

# COURSE GRADE COVER SHEET

Complete student information portion, make copies, and submit one form with each course.  
(In the event you are not able to make copies, please hand-write this page with each course.)

I have read the frequently asked questions on the back of this page: ☒ Yes ☐ No.

Student Number (Same as Inmate Number) 180161

Student Name: Eric St. George

Student Address: c/o CCF--180161; PO Box 600

City: Cañon City State: CO Zip Code: 81215

Unit Number: Fox Name of Prison: Centennial

Degree you are working toward: Masters of Ministry & Christian Counseling

My records indicate this is my 5th course. (paper 2 of 3)

Course Number & Title: or Name of Book From the Bible: CO0623 Counseling for Crisis and Addiction

Book Title: The Change Agent: How a Former College Quarterback Sentenced...

Author: Damon West

Begin/End Date of Enclosed Course: Jan 1 / Jun 30 2024

**Please note that if you are turning in a course that involves textbooks you need to turn in a complete course that normally has three books.**

## To Be Completed By Student:

Do you need us to send you your next course? ☐ YES ☒ NO

(This question applies only to those working on books of the Bible)

If no, what books will you use for your next course?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please give us the name and ID number of a few people that are interested in receiving information on attending our college. Thanks and God Bless You!

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_



**International Christian College and Seminary**  
P.O. Box 530212 • Debary, Florida 32753-0212  
[www.iccscampus.org](http://www.iccscampus.org)





**Q: Can you send me another grade coversheet?**

A: You can handwrite your grade cover page.

**Q: How long does it take to grade my work?**

A: We normally send correspondence out once per month. However, you do not need to wait on us to grade your work to continue your courses. If you are doing books from the Bible, we can e-mail them to your loved ones and they can print and send them to you. Just ask them to e-mail us.

**Q: Can I do my courses in pencil?**

A: Yes, but only if you have access to nothing else.

**Q: Should I staple or paperclip my work?**

A: If you do it is ok. However, we prefer that you do not use staples or paperclips because we scan your work and it takes time to remove them from the papers.

**Q: What course will books from the Bible substitute for?**

A: We use the books from the Bible as foundation courses. You need 20 courses to graduate. We will determine which courses they will substitute for as you get closer to graduating.

**Q: Is there a way I can contact you other than by mail?**

A: If you are a federal inmate in good standing you can send me an invitation on Corlinks and I will accept. If you are a state inmate you can have your loved ones forward an e-mail to me and I will respond. My e-mail is [drmcorkle@icccampus.org](mailto:drmcorkle@icccampus.org). You, your family or friends are welcome to call me. My cell number is (407) 760-5616. The office number is (877) 391-3741 ext. 700. As long as I do not have to pay, I will accept all calls. If for any reason you do not reach me on your first attempt, please keep trying. I will pick up.

**Q: How do I know if books I have available are acceptable to use as substitutions?**

A: As you know, we have a list of suggested books for your degree. However, we can customize some of your future courses to assist you in obtaining your goal. Everyone knows what they need help with. Please pray about it and once you have identified an area where you would like to improve, look in your chapel library or psychology department for a combination of books that are 900 pages. Once you find the books give me the name of the book, the author and the page numbers and I will enter these as a custom course for you.

**Q: Is there a time limit for each course?**

A: No, you can work at your own pace.

**Q: Can I send in my work if my tuition is not current?**

A: Please do not send in your work if your tuition is not current. If your tuition is not current your student file is flagged on hold in our system and we are unable to grade any work until the tuition is current. If the college does not receive a payment within 90 days the student file is permanently closed.

**Q: I have been writing sponsor letters but have not obtained a sponsor.**

A: Some students have to write 50-100 letters before they received a positive response. It depends on your letters. You need to pray and write each one individually from your heart. Also, ask family and friends to help find sponsors.

**Q: Will I receive feedback from the graders/readers?**

A: Courses are graded by graduate students. They jot down notes for me to read about each of your papers. They normally put down opinions that are highlighted to advise that this is interesting. Unless they point out a problem on the paper, I will accept it as-is. If they provide a problem, I return the paper with their notes asking you to re-do and re-submit. In the past I would write down some comments and students would brag to other students in their dorm making them feel inferior. For that reason, I normally just keep to the basic comments. I know some of you put a lot in your papers and deserve complete feedback. You can call me from your chaplain's or unit manager's office and I will be glad to discuss your papers in full detail.

**Q: Can you send back my original work?**

A: When we receive your work, your courses and correspondence are scanned into your student records. If you want your original work sent back to you, you must send us a self-addressed, stamped brown envelope with as many stamps as you used to send your original work to us, clearly stating that you want all of your work returned. Once your tuition is paid, if you want a copy of your work, we will email it to you upon your release or you can have your sponsor send a request and we will email it to them.

**Q: How long can I use the Books from the Bible?**

A: You can use books/questions from the Bible up to your Bachelor's Degree.

**Q: Tell me again about your accreditation**

A: We are accredited by the International Theological Accountability Association (ITAA) and are recognized by the Department of Education in Florida. ICCS has been privileged to work with several regionally accredited colleges and universities that do accept some ICCS course transfer credits into their programs. This offers our students the option of benefitting from their ICCS training when pursuing a formal degree at various academic institutions.

