

## Is it Even Possible? II: Doctoral Degree, Phase One

After toppling the task of obtaining a Master's Degree in prison, make the Doctoral Degree your next objective. All the peripheral skills outside of the coursework will now come into play. First, to be admitted into a doctoral program, the student must qualify. In this instance, there may be a time requirement before one can apply. For example, my seminary, Covenant Bible Seminary, required three full years in ministry work before one can apply to the Doctor of Ministry program. Next, understanding the State, Department of Corrections (DOC), seminary, college, or university requirements are keys to success. This means obtaining the right forms, getting various levels of permission, and so on. Last, the student must break down the syllabus for each course into smaller tasks; this syllabus deconstruction will save time and create less error. These vital steps enabled this doctoral candidate entry into the program and continued to reinforce skills that were gained from the Master's Degree program. To be clear, I'm still enrolled in my Doctor of Ministry program; the goal of this essay is to detail the preliminary steps that won admission into this highly esteemed program.

Preparing to qualify for any doctoral program can be an arduous event; qualifying for an excellent and esteemed doctoral program in Ministry or Theology may prove just as difficult. Send a query letter requesting an application, fee schedule, and other relevant information. Start collecting necessary transcripts, letters of recommendation, and registration fees. Make sure you meet time requirements; each institution may have vastly different standards. Also, many colleges, universities, and seminaries require an essay or personal statement. The prospective student needs to understand those requirements and gather the necessary information so that the

institution may accept your application; give the institution a reason to say yes to your application. At this stage of the admission process, the prospective student would do well to maintain attention to detail; a mistake here could cost you admission into the degree program. In addition, students not accepted do not get refunded their registration fee; this registration fee covers the overhead for administrative costs to process the application.

In order to be successful in the doctoral program, make sure all the formalities are completed; the State, DOC, seminary, and the local college all have requirements, agreements, and forms that need to be signed. Contact the state accrediting body and ask for written information concerning accreditation. For example, I contacted the Washington Student Achievement Council and found that secular institutions have different accreditation requirements than do schools of religion; schools of religion are exempt from various state and federal requirements. Consult your counselor for the required forms. For example, DOC requires a correspondence school permission form called a DOC Form #20-305 which your counselor, the local college, and possibly others in the chain of command need to sign. In Washington State, the DOC Form #20-305 provides permission into the correspondence program, sets up a local college to proctor exams, and readies the mailroom to accept various academic materials from the institution. Next, complete all agreement paperwork to connect the student, DOC, and the seminary in a contractual meeting of the minds. For example, DOC required the school to sign and return the DOC Form #20-309, which mandates not to trade personal information between the school, professors, or the students. Failure to ready these documents and obtain signatures could mean failure at a critical checkpoint: mailroom, correctional officers, counselor, or superintendent/warden. After doing all the hard work, missing such a simple step will critically derail you and only add frustration. Make sure you

cross all the "T's" and dot all the "I's." Missing a step or a form here can be catastrophic. Why? You completed the application work for the seminary; now forms not signed on the prison side need to be completed so that textbooks are allowed by the mailroom. In addition, certain mail (e.g. assignments) will not be allowed to exit the prison, and your studies cancelled due to lack of superintendent/warden signatures. Plan ahead and plan to succeed.

Whether you go to community college, university, or seminary, there is a key to academic survival: Master the syllabus. In so doing, you save countless hours from mistakes and extra work. Write your professor for the course expectations; not all the professors want the same format turned in. Make sure you understand each course syllabus; different syllabi look similar, but the details may be different. In addition, think about asking for work towards extra credit (EC). When ordering your books, check to make sure DOC allows the following: Used books, textbooks only from the seminary, or authorized book sellers. Apparently, in Washington, there was a restriction on used books. Later, I found out this rule was created because individuals were sending contraband hidden inside used books. Understanding the protocol, this might save you a lot of money wasted on books the prison will not authorize or allow. Secondly, figure out the professor's syllabus; this lets the student know the expectations, discern areas where trouble may lie ahead, and where to get reasonably-priced books. The last step is to master the syllabus; you gain the roadmap to great grades.

Are you ready to make the leap? Making sure you follow all the necessary steps in sequential order will ensure success at any level of college you attend. Do the ground work to start: query letters, application, letters of recommendation, transcripts. Pay attention to formality; get all the information and forms filled out correctly. Become the syllabus master; the formula for success = professor + requirements + books (S=P+R+B). To conclude, this essay

described the beginning stage of entering a doctoral program in prison; it is my hope that I have peers who also take on this important challenge. Successful re-entry requires inmates to develop the necessary skills to be a returning citizen; a citizen who builds up himself, his community, and his country. The privilege allowed me to participate in such a program by the State of Washington, DOC, and Covenant Bible Seminary is indeed an honor. God Bless.

The following is my personal statement into the Doctor of Ministry program for Covenant Bible Seminary in Lakewood, Washington. Hopefully, this will give an example of what institutions look for toward admission. On January 12, 2020 I was honored with great excitement to see the following quote from the seminary:

“I write to advise you of your acceptance into the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Covenant Bible Seminary” (Dr. Danny E. Holcomb, 2020, Personal Communication).

**Good luck and God Bless.**

## Personal Statement for Application

Accepting God's call to a challenging Doctor of Ministry program requires a certain spirit: eyes that can see, ears that can hear, opening oneself up to God's spirit, and wanting to know. Before prison, I can easily speak to the fact that I had not the aforementioned spirit. The reasons I have for seeking to participate in Covenant Bible Seminary's Doctor of Ministry program are drawn from Matthew 9:37, 38; the words of Jesus are clear when He spoke, "*...the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into His harvest.*" The anticipated goals for this student and for the target population are to walk closer with God. The outline plans to reach the anticipated goals are scientific and industry-proven methods. To the CBS Admissions Committee, Dean, and faculty, the following are my plans to accept God's call to your esteemed Doctor of Ministry program. As the Gospel of Matthew details, "*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:14-16).

