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# University of Glasgow

School of Social and Political Sciences  
College of Social Science

**“If I had nae hope... I would either be locked up or  
deid”: Locating hope in desistance**

**Sarah Kennedy McKean**  
MSc., B.Th.

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how hope is experienced and understood by those at various stages of the desistance process. This is an interdisciplinary project combining criminology and theology. Hope can of course be viewed through the social structures which create an environment in which hopeful characteristics can be developed and hopeful actions displayed. This is of great significance in this research given the importance of relational support in generating hope which is revealed in the data collected. However, interpreting this data on merely a socially constructed level limits the extent to which we can know the value of hopefulness. The complex nature of human existence and experience can, and should, be examined on various levels, as McGrath suggests, in order that a more rounded picture can be created. The use of theology allows for not only an additional level of knowing, but also a deeper level of examining that which can be known (McGrath 2015). This research offers an invitation to consider a different perspective, it does not contend that this is the only viewpoint, it is one lens which can contribute to a wider and deeper understanding of the overall lives being examined. I do not argue for the existence of God or the need for religion; this project does not lend itself to such discussion. Rather, theology is used as both a guiding analytical tool, and explanatory lens through which participants' experiences of both hope and desistance can be viewed and understood.

Some existing literature shows desisters naming hope as a contributing factor to desistance. Weaver's (2016) research revealed narratives naming hope, to varying degrees, as a contributing factor to desistance. For some, hope was very targeted, and goal based, whilst others used hope to describe a state of being. Conversely, Schinkel and Nugent (2016) show, that for some, hope often led to disappointment therefore becoming a source of pain rather than encouragement. Halsey et al (2017) found that a sense of hopelessness can often result in re-offending and disturbing the desistance process.

The fieldwork for this research began in January 2019 and was completed by the end of October 2019. Participants for this research were male and were recruited on the basis of belonging to one of the groups: (1) those who were serving the last six weeks of a short-term sentence; (2) those who had been out of prison for between three to six months; (3) those who had been out of prison for 2 years or more. The research groups were developed in order to capture a snapshot of how hope is experienced along different stages of the desistance journey. The fieldwork consisted of a creative element: photography; collage;

painting and drawing; followed by two interview stages. Photo and image elicitation was used in order to ‘set the scene’ of hope allowing for a natural flow of conversation of what might otherwise be an abstract concept. All participants were interviewed in a semi-structured style alongside their images and those who I was able to maintain contact with were re-interviewed 3 months (Group 1), or 6 months (Groups 2 and 3) after the first interview stage.

Using theology as a guide in both fieldwork and analysis has revealed an additional layer to meaning making and the experience of desisters. The research reveals the main sources of hope, such as community, relationships and small acts of mercy. The thesis highlights the main obstacles in hope and how desisters battle with this in order to sustain their desistance journey. I argue that small acts of mercy can have a dramatic impact on desisters hope journeys leading to significant life turning points.

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**Author's Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Sarah Kennedy McKean

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*an' all these other good things kinda branch oot hope... It goes together, you know, tae make somethin' better. So if you've got hope, then you've got aspirations, then you've got motivations, you know... I don't want tae be the wee guy that's fuckin' got nae shoes sittin' in a corner, stinkin', fuckin' hands boggin'... It's important tae have hope.*

Ian, Group 1 (Interview 2)

The feeling and experience of hope is one that is familiar to us; daily moments of hopeful anticipation, a notion of longing for a particular outcome, participating in a social or political movement in hopeful expectation. A dip, or loss of that hope is also an experience with which most of us have become accustomed, for some even the complete loss of all hope, of all meaning and reason in life. This hope familiarity blinds us to discover further, deeper meanings of hope, the functionalities of hope, the sources of hope, the maintenance of hope and methods of recalibrating before a disappointing dip in hope becomes overwhelming. Stories from, and research conducted with, those who have experienced imprisonment all too often tell of this overwhelming loss of hope. Hope is lost within the prison walls, behind the locked gates, the isolation amongst closely confined strangers, the unfamiliar sounds and smells only found in prison which all too quickly become familiar. Then, upon release, when one may expect joyful hope in abundance, instead, often the loss of hope is exacerbated by new fears; possible homelessness; few, if any, sources of support and guidance; isolation although not surrounded by strangers now, a staggering lone isolation. Yet, others do find hope. Some find new hope within the prison walls: learned skills, supportive contacts, not a fully formed hope experience, yet one which makes prison life bearable and makes the outside world seem less daunting. Challenges are still present threatening this hope, however the dips are met with hopeful interjections which prevent them from becoming devastating. A way out this dip becomes visible and possible.

The desistance journey is a tumultuous one; there are achievements along the way, however the challenges can often seem to outweigh progress made. Hope, provided by the possibilities of a changed, crime-free life, can soon dwindle with the added difficulties everyday tasks have when tackled by those who have experienced imprisonment. This research is a desistance study with one distinct focus; the experience, purpose, function and sustainability of hope. Hope is explored with three different groups at different stages of the desistance journey: those in prison and being released within 6 weeks of participating;

those who have been out of prison between 3-6 months; those who have been out of prison for 2 years or more. All participants have expressed a desire to desist and have engaged with support organisations in order to make the best go of it. Participants' hopeful journeys were examined alongside their desistance journeys over a relatively short period of 6 months. Longer was not possible due to PhD time constraints. Over just these 6 months, experiences of and attitudes to hope changed. Participants lives had changed, even those who had been out of prison for a number of years showed changes in circumstance and hope despite their desistance journeys being the most stable. Every participant engaged firstly in a creative element of the project using photography, collage, drawing and painting in order to express their understanding of hope, sources of hope and hopes for the future. These then became the catalyst for the first interview where participants shared life stories of offending and times of hope, or hopelessness. Six months later participants were re-interviewed to examine whether their ideas and experiences of hope remained the same or had changed. Lives, journeys and hopes had changed to varying degrees across all three research groups.

Every section begins, as this introduction does, with a quote from one of the research participants. This sets the scene for the project as a whole. The aim is for the overarching voice to be that of the participants; their journey of hope and desistance is the central theme. Throughout this thesis participants words are italicised to make them stand apart from the literature, previous research and theoretical viewpoints. The guide throughout the research and analysis has been Christian theology: initially prompting an investigation into hope; highlighting specific aspects of life as theologically significant; searching for meaning in the language used. Theology acts as both a research guide and analytical guide in an attempt to uncover additional meanings to existing desistance theory, constructing a multi-dimensional view of the data.

For obvious reasons theology is rarely utilised without its natural bedfellow, religion. This is not a study on religion. Religion appears, but only as introduced by a minority of participants. Neither is this a study on God. Ideas of *a* God, the existence of a higher being, or something unexplained working to incite coincidences again are only relevant if expressed by participants. These stories of hope are examined through a theological lens in order to add an additional layer to existing desistance literature. The nature, and therefore examination, of hope lends itself to historical, philosophical, psychological study, all of which are touched upon in the following pages. However, theology incorporates elements

of all of these whilst also enabling a discussion on the unexplained, the spiritual (whether religious or not), and offers an additional explanation to consider alongside sociological viewpoints. Theology has been the common guide from the construction of a research plan, the methods used, the questions asked, the analysis conducted, through to the resulting conclusion. Theology used like this offers a more rounded picture of life simply because it offers another lens, another explanation of behaviours, of feelings, even of nature. Using many lenses working together introduces new ideas, alternative snapshots of life which can help produce a better understanding of life journeys such as the one through criminality to desistance.

This research has found that hope can be fragile, yet resilient. It is available in unlikely places, yet for it to truly be utilised, it must be sustained from a number of sources. The pains of losing hope are real and devastating, but not necessarily ultimate. Hope can be rekindled, and may be all the more precious after having known its loss. Hope acts as an impetus for desistance. However, that which is hoped for is rarely realised quickly, if at all due to extra challenges faced by those with criminal records and particularly those who have been imprisoned.

## Outline of thesis

### Chapter 1, An Introduction

The current chapter outlines the objectives of this research and the context in which the subject of hope will be examined. It introduces the concept of examining desistance through a theological lens and the validity of using theology as an additional method of interpreting data.