There are different kinds of accreditation. Governmental Accreditation and non-governmental accreditation. Governmental accreditation is requested in order to receive student aid money. We, along with Rhema Bible College and many more, choose non-governmental accreditation. With governmental accreditation, we would not be able to offer higher degrees unless the student took some courses on campus. That would make our prison program ineffective to you and many others.

**Q: How many credits are each course?**

A: Three (3) credits or one (1) course is equivalent to 45 contact hours, 60 credits or 20 courses is equivalent to 900 contact hours.

A contact hour is a measure that represents an hour of scheduled instruction given to students. A semester credit hour is normally granted for satisfactory completion of one 50-minute session (contact hour) of classroom instruction per week for a semester of not less than fifteen weeks.

**Q: Do I have to start with my Associate's degree or can I go directly to my Doctorate degree?**

A: If you have college credits, we need to see the official transcripts and we will enroll you in the appropriate degree program. If you have no college credits you need to start with the Associate's degree. The undergraduate degrees (Associate's and Bachelor's) each require 60 credits or 20 courses to graduate. For graduate degrees, the Master's requires 48 credits or 16 courses plus a Master's thesis and the Doctorate requires 36 credits or 12 courses plus a dissertation paper to graduate.

**Q: Will you write a letter to the Parole board for me?**

A: Yes. If you are a student in good standing with us, we will gladly help with Parole and Letters to the court. You must have a hearing date. If the date is near, I suggest you have your family or friends get in contact with us so we can have the rough draft approved and we can obtain the name and address of who you want it addressed to. Otherwise, you can write to us with the information.

**Q: How can I help ICCS?**

A: Help us spread the word about our college by sharing the school's flyer wherever you can i.e. your prison chapel, library or common area. You can also support us through prayer and by recommending us to your friends who are interested in pursuing a theological degree. To go a step further, consider "paying it forward" by sponsoring a new student.

**Q: Why is my coursework postmarked from Austin, Texas?**

A: Our grading center is in Austin, Texas. All of your correspondence is to be sent to:

International Christian College and Seminary  
P.O. Box 530212  
DeBary, FL 32753

**Q: Can I continue my degree when I am released?**

A: Yes. You are welcome to continue upon your release. We will keep your tuition at the same price for the first two years. You will have an option of taking your classes online or textbooks or a combination of the two. It will be your choice.

**Q: What is the cost for my next degree?**

A: We offer men and women in prison an 85% discount from our normal tuition. Our current tuition is \$9,497.00 (It continues to go up each year). We offer it to inmates at \$1,425. If you pre-pay you receive an additional discount and only pay \$997. Please note that the rate you will be paying is \$22.00 per credit hour. The standard community college charges between \$150 - \$300 per credit hour. There is no additional discount.



COUNSELING FOR CRISIS AND ADDICTION  
C00623  
(paper 2 of 3)

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Text Read: The Change Agent: How a Former College Quarterback Sentenced to  
Life in Prison, Transformed His World (2019) by Damon West  
ISBN: (none), 342 pages in 28 chapters

CONTENTS: (Prologue) Rock Bottom (ch 1) The Escape (ch 2) Innocence Lost  
(ch 3) Better Days (ch 4) Youth is Wasted on the Young (ch 5) Menagerie of  
Miscreants (ch 6) Fork in the Road (ch 7) Debts Demand to be Paid (ch 8)  
Proximity to Power (ch 9) You Don't Have to Win All Your Fights (ch 10) You  
Cannot Give What You Do Not Have (ch 11) Fruit of the Poisonous Tree (ch 12)  
Misery and Time (ch 13) The Coffee Bean (ch 14) The Animal I Have Become  
(ch 15) You'll Never Leave This Place Alive! (ch 16) Footprints in the Sand  
(ch 17) Halftime is Over (ch 18) Not on My Line (ch 19) Bench Warrant (ch 20)  
The Secret to Life (ch 21) Parole Hearing (ch 22) The Nightmare is Over  
(ch 23) On-Chain (ch 24) The Carrot and the Stick (ch 25) Hat on Tight  
(ch 26) Three Tools to Begin Your New Life (ch 27) Living in Recovery (ch 28)  
The Good Thief (Epilogue) Life Coming Full Circle

Why this book was chosen for Counseling for Crisis and Addiction: This course  
is a study of individuals that are in crisis and whom are dealing with addiction.  
This book promised to be a story about crisis and addiction. The cover told me  
that the author had been a prisoner in Texas, convicted and sentenced to life.  
The back cover reads: "The True Story of a well-raised kid, a three-year starting  
quarterback, a young person filled with potential... until a shocking addiction  
took hold. The book was indeed an autobiography of a former prisoner that  
catalogued the author's life prior to becoming addicted to drugs and his descent  
into a life of drugs and crime that culminates in the inevitable prison sentence.  
The book also has a cliché redemption and deus ex machina salvation from a life  
sentence, which I tolerated because it was a true story written by the man who  
lived it. The book was written from a human cage -- euphemistically called a  
"cell" by society -- just as this review of the text is being written from a  
human cage or "cell." My interest in this story of addiction and prison was  
going to be piqued because it is the story by which I am surrounded. As I write,  
March of 2024, I remain imprisoned by Colorado's Department of Corrections. While  
I've never experienced addiction personally, I've heard hundreds of these type  
of stories while imprisoned. The author Damon West's story includes a lifestyle



of crime and theft and addiction to cocaine and later methamphetamine, to which I cannot relate. Much of West's prison experience felt familiar to me.

