among humanity. She expressed:

> Like people are so unforgiving, they remember the mistakes that you make. But not your goodness. people are so quick to condemn and judge, you know. But, religion, Depending on what path you taking, you know, the forgiveness, the compassion. We all need compassion, you know?

Lastly, Emily expressed: "I've learned how to forgive others that I may have felt I took part in my being incarcerated." Emily's response demonstrated that she has learned how to forgive others whom she may have blamed for her incarceration. This statement suggested personal growth and a willingness to let go of resentment or blame.

Spiritual Growth: Empathy, Kindness, Boundaries. The theme of spiritual growth through the lens of empathy, kindness, and boundaries, was articulated by participants who reflected on their personal journeys and philosophical understandings. The excerpts from various individuals shed light on the transformative power of spirituality in shaping their perspectives on life, relationships, and personal conduct. Melissa reflected on the transient nature of life and the importance of surrendering to a higher purpose:

> But I pray a lot. I believe that. There's divine purpose for my life. perhaps the plans that I have for myself are not the plans that the universe has for me, you know? So now, I find myself in a place of surrender. I tried to validate people. Tell people that I love them. Like to lift people up, to give people hope. Um. And just make it, you know, see what the day brings.

Melissa further emphasized the significance of being a blessing to others, expressing: "I have more peace. I meditate. I do what I can every day to try to bless somebody because I feel

like I've been blessed. So every day I want to be a blessing. I want to help someone. And I can lay down and sleep in peace." Serena delved into the idea of self-awareness and compassion, and highlighted, "Like if I'm always working from a narrative that I'm the biggest sinner here, I'll have grace for everybody around me like I will. And I think that's important. I think it's important to know who you are, naturally, and who everyone else is."

Furthermore, Mark emphasized the importance of compassion and recognizing the humanity in others, stating, "Because the solution to inhumanity isn't more inhumanity. Right. And even in my interactions with staff people. Even the. Bad ones, I tried to show them that I was a person first, whether they wanted to see me as that way or not."

Spiritual Ethics: Guiding Morality. Among the participant responses, spiritual ethics played a pivotal role in guiding human morality, providing a framework for discerning right from wrong and fostering a sense of responsibility towards others. Spiritually inclined individuals found themselves drawn toward a moral compass rooted in principles of compassion, empathy, and interconnectedness with the universe. This ethical framework served as a beacon, illuminating the path toward virtuous behavior and helping individuals navigate complex moral dilemmas. For instance, Sarah's reflection captured the essence of how spiritual ethics influenced personal morality. She acknowledged her inherent belief in right and wrong, attributing her past missteps not to a lack of values, but rather to poor decision-making. She described the following:

> And my values are I mean, I do believe in right and wrong. And I know the difference between right and wrong. I just made bad choices. And today I wouldn't make the same stupid decisions that I made then. I mean, I'm ethical. I believe I'm a very, very ethical person. And I strongly believe in ethics…my value system was never really wrong, but my decisions were bad.

Furthermore, Kevin's narrative offered insight into the transformative power of spirituality in moral development. He contrasted his past indifference towards harming others with his present commitment to living a principled life guided by spirituality. Kevin's acknowledgment of his previous lack of conscience reflected a profound shift in his ethical orientation, wherein spiritual principles informed his understanding of right and wrong in the present. He elaborated how spirituality could instill a sense of moral responsibility and empathy, guiding individuals towards actions that prioritized the welfare of others and stated:

> And I try to live my life by my spirituality again and try to do the right thing, knowing what is the right thing and what is the wrong thing. Before, I did not have a conscience, I didn't care who I hurt or who got hurt or even if I got hurt for that, for that matter as well.

Overall, their belief in ethics remained steadfast, indicating the enduring influence of spiritual values on her moral compass and recognizing past indifference towards causing harm underscored the transformative impact of spirituality on moral awareness.

Doubts/ Struggles Around Faith

Questioning religious authenticity/intent of other inmates

Interestingly, although the participants acknowledged the influence of religion and spirituality on desistance, some participants conveyed various sentiments and observations regarding religious authenticity, spiritual intent, and the demeanor of those practicing their religion in prison. Distrust of other prison inmates and the hesitancy to confide in others was suggested through the narrative responses gathered in a longitudinal study among prisoners in Pennsylvania (Said & Davidson. 2023). Through the narratives, it became evident that these experiences have played a significant role in shaping their perceptions and beliefs. For instance, questioning the authenticity and intent of religious practices among fellow inmates was a

recurring theme. In reflecting on observations made within the prison environment, individuals remarked on the apparent incongruence between outward displays of religious fervor and internal authenticity. For example, Jasmine, stated:

> I definitely have my beliefs and I just I think it's so cheesy when people say that, they all find God and either their sobriety or their incarceration. And I tried I really tried to participate in that um while in prison. But then it's like you go back to the yard. So you go to these services with people and they're like, they have their hands in the air and they're praising God and they're doing all the things. And then you go back to the yard and you see them like. Doing these odd things that, you're like, Well, that's one person that I just saw, like with their hands in the air. And, you know, like, that's kind of weird.

Furthermore, doubts surrounding the authenticity of religious institutions and their followers were highlighted. Participants critically examined the commercialization and superficiality they perceived within corporate religious structures, contrasting it with the genuine faith exhibited by individuals in less affluent settings. This disparity led to a deeper questioning of the motives and values embedded within organized religion, contributing to a sense of disillusionment and detachment.

Moreover, the prevalence of religious practices within the prison environment elicited cynicism among some individuals. While acknowledging exposure to various forms of religious expression during incarceration, there was skepticism regarding the transformative impact of these experiences. For some, the observed misuse of religion as a tool for manipulation and evasion of responsibility reinforced existing doubts and served as a deterrent to embracing religious beliefs. As narrated by Serena:

> And by doing so, I realized that, you know, corporate America, like just our whole our church system is all watered down, like people are in these third world countries get church,

> they dig the Bible, they grab onto it. And then, you know, there's hope in it. Here it's just like it's almost a status-y thing. It's weird. I don't I don't know, but. It played a huge role for me and those people played a huge role for me.

Overall, the theme of doubts and struggles around faith within the prison context encompassed a spectrum of experiences, ranging from questioning the authenticity of religious practices to grappling with disillusionment towards organized religion. Through introspection and interaction with others, individuals navigated complex emotions and perspectives, shaping their understanding of faith and spirituality amidst challenging circumstances.

Complexity Around Faith

Participant's narratives shed light on their journeys of disbelief, doubt, and unexpected connections within religious settings. Through these accounts, a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding faith emerges, influenced by personal struggles, societal expectations, and interpersonal interactions. For instance, Despite having doubts, Serena found genuine connections in religious communities as evident from her response:

> There was a church that I was very highly connected with that did Bible studies. And although I enjoyed the Bible studies, that that was not the intent of going. My intent was to just talk to these people. And they were just so real about. You know, like there's nothing I'm going to say that's going to shock them, which to me, in my mind, walking in like I'm a three time divorcee, a heroin junkie, like I thought they would die right there on the spot. But that's not how they were. They like. They displayed the things that you only read about in books like.

Samantha conveyed her disbelief in the existence of a higher power, particularly during childhood, questioning the presence of God amidst personal hardships and adversities. She stated: "I didn't believe there was a God when I was younger. I felt like if there was a God then I

wouldn't be going through this." In sum, these narratives explained the multifaceted nature of faith and spirituality, encompassing moments of doubt, disbelief, and unexpected connections. Despite grappling with skepticism and questioning the existence of a higher power, individuals found solace and affirmation through genuine human interactions within religious communities.

The mixed-methods analysis revealed noteworthy insights regarding the association between faith identity and the propensity for almost reoffending, as evidenced by binary logistic regression. Notably, individuals identifying as religious and spiritual exhibited a heightened likelihood of reporting instances of reoffending, implying a potential risk factor associated with their religious affiliation. Based on the FST, the quantitative analysis, confirmed the existence of the resources of religion and spirituality, through the results that indicated a positive association between religion, spirituality and desistance. However, a closer look through qualitative analysis unveiled nuanced perceptions on how religion and spirituality served as a resource that FIP's utilized to work towards their desistance journey. It became evident that within one's faith identity, there exist both protective factors such as finding a sense of community through religion and spirituality, shifting perspectives in one's mindset through connection to core values, relying on religious mentorship to transform faith etc., and constraints due to questioning other inmates' religious authenticity, grappling with doubts/disbelief in the role of a higher power contributing to a multifaceted portrayal of the phenomenon. While some individuals find their faith to be a protective resource, others encounter limitations. Further, some experience faith as a resource and a constraint concurrently, thus presenting a complex and varied picture. The mixed-methods findings will be explored in further detail in the discussion section.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

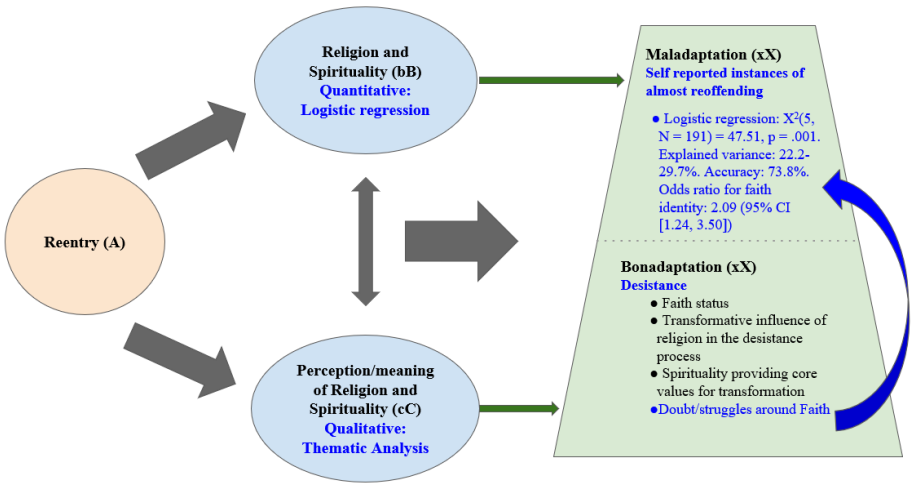
The purpose of the present mixed-methods study was to examine the association between one's faith identity (i.e., religion, spirituality, etc.) and self-reported instances of almost reoffending among formerly incarcerated individuals. A binary logistic regression was used to examine the association between one's faith identification with religion, spirituality, and the self-reported instances of almost reoffending. Additionally, interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of formerly incarcerated individuals' perspectives of how religion and/ or spirituality contribute to the desistance process.