### Chapter 2, Reviewing Hope in the Desistance Literature

This chapter gives an overview of existing desistance literature pertaining to the subject of hope. I outline the role hope has been found to play in the desistance process. The chapter shows the impact hope can have on reintegration and identity formation. It also outlines the role society can play in creating realistic pathways which establish and sustain hope.

### Chapter 3, The History and Theology of Hope

Our understanding of hope is dependent upon the discipline used to define it. This chapter gives an historical account of philosophical and theological understanding of hope. This chapter highlights the significance of hope and how a deeper understanding of it can help uncover additional layers of meaning in the context of desistance. This chapter reveals impacts of hope as experienced by the individual and in society.

### Chapter 4, Why theology?

Chapter four outlines how theology can be used to explain criminological concepts such as desistance. I argue that theology can add another layer of reflexivity and enables a richer examination of the data. The chapter also explains the methodology of photo elicitation, collage, drawing and painting. It outlines why this is particularly helpful for abstract concepts such as hope and also how it can facilitate theological engagement in an imaginative manner.

### Chapter 5, Research Design and Positionality

This chapter explains the methodological underpinnings which allow criminology and theology to work together. Here, I give an overview of my positionality as a researcher and develop the concept of researcher 'insider syndrome'. I explain how Taylor's Immanent Frame (2007) provides a conceptual framework appropriate for this research.

### Chapter 6, Data Collection and Analysis

Chapter six tells the story of the fieldwork stages of this research. I explain the participant groupings and why I chose three separate groups at different stages along the desistance process. I give a detailed account of the process followed when recruiting participants and discuss the complexities involved. I discuss the difficulties in maintaining contact in order to secure interviews and how that can develop into a feeling of 'researcher stalking.' This chapter also outlines the analysis process followed and explains how case studies were chosen. I also outline how the major themes became apparent through analysis.

### Chapter 7, Case Study 1 - Ian's Hope Journey

This is the first of three case studies. Ian from Group 1 was still in prison when he first took part in the research. This gives an overview of Ian's offending behaviour and his experiences in prison. Ian's experiences of hope are told through his life stories. Out of all participants, Ian had the most dramatic 'hope transformation' between the first and second

interview stages. I discover what brought about these changes for Ian and discuss the impact this has had/is having on his experience of desistance.

#### Chapter 8, Case Study 2 - Andy's Hope Story

Chapter 8 tells the story of Andy from Group 2 and how he has experienced hope in his life. Andy is the only participant in this project to have had a Christian hope before, throughout and after his offending behaviour. Andy is from Group 2 so had been out of prison for 3 months when he agreed to take part in this research. Andy identifies his main barrier to hope as the inability of society to accept his offending identity; his offences are all related to child pornography. Andy is the only participant who felt compelled to change his name once released from prison by way of enabling him to live a new identity. Having assumed a new identity, he explains why this remains a barrier to fully integrated desistance.

#### Chapter 9, Case Study 3 – Sean's Hope Story

Sean is from Group 3 and has been in and out of prison from a young age. At the time of recruitment for this research Sean had managed to remain crime free for seven years. This chapter talks about Sean's varied offending background and highlights the one specific charge which has had the most profound impact on his life. Sean's sense of injustice brought about by this charge in particular is his greatest barrier to experiencing hope. Since being released from prison Sean had become a Christian and speaks to the support his faith and faith community have given him. Sean's greatest source of hope is through his faith and the belief that God is working out things for the best outcome for Sean's life.

#### Chapter 10, Thematic Findings

Chapter nine examines the main themes emerging from the data. I explain how the creative element of the fieldwork provides an insight into the ability to hope for and imagine a new self, or new outcomes. This chapter goes on to explain the nature of virtuousness and how participants engaged with this idea. The gift of mercy is also explained as well as the conventional norms which were the overarching hope of all participants across all groups. There is also a discussion on what influences interruptions to desistance and how this can impact experiences of hope.



## Chapter 11, Conclusions

This chapter highlights the main insights from the case studies and themes and gives concluding thoughts going forward. I emphasise the impact small acts of mercy have had on the participants and suggest that mercy could play a more prominent role in punishment and the desistance process. This chapter ends with a reflection on writing about the concept of hope during a pandemic and how this could have impacted the hopes of those who took part in the research.

## Chapter 2: Reviewing Hope in the Desistance Literature

*You've got your bullies, you've got your cool kids, you've got your geeks I suppose. But you can't go home from here, this is your home. So at least at school you can go home and hide in your room or cry to your mum and dad. And here there's nobody to greet to... and the guards, they don't care. Honestly don't care. They ... they palm you off at every single stage so they do. Do you know what I mean? And it drains the hope... if you gave me two cards here I would have turned one to hope and one for things that drain the hope out of you.*

Kevin Group 1

### 1. Emotion and perspective

Although the role of identity is key in cognitive understandings, the extent to which this is relevant is debated and will be discussed more fully at a later stage; cognition covers a vast array of aspects, such as emotions, perspective, understandings, beliefs and attitudes, all of which are subject to the possibility of transformation. Emotion and perspective go hand in hand in both the emergence of criminal activity and its termination. The search for excitement, and the nature of what is perceived as exciting, is often both a contributing trigger in committing crime, as well as an obstacle in desistance, particularly for younger offenders (Bottoms and Shapland 2011). Thrill seeking, however, is often secondary to the more prevailing emotions of anger, hurt, resentment and disappointment, which are particularly significant for those who have encountered childhood trauma and (or) themselves having been the victim of crime (Hamilton 2016). Emotion, as a contributing factor towards desistance, is associated with the negative emotions those who have committed crime associate with either the criminal lifestyle itself, fear of getting arrested or retribution from other criminals (Patternoster and Bushway 2009; Weaver 2016) or negative experiences with the criminal justice system and fear of punishment (Shover and Thomson 1992). Although the initial step towards desistance is more likely to be influenced by negative emotions, once the journey has begun it is supported by an increase of positive emotion, such as hope, pride, self-worth and happiness (Farrall and Caverley 2006).

What a person hopes for can reveal a lot about what's important to them and what their motivators are. For example, someone leaving prison may hope to steer clear of criminal activity, whereas another may hope not to get caught next time. When desistance is the goal, hopes are predominantly focussed on basic needs being met and the formation of

positive social bonds, i.e. having a home, gaining employment, adequate financial support, relationships with friends and family, marriage. For most of these hopes to be realised there is often a need for patience and perseverance and the ability and willingness to endure setbacks. In Snyder's (2000) hope theory, people lose hope when they are blocked from attaining their goals and when they don't have enough "hope resources" to overcome the blockage. As a result, hopelessness is widely cited in desistance research as desister's narratives reveal the ongoing barriers encountered throughout the desistance process.

It is in this loss and gain of hope that the idea of desistance being a process or journey is perhaps most apparent. This journey is littered by hopes realised and encouraging the individual onto the next stage of the journey only to encounter a setback which may initiate a feeling of hopelessness which oftentimes is more easily developed than the restoration of hope. The fluidity and subjectivity of hope makes it difficult to measure and also means it can be a fragile concept.

Christian et al. (2009), studied 37 previously incarcerated individuals in order to find what was responsible for their 'transformation.' They found that there were no consistent patterns that would allude to the significance of specific events, locus of control and cognition. However, there was consistency in the individuals' points of view and the necessity for those who are the focus of change to define for themselves the most salient problems and most troubling states or identities (ibid: 26). In Burnett's 1992 study, she found that the individuals who have an optimistic outlook about their future and desistance pre-release from prison are most likely to refrain from re-offending post-release.