Once Damon West's story was read, it confirmed my expectations. He discusses how he coped with his legal crisis, his trial and conviction. He talks about how his drug addiction led to hopelessness, and how he ultimately overcame the addiction. He speaks at length in his story about his faith in God, another reason why the book was so relevant to a course in Christian Counseling. While I generally seek out texts that are written by PhDs in their respective fields and also have a large bibliography with citations to peer-reviewed journals, I made an exception for this book. I did so for two reasons, the text is an autobiography relating the author's personal experience, and one could say that we all hold a doctorate in ourselves. The book was also recommended to me by a fellow prisoner and handed to me with a hearty, "You gotta read this."

#### Summary of Damon West's story

West uses a writing style that is Quentin Tarantino-esque to make his story more interesting. It opens with the attention-grabbing focal point of his tale, the moment that the jury delivers its verdict. I can't fault him for doing this. Having lived through a trial, I can certify that it is the most intense experience in a person's life. Merely being charged with a serious crime effectively seals one's fate -- prosecutors have the homefield advantage and seemingly unlimited government resources -- yet throughout the entire process one can't help but to hold out hope for a positive disposition. West does not get a positive disposition. He is convicted. Worse, he is convicted of engaging in organized crime. This is a gross over-charging by the prosecutor. (I've seen this behavior firsthand during my time in prison. Prosecutors are zealots. If a person legitimately commits a crime, the State will blow it entirely out of proportion. A barfight -- legitimately a simple assault -- will be charged as aggravated battery. If he uses a pool cue or a bottle, he'll be charged with attempted murder. West was a burglar, and that's crime enough worthy of being charged and convicted. The organized crime charge was completely gratuitous. The prosecutor seeks a sentence of "LWOP" (life without parole) and the jury returns a sentence of 65 years. The 65 year sentence is a de facto life sentence. West says that he "had hit rock bottom."

West's first chapter opens with an excerpt from his "Prison Diary." (This is a behavior that I feel is a disservice to oneself. I do not keep a prison diary. Too many days pass with zero activity, and it is very disheartening.



I do keep a record of major events via a semi-annual update to family and friends) West's entry shares a story of an escape and the resultant lockdown: Lockdown, ...this is a concept that every prisoner is all too familiar with. The greater world got a small taste during the Pandemic. Lockdown is the government answer to every situation. In prison it means a day spent in one's 6-by-10 hell struggling to entertain oneself with television or reading and not annoying or being annoyed by your cellmate. He dates this entry March 10, 2011, almost 2 years after his May 18, 2009 conviction date.

The next step in telling his story flashes back to his birth on October 21, 1975 in Port Arthur, Texas. He has two brothers, an older named Brandon who he says has a genius IQ, and a younger named Grayson who he says looked up to him and followed him around. Otherwise, Mom and Dad, Genie and Bob West, are normal middle-class parents. Mom is a Catholic, and Dad doesn't identify with any religion. West talks about a babysitter named Cathy who, when he was 9, would engage in sexual activities with him. He refers to this as sexual abuse but only in hindsight. The adult behavior did trigger in him a destructive premature growing-up... he says he was drinking and smoking by age ten, marijuana by twelve, and fully sexually active also at twelve. He reflects on how he stopped maturing emotionally at that young age owing to his having been thrust into adult behavior too early.

West invests the next chapters on his high school football career, and his interest in being a quarterback. This interest is based on the attention that comes from being the quarterback. West's retelling of his high school lifestyle read like Hollywood's "Varsity Blues." Partying, alcohol, drugs, lots of sex, and popularity that goes along with being a high school football quarterback in Texas.

Returning back to the storyline where he is in prison, West goes back to his Prison Diary entry for Christmas Day 2011. "Christmas in prison is depressing," he says. He discusses his attendance in 12-step recovery meetings. He says that by his estimation that "80 percent of the people in prison are addicts of some sort." I think I could agree with his estimation. In my own experience, a supermajority of the prisoners around me were heavy drug or alcohol users. I am personally less liberal in using the word addict, but among prisoners it most likely fits. This point emphasizes why I chose this book to begin with, there is a statistically strong correlation among crime, prison, crises and addiction.

West says that he prays this prayer every morning which he learned from A.A.:



"God, I offer myself to Thee, to build with me and do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of Life. May I do Thy will always."

Reminiscing over his college football career, West tells us about his "fork in the road moment," that event that took his drug and alcohol use to the addiction level. In June of 1997 he cut his achillies tendon -- not while on the field -- but while taking a shower at his girlfriend's apartment. The towel rack fell and shattered and he stepped on it severing his achillies tendon. He says that he knew his career was over and this kicked off a "pity party that lasted for over a decade." This "pity party was going to be fueled with cocaine, ecstasy, pills, mushrooms, and just about any drug he could get his hands on." Despite the drugs and partying West maintained his professional life. Following the dot-com bubble bursting in 2000, having worked in tech since his 1999 college graduation, he and his brother Brandon moved to Washington DC to pursue a career in politics. Once in Washington DC, West takes a job in the office of Gene Green, congressman for the 29th District of Texas in Houston, as a staff assistant. He recalls his experience of being in DC during 9/11.

