

Recent Alumni Recognition Award Interviews

[Charles Caraway, 2010]

1. How did you come to attend CIU?

By way of Broad River, but not in a boat. The Prison Initiative poster hanging in the entrance of my dorm grabbed my attention and I was unable to complete another daily task until I filled out an application (2008).

2. What did you study at CIU?

The emphasis of the degree was Bible, but even learning Math was enjoyable because of the presence and influence of men like Dr. Johnson.

3. What did you most enjoy about your time at CIU?

Genuine fellowship with an ever-expanding spiritual family—students and professors. Having godly men pour wisdom and love out in such abundance, and being surrounded by like-minded brothers striving toward a common goal was a delight. It was also a challenge, a challenge that rivals the fellowship as the most enjoyable aspect.

I was challenged to look outside of my comfortable theological box and as a result saw that the glory of God is revealed in “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4, ESV). I learned that it is His awesome work that saved me by the “Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6, ESV). I was liberated from self-reliance and self-condemnation to enjoy Him and His finished work.

I could actually combine these two aspects because God used the two years of wonderful community building as an avenue to rescue me from doctrines that were hindering growth and escorted me along a journey of loving Christ preeminently. What compares to seeing and daily falling more in love with the liberating beauty of Christ? Nothing!

4. What did you do after you graduated from CIU?

I served as an inmate missionary to multiple institutions (2010-2016) ministering through teaching/preaching, counseling, Hospice service, and joining with other CIU graduates and leaders to expand the original Character-Based Unit housing program and establishing new residential character programs.

5. What do you do now?

I serve as a Teaching Assistant for the Birmingham Theological Seminary Prison Initiative Bibb Correctional Extension in the Alabama Department of Corrections (2016-to present). With the first cohort graduating my responsibilities are shifting to the launch of JUMPSTART AL (JS), a discipleship program geared toward reentry. JS AL is the first charter ministry of JS SC, moving us one step closer to seeing the mission fulfilled—“Break the Back of Recidivism in Our State and Our Nation.”

6. Tell me a little bit about your family.

My parents are loving and supportive and have spent years graciously cultivating my heart to serve others. My mother is a nurse, a woman filled with compassion and driven to express love. My father is a pastor and has a heart for embracing the hurt with love and helping to ignite hope to broken churches. My step-mother is a living testimony of God's magnificent grace and, like my mother and father, has been a constant source of encouragement and support.

I have six siblings—3 sisters and 3 brothers (2 are step-brothers)—and a rapidly increasing pack of nieces and nephews. My brothers are driven and are pursuing their goals with diligent work. My sisters are lovingly attentive and put up with me still calling them my babies, even though they are all mature women.

I am grateful for close relationships in my family because through nearly nineteen years of incarceration, they have pressed me to have hope instead of living with discouragement by pointing my focus to Christ and not my circumstances, and in recent years have blessed me with the opportunity to reciprocate by seeking my counsel and answers from the Bible.

7. What advice and encouragement would you give to current students?

Submit the pursuit of academics to the preeminence of Christ and the authority of the Scriptures. The greatest knowing is of the "Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:7, ESV). True satisfaction does not come from nursing, business, or even a biblical degree, but from knowing Him and being a vessel through which He pours Himself into others. Seek His Kingdom and His Righteousness first and watch how He gives great satisfaction as you honor Him in your vocational and ministerial endeavors. The greatest good, God, will give the greatest gift, Himself, to and through you for His glory and our enjoyment.

8. What advice and encouragement would you give to alumni around the world?

Your sacrifice is noticed and deeply respected. Having left all, forsaking the comfort of close proximity to family, and loving Christ above all, you are an example of true surrender to the will of the King. I pray that you daily focus on the riches of the message you have traveled so far to spread, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27, ESV).

9. Any Prayer Requests?

- *For BTS cohort one and their soon deployment to serve in new mission fields (prisons).*
- *For the Radical transformation at Bibb Correctional Facility (and all of ADOC) through the new JS program.*
- *For myself, family, and friends to be empowered with patience and daily renewed with hope and expectation as we wait to see what is God's plan for my life (inside or outside of prison).*
- *For growing relationships that glorify God and connections that build His Kingdom.*