The key to sustaining hope during desistance is dependent upon both personal and professional relationships. Of the 199 probationers in Farrall's 2002 research, over half showed indications of desistance. This desistance was attributed not only to their own individual motivation but was found to be due, in large, to both the personal and social contexts in which the ex-offenders found themselves (Farrall 2002; Farrall and Calverley, 2006). Farrall found that rates of success were greater with those who had gained employment and had either strong pre-existing family ties or were developing new positive relationships (Farrall 2002: 227). McNeill and Weaver have suggested that desistance can be 'provoked by someone believing in the offender; someone who perhaps carries hope and keeps it alive when the offender cannot do so for him or herself' (2010:13). This is effective when initiated by someone in a position of power or authority most is most

widely sustained by communities and society. According to Slade (2009), close relationships are vital in that they shape identity, contribute to wellbeing and promote hope. LeBel et al. (2008) found that in order for social changes to occur they must be preceded by hope and it is through hoping that individuals are able to approach and take advantage of pro-social opportunities. This foundational hope will also enable desisters to be better equipped when setbacks arise. However, as previously stated from Nugent and Schinkel's research, although hope can empower some to deal with set-backs, for others it is these glimpses of failing hope which add to the pains of desistance.

McNeill and Weaver describe the way in which hope can sustain desistance as a virtuous circle:

the evidence suggests that desistance may be supported by a kind of 'virtuous circle' where hope and hopefulness is realised through opportunities that in turn vindicate and reinforce hope and hopefulness; the relationship between subjective and social factors is iterative. While we need to know more about the interactions between these sorts of factors and about their sequencing, for the moment the message is that interventions must simultaneously attend to both.

(McNeill and Weaver, 2010: 6)

Where these opportunities and relationships fragment, the circle is broken, resulting in the subjective and social factors which kept the continual cycle ceasing to work together. When these fragments increase the circle is unrecognisable and its rebuilding more challenging. It is for this reason that in desistance hope cannot be confined to the subjectively of the desister, instead it must also be evident in those surrounding them, and wider society. Hope cannot be fully realised when individuals are constantly reminded that they were once prisoners or offenders. If they remain identified as not quite as good as the rest of society, or not worthy of the same treatment then in order for any hopes to be realised, they must be greatly limited. When society gives the message that a 'normal life' is unattainable for those who have been in prison, it is unfair for that same society to expect 'normal' behaviour from ex-prisoners.

Accepting someone as a desister speaks both to the hope that society has towards ex-offenders, and to the hope the desister can have for themselves, 'societies that do not believe that offenders can change will get offenders who do not believe that they can change' (Maruna 2001: 166). So, a key task in promoting hope in desistance must rest in changing the ideas society has towards the offender. This speaks to the structural factors at

play in desistance, such as employment, housing, and relationships which interplay with subjective factors such as hope, expectation, shame at past behaviour and openness to 'alternative identities' (LeBel et al (2008). Creating an evident pathway towards housing and employability allows desisters to experience realistic expectant hope:

[hope] provides [desisters] with the vision that an alternative 'normal' life is both desirable and, ultimately, providing they overcome the obstacles and uncertainties that remain, possible. For hope to be meaningful, the object or situation desired must appear attainable at some level (Farrall and Calverley 2005: 192-3)

Achieving these structural factors which reflect this 'normal' life makes space for the creation of pro-social bonds and increased capacity for hopeful resources. The attainability of these initial hopes opens doors to allow for hope-full futures.

## 2. Prison, when 'visibly hope-based' (Liebling et al, 2019)

In 2018 Liebling and colleagues conducted research in HMP Warren Hill where prisoners experience a uniquely, 'tailor-made 'progressive' regime in closed conditions'. The prison hosts a Therapeutic Community (TC) and a Psychologically Informed Planned Environment (PIPE) unit (Liebling 2019: 105). The prison was referred to as a place of hope, firstly evidenced by the large sign reading HOPE on the gate. Prisoners spoke a language of 'hope' and 'progress' (p.116) describing being treated with respect, being welcomed with a handshake and a cup of tea (p.104). The aspects of Warren Hill which were found to forge this feeling of hope were; the sense of community, staff support and engagement, strong relationships and a belief in transformation. Although they found the prison itself to be creating a space where hope can be forged, the downfall came once prisoners were released. Because of the lack of support from agencies outside of the prison the hope created at Warren Hill was unable to be sustained and therefore the likelihood to re-offend increased. This speaks powerfully to the need for community support and the involvement of agencies once an offender has been released. Despite the many resources available at Warren Hill, the journey towards and through desistance is similar to all those embarking upon that journey. Hope is often at its highest at the beginning and on the approach to being released (Farrell and Caverley, 2006). For the majority of offenders it is the outside world that depletes the hope they have stored.

### 3. Pains of hope

Farrell and Caverley (2006) suggest that throughout the desistance process and as the time of non-offending increases, so too do emotions and their importance to the individual. They recognise this 'emotional trajectory of desistance' as having four sequential phases: (1) early hopes, narrow scope of positive emotions based around hope and happiness; (2) intermediate phase, internal disquiet, regrets about past behaviour, after experiencing some setbacks more determined to distance themselves from crime; (3) penultimate phase, increasing shame and guilt about past crimes, continued desistance appears mainly motivated by this guilt, pride and a sense of achievement, recognition of trust from others, hope based on a more certain future and achievable goals; (4) 'normalcy' phase, far removed from their former offending life, sense of reward having gained social bonds, self-esteem, confidence (ibid, 2006: 124). This trajectory is not universal amongst those on the desistance journey.

Nugent and Schinkel (2016) compare two different groups of ex-offenders and their desistance journeys. They found where hope is often a motivating factor in desistance the opposite can have a detrimental effect where 'going straight can be painful and lead to limited lives.' (2016: 569) The pains spoken of were namely isolation and loneliness, goal failure, and a lack of hope, with the latter being the product of the first two. One of the research participants referred to hope itself being the source of his pain. Despite becoming a father and forging what is regarded as desistance promoting relationships, his failure to find a job meant that one of his main personal goals seemed impossible and therefore hope became redundant. The inability to see hope for the future is demoralising, however, when coupled with the notion that the hope once responsible for powering the desistance journey was futile and perhaps even a lie, it fuels ubiquitous instability and uncertainty.

Nugent and Schinkel (2016) also found that when those who set goals and have specific hopes for the future are faced with setbacks and prolonged periods of not seeing, or achieving, outcomes then the hope and optimism once experienced in 'phase one' instead turns to an increased sense of hopelessness. In the process of breaking off from previous social bonds in order to seek more positive relationships which helped to distance themselves from previous offending behaviour, some found themselves unable to find pro-social relationships to replace those previously lost. This too affected their sense of identity, whilst attempting to shed the criminal identity the adoption of a non-criminal

identity is more problematic when individuals are unable to attain what they perceive to be staples of a ‘normal’ life, such as housing, employment and relationships.

An optimistic view of the future combined with realistic goals is an essential element of the desistance journey. Without the hope of succeeding the risk of re-offending and re-imprisonment is greater (Burnett and Maruna 2004). In their studies, both Friestead and Hansen (2010) and Nugent and Shinkel (2016), found the key to ensuring that hope would not have an inverse effect is the realistic nature of it. They found not only does unrealistic hope result in increased feeling of failure and add to a distorted sense of identity, but also for post-release prisoners, it can leave them poorly prepared on release and can have a detrimental effect on desistance once released. Friestead and Hansen use Dillard et al. (2009)’s term “dark side of optimism” to describe the effect:

there is a ‘dark side of optimism’, which can lead to a greater likelihood of actually experiencing negative events in the future, because seeing oneself as less at risk than one actually is may prevent one from engaging in protective behaviour and/or avoiding risk behaviour. (Friestead and Hansen, 210: 287)

It is important to note that although some hopes may be unrealistic for those embarking upon desistance even the most moderate of hopes can prove extremely challenging as they come up against personal and social barriers. In the film, *The Road from Crime*, Allan Weaver succinctly speaks to the heart of the desistance issue, ‘The real punishment starts when you actually get released’ (*The Road from Crime*, 2012). The constant obstacles created as a result of having a criminal record have left some unable to find any kind of employment for considerable years, or maybe ever. Renting accommodation is more problematic and even accessing healthcare can prove more challenging.