Flashing forward, returning to the prison storyline, West describes to his reader how the "politics" of prison works. He reminds us how following his conviction, his parents told him during a visit to not come home covered in tattoos and as a member of a racist white-supremecist gang. His life experience had been one where racial diversity was accepted. West had been an athlete on racially diverse sports teams, and describes his hometown as a racially diverse "melting pot." Prison is racially diverse, indeed prisons are notoriously populated by minority-overrepresented distributions. This I can confirm from my personal experience. Prisons are known to be filled by gangs. This I can also confirm. He names several white supremecist gangs: Aryan Brotherhood, Aryan Circle, White Knights, and the "Woods." In my experience, I have not encountered these specific gangs. There are plenty of gangs in prison where I'm held. The White gang is called "The 211s" and are Aryan adjacent, and definitely call one another "Wood." There are plenty of other gangs, but here's what I've seen that is far different from what West describes -- they're integrated nowadays! The Southern California Crip and Blood gangs, which were historically all Black and continue to be largely Black have taken White guys and many mixed-race members. The Chicano Sureño gang is still primarily American-borns of Mexican descent, but they have some multi-



racial admixture. I've even heard stories of White Paisas. This is naturally a story that would be shared with me as I've learned to read, write and speak in Spanish during my incarceration. Because I am proficient in Spanish I chat with Paisas regularly. Paisas are generally Mexican-born full Hispanics. They accept other non-Mexican nationalities; central and South American, and Caribbean islanders. I've not yet met the elusive White Paisa. In contrast, in West's Texas prison, the race situation is very segregated. Where race relations are fairly relaxed here in Colorado, and in this era, not so in West's story. He details many race-induced fistfights he's endured. He calls his first fistfight a "heart-check" which he says is a de rigeur initiation rite. I have repeatedly been told that this was standard here in the Colorado system, but I never had my "heart checked" personally. I've had a couple of close calls, but the existence of mindless random acts of violence is rare in my experience. More often the scuffles are personal to the individuals involved, as I've seen.

In another scene reminiscent of a Hollywood cliché, West tells a story about his efforts to end his torture at the hands of Black gang members. He forces himself onto the basketball court of all Black players. They play very rough with him, since he is unwelcome, but he returns the following day. After an entire week of coming back for more, West earns the respect of his fellow Black prisoners.

Bouncing back to the storyline pre-Prison where West is in Washington DC, we learn that he'll be returning to Texas. Damon's younger brother Grayson is having difficulty leading a sober and productive adult life. Damon agrees to move back to Texas and live with his brother in Austin. Damon has been drinking heavily and doing cocaine while living in DC, socially acceptable in politico-class circles. Once he's moved in with his brother, Grayson confides in Damon that he's been using Crystal Meth. This is a boundary crossed. Damon tells his brother that Meth is a "White-trash drug" and makes their apartment a "meth-free zone" while green-lighting "coke, booze, pot, and even some pills." The living arrangement lasts only from May 2003 to JAN 2004, when Damon's campaigning job ends due to an election loss for his politician employer. Damon finds new work in Dallas through his father at the United Bank of Switzerland (UBS) where he can put his list of political-donating contacts to use as a stockbroker. His Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity brother was a cocaine dealer in Dallas, making the move even more enticing to him.

The segue back to prison introduces a part of prison-life with which I am



very, very familiar; the post-conviction collateral attacks and the law library lizard jailhouse lawyers. West does not talk about any of the state-level direct appeal or collateral attack. His first discussion of any post-conviction litigation is his federal habeas corpus filing. West goes through a description of the colorful cast of jailhouse lawyers, legal beagles and other denizens of the prison law library. I know these characters very well... I am one. I had a good laugh as he derisively described the wanna-bes and know-it-alls. Very familiar. He also talked about the experience of considering hiring one of these guys and weighing it against taking on the task for himself. Following the sage advice of one of his law library's usual suspects, Mr. Wilson, West chooses to do the work himself. Petitions for Writ of Habeas Corpus are almost exclusively written by so-called "writ-writers" who are jailhouse lawyers, or they are written "pro-se" by the applicant himself. Why? Because lawyers are prohibitively expensive, and there is no legal right to representation on collateral attack like there is for direct appeal. Also, prisoners are overwhelmingly broke. We remember, the poor are disproportionately represented in populations of incarcerated people, and prisoners typically earn nearly zero income.

West tells us that his issues he presents in his Habeas Corpus include Ineffective Assistance of Counsel and Fruit of the Poisonous Tree. These are super common issues. IAC is typical because so many are represented by the public defender; a state-sponsored defense counsellor. They are totally overwhelmed by volume and completely uninspired by design. PDs are deal-brokers, motivated almost exclusively to negotiate guilty plea deals. They provide shoddy representation to their clients, especially those who pursue trial. West had a private, paid attorney. They are also generally lousy, as I've seen. The standard for judging IAC is spelled out in the seminal Strickland v. Washington case and its progeny. West's other issue, "the fruit of the poisonous tree," has to do with suppression of evidence that is obtained by unwarranted searches. The doctrine is based on making a punitive effect on police who violate the Fourth Amendment and effect illegal searches and seizures. This portion of West's story also talks about how he depended on the help of his parents to assist him in preparing his Habeas Corpus. He would write out his work, and his mom would type it out in sections. This is a painful reality; having family support is so very vital to progressing through the system. Families have a tendency to turn their backs on their imprisoned loved-ones. There are feelings of shame due to their loved-ones having been convicted of a crime. There is the feeling of helplessness; the government



is a leviathan after all. The cliché "you can't fight city hall" looms large in the minds of a prisoner's family, and they give up. Then there too is the vicarious depression.