The qualitative findings helped to parse out the differences and unique contributions of one's faith identity (religion, spirituality or neither) on the desistance process. The quantitative findings provided an interesting insight into how religion and/ or spirituality contribute to the desistance process. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, suggesting that the association between the independent variable (faith identity) and the outcome variable (self-reported instances of almost reoffending) is unlikely to have occurred by chance alone. The model correctly classified 73.8% of cases, indicating its predictive ability to distinguish between individuals who are likely to report instances of almost reoffending and those who are not. These findings indicated a positive association between religion and spirituality and the likelihood of self-reported instances of desistance, which captured a substantial portion of variability, between 22.2% and 29.7% (Nagelkerke R^2). However, there is unexplained variability indicating a more complex picture of formerly incarcerated individuals. Those identifying as religious and spiritual are twice as more likely to self-report instances of almost reoffending compared to those who did not identify as religious or spiritual.

A notable consideration is that a response of 'yes' indicated that the participants self-reported almost reoffending, however, based on study inclusion criteria they did indeed desist. Thereby, indicating that religion and spirituality could be one among several other crucial factors that contribute to the desistance process, pointing to the potential of long-lasting change and transformation post release from prison. Based on family stress theory (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) utilized in the present study, the results suggested that religion and spirituality (bB) acted as coping resources for many individuals, however self-reported the likelihood of almost re-offending as indicative of dealing with the crisis of the likelihood of reoffending, "maladaptation" (xX), suggesting a near return to criminal activities, as shown in Figure 2. Although beyond the scope of this study, it may be that those who are more likely to almost reoffend may also be in greater need of a coping resource, such as faith, to maintain desistance. However, the association is nuanced as although the study found that those who identify as religious and spiritual are more likely to report almost reoffending, additional factors may also contribute to individuals' desistance behaviors.

Figure 2

Theoretical Map of Mixed-Methods Findings



The qualitative findings supported the research question of the contribution of religion and/ or spirituality in the desistance process of formerly incarcerated individuals, offering unique insights into the journey of desistance. The qualitative responses corroborated with the meaning making process around the resource (religion and/spirituality as a part of their faith identity; cC) contributing to positive adaptation "bonadaptation" (xX) as indicating desistance, as can be seen in Figure 2. The narratives of the participants shed light on how religion, spirituality, and integration of religion and spirituality contributed to their perceptions of how their faith identity (religion, spirituality, integration of religion and spirituality/ personal relationship with God) provide a sense of community, morality, core values, opportunity for self-reflection and belief in the divine intervention. Additionally, divergences in how participants engaged with their faith identity emerged. Some participants demonstrated a complex relationship with faith by sharing their accounts of seeing other inmates and doubting their authenticity, denying identifying as either religious or spiritual.

Literature on the role of religion and spirituality within desistance is mixed and in need of clarity. Previous studies have examined religion and desistance, from the perspective of religious participation which has been defined as a "system of worship and doctrine that is shared within a group" (Fetzer Institute, 2003 [1999]). In contrast, spirituality is "concerned with the transcendent, addressing ultimate questions about life's meaning, with the assumption that there is more to life than what we see or fully understand." As prominent in the definition, spirituality is a difficult concept to measure in research and previous study has longitudinally studied spirituality-desistance link, however, excluded women prisoners from the sample and examined spirituality from the perspective of "being close to God" and religious participation (Giordano et al., 2008). The present study advanced the literature through an analysis of first-hand accounts of

formerly incarcerated individuals and explored the convergence and divergence in the definitions and the contributions of how religion, spirituality and integration of religion and spirituality contributes to desistance. Further, an argument that supported the purpose of the present study indicated that the protective contribution of religion has been established in reentry outcomes, however, specific examinations in the way it plays out has been underexplored (Morag & Teman, 2018, Stansfield et al., 2018;2019).

The current study expanded existing literature to provide a nuanced understanding of formerly incarcerated individuals having a unique personal relationship with God that didn't fit the criteria of following religious rituals. The role of social support has been acknowledged in desistance literature (e.g. Denney et al., 2014; Naser & La Vigne, 2006), however, the potential role of divine presence in alleviating loneliness, is a new insight that emerged through the study. Future research can further examine how God's presence can provide a sense of social support and unconditional love and acceptance when prison can seem like an inescapable life situation in addition to the stigma of being a "criminal" post-release. The following section will situate the study's findings in the current literature, explore implications and limitations, and offer summary conclusions and next steps.

Mixed-Methods Advancement in Desistance Literature

The punishment-based dominant discourses such as crime, control, and punishment tend to dismiss the function of protective factors, such as religion and spirituality that could provide a sense of belonging and connectedness and a sense of security, especially when one's situation may seem out of control (Schuilenberg & Steden, as cited in Steden et al., 2014). Punitive and control discourses can be understood through the lens of Erving Goffman's concept of prisons as "total institutions", which posits that prison authorities aim to achieve complete control over

inmates by stripping away their external identities. This implies that carceral control takes place by removing markers of personal expression such as mandating to wear uniforms, governing the daily routines of inmates, etc. (Ellis, 2023). Enforcement of such strict rules and regulations further erodes an individual's sense of self and replaces it with a deep internalization of the incarcerated role, a process Goffman termed the "mortification of the self" (Ellis, 2023). Dehumanizing carceral tactics likely impede desistance processes and, as such, the present study attempted to initiate further research on what fosters recovery, rehabilitation, and self-growth among formerly incarcerated individuals and is needed to better shape reentry outcomes.

While prior studies have emphasized the supportive, hopeful, and meaning-making roles of religious beliefs and practices for incarcerated individuals (Hallett et al., 2016; Johnson, 2011; Levitt & Loper, 2009), their potential influence on desistance remains underexplored. Research predominantly focuses on the relationship between religion, spirituality, and post-release recidivism, often demonstrating positive associations (Clear et al., 1992; Kelly, Polanin, Jang, & Johnson, 2015; Power, Ritchie, & Madill, 2014).

The present study expanded on existing research by examining the interplay of religion and spirituality in the context of desistance processes. However, there are variations in defining and measuring religious engagement, necessitating a more nuanced investigation to better understand how religion and/ or spirituality contributed to the desistance process which may not necessarily be tied to religious participation (Ellis, 1985). This study sought to address this gap by utilizing mixed methods to explore how religion and spirituality may correlate with self-reported instances of almost reoffending among participants. Additionally, the study aimed to uncover participants' perspectives on the influence of religion and/or spirituality on their path towards desistance. By integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses, this research endeavored

to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of religion and spirituality in the desistance process within correctional settings.

Interestingly, the present study found a positive association between faith identity and self-reported instances of almost reoffending. The variables of religion, spirituality, and desistance were examined to understand broader trends and subtle nuances of perceptions of religion and/or spirituality contributing to desistance. A recent mixed methods study utilized the lens of social control theory in the context of religion and found that among those who are successful in desisting, religion only appeared to play a role for the one person who was able to connect with a robust church community (Said & Davidson, 2023). A limitation of this study was not including spirituality. A pioneering study examined adolescents across three stages of the study to assess for the influence of spirituality on desistance, however, was limited to men and the sample excluded women (Giordano et al., 2008). Further, religion was viewed in terms of the level of religiosity, and participation in religious study groups, leaving less room for exploring the role of spirituality and the integration of religion and spirituality which were captured in the narratives of male and female formerly incarcerated individuals in the present study. Including gender diversity is critical to ensure representation and equity in the sample, providing a comprehensive understanding of how men and women's faith identity influence the desistance process.

Complex Interplay between Religion, Spirituality, and Desistance

Findings from this mixed methods study suggest that religion and spirituality play a complex and deeply personal role in desistance. Quantitative results indicated a positive association between an individual's faith identity (religious, spiritual, or neither) and their likelihood of almost reoffending, suggesting that formerly incarcerated individuals with a

religious or spiritual affiliation are more inclined to report instances of nearly reoffending. Binary logistic regression analysis revealed a notable correlation between an individual's faith identity—be it religious, spiritual, or non-affiliated—and their propensity for near-reoffending. Specifically, this association suggested that formerly incarcerated individuals identifying with a religious or spiritual group are more prone to reporting incidents of almost reoffending. Although beyond the scope of this study, possible explanations for this finding include people with a faith identity may be more likely to answer this question honestly due to an internal moral code or external religious guidelines, and/or people who are more likely to almost reoffend may need advanced coping strategies, and therefore turn to faith, to continue desisting.