Desistance literature also highlights the fluid nature and uncertainty of hope. In order for the desistance process to begin, and be sustained, the right amount of hope is needed at the right time (Burnett and Maruna, 2004; Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Nugent and Schinkel, 2016). Too much hope can lead to daydreaming, or an ‘overconfidence brimmed with optimism’ (Maruna, 2001:149), whereas insufficient hope can lead to fatalism resulting in ‘fuck it moments’ (Halsey et al 2016). Halsey and colleagues found that moments of re-offending can be ‘manifestations of the pain and angst experienced by ex-prisoners who feel the need to repress the real dimensions of their struggles’ (ibid: 1049). These moments reflect a desire for agency in what is otherwise a precarious situation (ibid).

Examining short-term prisoner's experiences of hope, Laursen found that three main themes emerged: '(1) prisoners' hopes grow out of despair rather than opportunity; (2) prisoners' hopes are connected with the search for meaning; (3) hope flows through ideas of transcendence, relationships and normality' (Laursen, 2022: 2). For Laursen, 'hope is inextricable with despair' (ibid: 3), yet desperation offers little by way of concrete hopes. For hope to be an effective stimulant for desistance there must be more than just despair. Concrete hopes based upon realistic goals and a journeying towards them is the activity of hope. Hope acting within the individual motivates toward goals rather than just replacing despair with a more positive perspective.

#### 4. Belonging

Maruna and LeBel (2010) recognise the powerful / powerless dynamic in what they term, de-labelling. They argue that for individuals to truly lose the label of criminal then this can only be achieved through a system whereby the state is able to officially wipe the slate clean leaving offenders free from the stigma of their criminal record. Moreover, the intervention of the state adds credence to the de-labelling as it is endorsed by officials in power rather than family and friends whose support they may expect, regardless. Furthermore, they argue, 'if the de-labelling were to be endorsed and supported by the same social control establishment involved in the 'status degradation' process of conviction and sentencing (judges or peer juries), this public redemption might carry considerable social and psychological weight for participants and observers' (ibid: 79). Practices such as this could not only de-stigmatise and provide space for new, positive, sought after labels, but it could also allow for a clearer path of, what McNeill and Graham term 're/integration' (2018: 433)

The term re/integration is significant in that it avoids the assumption that all offenders want to reintegrate into communities on the outside, and also allows the inclusion of those who have never experienced integration in the first place (ibid: 433). McNeill's tertiary desistance refers to how an offender locates themselves in society and the concept of belonging to community, both morally and politically: the idea of how one self identifies and is recognised by others. Primary and secondary desistance are precursors to the tertiary stage of desistance: primary being the identification of a crime free gap in an otherwise



criminal career and secondary involving the assuming a more positive crime free identity (Maruna and Farrall, 2004). Tertiary desistance alludes to the fulfilment of all that was hoped for in the previous two stages. This may include a making good, 'to give something back to society as a display of gratitude' (Maruna 2001:87), but McNeill stresses that it must include the availability and receiving of social goods, 'enjoying fair access to all the resources, rights and opportunities routinely afforded to other citizens' (McNeill and Graham 2018: 436; see also McNeill 2012 on 'social rehabilitation'). We know that this is rarely the case and as a result discrimination and post-punishment disqualifications continue leaving some desisters unable to achieve this state of tertiary desistance.

Even for those who are able to overcome such social barriers it could be argued that the extent to which they belong in a given community, or even in society, is questionable: belonging, or being accepted as an ex-offender is not the same as being recognised and accepted as an equal. Those with a criminal record who have managed to secure employment are still known to have offended by those in power in that particular setting. For those attempting to 'make good' and volunteer in their communities, spent convictions continue to remain on PVG disclosures in Scotland and CRB in the rest of the UK. Even in more social, community based settings the sense of belonging can be influenced by past offending behaviour. Churches are a place where forgiveness and acceptance are widely spoken of and have a general understanding of everyone being a sinner. Armstrong found that although not all faith communities are equipped to support those from socially excluded groups (Armstrong 2014), the ones that were seemed to have a shared belief in individual transformation, not just in terms of faith; 'communities that facilitated this belonging and bolstered their burgeoning hopes for transformation were those that understood how to draw them into community through compensating for their individual deficits' (Armstrong 2014: 11). The relationship afforded by 'doing community' as opposed to an 'us and them', helper and one receiving help, allows a more meaningful sense of belonging. Individuals are no longer just part of a group of ex-offenders, they are side by side with people from a wide variety of social spheres. Prisoners and ex-prisoners are a part of society, regardless of the ostracisation they may experience. It is in the interests of society to reduce crime rates and most would aim to live harmoniously with one another. An interdependent state of desistance is reliant upon the state, society, communities and practitioners recognising value in the lives and stories of offenders. This further complicates desistance as it places onus on society to change *their* hopes when it comes to ex-prisoners.

## 5. Stigmatisation and labelling

Labelling theory has been criticised for neglecting what motivates primary deviance. Its lack of empirical evidence has also led to criticism due to inability to measure the extent to which placing a label on someone can affect their future behaviour and if it is dependent upon 'status characteristics' alone then its theorising is irrelevant (Tittle 1980). Although it is difficult to measure the magnitude a label can have on someone, we are able to say that it *can* have *an* effect. It was found that men who turned to religion and were 'born again' risked being labelled as 'sissies' as their masculinity was questioned (Brereton 1991, 98-101; Gooren 2010, 103-105; cited in van Klinken 2012:222). Weaver (2016) found that those who participated in her research refuted the label gang because of its highly structured organisational connotations, despite occasionally using the term themselves and having displayed gang like behaviour (2016: 76). Individuals often use labels to describe themselves: mother; father; daughter; son; husband; wife; neighbour; friend. All these words or labels influence how people see themselves, and how they are viewed by others. The terms prisoner, offender, criminal and even ex-offender and desister speak only to the behaviour of that person. This brings a disjunction with hopeful integration. The label ex-offender does little to de-stigmatise and offer full belonging and integration; how often does the prefix 'ex' go unheard and the offender ring loud when those for whom it refers to are faced with building new relationships and seeking employment?

The role of hope in desistance is far more than an optimistic outlook. Hope is a joint enterprise in the changing of lives and the reduction of crime. Desistance does not occur in a vacuum. As outlined above, social bonds, relationships, belonging (on micro and macro levels), all play a role in establishing the motivating hope to 'go straight' as well as the sustaining foundations which enables long lasting desistance.

## Chapter 3: The History and Theology of Hope

*Throughout ma life, there's been times where I just went totally, totally, totally off the rails an' that's the bit about makin' sense an' things not makin' sense an' not bein' compatible, even wi' ma erratic behaviour. That's neither here nor there but probably the whole bit comes in, an' I hope tae God there is a God.*

Ryan, Group 2

### 1. Introducing the perspective

In the following discussion, I offer a historical and theological account of hope, more specifically as it has been understood in western civilisations, and via Christian theology and biblical hermeneutics. I go on to explain why theology can be a relevant tool through which to examine social phenomena, and how it can offer additional insights in order to construct a fuller picture of human experience and social life. I conclude this chapter by defining hope, constructing a perspective through which this research has collected and analysed data.

### 2. Why theology?

Theology, in its simplest form is the study of God and therefore often presumes a level of faith. Similarly, religions are created around a faith system which in turn informs actions, ways of life and worship practices. However, to view the world theologically does not impose a presumption of faith on others, rather it offers a lens through which phenomena and behaviour can be examined providing an alternative view and, in some cases a deeper, fuller view which can complement sociological enquiry. McCarragher proposes that, 'Marxists can be the very best theologians, especially when they stare, unbelieving, into the abyss of historical hopelessness' (McCarragher, 2017). He reasons this with Adorno, a professed atheist, who in *Minima Moralia* (1951) cites the eschatological hope of biblical religion as, 'The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in the face of despair.' The despair of which he speaks is universal, however starkly informed in the wake of World War Two and in particular the brutality of Nazism. Adorno sought to awaken and employ the moral authority of the sacred for critical purposes (McCarragher, 2017). His story was not one of conversion to religious beliefs, but rather one of

contemplation of the sacred for investigatory purposes. Adorno introduces a meeting of critical thinking and theology by means of the theoretical exploration of themes such as prophecy, messianism, and redemption. This is a theological exploration of the concept of hope as it appears, is understood and is experienced by those at various stages of the desistance process. It is a meeting of criminological and theological theory in order to find meaning and significance in individual stories and lives. The aim is to shed an additional light on the desistance journey thereby creating a fuller picture of the journey as a whole.