West's next vacillation to the story of his descent into drugs and crime chronicles his first experimentation with Crystal Meth. One of West's UBS co-workers joins him in his vehicle in the parking garage where he believes they'll do cocaine together. The co-worker, named James, instead pulls out Crystal Meth. James sells West on trying the drug, using words that remind him of how his brother described it. West talks at length about the experience an addict has surrounding the "ritual" of using drugs. This information is useful to a student, like me, learning about addiction. Ultimately, West likes the feeling that smoking meth gives him, and his fate is sealed. Quickly, his life revolves entirely around using meth. He fails his Series 7 exam and is fired from UBS. He tries other work in real estate, and later in a casino deal with some sports celebrities. He falls deeper into a life and lifestyle of a meth-addicted druggie. Using meth becomes his full-time occupation. He no longer is able to exist in circles of polite company; his circle is filled with dope addicts and dealers. He is awake for days on end, commonplace for meth users. His apartment becomes a hub for drug trafficking. In time, he becomes homeless and he lives on the streets of Dallas. Turning the corner on his journey to meth-head life, he moves into a traphouse and starts stealing to support his habit. A "traphouse" is a slummy house filled with drugs and drug dealers. While high, he and his fellow addicts began plotting home burglaries as a step up from breaking into cars and storage units. Stealing was his means to support his habit.

West details many of his theft exploits. He tells the story of the crime that would lead eventually to his imprisonment. His first home burglary spree was during the Thanksgiving holiday of 2005. He was stealing from a girlfriend's neighbors in an expensive high-rise condo building, using her garage door opener to gain access to the building. He says that he steals throughout Uptown Dallas. His "disguise" was to be well-dressed (presumably a suit and tie from his politico times) and a fancy luxury car (stolen with swapped license plates). He talks at length about using stolen identities and stolen credit cards. He tells us that because of his appearance, he could always get into gated neighborhoods, sometimes using a ruse of "looking for a girlfriend's dog." Using stolen cars would be the thing that took him down... and a healthy dose of stupidity on the part of a partner. In February 2008, West had a partner named Steve whom he'd met at



a traphouse and been doing home burglaries with him. Steve called West screaming "oh, my God! I am so screwed!" There was a tow truck picking up the stolen car that Steve had been using in his apartment complex's parking lot. "What's in the car, Steven?" "My burglary bag with all my tools. And, my gun," Steve answered. Steven called the tow yard and an officer told him, "the car is in the property of the authorities who are going to arrest you now." The plan these two crazy fellas hatched was to STEAL THE CAR from the police impound!! :) It is hilarious that West is successful in stealing the car from the impound lot. More hilarious is that he hides the car in a garage of a house that he's burglarized! All of this caper is to no avail because Steve had been so stupid to have taken the stolen car to a shop and have glaspak mufflers installed onto it. He wanted to soup-up the car and make it louder while he used it. And, he gave the shop his real name and actual home address!! The shop ran the VIN through the state, and when the results came back stolen the shop told the police right where to go pick it up. This car had been stolen during the Uptown burglaries, and now the police had it tied to Steve. The story worsens. West tells us, "you would think this would have scared me into ceasing what I was doing. You would be so wrong. I could no more stop than I could fly an airplane. The burglaries paid for my drugs; the drugs controlled my life." This statement is so poignant for understanding addiction.

In May of 2008, West and Steven were still burglarizing houses and stealing cars. West was caught burglarizing a garage in a North Dallas apartment complex. He was in a stolen care and had stolen items from burglaries in the Galleria area in the car. At this point he'd had some minor charges in the past, and now with this arrest serious charges. He manages to bond out of jail pre-trial. The judge, a man he knew from his days rubbing elbows with political elites, recognized West and ordered he wear an ankle GPS, an ankle alcohol detector, and weekly drug testing as conditions of bond. West left the jail and got high right away, "drug tests be damned." Again, West is the picture of addiction. Appearing in court for a hearing in June 2008, West is arrested again. The arrest is for an additional burglary associated to the earlier spree. He bonds out again, keeps getting high. Over the Fourth of July, he and Steven go on another spree in Uptown. The media go wild and report the burglaries, this time airing a photo from an elevator security camera. He doesn't quit. On the internet West looks up instructions on how to bypass the wiring on his ankle monitor, and removes it. He uses his "freedom" to go out and buy more meth and get high, in addition to making contact with



everyone involved with the burglaries. On July 30, 2008, he wakes up and has sex with his junkie girlfriend, and calls his dealer to buy more meth. He gets a call from the officer monitoring his ankle bracelet. The officer says he's coming over for a home visit. He knows he's being arrested today. Does he call off his dealer? No. The dealer arrives and mentions that there are strange cars in front of the house. Still, they light up a bong filled with meth. As they smoke, the living room window shatters and a flash-bang grenade is thrown into the house. SWAT flood the house. Back in jail, West asks himself, "How can I get high in here?" All he could think about was feeding his addiction.