At face value, this quantitative finding may seem counterintuitive given extant theory and literature demonstrating the social support value that religion and spirituality can hold (e.g. Colvin et al., 2002; Denney et al., 2014). The complex finding in the present study pointed to the nuance of the participants identified as being religious and spiritual, self-reported instances of almost reoffending, yet chose to desist. However, research offers insight into how the definition of desistance acknowledges that people who have engaged in criminal activities may experience fluctuations in their commitment to such behavior, due to a range of factors such as personal growth, changes in social networks, or shifts in opportunities (Bushway et al., 2001).

Criminology literature has established ‘turning points’ that may be associated with, a reduction in criminal behavior such as marriage, having children, and employment (Abeling-Judge, 2016; Doleac, 2023; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Additionally, social control theory posits that ties to religious institutions may deter an individual from committing a crime (Hirschi, 1969). Due to the difficulty in the measurement of religion and spirituality, an omission in literature has been the potential contribution of one’s faith identity on the desistance process. The

present findings can be explained through an underexplored topic of the notion of "spiritual struggle" or "negative religious coping" that reveals the dynamic nature of one's level of religiosity and spirituality based on feeling discontent with one's spirituality and a reappraisal of God in response to major life events or stressors, such as reentry from prison (Exline & Rose 2005; Giordano et al., 2008; Stansfield et al., 2019; Jang & Franzen, 2013).The qualitative narratives shed light on the complex relationship between religion, spirituality, and desistance from criminal behavior among inmates. Despite acknowledging the influence of religious and spiritual beliefs on desistance, participants often questioned the authenticity and intent of religious practices among their fellow inmates. There was a recurring theme of skepticism regarding the transformative impact of religious experiences within the prison environment, with some individuals observing a disconnect between outward displays of religious fervor and internal authenticity.

Doubts about the significance of religion were reinforced by instances of religious practices being used as tools for manipulation and evasion of responsibility. However, amidst this skepticism, some participants found genuine connections within religious communities, highlighting the unexpected positive experiences they encountered despite initial doubts. On the other hand, some participants expressed disbelief in the existence of a higher power, particularly during times of personal hardship and adversity. Disbelief in a higher power was linked to their questioning of why they were experiencing difficulties if there truly was a benevolent deity. Ellis' (2023) ethnographic study of women in prisons found that religion helps to provide a sense of liberation in a controlled prison environment and simultaneously experience "secondhand carcerality" that comprised influence by non-carceral institutions. For instance, a woman inmate demonstrated how obeying the religious expectations of her behavior, and

religious messages around her to obey prison authorities led to realizing her “resistance” to authorities as a deviation from her faith. Other instances of secondhand carcerality included regulations on when and how inmates are allowed to engage in religious rituals and the prison administration's own religious identity influencing the treatment of the inmates. Thus, in turn, secondhand carcerality implies a double-edged sword of religion providing the so-called liberation from prison’s control, but simultaneously perpetuating the belief that inmates deserve this punishment, in turn, coercing them to obey the prison rules under the guise of honoring their faith. Ellis (2023) concluded that religion plays a multifaceted role within carceral settings, offering solace, agency, and a framework for understanding and challenging the complexities of imprisonment while also interacting with and influencing the dynamics of control and authority.

The present study revealed fewer moments of doubt among formerly incarcerated individuals which were not tied to the prison authorities, however, had doubts around faith after witnessing other inmates lacking authenticity about their religious beliefs. Additionally, some participants conveyed how religion is used as a tool for a manipulation, and described the capitalism that exists in the church system, where the involvement with the church as seen as a status symbol. Despite the skepticism around the beliefs around religion and/or spirituality, participants reported experiencing a shared sense of community, time for self-reflection, prison providing an opportunity for religious mentorship and divine presence and intervention alleviating loneliness and providing the path of desistance.

Unique Contributions of Faith identity in the Desistance Process

As established in the above section, the role of religion in formerly incarcerated people is complex. The present study is among the first to center participants’ voices and understand how religion and/or spirituality shape the desistance process. Several studies have examined the

relationship between religion and spirituality, and desistance particularly, exploring it in the context of attendance at a house of worship, the familial importance of religion, and attitudes toward spirituality (Desmond et al., 2013; Salas et al., 2014). Historically, it has been methodologically challenging to operationalize and measure faith. This challenge extends to parsing out the distinctions between religion and spirituality in their influence on the desistance process among formerly incarcerated individuals. Further exploration involves understanding religion through tangible rituals and utilizing faith-based interventions to comprehend how religion and spirituality contribute to desistance, as demonstrated in some studies (e.g. Giordano et al., 2008; Mapham & Hefferon, 2012). Intuitively, religion is easier to operationalize due to the established faith institutions and rituals associated with one's religion, however, the subjective and abstract nature of spirituality makes it more difficult to define and study in research.

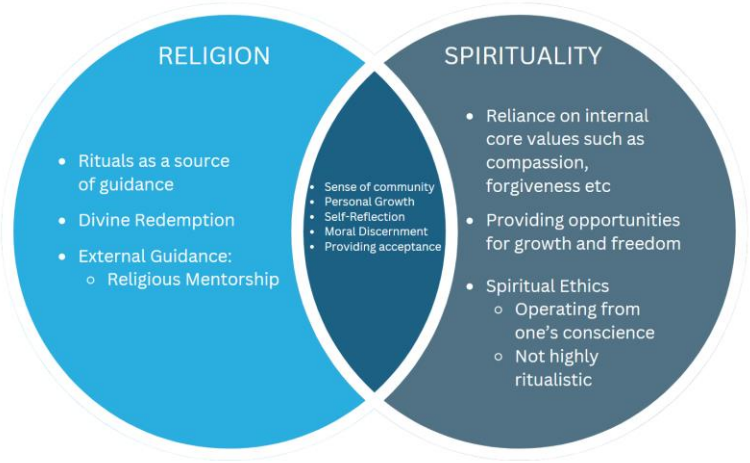
By examining the narratives shared by participants, the present study illuminated key distinctions between religion and spirituality, offering valuable insights into commonalities about the perspectives on religion and spirituality, such as religious principles and spirituality having some commonalities of love and charity, contribution to personal growth, an opportunity for self-reflection, a sense of community, and acceptance. The benefits of engaging in self-reflection have been echoed in mixed-methods research, however, have mostly been seen through narratives of in-prison experiences with religiosity (Said & Davidson, 2023). The present study advanced this understanding to include how spirituality and the integration of both religion and spirituality could offer an opportunity to contribute to personal growth. The following section elucidates the specific divergences in understanding how religion, spirituality, and the integration of religion and spirituality play out in the desistance process.

Divergence in Faith Experiences

Differences in how the participants engaged with religion and spirituality became apparent in the narratives shared, as shown in Figure 3. For instance, one prominent theme described self-reliance versus reliance on external help such as religious leaders, bibles, and so on. Spirituality emerged from self-reliance and connecting to different core values that seemed to foster lasting change such as having empathy for others, compassion, wanting forgiveness, and seeing beyond their crime. Likewise, participants' perspectives on religion included relying on rituals for guidance, believing in "God showing so many signs" and receiving religious mentorship in prison through pastors helping to nurture faith and even helping to get employment through a pastor's contact. Although, the survey captured only the identification of faith identity, i.e. religion, spirituality, or neither, the qualitative response expanded this understanding to include the integration of religion and spirituality to describe how participants utilized faith in their ways.

Figure 3

Convergence and Divergence in Faith Experiences



Further, Quaker worship demonstrated the idea of being together but alone, deriving a personal meaning-making process through silent worship without focusing on a preacher or engaging in any prescribed rituals.

Research has named the reliance on internal versus external locus of control through hypothesizing that an increase in sentencings or legal involvement would increase the likelihood of relying on external locus of control, may be less likely to engage in help-seeking behavior or participate actively in treatment programs aimed at reducing criminal behavior. They may resist behavioral changes and treatment strategies, preferring to rely on external sources of control rather than taking responsibility for their actions and outcomes (Anistasha & Danielle, 2022). However, Anistasha and Danielle's (2022) study focused on external interventions rather than individual first-hand accounts of the potential role of religion and spirituality contributing to the desistance process. In the present study's context of formerly desisting individuals' reliance on external sources such as religious faith and support from religious organizations, emerged as a belief that their ability to desist from criminal behavior or stay out of legal trouble is dependent on external factors such as divine intervention, the guidance of religious leaders, or the support of religious communities. They may have seen themselves as having little control over their behavior and outcomes, instead placing their trust and reliance on external forces to steer them away from criminality. This reliance on external sources of control, particularly in the form of religious faith and support, contrasted with an internal locus of control, where individuals believed that they had a significant degree of control over their actions and outcomes. Hence, religion possesses the capacity not only to provide a sturdy traditional belief structure and foster beneficial interpersonal connections but also to supply an institutional framework for assistance. This framework aids recently released individuals in rebuilding and strengthening relationships,

attaining employment, securing safe housing, accessing healthcare services, and receiving social support (Campbell et al., 2007).

