Michael Landon

The Onesimus Workshop

The coolest thing about this workshop was that it opens the minds of the parishioners or the people that are coming to my church what to expect from us when we come out. You know, its like, there’s a couple from another church in our workshop that doesn’t have a clue what kind of people or who the people are that are coming to them and this opens their minds to realize that we’re not different from regular people, we have just been in one spot for so long, doing it one way for so long, it’s going to take us a minute to adjust. For me this workshop gives us, it’s God’s way of giving us a way to acclimate ourselves back into the world with support behind us, you know. There were some extremely valid questions in the workshop talking about how we were coming, how do you deal with people that are coming out and they still have that prison mentality. What kinds of things can do you for them and where do you draw the line of what you’re doing for them, you know, the awareness, and I think the best thing that I saw with the workshop is that it’s our people. We are trying to target the people that are coming out to their home environment. They’re not going to some big megachurch they’ve never been to. They’re not going to some huge organization that they’ve never dealt with. They’re going home and that church is at home and it gives them a place to feel like, “ok, if nothing else, I can retreat here, try to recoup, and figure out what to do next”. And it’s strengthening that connection of running with like minded people. You know, running with fellow Christians, fellow disciples. That’s one of the biggest things with my church is that it’s just targeted on making disciples, you know, and it’s in line with everything that we’ve seen so far, man. I really dig what ya’ll did with this workshop. I can’t wait to read that book that you guys did for us. I just haven’t had a chance to get it.

What are the differences between life on inside versus life on outside?

The first, biggest, difference is that I was free. There was nobody that had control of me, you know, and, man, in a penitentiary, you go through the same thing, the institutionalize way of doing things, man and it’s like when you eat, when you shower, when you go to work, when you get up, when you go to sleep, and in the world, you don’t have that. When you come home, you’re in control of that. You’re not waiting for somebody to tell you, “ok, it’s time to eat” or “ok, it’s time to shower”. That took some acclimating. That took me a minute to get used to. And the level of communication, the way people communicate is completely different. You know, when you walk out, and you go into a grocery store, it’s not like you’re going to the commissary. You know, people in the grocery store want you there. They want you to buy things. They’re not working there just because they have to be there and they have to supply a service, you know. I am still thrilled by the level of customer service in places we go. That’s something that really – the way people communicate and interact with each other, those are probably the biggest differences when I first got out. And the ability to get some space and just find peace and quiet. That was amazing.

How did your thinking change?

The first couple of months were hairy because I was thinking, and this was in my head, I’m thinking, “I gotta do this”, “I gotta do this”, “I gotta get this done”, “I gotta get lined up for this”, “ I gotta find a job”, “I really need to get some communication with some family members”, and I had this whole list of stuff that I wanted to do. And everybody around me was like, “slow down, man. You’ll be all right. Relax.” And in my head I was like, “You don’t understand. I’ve been relaxed for the last 6 years! You know, I’ve been relaxed for the last 15 years except for 2 little breaks. I don’t want to be relaxed! I want to get this done. I want to succeed”. And there was a Pastor that told me to just be still and let God work. And trying to bring that thought and that phrase into my head and make it become a habit took a minute. It was about a month before I could remember that for me, I’m serving God and whatever he puts in front of me is what I’m supposed to do. I may have my list of stuff that I want to do and that I ask Him about – he’s gonna make that happen. And within the first six months, man, he started making things happen because I was being of service and I was seeking Him. I wasn’t just running off trying to do it my own way. It took about a month or two for the inner dialogue, my mind to just processing on, “what does Michael want to do?” versus what’s God’s plan, you know. And I had some good people behind me that helped me adjust with that too.

What is the difference between the church on the inside vs. outside?

Man, I love this question because I need a church, personally, that the people in it are living Christian lives. They’re not just going to church. That’s not their definition of a Christian is going to church or maybe going to a food drive or something. They are walking their lives in the word. I had a mentor for like 2 or 3 years before I got out that my first conversation with him by mail was, “hey man I need to learn how to live life as a Christian from the Bible but in actual life – not just how it sounds in a Bible study. And, so when I got home, I needed a church that had people that were doing that. That were authentic, you know – that had real lives, real problems, but still showed up and still participated, you know. And God blessed me because when I started looking for those people, he put them in front of me. You know, If I had went and looked for all my old friends - I have a list of people that hit me up as soon as I landed on Facebook that I could have connected with, but I had no desire to because I had authentic people around me that were doing what I am striving to do. So, a church that’s open to somebody that coming home that wants to live a Christian life and is willing to walk that life with them and hold them accountable of it, that’s what I look for.

What are some obstacles to re-entry?

That one – you know I landed in a homeless shelter because I didn’t have any place to go and it’s run by a church (names church as Dallas International Street Church) and they had a men’s program where you go and you stay at the program for 30 days and you stay there – you get discipled, you learn, you get to do Bible Studies and classes and a lot of guys that are there come off the streets so that’s where you get to get recovered and get some health back. And I didn’t want to sit still for 30 days. I had just been sitting still. So getting to the churches that I wanted to get to, the transportation was cause I was way out in the middle of nowhere, but when you ask somebody what their church is about and the people are about, it’s almost like their giving you a promo or a commercial for their church instead of their honest opinion a lot of times. So a lot of times I would get a lot of good response about what their church was about but then I’d show up and be like, “this is cool, but it’s not me”. You know, and there was always that inner thought of, “man I don’t want these people to think that I’m just trying to play a game on them because I’m bouncing from church to church, but God will let me know when I land at the church that I’m supposed to be at. You know, and right now I got two home churches and one’s in Dallas and one’s in Crandall. You know and God makes time in my life for that. I don’t know how He does it, but he does. Scheduling was an obstacle for me as is not trying to do too much to get to where I was going and remembering that to go in with an open mind, not go in with somebody else’s filter on

What kind of support is helpful?

The biggest thing that’s helped me so far is having church members want to see me succeed in that their focused and keeping me focused. You know, their not so much worried about what I’m fixin to do as in how they can help me strive to get where I’m going. You know, they want to walk with me in it. But they want to see me be accountable for what I am doing. They’re not doing it for me. You know, so I think one of the biggest helps was is that my Pastor would ask me when they would ask me to do something , “Do you think you really can do this?” “Is this something that’s within your range of skills or is this something that you’re capable of? Not because I doubt that you can do it but because I don’t want to put you out of your element.” And they wouldn’t let me sell myself short. Not once, if I started to fall back to my old attitudes or my old thinking did they say, “ok, you’re screwing up. Go ahead, do what you do.” They went and they called me on it. They’re like, “dude is that what you really think is God’s will for you to do?” So having authentic people that have the same focus and mindset that I do is probably the best thing that’s helped me so far. And being able to be of actual service, you know, to the kingdom of Christ and to my church community. I would not have made it this far if I had just gone off and tried to do this on my own. I follow God’s lead and remember to constantly be willing to be of service for him. The churches that I’m involved with gave me those opportunities. That’s how I can explain that.