In his phone call to his parents, West's mother reminds him of the old Footprints in the Sand parable: "That's when God said, 'Damon you fool, every time you saw one set of footprints, I didn't abandon you, I carried you!'" Continuing, "Look down in that jail cell, Damon. Look where you are standing. There is only one set of footprints, and they are not yours. Get on God's back. I don't want to lose my son."

After this arrest, there would be no bonding out this time. The bond was set at "over one million dollars." Effectively, to most people a million dollar bond is no bond at all. I personally had a million dollar bond. This is what district courts do when they are going to take your life and have no intention of affording you any semblance of a fair trial. It is nearly impossible to advocate for yourself while languishing in a county jail pre-trial.

At this point in his book, West has merged his two storylines. We return to prison at the time where he's been convicted and been in prison for several years. His "prison diary" entry for his five-year reads: "Tuesday, July 30, 2013. Today is a big day for me. It marks five years of incarceration. Five years ago today, the Dallas Police Department saved my life and rescued me from a world of drugs, crime, and immorality. Had it not been for them, I shudder to think of not only where I would be, but how many more innocent people I would have hurt by now. It may sound a little odd to hear this, but I truly believe the massive sentence of sixty-five years, that life sentence, saved my life." This is a sentiment I have encountered enough times to call common. Many who were addicts outside the confines of prisons say that being incarcerated has saved their lives. I personally feel that the incarceration-as-means-to-recovery method is garbage and a terrible use of prisons. But, the fact that taking away a person's liberty and locking them away from intoxicants can lead to recovery. I feel that the connection is correlation rather than causation because there is a predominance



of prisoners returning to their habits upon release.

-TEACHING AS SELF-THERAPY- One of the activities that West talks about engaging in while incarcerated is teaching. Not his official prison "job," which is working in the "Unit Supply," a warehouse for all supply goods for running the prison; paper, pens, soap, razors, lawn mowers, etc. (In prison, everyone is "supposed" to have a prison "job." Many work in kitchens, laundries, or grounds maintenance. Prisoner labor is indispensable for running a prison. No prison functions but for operating on the backs of the prisoners who are imprisoned in those prisons. Because prison disproportionately affects the poor underclass, most jobs in prison are in repetitive and unskilled labor. It has further been my experience that there are not enough jobs to go around and getting a job usually comes from a large amount of brown-nosing, boot-licking sycophantism because having a job is one of a small number of ways to spend less time rotting in a cell--a big deal in the giant warehouse holding pens that are today's prisons.)

West says that he teaches men in tutoring sessions while they are working on their GEDs. He tells us that for him, tutoring makes him feel "useful." This is a behavior that I found familiar. Since I've been imprisoned, I've found myself in a similar place and role. Albeit unwittingly at first, I have repeatedly found myself in the role of a teacher. Many in prison have very little education. This is often because of any of a number of scenarios; a poor upbringing where education was not valued or affordable, growing up in a poor neighborhood with bad public schools, growing up in a culture that denigrated educated people, leaving school very young to pursue gang-life, drug-dealing, or even legitimate work to contribute to a poor family with no father present, and of course a giant contributor: addiction. Many traded study time in youth with time spent wasted, high on drugs.

For many, imprisonment represents a first opportunity free of crime-life and addiction or from time-consuming work to support oneself or one's family wherein one may pursue even a basic education. Being educated myself, and having a very patient disposition that comes from a career in entrepreneurship that required tasks such as sales (teaching customers) and having employees (teaching trade skills), I have often found myself a teacher. I have been a para-pro for GED classes, an official prison "job." I have taught many students one-on-one who were studying to pass their GEDs but didn't attend GED classes, because the GED classrooms can be very disruptive and zoo-like environments. I have had several students that were working on college correspondence courses, especially math.



I had one student that was looking toward parole and expected to return to college upon release and wanted to learn calculus in prison while he still had nothing but free time so he could get a jump on school. I asked him, "How'd you do in Trigonometry?" He told me he was working through Algebra II in a correspondence class. We worked together for six months, 1-2 hours per afternoon, five days a week. We did all of trigonometry and differential calculus. He was paroled before we could do integral calculus. Nonetheless he'll have a great head start. I've also taught beginner and intermediate Spanish classes and ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. This gave rise to my nickname, "El Maestro." I can confirm the author West's assertion that being a teacher can serve as therapy. When I've been asked, as I have been often asked, why I give my time to teaching in prison, I explain, "It's one of the only times in prison when I feel normal. I feel like myself when I'm teaching, and for that duration of time I can feel like I'm not in a prison." This idea of helping others as a means of overcoming crisis and addiction is a main tenet of the leading recovery program, and West points to this several times in his book.

-ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS- West talks at length about his experiences in Alcoholics Anonymous. While West only talks about alcohol tangentially to his drug addiction, the AA model is applied to alcohol addiction and drug addiction. Because of West's large investment in writing about AA as his pathway to recovery from addiction, I will also study more about AA for this course on crisis and addiction.

In Chapter 18, West recites the familiar "Serenity Prayer" which he tells us that he led with his AA group from rote memory:

"God, grant me the serenity,  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference."

The Serenity Prayer makes perfect sense as an application of the AA model -- AA relies on giving oneself over to a higher power. AA teaches that the only way to recover from addiction is to submit oneself over to the higher power because the addict has no ability to control the addiction.