In the context of desistance from criminal behavior, individuals with an internal locus of control may rely more on personal values, decision-making skills, and self-discipline to avoid illegal activities and maintain positive behaviors through values such as values of forgiveness, empathy and a sense of morality. Research indicates that spiritual resilience is achieved by fostering a deep-seated belief in the meaning and purpose of life, as well as in virtuous qualities like compassion, forgiveness (O'Connor & Perreyclear, 2002), and gratitude, often extending to a sense of gratitude towards a higher power (Jang et al., 2018b; Maruna et al., 2006). The very idea of someone committing a crime conveys a sense of negativity towards the offenders for what may be considered "unforgivable" actions, perhaps even directed towards family members of the offenders due to the stigma around crime. The positive traits linked to personal growth, such as compassion, forgiveness, and faith, are often disregarded in individuals, despite being developed and discussed in studies cited by Elisha and Ronel (2023). The present study contributed to the understanding of "humane" aspects of incarcerated persons as a shift to provide a more holistic view of a former offender's road to recovery and what prevents further engagement in illicit behavior. The language used for incarcerated persons as "criminals" or "offenders" further perpetuates the negative presentation and pathologizing stance of those who are involved in the criminal legal system. The theme of feeling a sense of acceptance from their religious community and a sense of community developed through spiritual connection validated the idea of their faith communities seeing beyond their crime.

The common link in one's faith identity of religion and/or spirituality contributed to a shift in mindset through the development of a sense of morality. The participants who identified

as religious conveyed the sense of moral compass derived through religious mentorship and rituals of reading the bible versed providing moral guidance Previous research corroborated with current findings that religious leaders, prison chaplains, and volunteers with humanist, spiritual, and religious affiliations have been found to provide invaluable support to prisoners in navigating the dehumanizing environment of incarceration and the complexities of reintegrating into society (Pew Research Center, 2012; Schroeder & Frana, 2009; Stansfield et al., 2017). Contrastingly, spirituality provided a sense of spiritual ethics that derived from internal sources and abiding one's conscience rather than an external source guiding them through a path of morality. Therefore, spirituality may serve as a pivotal factor in fostering pathways towards what literature conceptualizes as identity desistance (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016). Identity desistance can occur through individuals embracing a spiritual ethic rooted in their conscience, thereby guiding them towards the trajectory of desistance and, subsequently, facilitating identity transformation. Such a paradigm shift holds potential to catalyze relational desistance (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016), wherein society transcends the dehumanizing stereotypes associated with formerly incarcerated persons (FIPs) through changes observed with FIP's embodiment of values such as compassion, forgiveness, empathy etc., as found in the present study.

While most participants identified as being religious and spiritual they expressed being selective about parts of religion, even highlighting doubts of other inmates' authenticity and genuineness when it comes to faith. In sum, spirituality provided a sense of compassion and forgiveness by not limiting an individual to rituals and external reliance for help, while religion seemed to emerge as an aspect involving religious rituals, religion prescribing what is "morally correct" rather than an individual gaining insight themselves. Additionally, given the context of the formerly incarcerated individuals, it makes sense that due to religious binding based on rigid

rules and routines, spirituality provided more freedom while religion is tied to specific prescribed ways of being. For quantitative analysis, religion and spirituality were combined due to the limited responses for each, and it was found that religion and spirituality together may increase the likelihood of self-reported instances of almost reoffending. Perhaps, separating the two independent variables in the larger sample could yield different results in self-reported instances of reoffending. However, the narratives of participants explain the unique difference in how participants perceive and engage with tenets of religion, and or spirituality or define their relationship with God. According to Zinnbauer et al. (1997), while many individuals who consider themselves religious also claim spirituality, there has been a noticeable rise in what Fuller (2001) termed "unchurched traditions" in the United States. This trend, where people identify as spiritual but not religious, has been observed in studies (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009; Mercadante, 2014). The present study contributed to this understanding by adding identification of having a personal relationship with God, for those who don't fit into distinct categories of being religious and/or spiritual.

Overall, religion and spirituality held profound personal significance and played diverse roles in the process of desistance, often intertwined with the tenets of Family Stress Theory. They possessed significant potential as protective factors, serving as resources that deterred crises and recidivism. Quantitative analysis suggested an association between religious faith and desistance, yet it prompted further inquiry rather than providing definitive answers. Did individuals turn towards faith as a protective mechanism to prevent recidivism, particularly when faced with circumstances beyond their control, as posited by Family Stress Theory? It was conceivable that individuals predisposed to recidivism sought solace in religion, spirituality and defining a personal relationship with God to avoid reoffending, amidst the stressors within their

familial environment, suggesting a complex interplay between faith identity and recidivism. It is also plausible that those who identify as religious or spiritual may feel more compelled to answer honestly a question about almost re-offending. However, our understanding was constrained by the limitations of logistic regression in quantifying such dynamics. Future research endeavors are needed to delve deeper into how religion and faith, within the framework of Family Stress Theory, actively deterred individuals from reengaging in criminal behavior. The present mixed-methods approach represented an initial exploration into the association between faith and desistance, incorporating aspects of Family Stress Theory. Furthermore, race matters in the post-prison transition due to the impact of surveillance structures and policing practices in specific neighborhoods. For instance, Rios (2009) showed the influence of racialized and gendered crime through punitive police treatment by equating men and masculinity with guns among Black and Latino youth, preventing them from desisting. Interplay between race, gender and one's faith identity could be critical to examine the potential systemic influence in the desistance process, which was beyond the scope of the present study. Subsequent studies can examine how factors such as educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and race intersected with faith and familial stressors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its role in desistance.

Implications

In line with the shift toward positive criminology, literature has begun to move away from the "idea of security" that is equated with notions of 'crime', 'punishment' and 'control' and toward desistance-focused ideas that include 'trust', 'care' and belonging (Schuilenburg, 2015). In other words, when we think about security in the context of criminology, we should not focus solely on issues related to punitive measures such as crime and punishment but also consider the importance of trust, care, and a sense of belonging in creating a genuinely secure

and harmonious society to develop a more comprehensive understanding of security. In this way, scholars are beginning to shift from a punitive mindset to a rehabilitative mindset. As such, research exploring mechanisms of rehabilitation during reentry is needed. It is evident that contrary to pre-existing ideas of stricter punishments, positive criminology ideas (and, in parallel, recent federal policy changes) mark the commencement of a more humane and growth-oriented perspective. Consequently, desistance research has begun to embrace a resilience and growth-oriented framework.

The present mixed-methods study of faith identity and desistance, the process by which individuals cease engaging in future criminal behavior, has several implications for research, theory, and practice. First, future research can delve into to specific religious and spiritual mechanisms over some time to continue to strengthen the understanding of challenging concepts such as religion and spirituality and highlight ways in which in-prison and post-prison provide opportunities to engage with one's faith, beyond our predominantly Christian sample. Additionally, comparative research across different religious traditions and spiritual practices can elucidate whether certain aspects of religion or spirituality are more conducive to desistance than others. This can provide a nuanced understanding of the role of religion and spirituality in the desistance process. Social influences of desistance such as employment, marriage, the propensity to commit a crime reducing as one ages, and other key life events contributing to the desistance have been well-established (Abeling-Judge, 2016). However, more internal and long-lasting transformations such as perceptions of one's faith identity influencing the desistance process have received minimal attention from research scholars. The mixed-methods study could expand the view of 'Knifing off'(Maruna & Roy, 2007), for how religious conversion or deepening

spiritual commitments can lead to transformations that support desistance, considering even personal relationship with God for those individuals who don't neatly fit in one category.

Second, practitioners working with individuals involved in the criminal justice system could incorporate religious and spiritual resources into rehabilitation programs. This might involve collaborating with religious leaders or organizations to provide support tailored to individuals' spiritual needs. This could include broadening one's understanding of what entails religion and spirituality, allowing flexibility to practice one's faith as evident from the present studies group of individuals who integrated aspects of religion and spirituality, defining their relationship with god. Such efforts have been initiated in the domain of therapy, by the American Psychological Association (Norcross & Wampold, 2011) and have advised therapists to adapt to an individual's humanistic, religious, and spiritual needs unique to each client. Emphasis on one's unique relationship to religious and or spiritual values could be extended in prisons, to allow an opportunity to engage with their faith in ways that make formerly incarcerated individuals feel connected to their understanding of the divine.

Lastly, recognizing the diversity of faith beliefs (religion, spirituality, and integration of religion and spirituality), rehabilitation interventions could be culturally sensitive and respectful of individuals' faith traditions, as the present study found an integration of religion and spirituality that may not entail following organized rituals and practices. When considering the implications, it is pertinent to note that religion and/ or spirituality can serve as a valuable resource, among many other resources that were beyond the scope of the study. Overall, studying the intersection of religion, spirituality, and desistance can enrich our understanding of how individuals navigate the journey away from criminal behavior and inform more effective interventions and support systems.

Strengths and limitations

The study's findings are constrained by the predominantly Christian composition of the sample, limiting the generalizability of the results to other religious groups, such as Jewish or Muslim individuals. This limitation is further exacerbated by the historical context of religious permissions within prisons, introducing potential biases associated with certain religions. The study recognizes the need to situate its findings within this specific demographic and acknowledges the discriminatory history shaping religious practices in correctional facilities. Additionally, the survey only provided one response that restricted participants' response options in terms of only choosing religious (different types of religion), spiritual, and/ or neither, or something else. However, measuring data this way did not allow the nuances of religion and spirituality to concurrently exist. The qualitative responses provided rich data around religiosity and spirituality concurrently offering a more nuanced perspective.

