

respondents viewed their circumstances positively. Noted criminologists Robert Sampson and John Laub, who work on factors that contribute to the desistance of crime, discuss “transformative action” and “subjective reconstruction of the self,” concepts they found to be quite common among people who develop new commitments and find purpose and meaning in life and consequently stay out of trouble.⁴²

Along the same line, Maruna found that persisters had a much more pessimistic or fatalistic outlook on life and that they tended to attribute this feeling of doom and gloom to a lack of opportunities and hardships stemming from various forms of past social and economic disadvantage. Desisters, on the other hand, like many IFI participants, had a much more positive outlook on life.

I was just fortunate to get into the program. Before the program I didn't pray, I didn't read the Bible, and I didn't know God. In March of 1997, I prayed in my cell and gave my life to Christ... You know, I just found out that I won't get out in February as planned, but instead November. But that's okay because God wants me to stay in this program longer. (Stuart)

I'm a stronger believer in God, I have grown in patience, I have a peace of mind that I never had in the world. I have joy. I stopped asking God for parole. Whenever He wants me out is OK, I'm willing to stay in prison another year. My father passed while I was here, but this program has helped me deal with his death. (Phil)

You know I was so disappointed to get a serve-all (instead of early parole) because it was going to put me back an extra six months, but all-in-all I really do think it has been worth it. During that time my confidence has really been boosted-up and it has forced me to get up in front of people—its been great. The extra time here has helped me to learn to lean on God, because I know I can't make it by myself. (Gene)

Spiritual Transformation Theme 5: *The Need to Give Back to Society*

In order to rationalize their situation, inmates commonly state that they are in prison not because they deserve to be, but because the criminal justice system is either unfair or corrupt all together. Their incarceration, therefore, can be viewed as an indictment on society rather than on them personally. It is the system, many prisoners have contended, that is in need of reform and rehabilitation.

Conversely, instead of feeling that society owes them, many IFI participants feel an overwhelming need to give back to society and the community when they get out of prison. Many view themselves as people who were down-and-out until someone cared enough to help them up. Now that they have turned their lives around and have a new and positive identity, they express an unusual sense of gratitude for this new life and they feel compelled to give back to a society that they have never helped before. They feel an overwhelming desire, if not obligation, to make a positive contribution to the community. They believe their experiences of going “to hell and back” especially qualify them to reach out and help others not to make the same mistakes they have made.

I've always believed in God. But I got away from God as I got into my teens. This program has brought me back to my Christian roots. My feeling and thinking is different from when I got here. I see a big change in myself,