Elsewhere in the book, West speaks about attending AA in the prison context because it is so important to recover from addiction -- or at least begin recovery as AA teaches that recovery is a lifelong process -- prior to leaving prison. Here I'll quote West in full: "Some people's purpose in life is to serve as a warning to others of what not to do. My life is no exception. I'd found a lot



of value in the men of this [AA] program who had made multiple trips to prison. I'd asked many of them the same question: 'What are you going to do when you get out of prison this time?' Their answers, for the most part, provided me with a blueprint for the things I will not be doing when I walk out of here. The principle items on their lists were things like: getting laid, finding their old friends, getting high, getting drunk, getting 'paid.' The lists seemed to be more about selfish desires as opposed to how to give back and help others.

Missing entirely from 99 percent of their lists was a program of recovery. If they weren't into recovery meetings in prison, it was highly unlikely they would ever surrender to a program of recovery on the outside. Case in point, each week here they had a voluntary AA/NA meeting, where I join about twenty guys out of over five hundred on the unit. Participation was beyond pathetic. The victims of our addictions deserved better.

Always, it came back to the victims of crime. Our sentences were our atonement. After all, penitence was the very root of the word penitentiary. Addicts, internalizing by nature, often only think about things in terms of themselves and how their choices affect them. When they talk about prison saving their lives, I challenge them to focus not on their own lives, but the countless scores of potential victims their arrests saved. In my case, I certainly believe this to be one of the most positive aspects of my incarceration.

You either want to change and will go to any lengths to do it or you fake it until you make it, only to repeat this process over and over the rest of your life. Jails, institutions and death were what these living examples showed me were my future if I did not work a program of recovery for the rest of my life."

West's strong indication that addiction and the disease model of addiction is the causation factor that is foremost in criminality and crime is something that I can agree with vehemently using my own observations in prison as the basis. From my perspective, and from what I've witnessed, crimes and criminality that stem from a genuinely evil place or from true motive that is criminal is rare. For every property criminal that is driven by greed, two are motivated by desperation or addiction, speaking exclusively from my own interactions with criminals. Prison, as I've experienced it, is mostly worthless. There is no "corrections" in the so-called correctional facilities. If I were hired tomorrow as a consultant to the prison system I would reserve prison to exclusively violent incorrigibles and repeat offenders that must be sequestered from society in order to protect the citizenry. Prosecutors would likely argue



that this is what is being done... but that is not what I've seen during my imprisonment. In addition, I would sentence people to lifestyle changes that inherently benefit the convicted and society. One of the biggest changes in lifestyle that prisoners resist and would provide discipline is 9 to 5 work. Sentence people to working a job. (Not a prison job, but true full-time work in the real world in lieu of prison) Most of the prisoners I have met that have dysfunctional lives did not maintain a job in the outside world. Proper "corrections" would include vocational training and a life not confined to a cell. Much of the other criminal issues resolve themselves once a man is gainfully employed. Addiction (generally) doesn't exist well with being a 9-to-5 working stiff. A steady paycheck resolves poverty, and its concomitant desperation. Maintaining working hours reduces the ability to indulge in the nightlife... and the cliché that nothing good happens after midnight tends to hold true. Prisoners around me tend to agree with these premises. I have -- somewhat comically and sarcastically -- suggested that free people are already willingly imprisoning themselves. Free people carry cell phones with which their physical location may be tracked at all times. Combined with a lease/mortgage on a residence and a 9-to-5 job and a spouse/mate, and the person is effectively 100% penned in. With only marginal supervision above and beyond that of the lessor/mortgagor, boss, and spouse/mate the state could effectively imprison a person outside of a prison at liberty in the community. This is the "community corrections" model, which does exist but fails miserably, for more reasons than can be described within the scope of this text summary/essay.

-PAROLE- Returning back to West, in March of 2015, he was eligible for parole. He tells us that he had accumulated more than six years of actual time served, six years of "good time," and three years of "work-time credits." This fifteen years was 25% of the "calculated sixty year life sentence requisite to be parole eligible." This is extremely... "fortunate" <<facetious>>... and also likely why Texas deals out sentences that are so excessive. In many systems, a man must serve at least 85% of his sentence before becoming parole eligible. In Colorado, where I am imprisoned, a man must serve at least 33% of his sentence and up to a minimum of 75% of his sentence in order to be parole eligible. The different percentages are contingent on non-violent/violent/repeat-violent offender classifications. We also do earn "good time" and other credits that bring parole eligibility nearer as described in West's scenario. The parole systems are different state-by-state and in the federal system. For West, he tells us that



he will spend the rest of his sentence on parole: "If I screw up, y'all have me for the rest of my life," ... "Yes, we do. You'll be on parole until you're ninety-seven years old. Until 2073." Here in Colorado, parole is different from West's experience in Texas. Parole is a fixed 2, 3, or 5 year "tail" that is separate from the sentence in prison; it is determined by statute.