Additionally, the study falls short in addressing the intersectionality of race/ethnicity within the examined population and its impact on the role of religion and spirituality in desistance. This intersectional lens is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

The primary methodological limitation stems from the study's reliance on secondary data analysis. Despite being informed by existing theory and literature; the analytic model was constrained by the available items in the original survey data source. The study also lacked pre-release religious data, hindering a comprehensive exploration of the participants' religious trajectories and their influence on desistance. Moreover, the study did not capture long-term data, preventing a nuanced analysis of the sustained effects of religion and spirituality on desistance

over an extended period. This limitation restricted the study's ability to discern the enduring impact of these factors on individuals' desistance journeys.

Despite certain limitations, this study incorporated a mixed-methods approach by combining binary logistic analysis with qualitative interviews, providing a comprehensive exploration of the role of religion and spirituality in desistance. The research design was underpinned by established theoretical frameworks, aligning the study with existing literature on desistance. Leveraging secondary data analysis enhanced the efficiency of the research process and enabled the investigation of novel research questions. While the study sample was predominantly Christian, findings are situated within this context, recognizing potential biases associated with the religious demographics. The explicit focus on desistance contributed to the study's strength, addressing a notable gap in the literature and offering valuable insights for rehabilitation efforts. The study's transparent acknowledgment of limitations, such as the absence of pre-release religious data and long-term follow-up, demonstrated methodological rigor and served as a foundation for identifying areas for future research, contributing to ongoing scholarly discourse.

Conclusion

Through the present mixed-methods study, the complex and dynamic nature of the desistance process comes to the forefront. Specifically, past research has examined religion, spirituality, and desistance through faith-based interventions, religious attendance, and so on. The study advanced the understanding by parsing out specific differences in how each aspect of religion spirituality, and complexity around faith play out in the desistance process. As described in the qualitative responses, it becomes apparent that what contributes to desistance is having the freedom to establish one’s relationship with God, developing core values such as compassion,

forgiveness, a sense of community through God, Divine presence alleviating loneliness, etc. Thereby, leading to the fundamental question of what factors contribute to desistance, and reentry programs target employment, housing, etc. have been established. A missing aspect has been how religion and spirituality, can provide avenues for lasting change among formerly incarcerated individuals The quantitative results conveyed the complexity of how religion and spirituality may not always be a deterrent for recommission of crime, but is a crucial part in choosing not to desist despite coming close to reoffending. Additionally, the responses of the participants also indicated the complexity around one's faith which could explain the consistency in what contributes to desistance across the sample.

The present mixed methods study attempted to examine the complex relationship between one's faith identity and desistance. This, however, does not deflect the responsibility of policymakers, prison authorities, and the communities at large to foster the humane values of compassion, and forgiveness, and provide a sense of community when engaging with formerly incarcerated individuals. Additionally, the research brings forth further questions about the potential of lasting change among desisting individuals by allowing a space to foster one's spiritual or religion or integration of religion and spirituality (even beyond Christianity, although the study sample was predominantly Christian) in prison and post-release. This could mean moving beyond the narratives around the possibility of "criminals" desisting only after strict punitive interventions and policies have been implemented. Instead, to further catalyze a shift from a punitive mindset, to a rehabilitative mindset, embracing a more humane and growth-oriented perspective.

Appendices

Participant	Summary	Quotes/Responses
Winston (005)	Winston conveyed having difficulty describing himself due to his criminal record of being an arsonist and worked in the education sector. One of the core values is helping others, intelligence. He claims to be an empiricist denying the role of religion in desistance. Further, he expresses skepticism about teaching children about “paranormal” and equates angels as being a vampire that doesn’t drink blood. At the same time, he acknowledges his mother being religious, enjoying reading the bible, being moralistic and enjoying reading and teaching about it. He mentioned the “complete loss of freedom” turning his life around post-incarceration. Hope was a way to rise above hard times, particularly, hope about the future.	“ I'm an empiricist and without any evidence I have no belief in any supernatural beings or the beliefs that other people hold that are called religion.”

Serena (004)	The participant was incarcerated for 7 years due to drug addiction, has had multiple convictions of forgery and fraud and realized after going through treatment for drug addiction, having a close friend pass away etc. she was able to question who he was in the past/present and what she wanted to do. she expressed chaplain's teaching around the bible "clicked something for her" as before that he was always mad. He conveyed the chaplain exploring her thoughts about people and sharing that "we're all bad", making him question his beliefs about Christianity (in terms of people being good and uptight. She was able to acknowledge that there are some good days, some bad days and the realization-"my inclination is always going to be not what is holy in God's eyes", but to do what makes her feel good. This further led to the realization of hurting other people. She expressed staying away from "organized religions like churches and stuff" as she felt she didn't fit the stereotypical ideas of how church people are. It was the pastor at the Rockville and women in the program challenged beliefs and found the association with a church that did bible studies helpful, because of being in a space where she felt accepted, despite being a "three time divorcee and a junkie". She conveyed that skills don't help, rather it is the support and having a cheerleaders such as her old boss, friends and family.	"There was a church that I was very highly connected with that did Bible studies. And although I enjoyed the Bible studies, that that was not the intent of going. My intent was to just talk to these people. And they were just so real about. You know, like there's nothing I'm going to say that's going to shock them, which to me, in my mind, walking in like I'm a three time divorcee, a heroin junkie, like I thought they would die right there on the spot. But that's not how they were. They like. They displayed the things that you only read about in books like….. I don't think you can love like that and forgive like that on your own, because I know I couldn't I couldn't even accept who I am"
Jasmine (002)	Jasmine shared being out on the streets "using heroin, meth, committed crimes" and noticing people she was doing this with	

	getting indicted. The participant expresses a nuanced perspective on spirituality and religion. While they don't identify as religious, they acknowledge having personal beliefs. They express skepticism towards those who claim a sudden religious transformation during times of sobriety or incarceration. The participant attempted to engage in religious activities while in prison but found the behavior of some participants contradictory and insincere. They emphasize the importance of genuine authenticity and acceptance of people for who they are, even if their beliefs or actions differ from one's own.	
Jack 014	The participant discusses their affiliation with the Religious Society of Friends, also known as Quakers, and how it has influenced their spiritual experience. They highlight the unique aspect of silent worship in Quaker practices, allowing for ample time for reflection and contemplation. The participant finds value in focusing on Quaker testimonies, such as simplicity, as a source of guidance. Despite feeling unchanged personally, they emphasize the positive impact of being part of a larger faith community outside of prison. Engaging with like-minded individuals provides opportunities for worship, fellowship, and networking, suggesting that their religious beliefs contribute positively to their life beyond incarceration.	
009 (George)	The participant viewed himself as a very bad person who was “violent” and also a “thief” and “used drugs” but changed significantly post-incarceration. The participant	

	highlighted the significant role that religion, particularly Christianity, plays in their life after prison. They describe themselves as a staunch Christian who attends church regularly, both on Sundays and occasionally on weekdays. The participant perceived going to church as a means to internalize and follow the Ten Commandments given to Moses, believing that abiding by them ensures a righteous path. He emphasized the positive influence of religious teachings, suggesting that the lessons learned in church contribute to the development of good morals. The teachings, particularly those on Sundays, are seen as guiding individuals away from wrongdoing and encouraging them to treat others with respect and kindness. The participant connected these principles to the idea of living a good life and avoiding negative behaviors. In summary, the participant credits their post-prison religious commitment, particularly Christianity, for providing moral guidance, promoting respectful behavior, and fostering a sense of consistency and belief in positive change.	
003 Zack	The participant describes himself as being a calm person after reaching "rock bottom" in prison, not being able to get his own space despite requesting the authorities and expressed being "assaulted. The participant reflects on their past engagement with spirituality, specifically in their interactions with their pastor when feeling down. Although they describe themselves	So spirituality has really guided me to be a calm person. And although I'm not that religious, I do love to read the Bible. Like my pastor, I do have some, let's say when you are hungry, he has some like the Bible scriptures you should read. Say when you have some emotional imbalance or I feel sad is some certain bible verses that he sends you the and anything that your even if you're happy and you want to share your happiness with him. Is that a

	as not very religious, they express a preference for speaking with someone who can provide hope and support. Despite being a Catholic, they clarify that they have never been extremely religious. During the pandemic, they obtained a job through a connection from their pastor, who spoke highly of them. Spirituality, even though they don't consider themselves highly religious, is credited with guiding them to be a calm person. They express a love for reading the Bible and receiving specific verses from their pastor for various situations, whether it be when they are hungry, emotionally imbalanced, sad, or happy. The participant emphasizes the calming effect of understanding situations in a religious way, aligning with the teachings of Jesus. They advocate for seeking support and sharing one's situation with others, including partners, parents, or siblings, to find solutions even in challenging times. The overall tone suggests that despite not being overtly religious, the participant finds comfort and guidance in their spiritual practices and connections	Bible scripture verse that he sends to you and you read it and now understand everything and it's good to understand everything in a religious way. It helps it to become calm the way Jesus wanted, the way Jesus was.
Riley(010)	After incarceration, the participant describes a shift towards a deeper connection with God, turning to prayer and seeking a fresh understanding of life. Guided by their religious leader, they found solace in maintaining closeness to God, whether in good or challenging times. The participant emphasizes the importance of not doubting the divine plan, recognizing that everything happens for a reason,	Well after incarceration, I found myself just turning more to God and praying and just getting to know everything again in a fresher and a deeper level. So. Yeah. With the help of my religious leader, I found that it was necessary to just pray and be close to God, even when things seem okay or when they don't seem okay. And you just don't have to doubt that. And everything just happens for a reason. And it doesn't have to be a negative reason. Maybe in the human perspective, maybe we think that it's something ugly, maybe.