My reasoning to apply to the Doctor of Ministry program began many years ago; a small seed was sown<sup>1</sup>. The seed was to teach God's Word to those who are hiding in or running about the darkness. In the Gospel of John, the scripture details, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not*" (John 1:1-5). In other

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<sup>1</sup> Gospel of Mark 4:30-32

words, I hope to be a light to men in the darkness of prison. The first reason to apply is that this program will allow God to lead my outreach efforts. For example, Jesus taught us not to hide our talents, but develop them<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, the program will develop my ministry. My ministry focuses on education, counseling, and outreach. Lastly, the program brings an opportunity to work with seasoned professors and ministers of God. These spiritual mentors may have decades of experience, and coupled with my own experience, much good may come from the interaction. Throughout the years, God has guided my education and my actions for His purpose; His outstretched hand enables me to stretch my skills with the opportunity to minister at an advanced level.

The anticipated goals are specifically focused to help bridge the Gospel to those people dwelling in the darkest of places: prison. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus speaks about the life of many seeds sown<sup>3</sup>. In this parable, He tells of one seed, "*And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred*" (Mark 4:8). The first goal is to create an outreach ministry for prisoners. This outreach ministry I call Standardized-Evangelical Essence Diploma (SEED); SEED is a program getting prison Christians seminary-ready. The second goal is to facilitate SEED at/near **no cost** to the inmates. Jesus spoke of good trees bringing good fruit, and corrupted trees bringing evil fruit<sup>4</sup>. There are many ways to corrupt men in prison. Drugs, gang-violence, stealing, and lying all contribute to corrupted trees. Also, sporadic support systems and confusing protocols in education lend to the corruption in prison. For example, after years of heavy drug use, inmates simply don't have the capacity to keep up with normal studies; Christian studies are even more

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<sup>2</sup> Gospel of Matthew 25:14-29

<sup>3</sup> Gospel of Mark 4:3-10

<sup>4</sup> Gospel of Matthew 7:17-20

confusing due to language, multiple translations of the Bible, etc. Therefore, as a third goal, SEED needs to focus on a standardized scriptural educational base for students. Jesus said, "*The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness*" (Matthew 6:22, 23). Put another way, some Biblical studies are so confusing by jumping around from verse to verse. This may be fine for regular folks, but for inmates, this is confusing and against all pedagogical teaching. My ministry will aim to streamline some of these problems; scripture needs to bring forth the light, not keep the marginalized in darkness. These goals, I present through the guidance of God, are logical, inexpensive to facilitate, and are scripture-focused. For years now, I've witnessed the lamps of these fellow prisoners; sowing the right seeds, will God make miraculous trees out of these men to bear good fruit?

According to God's scripture, specifically Proverbs 1, we are to know wisdom, instruction, and words of understanding. Once known, wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity shall follow<sup>5</sup>. Some of the methodologies I've learned over the years, I believe, help to achieve the previously mentioned goals. The first method is to develop SEED with Six Sigma methodology and maintain the ministry with Lean concepts. These two methods are used to create a process with as little errors as possible. In addition, after development of the process, the team must maintain and constantly improve the process. In many large corporations, Six Sigma and Lean concepts create a way to minimize errors that are costly during production. Working with the limited funds as an inmate, I cannot afford to make costly mistakes. For example, Jesus observed in the Gospel of Luke, "*And He looked up, and saw the rich men*

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<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 1:1-5

*casting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And He said, of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had"* (Luke 21:1-4). Secondly, in the specialization of psychology known as Industrial/Organizational (I/O) Psychology, there is a call for robust science to permeate all actions. In other words, I/O Psychologists need to focus on the science and theories that work, not make more work. Creating theories and systems just for publication isn't ideal for applied science. Hence, the I/O format will include a number of people, outside of the SEED facilitators to establish credibility, consistency, and most of all, performance. Especially at a price that an inmate can afford; this reduction in monetary capital may be God's challenge towards my ministry. Lastly, I will use what I/O Psychologists call a scientist-practitioner model. It's a fancy way of saying I will utilize tried and true methods. For example, I will not use some awkward form of accounting. God trained me in accounting; therefore I will use industry-standard Generally Accepted Accounting Practices (GAAP). Put another way, the SEED ministry needs to transfer to the outside world in a seamless manner. Once I leave prison, I will be bombarded with so many details and demands. These details and demands may impoverish my ministry if I do not take proper precautions. While the use of secular methodologies needs to be tempered with God's guidance by scripture (2 Timothy 3:16), my training in these areas will produce positive results for the Glory of God.

This statement for application towards the Doctor of Ministry program at CBS is my answer to God's call. I have stated the reasons, the need, and the God-provided opportunity. In short, I was once lost, but now found<sup>6</sup>. Are there others lost to God? My intended goals are to

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<sup>6</sup> Gospel of Luke 15:32



provide a no cost alternative for inmates striving to enter seminary. I call this outreach program SEED, which stands for Standardized-Evangelical Essence Diploma. This program has a standardized curriculum that is logical and easy to use, especially to inmates that struggle with reading comprehension. Six Sigma, Lean concepts, and I/O Psychological frame-works tempered with God's scripture will help me to achieve the goals of developing my ministry. The military has a motto: "Leave no Soldier behind." God, in His Grace, did not leave this Soldier behind. When I asked Him to carry my pack for one mile, he carried it for two. Getting the much needed rest<sup>7</sup>, I can march towards God's plan for me. With your help, I may strongly say as I minister: "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me*" (Psalms 23:4).

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<sup>7</sup> Psalms 23:2-3