When eligible for parole, West capitalized on his recovery from addiction effort to gain the faith of the members of the parole board attending his hearing. Texas offers, we're told<sup>1</sup> an "FI-5" parole option. The title is not defined or explained.<sup>1</sup> The program is described as having a "six month in-prison treatment program, followed by eighteen months of after-care in the free world." The FI-5 we're told as West quotes the parole board member, "The program you're referring to is one of our toughest, Mr. West. Are you sure that's what you want?" He answers, "Yes ma'am. Give me some help." He also told her, "Ms. Smith, there is not a day that goes by that I don't think about the pain, hurt, suffering, and loss I have caused many. I take full responsibility for my crimes and all the collateral damage that resulted from it. The addict that committed those crimes is not the man you are speaking with today because I'm in recovery." In his parole application, West submitted his sign-in sheets from his AA attendance. She asks West, "What's the eighth step?" to which he answers, "Made a list of all the persons I harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all." He added further that in order to make amends to those he couldn't apologize that he "planned on going to schools to warn kids about the dangers of drugs and consequences of bad decisions." Also he would use his "life as an example of what not to do... the most humbling and selfless way [he] could think of to make amends to those [he] had hurt." The parole board panel member told West that, "It was obvious to her that addiction was what had happened to [him]." He quotes "The Big Book of AA" several more times for good measure. The parole application packet also advises the parole panel that West had "taken a ton of correspondence Bible classes..." which is hopefully something I will never share with a parole board because I will have reversed the illicit conviction against me in court. My motivation for doing this work is so that I can have a tangible asset to show for my time that was otherwise stolen from my life. West's parole board panel was particularly impressed with his schooling efforts. The final question he was asked was, "if you could be anything in life, tell me what that would be in just one word." He responded, "Useful! I just want to be useful." Another take-

<sup>1</sup> FI-5 is "In-Prison Therapeutic Community (IPTC). [www.tdcj.state.tx.us/bpp/what-is-parole/vote-options.html](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/bpp/what-is-parole/vote-options.html)



away from the AA "Big Book". On May 1, 2015, West learns that he's been granted a very rare parole on the first attempt. His release date was November 16, 2015. Those intervening months while technically on parole but still in prison were spent in the "Kyle Unit" doing FI-5. West says, "The curriculum was helpful, with three phases necessary for graduation. One glaring omission was the lack of a required 12-step component to the program." West completely stands behind his faith in the AA 12-steps as the best and most efficacious route to recovery.

#### RECOVERY IN THE REAL WORLD

On parole for the rest of his life, relapse into addiction would spell a return to prison. West's commitment to recovery and sobriety is firm. He becomes a proud honoree with Sertoma - Service To Man - for his work he does "speaking to youth all over Southeast Texas."

West talks about engaging in several other charitable and religious organizations. He tells us about entering a "Dancing with the Stars" event put on by the Junior League of Beaumont. Beaumont is a suburb of Houston. Comically, and in self-deprecating humility, his routine was performed with the sheriff of Jefferson County Texas, and called "The Cop and the Con." His dance partner was the first Black woman to be a sheriff in Texas history. They danced to "I Shot The Sheriff" and "Bad Boys." I venture the routine received lots of laughter.

West works in law, for the firm Provost Umphrey who had reviewed his pro-se written Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus. His experience as a jailhouse lawyer prepared him for the work. He also earned a Master's in criminal justice from Lamar University. He speaks at conferences and in prisons, even returning to his own prison unit only a year after having paroled. I can't personally imagine how emotionally difficult THAT had to have been!

#### FAITH

West has told us throughout the text that his faith in God was central to his ability to endure the crisis of the justice system's impact on him and in incarceration, and in working through the recovery from his addiction. He tells us that he's been actively practicing his Christian faith during his imprisonment. He fondly recalls a four-day retreat from February 2014 while in prison that was put on by a Catholic organization called ACTS. ACTS stands for "Adoration, Community, Theology, and Service." They provide food (rare treats in a prison like ice cream and pizza) which is a lure few prisoners can reject, along with fun games and faithful fellowship. There is a very similar program in the Colorado prisons called Kairos; I've never attended. The sign-up lists are very long and



attendance is highly sought after. West began wearing a bracelet that is described as appearing like a string of interlinked fishhooks, symbolic of Christ being a fisher of men. He talks about civic leaders in his community being familiar with the bracelet and recognizing it as belonging to the ACTS group. He participates with ACTS now as a free citizen, another way he gives back to the community that he feels a debt owed for his crimes and sins. He also says he's joined the church in his community that is connected to the ACTS group.

Interwoven throughout his biography, West impresses upon his reader how critical his faith is to his life, especially as it pertains to recovery from addiction. The AA model is wholly dependant on the submission to a higher power that is said to be central to recovery. To West, his faith is so critical, his penultimate words of his book sum up how he could not have recovered from his addiction or survived his crises without it: "Spiritually, I've never felt closer to God. Without asking for anything from him, except that He put in front of me what He needs me to do for Him, my life has never been fuller and more useful. As long as I keep God and my program of recovery in front of everything I do, my life is simple. Besides, I have a ton of perspective on what a bad day truly looks like. So far, I haven't seen one on the outside of those prison walls."

#### CONCLUSION

Having finished Damon West's memoir of his journey through addiction, his crisis of imprisonment, and his revelation of the harms of crime and drug addiction, I find that it was a proper addition to this course of study. Indeed, his multiple references to Alcoholics Anonymous, the Big Book of the eponymous organization that serves alcoholics seeking recovery, I have chosen that book for my final text in this course. The AA Big Book is readily available to me in our chaplain's library.