	even if it may seem negative from a human perspective. They express a post-prison transformation, becoming more religious and crediting religion with helping individuals discern right from wrong, make sound decisions, and navigate various aspects of life, including relationships with authority, friends, and family. The participant sees religion as a source of guidance that can potentially prevent issues and troubles. Looking ahead, the participant expresses hope for personal growth in their career and social life, anchored by a connection with God. They seek assurance that everything is fine and express a positive outlook on the future, emphasizing the role of faith in helping them navigate life's challenges.	But, you just have to see the positive side of everything. Can you can you describe a positive future for yourself? Speaker 2 [00:31:27] Okay. For me, a positive picture will entail me growing in, let's say my career and my social life and just not getting into trouble with people and having meaningful friends and definitely supporting or getting support from my family. “And yeah, having some sort of connection with God and just assurance that everything is fine or everything is okay and well, whatever will help me get there.” think it's just my core values, just being patient with everything and understanding the fact that I, I really don't have to have everything I need at that moment for things to work. And I can also say, yeah, being patient, having integrity and loving each and every person, no matter how they are, even in their weaknesses and their characteristics and. Yeah. Just being strong for myself and others that may also need help.
012 (Sarah)	The participant reflects on their past experiences, acknowledging that, unlike some who find God in incarceration, their relationship with spirituality remained consistent. They recognize that many individuals turn to their churches for support when facing incarceration, finding solace in the community of parishioners. The participant, however, had always held a fear of God due to their upbringing. Upon self-reflection during classes, particularly on decision-making and its consequences, they gained insights into their own actions and the factors influencing their decisions. The educational	Um. I don't really I'm not really sure that. There was any religious role in my ability to desist. I think that I mean, I have my own beliefs and and in my own faith, I guess I was raised Catholic. But, you know. I wouldn't say I'm a devout Catholic. I. I guess I'm just independently thinking. I have my own. I have my own faith, my own set of. You know, spiritual beliefs, I guess. But I don't really think that that was a major factor for my not becoming reincarnated. I think I'm the the most and the thing that really prevented me from going back to prison again were were my kids. Hmm. You know, was was being able to take part in their, you know, upbringing and and, you know, being a mom to them meant more to me than anything. And, you know, that was the

	experiences helped them understand the root causes and provided alternatives and resources to avoid repeating similar mistakes. Learning to network with teachers, counselors, staff, and fellow inmates became a crucial aspect of their rehabilitation. The participant stresses the importance of having a support network, whether through church, family, friends, or organizations like AA. They underline the significance of a safety net in facilitating positive choices and actions. The decision to bring their mom into their home during her later years, despite struggles with dementia, is framed as a positive outcome made possible by their support network and the position they found themselves in. The participant implies that faith and support networks played key roles in their personal growth and the ability to contribute positively to their mother's well-being	worst part of being incarcerated, was leaving them behind. So, yeah, I would never put myself in a position again to put my kids through that again
015 (Max)	After spending 13 years in prison, upon release, the participant found that their outlook on life had significantly improved. Initially, there was fear and nervousness, but those emotions dissipated. They approached life with a more positive mindset, understanding that challenges might arise, but they could overcome them, as they had done before. During their time in prison, they engaged in extensive reading, self-reflection, and contemplation, given the ample time for introspection. This period of self-discovery shaped their core values, emphasizing empathy and a better understanding of others' struggles. They developed	It's pretty much the same. It may have made me a little bit less religious. You see a lot of religion in prison, and it's not necessarily a religion for religion sake. So, you know, it's may be kind of cynical, but I don't necessarily know that it would have changed anything. I was not religious before I went to prison. And so I don't think it's really changed that much. I think some people religion gives them something to hold on to and gives them some hope. So I think it does help some people. But. You know, and I also think some people use religion as a scapegoat and as a means of manipulation. So, you know, I think it depends on the person..As to how they use it now. What it what it does for them.

	a greater inclination to help others and realized that life was not solely about themselves. While their overall perspective evolved, their religious inclination remained largely unchanged, perhaps even leaning towards being less religious. The prison environment exposed them to various expressions of religion, sometimes seemingly devoid of genuine faith. Although they might have been somewhat cynical about its impact, they recognized that religion could be a source of hope for some individuals. However, they also acknowledged that some might have exploited religion as a scapegoat or a means of manipulation. Ultimately, the influence of religion appeared to vary depending on the individual and how they chose to utilize it in their lives.	
013 Dylon	Over the nine years since their release, the participant reflected on their journey, particularly the initial challenges faced upon reintegration, including the difficulty securing employment within the first month and a half. The participant, along with a sibling, had experienced incarceration due to taking the life of an abuser, and while in prison, the loss of multiple family members occurred. Despite these hardships, the participant emphasized the significance of faith as a core value, noting a profound spiritual transformation during their time in county jail where they encountered God in a powerful way. This encounter fundamentally shifted their perspective on life, instilling a belief in God's love and changing the trajectory of their life.	I mean, my core values is definitely faith. You know, that's something that, you know, I grew up in the church, but it's kind of like I knew about God, but I didn't know God, you know? And it wasn't until I was in the county jail where I had that that, that. Contact with God in a mighty powerful way, you know? And that really just changed my whole thinking, you know, and the way that I viewed life. And I could now say that God was loving, you know, because of the different things that he saw me through. I'd say another core values being true, you know, and something I was able to to finally be able to be when I was incarcerated, you know, because I was able to take those mask off

	Integral to their post-release life, the participant emphasized the role of faith in connecting them with supportive communities. They attended a Christian university and later were accepted and loved within various job environments, highlighting the positive impact of their faith and demonstrating its power to facilitate acceptance and positive connections. The participant engaged in preaching opportunities, reflecting a continuous process of growth in their faith and relationships. From the participant's perspective, religion served as a source of hope, particularly in the challenging environment of prison. The relational aspect of faith was highlighted as a powerful force, providing a sense of companionship and dispelling feelings of loneliness. The participant underscored the importance of the "village" – a collective support system that included family, community, faith, employers, and support groups – crucial for successful reintegration. Friendship, as depicted in biblical references, was emphasized as a significant aspect of the participant's life. True friends, identified through adversity, provided support and solidarity during challenging times. The participant acknowledged the unwavering support of their wife and friends from Washington State, emphasizing the profound impact of these relationships throughout their incarceration and subsequent reentry into society	

011 (Female) Samantha	After several incarcerations, the female participant underwent a transformative period following her last one in 2018. While in jail, her religious inclinations evolved, shifting away from her Lutheran baptism to a deeper engagement with the teachings of the Jehovah Witnesses. The participant appreciated the informal and personal approach of the Jehovah Witnesses' group in jail, in contrast to the more structured and formal atmosphere experienced in Catholic settings. This shift in religious influence persisted after her prison experience. Reflecting on her younger years, the participant expressed a disbelief in God, a sentiment rooted in the challenges she faced at that time. However, her perspective evolved, and she became more religious after her prison experience. She recognized the role of religion in bringing order, discipline, and morals to her life. This shift in belief systems marked a significant transformation, with the participant attributing newfound purpose and structure to her engagement with religious practices and principles.	
016 (Female) Amanda	When she was first incarcerated, the female participant described herself as a total mess, struggling with drug addiction, neglecting her children, engaging in drug sales, and experiencing homelessness. She credited her transformation to God, acknowledging that her life was spared multiple times, particularly on April 4th, 2007, when she believed she was supposed to die but was saved because God had other plans for her. Raised in a religious	If it was not for God, my father. I would not be free. Now first first let me start, I would not be sitting here. I would not be sitting here because April 4th 2007, I was supposed to die that night. But instead of me dying, he saved my life because he was not ready for me yet. He had other plans for me and now I'm fulfilling his plans for me because I should have been dead a long time ago. But he has spared my life over and over. I don't know how many times I went to jail and I will pray and say, Oh, God, please help me get

	environment with her grandmother, mother, and grandparents all connected to the church, religion played a significant role in her life. In 2019, while in her prison cell, she prayed fervently on December 31st, seeking forgiveness and pleading for one more chance at freedom. Despite facing an 18-to-life sentence with no parole board appearance until 2026, she believed God intervened, and events began unfolding that eventually led to her release. Recognizing this as another instance of divine intervention, she felt a renewed sense of purpose – to help others. Despite not attending church as much due to COVID and work commitments, she remained connected through virtual platforms but admitted to falling short in maintaining her previous level of Bible reading and church attendance. Nonetheless, she affirmed her continued prayers and expressed gratitude for the second chance at life that she believed God granted her	through this. I promise you, help me get through this. I'm going to do better. He let me out. I mean. He just..he has always been in my life since I can remember because my my grandmother, my mother, my grandparents, they all have been inside the church. So I grew up in church. So religion is really my God-my father-is a big part of my life. 2019. I was in my prison cell. January. On December 31st, bringing in the New Years. And I remember laying on my stomach, praying to God to forgive me for all my sins and asked him begging for one more chance. Please let me get free. Please give me my freedom. I promise you I won't let you down. I remember laying there, I mean, I was praying, praying, praying, praying. And I know he heard me because that year, things just started happening. And I knew I was like, I'm going home, I'm getting out of prison. I'm not gonna be here for the rest of my life. Because when I went to prison, I had 18 to life. And I would not even be going to the parole board until 2026. So God saved me once again. And now I have to fulfill my purpose for Him. And I believe my purpose is to help others. I love helping people, but I fell out from doing it, during my trials and errors as trying to be a drug addict and drug dealer. Whatever else I was out there trying to be, something that I wasn't because I didn't know who I was. And God, I mean, he was showing me so many signs. And I was seeing him because I knew, but I would just overlook it
001 (Mark)	The participant recounted a period of incarceration where some individuals experienced genuine spiritual awakenings. Reflecting on the past, the participant described the federal government as oppressive, highlighting the circumstances that led to legal troubles involving a	"What helps people change?" I think, for other guys. Some of them legitimately have spiritual awakening. And of course, I think education plays a huge role in. Change. But that's not a surprise. I've been in education since I was 22. So of. Course, I understand that