As shown in chapter two, hope is a recurring theme in desistance research. The nature of things hoped for and the reasons behind this are well documented, as is the influence hope can have on an individual embarking upon the desistance journey. Millie suggests hope to be an alternative to the pain suffered by involvement with the criminal justice system. He calls for a ‘refram[ing] [of] our relationship with them [offenders] to one that is characterised by hope rather than pain, demonstrating empathy, and with greater emphasis on support, treatment and (hoped for) reintegration back into the community’ (Millie 2020: 184). Defining hope is dependent upon the discipline in which the definition lies. A philosophical understanding of hope, although in many ways closely linked to theological theory, has its own unique perspective which again is contrasted with the uniqueness of psychological explanations of hope.

### 3. Complexity of hope as good and/or evil

“Pandora’s box” is a familiar colloquial term commonly used when referring to an incidental action often resulting in unforeseen, adverse consequences. Hesiod’s 700BC mythological tale tells of the creation of the first woman, Pandora, formed at the request of the Greek god Zeus. On her wedding night Zeus gifted Pandora with a jar, which would latterly be referred to as a box, filled with all the evil spirits. Upon opening the jar Pandora released all the spirits into the world but one remained in the jar, hope. Some translations depict hope as clinging on to the inside of the jar, whereas others describe Pandora closing the jar purposefully prohibiting hope’s escape. The role Pandora plays in this tale, and her intentions, are disputed between the accidental release of evil and converse reading where not only is Pandora the root of all evil, womankind as a whole is, created to torment mankind. Although this raises many questions and would allow for much discussion, of particular interest here is the role hope plays in the story. Is hope an evil spirit just as the

rest of the spirits? Is hope the only surviving good spirit amidst a jar of evil? Why does hope remain in the jar?

Translation has a role to play in our interpretation of this mythological tale. The Greek word used for hope here is *Elpis* which can be translated as either a positive or negative expectation. In this story some have interpreted it as foreboding, a far more negative stance of fearful apprehension. The Biblical use of *Elpis* is, without exception, with a positive outlook and is only rarely used in ancient literature to describe the expectation of fear or evil. It could, therefore, be argued that Hesiod's use was of an optimistic nature too, nonetheless, this does not negate the suggestion that he could be one of the few using it to describe fearful expectation. The isolating of hope suggests its uniqueness from the rest of the contents of the jar, regardless of whether it was stuck to the top of the jar or trapped inside: it's self-recognition as distinct or Pandora's recognition of its distinctiveness determined it's whereabouts. The most powerful of all the evils or the only thing able to withstand all the evils? Hesiod did not provide us with his interpretation, perhaps preferring the ambiguity. It is worth noting that were we to accept the foreboding definition of *Elpis* then we must also consider that the world was saved from such despair and anguish, yet we know this to be untrue both in the world and in the remainder of the Greek myth.

There is an evident parallel to the Biblical story of creation's first woman, Eve, eating the forbidden fruit and thereby allowing sin to access the world. Another parallel has been proposed by Bock (2016), from 2 Corinthians 4:7, "But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." Bock suggests that just as the jars of clay referred to in Scripture are a metaphor for the human body, the same is true in Pandora's tale. Using this interpretation, she suggests the story emphasises that not only must hope be stored and guarded within, it is unique in that we are able to control hope when all other fates or spirits are outwith our control (Bock, 2016). For most, the tendency is to affiliate hope with the positive and this is certainly true in the vernacular. Even when it is seen as causing harm, the term used is false hope rather than altering the definition of hope itself.

#### 4. A historical overview of hope

For the most part, ancient Greek writers posited a negative attitude towards hope. It wasn't portrayed so much as an evil, but rather as an attitude attributable to folly, reserved for those lacking the skills and knowledge for proper reasoning. For Thucydides (460BC – 395BC), hope was a result of being unable to understand the present situation and thereby being unable to create effective plans in battle (*The Peloponnesian War*, 5.102–3, 5.113). Whereas for Plato (428BC – 348BC), he suggested that hope is passed on from divine beings to the mindless and gullible (*Timaeus*, 69b). Aristotle (384BC – 322BC), who wrote more extensively on hope, offered a more neutral stance and, though he never saw hope as a virtue in itself, he regarded it as part of the foundations towards living a virtuous life. The cardinal virtues of justice, wisdom, courage, and temperance are apparent in much of Aristotle's work and are the foundations upon which moral living rests. Where Aristotle considered the state of being hopeful, he links it exclusively to the virtue of courage. He suggested that hope for a positive outcome, being in the state of hopefulness, creates and promotes courage as well as fostering confidence (Gravlee 2000: 463). He argued that someone without hope must either be full of fear or be in a state of complete resignation having lost all their senses (*ibid*, 470). Unlike other ancient Greek writers, Aristotle posited that hope requires the ability to deliberate and consider outcomes as long as the outcomes are possible by chance or good fortune (*ibid* 472). Contrasting Aristotle's view, the Stoic philosopher, Seneca (4BC – 65AD) saw hope as something to be avoided rather than embraced. He stated that in the same way as we might avoid fear, we should also do all we can to avoid hope, as both obstruct our ability to live in the present (Bloeser and Stahl, 2017). Writing around the same time, the Apostle Paul's (5AD – 67AD) view of hope differed markedly, seeing hope as a gift of God only fully realised for those who choose to follow His way: '...we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe' (1 Timothy 4:10).

Augustine of Hippo (354– 430) was the first to hint at a political stance on hope as well as emphasising its significance for the individual. Bloeser and Stahl summarise Augustine's interpretation of hope as follows:

Thus hope is not just of concern for individual believers but also for statesmen [sic.] that are concerned with collective happiness, as paying attention to hope allows them

to pursue a political constitution that allows true virtue of citizens to emerge.  
(Bloeser and Stahl, 2017:5)

Augustine highlighted that all happiness can only result from hope for the future of humanity, individually and collectively. For him, hope was almost exclusively reserved for those seeking to pursue a godly life. Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) built on this understanding some 800 years later whilst also postulating a very distinct form of hope which is not dependent upon God. For Aquinas, hope was both a theological virtue, which he saw as a habit of the will given by grace, and when removed from theology, hope is an irascible passion directed towards unlikely future outcomes (§ III,26; ST I-II 40.1). Here we are given the suggestion that hope exists both for the believer and unbeliever although in different forms and to different degrees. Interestingly, Aquinas also suggested that, for the believer to have hope, they should be unsure whether they are to be ‘blessed or damned’ (ibid.,6) for with full assurance of salvation there would be no need for hope.

The 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were time of theological, ecclesiastical, social and political disruption and change, namely the reformation. One reformer, John Calvin, saw hope as the backbone of every believer’s ‘feeble faith’, that which both sustained it and allowed for patience. Calvin simply explained hope as, ‘nothing else than the expectation of the things that faith has believed to be truly promised by God (Furhmann, 1977: 47). During this time too was the birth of modern western philosophy. In René Descartes (1596 – 1650) *Passions of the Soul* (1649), he depicted hope as the partner of anxiety, due to the uncertainty both provoke. As previously suggested by Aristotle, Descartes also saw hope as the foundation of courage, agreeing that hope is not a virtue of its own, but that the hope that one will be thought well of can act as a stepping-stone towards virtuosity. Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679) agreed with the stepping-stone idea of hope; although for him, hope was a ‘pleasure of the mind’ deliberating expectations, fears and probabilities (Leviathan, 36, I.VI.14). Hobbes’ political observations, alongside his understanding of the journey of mankind, led him to conclude that man’s ultimate hope is for peace, which should be obtained under a sovereign authority, not that of God but of a stable government. Baruch de Spinoza (1632 – 1677) did not view hope as Descartes and Hobbes did. Rather than seeing it as a motivating factor in human agency, he regarded hope as irrational and as a foundation of superstitious beliefs and behaviour, being as it is the partner to fear. However, he did find political significance in hope, stating that both fear and hope are the basis of all political power (*Political Treatise*) ([1675] 2002:686). In order for people to

obey ‘good laws’ and remain faithful to the sovereign they must have hope that they themselves will obtain a ‘good’ from it.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century saw Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) develop an understanding of hope much less reliant upon psychology and rationality, or the lack thereof. He instead developed a theory based on the relationship between hope and reason. He asked, “For what may I hope”, (A805/B833) and stresses this is one of humanity’s most important questions only after, ‘What can I know’ and ‘What should I do’ (ibid). He saw hope as having three primary objects: (1) individual happiness; (2) individual moral progress; (3) the moral progress of humanity as a whole (Bloeser & Stahl 2017). He linked all hope to happiness and determined that individuals should hope that the reward for their good moral conduct should be that of happiness, and in turn, this good moral behaviour can make a difference to the natural order (O’Neill 1996). Kant emphasised the need to hope for “better times” aimed at historical progress towards morality and peace (AE 8: 309). Kant went on to say that not only may we hope for this, but we must (O’Neill 1996: 285). He gave two conditions for hope, simply that the thing hoped for is uncertain and that it is wished for.

Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860) and Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) were two of hope’s biggest critics. Nietzsche most scathingly described it as the, ‘worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man’ (*Human, All Too Human*, 1878: §71). He also used the metaphor of a rainbow to describe hope, calling it an ‘illusory bridge’ because of its elusiveness and ability to withdraw itself (seen in Bidmon 2016: 188f.). He also spoke of the rainbow being the bridge of the *Übermensch*, overman, or beyond man: as mankind ceases to believe in God their aim should be to create and establish new values and be humanity’s solution. He believed this type of hope to be a strong emotion, akin to anger, the object of which should be a change of social order. For Schopenhauer, hope was not evil, it was more simply a “folly of the heart” (*Parerga and Paralipomena* II, 1851: §313). He believed hope clouds reason and vision and therefore the perception of what is possible and relevant. His emphasis on suffering in life also led him to deduce that the only path towards happiness is that of limiting desires or extinguishing them completely. He did agree, though, that happiness, or pleasure, can be found in hope if the thing hoped for is actualised.

The most prominent theological and philosophical writer on hope in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is Søren Kierkegaard. Although his emphasis was on hope and faith in God, he makes a



distinction between earthly hope and eternal hope (Bernier 2015; Fremstedal 2012; McDonald 2014). Eternal hope relates to the *good* future possibilities that transcend all understanding. It is dependent on love: we should hope for ourselves and others to the same extent. Whereas for Kierkegaard earthly hope is more concerned for the immediate earthly advantages most commonly associated with youthfulness (Bernier 2015). Similarly, towards the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Albert Camus (1913 – 1969) and Gabriel Marcel (1889 – 1973) had opposing views on hope. Camus agreed with Nietzsche's view of hope as evil: life's absurdity negated any reason to hope for salvation and those who hold to impoverish themselves (Camus 1955). He also saw hope for social change as a worthless activity as they most likely lead to dictatorships. Conversely Marcel linked hope to the very rhythm of life, a necessity in personal development; the way in which despair can be overcome (Marcel [1952] 2010). This *absolute* hope is dependent on faith in God and acts as a response to the humanity owing everything it has, and will have, to God (ibid: 41).

## 5. Theological hope giants – Moltmann and Bloch

The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought us perhaps the two most influential writers on Christian and philosophical hope, Ernst Bloch (1885 – 1977) and Jürgen Moltmann (1926 - ). Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* portrays hope as “built into the structure of the world itself” (Eagleton, 2015: 95). Man's activity is not responsible for producing hope but rather man's activity is responsible for interrupting or corrupting the hope which is already at work in the cosmos. Eagleton (2015) describes Bloch's interpretation as, “Hope flows with the tide of the universe rather than moving against the current” (ibid: 100). For Bloch, hope is not confined to the desires, or even expectations of the individual, but rather reflects cosmological metaphysical possibilities not attributable to a Creator. He believed the human tendency to look to eschatological forms of hope was as a result of utopian will and human dignity. Influenced by Marx, his theory is future orientated, accepting that although the past influences the present, the predisposition of the world is to move towards a more positive outcome. He speaks of hope in the form of an “imposing upper case, rather than this or that particular craving” (Eagleton: 105). Humankind's role comes in their capacity to relate to, and accept, things which are not yet apparent but are realistically possible. Bloeser and Stahl (2017) describe Bloch's understanding of agency in hope as consisting of two factors, an affective component: the opposite of fear, and a cognitive component: the opposite of remembrance. Hope is a positive expectant emotion which we can choose

freely to feel and therefore for Bloch it is the “most human of all affects” (Bloeser and Stahl 2017: 5.1). Its cognitive aspect lies in the human ability to imagine, in particular, a better future, without focussing or remembering the past.

*The Principle of Hope* covers an array of subject areas, “stretch(ing) from ethics, aesthetics, mythology, natural law and anthropology to fantasy, popular culture, sexuality, religion and the natural environment” (Eagleton, 2015: 93). It is said of Bloch that, “no other historical materialist has more convincingly demonstrated the importance of philosophy, art and religion for revolutionary practice” (Kellner and O'Hara, 1976). It is important to note that Bloch's theory on hope is fuelled by progressive political theory. His aim was to make a shift in both philosophical and psychoanalytical practice towards society. Instead of seeking to interpret the present world, the aim should be planning for a better future, and instead of analysing the subconscious, we should analyse the “not yet conscious”, aiming towards a utopia. His background as a left-wing German Jew who had spent many of his early years in European refuges from Nazism undoubtedly influenced his utopian desires and his passion towards focussing upon the future. From his knowledge of fear and despair, a positive metaphysical model of hope was born.

Unlike Bloch's approach, Jurgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* highlights the importance of a theology of eschatology as well as an eschatological theology. Rather than a metaphysical approach in understanding hope, Moltmann is very much focussed on hope as understood in the person of Jesus Christ and the hope given by God to his people. Embracing Hegel's idea that history as a whole was the revelation of God, he asserted that eschatology, therefore, is the complete revelation of that history as found in the future (Powell, 2001). Moltmann contends that all the eschatological events spoken of in Scripture are already in the process of fulfilment and this is where the believers hope should rest, in the knowledge of that which has been promised has already begun. In *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, Moltmann expands on this by emphasising that “Christian eschatology” is not limited to Christians but ‘must also be unfolded as the eschatology... of nature’ (Moltmann, 1977: 135). The end times, for Moltmann, are not confined to the apocalyptic visions described in the Old Testament but rather his focus is on the new beginning allowed through the end of this cosmos which in turn allows him to interpret that biblical apocalypses as messages of hope in despair (Moltmann, 2004). In this he is similar to Bloch, in that the belief that the cosmos is continually moving towards

hope, and its fulfilment. For both, the focus is on the future and a transforming universe that will reveal better times.

## 6. Hope as remembering and journeying

The theory of the world, and all history encompassed by it, being on one journey towards hope, reflects Aquinas' description of the Christian as *homo viator* 'human wayfarer', journeying hopefully with God towards the holy city, the new Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God. Hope is as relevant for the individual as it is for a community, a country and indeed the world as a whole. This constant journey towards hope, when considered earthly and not solely eschatologically, implies that as time passes each event or even disaster has a role to play in gaining hope. Undoubtedly economic, political and societal progress has been made for some, but this is far from a worldwide phenomenon. Wars and famine remain and in areas where progress is apparent, this progress too brings new problems. Hope focussed only on the future, void of remembering, as Bloch suggests, lends itself too easily to the problems which the future might bring. For some, the past may provide happy memories which they can hope they will see again. Remembering is an important part of imagining as long as it does not become a melancholy dwelling in the past. For Kierkegaard, youthful hopefulness needs to be diminished in order to make way for man's ability to experience the deeper eternal hope. However, the youthful hope Kierkegaard speaks of may be hope at its most purist and need not be confined to youthfulness. It is not age that dictates the extent to which hope can be experienced, it is our experiences which inform our capacity to hope.