	website controlled by the FBI. The participant acknowledged the option to focus on the negative aspects, such as the absurdities in sentencing for various crimes, but chose a different path. Witnessing others who became bitter and refused to acknowledge holidays, the participant recognized the detrimental impact of such a perspective, deeming it a terrible way to live. The therapeutic process, participation in 12-step programs, and embracing faith and spirituality played crucial roles, along with a realization of being fortunate compared to many others. The participant emphasized how outlooks and attitudes during that challenging time influenced their current position, contrasting those who chose to dwell in misery.	it's. Powerful and important. Education, I think. When we think about a lot of what we try to do with criminal justice reform, the people we think about, you know, the street level drug dealers, the high school dropout that ended up on street corners, these kinds of things, education would save them See, so you you've said that visual of your ex wife bringing your kids and like the effort that that that. That she demonstrated through that communicated to you that you had people showing up for you. And you said that earlier, too. Like I. I didn't realize how loved I was. So what do you think helped you realize that? Speaker 2 [00:29:45] Being broken down and starting to get some humility. I was doing real, real fine in a lot of ways before the knock on the door. Dream job, dream relationship. Great kids. Grown up in all the best ways. So I was reading my own news clippings, I think. Quite a bit. And. That being completely just a. So when I got indicted. I went to. The. The back. Right corner of our backyard. And leaned. Against the shed and sincerely asked God to. Come get me. I was. Too afraid. To do it myself. But I didn't want to be there anymore. And I said the words, God, just come get me. And that's when my girlfriend. Came out. And said, Come on, we're going have. Dinner. So. He did. Come get me. But not in the way that. I was asking for at the time, but in the best way. So after that. I knew I was going to. Be okay and I. Always was. (in the context of turning point after release from prison) I think spirituality is one. Or relgion. Whatever, you know, the person they find. But they have to find forgiveness. To

		others, but most importantly to themselves
006(Adri)	The participant reflected on their experiences with religion in the context of their journey toward desistance. During their adjudication process, lasting almost three years, they encountered friends who were fervently religious and wished to incorporate religion into the participant's life. However, this attempt took an unexpected turn when they were connected with a Christian-based therapist. The participant found this experience to be off-putting, as the therapist consistently responded to their concerns by quoting Bible verses that seemed unrelated to their struggles. Despite the effort to infuse religion into their therapeutic journey, the participant concluded that this approach did not significantly contribute to their personal development or desistance. While acknowledging the potential benefits of religious engagement for others, the participant opted for alternative avenues, such as community involvement and professional organizations, to fulfill their needs for fellowship, a sense of purpose, and community support.	Now, I think. You know, my my I would say that they probably have changed a little bit. I'm trying to think put the words. And what my actual core values are. I'm not particularly religious. But I guess. But the deeply. Despite my deeply held beliefs of know I guess the concept of community So for me personally, not much. When while I was being adjudicated prior to you know, prior to being incarcerated, it went on for almost three years. And I have friends who were very, very religious and wanted to wanted that to be a facet of my life. And I found it was very judgmental and I was like, I don't like this
018 (Kevin)	The participant articulated their core values, emphasizing kindness, both towards others and oneself. They expressed a spiritual orientation, noting a transformation from a past involving gangs, violence, and substance abuse to a present guided by strong spirituality. This newfound spirituality played a crucial role in their commitment to doing the right thing and fostering positive change.	The factors for the high points was I was accepted into a house called this dismiss house. I applied for many houses and many houses said that I wasn't qualified for their programs because of my past history. But Dismis house gave me that opportunity. So that's one of the factors, huge factor, because it gave me a stable place to live and a stable place where I can grow spiritually and allow me to go back to school. So those factors played a big part in my life

	Reflecting on the importance of spirituality, the participant highlighted its role in promoting kindness, compassion, and the recognition of the underlying challenges faced by individuals dealing with substance use disorders or mental health issues. Forgiveness, especially towards oneself, emerged as a significant theme in their perspective on post-prison transformation. The participant acknowledged the transformative impact of spirituality, suggesting that it contributed to their personal growth, opportunities for freedom, and the prevention of a return to previous negative patterns. While the participant acknowledged engaging in religious activities during incarceration, they pointed out that their post-release spiritual growth surpassed their previous association with religion. They emphasized the necessity of spirituality, viewing it as an essential element that brings depth and meaning to one's life, preventing a sense of emptiness. The participant attributed their positive life changes to a combination of support from family, community, and spirituality, coupled with acquired knowledge and a strengthened conscience. In summary, the participant perceives spirituality, more than organized religion, as a driving force in their desistance process, leading to positive life changes, a sense of fulfillment, and a commitment to sustained transformation	I won't to say I'm a religious person, but I'm definitely a spiritual person. So it definitely played a part in me. Like I said before, I'm a I'm a person that was involved in gangs and a lot of violence and a lot of drug abuse and just killing my spirituality. And today, my spirituality is very strong. And I try to live my life by my spirituality again and, you know, try to do the right thing, knowing what is the right thing and what is the wrong thing. Before, I did not have a conscience, I didn't care who I hurt or who got hurt or even if I got hurt for that, for that matter as well. **Definition of Spirituality**:Spirituality to me or being the best person you can be, not only for yourself, but for your community, for the earth, for the people that are living in your community, living in this earth. Like, being kind and being compassionate to others, finding the good in everybody instead of pointing out the bad. Look at the good and realizing that you know, because of substance use disorder or mental health, you know, people are suffering today and that's not who they really are. And with some help and some care and some love, you'll see you'll see a tremendous transformation come out of them **Emphasizing role of spirituality over religion:** I don't think I really took religion that seriously. I think once I got out, I forgot all about religion and went back to my old ways. But I think it's the spirituality part. Like that's what really gave me the growth. The opportunities that remain free. You know, I think, you know, it's great that people are religious, but I think they need that spirituality with it, or have spirituality. Because without spirituality, I think we are empty

		My parents, my wife, my community, my spirituality. My knowledge of, you know, I know better now not to do the wrong thing. My conscience won't allow me to do the wrong thing, because it let me know that that's not the right thing to do. So. But I think, you know, it comes down to knowledge. Knowing, you know, knowing there is another way. Knowing that I don't have to lose. I don't have to go back to my old ways. My wife, you know, building me up, letting me know that I worth something today. I am not worthless. - what kept him going during difficult times
017 (Lisa)	When reflecting on her journey, the participant described herself as a responsible, accountable, and intentional woman. She expressed a deep sense of trust in a higher power, believing that everything is in God's hands. Despite not recognizing it at first, she acknowledged the divine intervention that led her to a work-from-home position, emphasizing the providence of God in orchestrating her life. Initially grappling with anger during her incarceration, the participant underwent a significant transformation, evolving into a positive and resilient individual. She recognized the beauty in life, even during challenging moments, and embraced the concept of finding reasons, not excuses, for positive change. The power of positive thinking became a significant revelation, a mindset she wished she had adopted earlier in life. The participant credited the company Televerde for providing a transformative platform during her incarceration, allowing her to	And, you know, I don't know if this is part of the interview, but Jesus came into my life and he has completely..it's a 180. There are days that I don't recognize myself. There are days when I get an email from a VP of Office from a call center in Australia. And I'm like, Is this man really like is he really asking my opinion? Is that really what's happening? And yes, it's really what's happening because through Jesus Christ, anything is possible. I'm living proof of that Spirituality has played a huge role. I don't consider myself religious. I couldn't quote, I couldn't tell you where a Bible verse is located. I rarely attend church, but I talk to Jesus every day, all day, every day, all day. And I see his hand in my life. I see it and I saw his hand in my life when I was incarcerated. I promise you. I heard him talk to me. I heard him talk to me. And he's the one who helped me accept that it wasn't that I had to stop focusing on the $27. I had to stop focusing on that, because that wasn't the point. The point was that I took it and he helped me come to terms with that. He talked to me. He talks to me all the time, whether I sound crazy or not. He talks to me all the time

	discover her potential. Expressing gratitude for the opportunities it afforded her, she believed that this version of herself wouldn't exist without Televerde's influence. She also acknowledged her ability to connect with people, considering it a gift from Jesus. Spirituality played a pivotal role in the participant's desistance process, with a distinction between being spiritual and religious. Although not regularly attending church or quoting Bible verses, she communicated with Jesus daily and felt his guidance in her life. She shared personal experiences of hearing Him during incarceration and finding comfort in the belief that, despite bad things happening, Jesus would bring good out of them. For the participant, knowing that there is someone orchestrating events for her good provided comfort and helped her navigate life's challenges. She recognized the complexity of the world and embraced the concept of free will. The participant expressed gratitude for Jesus's role in her transformation, attributing her positive changes to divine intervention. Even in difficult times, she found solace in the belief that Jesus had a purpose for her and had guided her through 28 years of addiction to emerge as the person she is today	
008 (Emily)	During her incarceration, the participant became more engaged in spiritual activities. Acknowledging the cliché of incarcerated individuals finding God, she clarified that her involvement was not motivated by societal expectations. Instead, it	was raised Catholic. That is. It is something. It is. It is more than just a religion. In my culture. It's pretty much. So ingrained into my culture. And as you know, even as an ethnicity, it is just ingrained. So every part of my life has had some kind of connection to the

	reconnected her with core values of doing good in the community, influenced by her father's commitment to charity work and giving people chances. The participant's engagement in study groups and Bible studies while incarcerated provided a sense of camaraderie and connection. It wasn't solely about religion but the shared values and support within the group. She maintained contact with clergy and volunteers from her time in jail and prison, highlighting their ongoing support and connection beyond the confines of incarceration. While feeling uncomfortable attending certain Catholic churches due to judgment, the participant found solace in congregations that aligned with the core values of goodness, non-judgmental attitudes, helping others, and charitable work. The participant emphasized the importance of spirituality over specific religious affiliations, focusing on the positive and supportive aspects that contributed to her well-being. Reading the Bible during incarceration, the participant found a passage addressing her anxiety and nerves. This experience led her to release worries and move forward, contributing to self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others. The participant did not feel a drastic change in her core identity but considered spirituality as an additional source of strength during challenging times	spirituality, part of Catholicism that may include some values. I don't necessarily agree with everything. I don't necessarily am a practicing or am a very involved individual in the religion. But the spirituality and the. I like to say the good parts of it are really part of my existence. I value. The strength that comes behind it. Definitely. While I was incarcerated, I really became more involved. It's always a cliché and it's always like, Oh, well, you know, everybody who gets incarcerated always finds God. And they're they're very involved in study groups and the Bible studies groups while you're incarcerated and you come out and nothing. And I didn't do it for that reason. I was very careful. But it was something that connected me back to kind of those core values. I talked about doing good in the community, and my dad was very much into charity work and giving people a chance and he was always doing something. And so we have been volunteering since we were young, you know, and everything. And so it kind of that's the spirituality part of it. So as far as I was involved there, it provided me a group that understood those values and weren't overwhelmingly wanting me to to talk about like it wasn't so much the religion, it was more the the camaraderie or the kinship behind it. The connection.
007 (Melissa)	The participant describes how their spiritual journey began during their incarceration. Engaging in practices	Describing myself, I think that. I'm a hard worker. You know, I'm a mother. I'm a grandmother. I'm a great grandmother. I

	such as yoga, meditation, and reading self-help books, they sought to understand the events leading to their crime. This period marked a significant impact on their belief system, leading them to explore various spiritual avenues. Expressing gratitude for the pain and describing their trust in God, the participant emphasizes a universal connection among people. They stress the importance of recognizing the common source of life and promoting positive change. Their faith in God becomes a source of strength, allowing them to navigate challenges with a sense of purpose. The participant values a personal relationship with God, transcending rituals and emphasizing a spiritual connection beyond words. This deep, intuitive knowingness sustains them, providing confidence in the divine. Regarding the role of religion and spirituality in desistance, the participant believes it helps people acknowledge their powerlessness and find something greater than themselves for redemption and reconciliation. They highlight the unforgiving nature of society, emphasizing the need for compassion and the positive impact of religious teachings in providing hope, structure, and discipline. The participant views religion as a source of belief, discipline, and structure, essential for everyone seeking meaning and purpose in their lives.	just persevere. You know, I'm a spiritual person. I consider myself a spiritual person. Um. So I just take one day at a time. It's hard to describe me because I feel like I'm just in survival mode. So I'm doing the things that I have to do more so than focus so much on self. You had to be more specific if you want a specific answer Okay. And the next question I have is related is what has helped you reintegrate and desist during this time? What has held you back? Speaker 2 [00:12:13] Well, it's been my faith. There's been prayer. Some of it was late. You know, I never. See my crime, that act that changed my life and the lives of other people. That's not who I am. You know, it was an isolated incident. You know, it's something that I experienced, but it's not who I am. It's never been who I am. It's something that I did for a lot of different reasons that intersected with each other in that moment in time. . You know, I grew up in. A household with a lot of spiritual people, some were religious people, you know. And I've always believed that. You should treat others the way you would hope they treat you, you know? Even if they don't, you know, because you're responsible for yourself and not them. You know. Okay. My core value is number one. I put God first, you know, and that hasn't changed before or after my incarceration. I think. It has become greater. I love people. Treat people the way you would hope they want to be treated. Love people, even if you don't love their behaviors. You know? Our histories make a person. I believe with our history that makes a

		person. And what I mean, for example. Okay. Sexual abuse. Okay. Person gets abuse. They get bullied. It messes with theie psyche. Some people can't assimilate it in a certain way. You know. Sometimes there are economic impacts. You know your environment. People don't just wake up and really say, I want to go out and commit a crime. I try to just live right, it, it, it's beyond words. It's beyond words. But it has sustained me, you know, because I believe that God doesn't make mistakes. Nothing happens unless God allows it. You know, people say, why is the evil? Why is this suffering in the world? And that's because people don't have God in their life. You know, they don't look for divine solutions to things, which, you know. They don't want to be obedient, you know, on the principle is the same. I was like studying the Zen, the Buddhists, the Muslim, the Christian, you know, it's about love. It's about charity. When you break it down, no matter who you say, you follow them. You just follow those basic principles. And you seek in the truth. Your steps would be directed. You know what I'm saying? Because. I don't know. God help me lay. I'm telling you, when I got hit by the car and I'm trying to walk and I couldn't feel my legs from my waist down, you know? You know, my cousin had died in my arms almost like a year to the day. Like, my closest relative dies in my arms four months after I get home. Like, you know, I'm looking for somebody, I'm finding the lights, and I thought about him and. I was just like, you know, like, God, please, you know, after everything I've been through, you know, like. And then, you know, I walk with pain, but I'm so grateful for the pain. You know. But yeah, I pray. I believe in God. You know? And I love everybody. I

		believe that there is good in everybody, God is in everybody. You know, I don't want to like preach to you, but that life life force that we all have, you know, this air that we all [inhales], you know, I believe is from the same source, you know. So it's been major, it's been major. You know my trust in God.
Additional quotes		
Serena "It's broken women coming out of prison. It's not people that got their life together. Like all these programs in prison, talk about, you know, we're going to teach you skills. Doesn't matter. I'm an example of it. I had college degrees going into prison. I had college degrees coming out of prison. That's not what changed for me. It wasn't the education, it wasn't the skills. It was having a cheerleader, really. Because when I got out, I had a couple of cheerleaders, my old boss, a couple of friends. My family was all my cheerleader again. And that makes a difference" [Criminal justice system, these two camps where it's one is punitive. You know, prisons must be punishment and the other is rehabilitative. But even for the people who believe that the criminal justice systems must be rehabilitative, the way it's set up is that it's not.] "And then there are people that are going to go back and nothing. No amount of programs they go there do is going to change it. They have to change that" [Indicating the importance of internal change]		
012 **Preconcieved notions of "criminals"** And asking people for help is very hard. Because there's that general. You already have that general consensus that you're a piece of shit. You know,		

people, you know, Average Joe and Suzy, two citizens. Don't realize that prisons are no longer for dangerous, you know, violent criminals. You know, they're for people who are shoplifting. You know, I mean it. They don't understand that. And so they have that preconceived notion. So and we know that coming out into these communities and so there's a lot of pride in people don't want to ask for help. You know what I mean? They don't they want to say, you know, like they've got it all set and they're good because of the pride.	
013 **Impact of labels- need to humanize** And so it's always about changing that narrative, you know, and just allowing people to see that, you know, these labels are not helpful. You know, that we have to use person first language. We have to humanize people instead of just keeping them as a label.	
011 **Mistreatment in prison** Oh, totally different persons. First time I was incarcerated, I was 16 years old and I was in the county jail and there was no minor tier, so I was in with the grown women and they just locked me in 24 hours a day and I mean 24 hours a day. Yes. The whole seven days I sat there before they decided they couldn't indict because nobody was coming to pay my $35,000 bail. Basically, the COs just pretended like they didn't even notice that was there. They didn't check if these people were giving me food, which sometimes they weren't. They were jerking me for my food. I couldn't even say anything. I'm 16 and a grown ass woman like, fuck you, you know. Excuse me. Right. You know, so it was a real hard set of fricking days, but if anything, I came out of it more of an angry person.	

011 **Age-crime curve** And it just made me realize, like I was 42 years old that I was still acting like the kid running around selling drugs, going to jail. Like what a fricking idiot. You know, like I it's just dawned on me suddenly, like, grow up and, you know. You are getting too old to go to jail, you know. So. And I guess	
001 “And that really puts a spotlight on how we handle rehabilitation and punishment, because there are a lot of people who we've separated from society and put away. That didn't need that the society didn't need to be protected from them. They really needed to be protected from themselves.” “my experience is that our federal prison system does not. Acknowledge the. Wide range of mental and emotional health issues that land people in prison. Probably for a lot of different reasons. It's. Politically not. Great to talk. About people who. Have landed in prison for sex offenses and to try to quote unquote, get. Them help. The knee jerk reaction is to just put those people away. They're just also there isn't there isn't the setup for. An opportunity for a prisoner, to be honest. With a mental. Health professional or even another. Even another prisoner, good gravy”	

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