## 7. Hoping in Community

Jeanrond observes that 'In all three Abrahamic religions [Christianity, Islam and Judaism], we can observe the manifestation of individualised eschatologies according to which martyrdom... is understood to guarantee immediate personal salvation and sainthood' (p.175). However, he sets apart Christianity as the only one which inhabits an eschatology dependant on universal hope and the presence of *all* others (p.174). The otherness embraced by the Christian faith, Jeanrond concludes, is as a result of 'critical and self-critical interpretation of all hopes, plans and visions of the future' (p.174). Collective

hoping, hope in community, for each independent individual, for the community as a whole and for those ‘other’ to the community are embraced with an ultimate hope in the salvation for all through God’s grace. He goes on to list the practices of ‘prayer, conversation, music, shared moments of tranquillity’, suggesting that all act as mediums through which hope can be awakened (ibid), practices which are reflected in the society outwith the church. Similar practices are commonly seen in organisations which support those with addiction issues and/or those embarking upon distance. A community of hope, not reliant on every individual abounding in hope, but rather coming together to hope, supporting and encouraging those who are feeling hopeless is a reflection of how church is intended to be and reflects the atmosphere of what are commonly termed ‘support groups.’

In researching a number of worshipping communities, Christian communities from various denominations, Packiam described what he saw as a ‘therapeutic hope’ (2020:173). Comparing a Pentecostal-charismatic group with a Presbyterian group he found that both turned agency and pathway over to God, the first due to belief in God’s supernatural power and the later because of belief in God’s sovereignty (ibid). Both groups found comfort in God being adaptive in their circumstances: if things went as they had hoped, they gave God the credit; if it did not, they continued to trust God anyway. The resilient nature of the Christian hope examined here is in acknowledging that God’s plans may be better than what individuals are able to desire or imagine for themselves. The ability to relinquish the outcome of hope in this manner is only possible if coupled with absolute faith in a higher being who’s ‘good goals’ (ibid, 171), are ultimately better than any human goals may be. For Roberts (2007) experiencing hope of this nature is what makes hope distinct from optimism. He grounds his understanding of hope in its ability to withstand suffering and therefore endure all outcomes, based on the Scripture, ‘Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.’ (Romans 5:3-4). In this relentless hoping and pressing towards a goal character is strengthened and is its own reward. Without the belief that a higher being is working things out for the best, this patient suffering and endless hoping is soon in danger of becoming hopeless and painful – an experience identified by many on the desistance journey. Understanding hope demands that we examine its fragility and the anguish caused by its loss, ‘Hope deferred makes the heart sick’ (Proverbs 13:12a). A strengthening of character is not always possible if the hope stores are empty or there are no assurances, such as faith, of what is hoped for. Packiam gives us the following definition of hope:

Christian hope is a confident assurance (act), grounded in God's promise and faithfulness as revealed in the Scriptures in general and in Christ in particular (grounds), that the triune God (agency) will bring about the 'resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come' (object) at Christ's appearing (time), making heaven and earth new and one (space), by means of what has already been accomplished at the resurrection of Jesus (pathway). (Packiam 2020:85)

Although this definition is Christocentric, the bracketed terminologies point to the heart of how hope can exist. For the Christian the grounds and agency are reliant on God, for those without a particular faith grounds and agency remain important if hope is to have a positive impact: hope must be based in reality, for some that reality is God, for others it is in achievable possibilities; where agency is not routed in God it must be afforded to the individual. Both of these have huge impacts on the desister, where achievable possibilities often seem impossible and the extent to which agency is experienced can be fraught. This research will go on to discover that it is through engaging these concepts that hope is found and experienced.

## Chapter 4: Why Theology?

*Just I hink there's somethin' where there's – it's like, for instance, people are put on your path. It's like you could be walkin' doon the street an' you'll meet somebody that's usin' an' they'll look all attractive an' they'll be like, come tae me. But then just 500 yairds doon the road, there'll be somebody fae NA sayin', how are you doin' Ian an' it's like that kinda stuff. So it's like some hings aren't coincidence, you know...I don't know if it's God but it could be... Aye, you know. It could be. I don't know. I don't actually know... It could be fuckin' ... it's just... it's strange, that's all, you know.*

Ian, Group 1

### 1. It's not about religion

This is not a study of religion, spirituality or chaplaincy. Faith and beliefs do not play a significant role in this research. Participants were not selected on the basis of existing faith or understanding of God. Some participants were practicing Christians; however, this was a minority. The final research includes 17 participants. Four participants identify as Christians; three have a belief in God but do not practice that belief in any formal setting and are unsure what role God could have in their lives; one believes there may be a God, 'something' out there; the remaining nine do not adhere to any religious belief system and during interview showed little interest in anything related to spirituality or faith. For those who are practicing Christians, their story includes the significance they have found in God and church communities, and they identify both God as a deity and those church communities as sources of hope. As their Christianity is of great significance to these participants, it is included in the final analyses, but it is not a central theme. Rather, this research uses theology as a thematical and analytical resource: it is the guide through which themes were exposed, as well as a tool used to support analysis. Criminological theory is used to reflect back on theological concepts and ideas to offer an additional layer of meaning as hopes and experiences are explained.

### 2. Criminology viewed through a theological lens

Although theological enquiry has had little influence in criminological research, religion and spirituality has been significant and is particularly prominent in desistance research. Conversion to religion, predominantly Christianity, has been cited as both a trigger towards desistance and a sustainer of desistance (Armstrong, 2014; Baier and Wright,

2001; Calverley, 2012; Giordano et al. 2007; Johnson and Larson, 1998; McRoberts, 2002; Maruna, 2001; Maruna et al. 2006; Miller, 2006; Petersilie, 2003; Schroeder and Frana, 2009; Sullivan, 2009; Weaver, 2015). Third sector organisations which support prisoners in the community are often funded by churches, or related organisations such as Bethany Christian Trust, Glasgow and Edinburgh City Missions, Faith in Throughcare and Centrepoint. The role of the prison chaplain and their significance in the justice system has also been explored. Criminological research has a familiarity with the role of religion and therefore in part with theology. However, this has been for the most part focussed on the psychological and sociological effects of having a new or rediscovered faith. The justice system and the roots of punishment have also been linked with historical theology and rooted in Scriptural interpretation. However, conversation between criminology and theology is limited, although emerging, for example the recent workshop and book - *Criminology and Public Theology* (Millie, 2020). The concept of hope, which is prominent in both desistance literature and theology, provides a setting in which this discussion can deepen.

Focussing on theology's engagement with natural science, McGrath holds that theology can provide, 'a richer narrative which holds things together in a coherent web of meaning' (2015: 151). This too can be the case in the social sciences. Using theology as a lens through which texts are both analysed and interpreted does not negate existing criminological theory, it rather exposes previously underexplored explanations and meaning. The search for truth is continually characterised with profound ambivalence and is therefore left exposed to multiple interpretations (James, 1907). Yet interpretations are often limited to one field of interest or way of seeing. Bringing theology and criminology together not only allows for an alternative perspective but also reveals similarities in two disciplines which have previously had very little overlap.

At the time of interview, participants' present realities differed significantly between groups; most notably, Group 1 were in prison whilst the other two groups were not. They all had the shared experience of offending and being punished, yet they also had contrasting experiences. As Layder summarises, 'No one approach or set of rules could possibly represent the infinite diversity of social reality and thus no fixed and rigid approach should be allowed to monopolize research practices' (Layder, 2011 p.134). Physical realities differed, what is more participants' internal lived realities differed. At various stages of the desistance process, fears and anxieties differed; mental health issues

differed; the existence or significance of addiction differed; outlook and expectations differed; hopes differed. Philosopher Mary Midgely uses the analogy of the world as a huge aquarium: ‘We cannot see it as a whole from above, so we peer in at it through a number of small windows’ (2003: 27). She later enhances this image by emphasising the murkiness of these windows: we know reality is in there, yet gaining a full image proves difficult. Using different windows, exploring other vantage points makes for a fuller view of what lies therein. Desistance from crime has been relatively widely examined predominantly through the windows of sociology or psychology. Here, I use an under-utilised window, theology. McGrath (2015) calls for maps of reality allowing different perspectives of the same scene, ‘Any one of them [maps] on its own is an impoverished view. We can learn from sciences such as physics, chemistry and biology but interpretation and understanding of it comes from an integrated vision of the whole’ (2015:22).

More than just discourse about God, theology allows a different lens through which concepts, such as hope, can be viewed and explained. It also gives another vantage point to the reality held within the ‘aquarium’. Theology is used to expand existing theoretical frameworks on hope, thus enhancing the range of perspectives on the realities of desistance. Explaining coherence between science and theology, Theologian Alistair McGrath states, ‘It is all about stories, pictures and maps. But which story makes the most sense?’ (McGrath, 2015, p.26). Almost 50 years previously, Ludwig Wittgenstein warned of the danger of theory limiting our vision by discounting that which does not fit our preconceived mental maps (Wittgenstein, 1968: 48). This research relies on desistance theory *and* theological theory, exploring both through stories and pictures. The theory informs the analysis of the data gathered, however what is revealed in the data also speaks back to predetermined theoretical ideas, suggesting alternative ‘mental maps’. This continual conversation between theory and data allows a deeper investigation of the analytical outcomes and thereby a more meaningful explanation of participants’ reality.

This project has used inductive, deductive and abductive procedures throughout the collection of data and then its analysis. It is inductive in so much as participants were given flexibility as to what they could include in their photographs, collages and pictures. Some chose to include only things that they hope for in the future, some chose to depict sources of hope from the past or currently, some how or where they experience hope, and some included a mixture of all of these. The images guided the beginning of every interview as participants explained them and set the scene for the proceeding semi-structured life story



interview. Every participant was asked whether there was something they wish they had included, but for any reason were unable to. Therefore, in the absence of pictures, stories of hope were led by their descriptive, remembered, imaginings of past experiences and feelings. The data gathered revealed the most relevant aspects of hope for these individuals at varying stages of their desistance journey. It is deductive in its initial research strategy. Deduction in Bryman's simplest explanation involves, 'the researcher, on the basis of what is known about in a particular domain and of theoretical considerations in relation to that domain, deduces a hypothesis, (or hypotheses)' (2012: 24). Based on pre-existing qualitative data we know hope plays a role in desisting from crime, both positively and negatively. There also exists wide theological exploration into the concept of hope, predominately related to Christian eschatological 'saving hope', but not exclusively. This theory shaped the research questions and prompted the discovery of a possible further route of enquiry. It is abductive in that there is a constant flow of gathering and analysing data whilst also allowing foundational theories to inform, but not confine the findings. Law calls for a need to:

imagine and practice world-making as flows, vortices or spirals in which links between different partially connected goods are made and remade. In which truths and spiritualities and inspirations and politics and justices and aesthetics are variously woven together and condensed at particular moments, and partially separated at others. (Law 2004: 152)

Here Law uses 'world' to refer to the observed discoveries which are not only seen, but are understood in terms of societal happenings as well as human experience. The goods are measured and understood relative to both theory, truths and individual experience. The constant flow of findings, interpretation and re-interpretation in light of further data as well as a periodic consultation of existing theory, allows for a methodology which both reflects social abductive reasoning whilst echoing a practical theology methodology. The below list is adapted from Swinton and Mowat (2006: 72-73) and highlights what they believe to be key methodological components when considering research in practical theology.

- **Hermeneutical:** 'Recognises the centrality of interpretation in the way that human beings encounter the world and try to 'read' texts of that encounter'
- **Correlational:** 'Tries to correlate at least three different perspectives – the situation, the Christian tradition and another source of knowledge' [for this project criminological theory and qualitative research, interviews, photo/collage/picture elicitation]

- **Critical:** ‘Approaches both the world and our interpretations of the Christian tradition with a hermeneutic of suspicion... [acknowledging] the complexity of the forces that shape and structure our encounters with the world’
- **Theological:** ‘Locates itself in the world as it relates to the unfolding eschatology of the gospel narrative; a narrative that indicates that truth and the grasping of truth is possible’

They develop this further by suggesting a best practice of ‘mutual critical correlation’ (ibid) whereby all of these aspects dialogue with each other and, importantly for Swinton and Mowat (2006), allow equal voice to each component. This project reflects mutual critical correlation to a degree in terms of constant dialogue between sources of knowledge and theoretical interpretations. With the aim of examining how and why participants understand, experience and attribute meaning to hope. The abstract nature of hope called for continued dialogue between theory and findings. Representing the intricacies of social reality can be limited with the use of one approach or a stringent set of methodological rules (Layder 1998: 133). This is particularly true when participants’ situational and mental realities are examined with a focus on how those realities are influenced or allow the experience of a concept such as hope. In Layder’s (1997) previous work, he explains that that the ‘social world’ is constructed of ‘domains’ such as social settings, contextual resources and social interaction, all of which exist independently of one another, thereby allowing both subjective and objective methods of examination.

Critical realism upholds that although a ‘thing’ in itself can be known, it can only fully be known by ‘conceptual thinking objectified in scientific theory’; phenomena are too complex to be known or understood solely through the senses (Given, 2012:1). Hope is complex and requires conceptual thinking. This research examines societal, relational and personal sources of hope as observed and experienced by participants. It also agrees with the critical realism stance that much of reality exists independently of our awareness or knowledge of. It seeks to explore this unknown reality using theological theory. For critical realists, knowledge of the world is always, ‘historically, socially, and culturally situated’ (Archer, et al. 2016). This research concurs; however, it is also concerned with the philosophical and theological positioning of the world as a whole (i.e. within a cosmology) and the world as experienced by the individuals taking part in the research (i.e. within an anthropology).

### 3. Creativity: Imagining hope through photographs, collage, pictures and paintings

Asking participants to take photos of things that represent hope to them brings the assumption that they have some idea of what hope is, and that they have experience of being hopeful, or have aspects in their lives that provide hope for them. It is interesting to note that throughout fieldwork none of the participants asked what I meant by hope. They engaged with the idea of hope immediately and began naming things, asking if it would be ok to include them in the project. Everyone had a level of knowledge about hope and what it was to hope for something. Expressing past experiences of being hopeful was more difficult, however, many did include this, more so in the groups using photography.

Before embarking upon The New York Recovery Study (NYRS), 2010-2012, Padgett et al (2013) conducted pilot interviews with individuals from this population. They had previously found that, in questioning individuals about more abstract concepts such as hopes and goals, participants struggled to make sense of what was being asked of them and therefore that line of questioning was deemed unproductive. Having had these experiences, coupled with concerns about broaching difficult or sensitive topics, such as trauma, this inspired the researchers to adopt photo elicitation, which proved to be a valuable resource. Although this research is not focused on the same population, it is highly likely that participants may have similar backgrounds to those who took part in the NYRS: they have experienced homelessness; mental health issues; and experienced trauma, they certainly will have all experienced the trauma of having been imprisoned.

Using photo elicitation unconsciously initiates an internal conversation with the imagination. For each participant to find objects, places, or people which have brought them hope, or that represent hope, requires both a remembering of the past as well as an imagining of the future, or in some instances the present. This is true for those whose sole source of hope is found in the natural, just as it is for those who may attribute hope to some higher power; faith and belief may be the foundation of such hope, but believing a higher power is working for good on your behalf is only fully internalised when it is coupled with the imagining of how that good work will materialise or at least the imagining of possibilities. The use of imagination was perhaps more implicit for the group of participants who are still in prison. They had less time in which to think about their images and were limited to the resources made available to them. As they were unable to

photograph specific images important to them, they had to use their imagination to think of what they would like to include as well as how they might represent this in collage form. Taylor touches on interpretation through a theological lens whilst discussing the validity of rationality in conjunction with belief. He asserts that as rationality is a procedural concept, in the sense that we take premises and draw inferences from them: ideas about God, as with ideas or beliefs of any kind, require a degree of reasoning, either top down reasoning, or bottom up reasoning (Taylor, 2007). Approaching data from both top down; the theological lens, and from the ground; raw data as produced by participants, allows for a meeting of rationalised imagined resources and possibilities which may better inform both behaviours, in this case desistance, and the theological concept of hope.

Asking participants to use their imagination also enables a theological discussion in terms of participant action rather than just in subsequent analysis. In theology, the use of imagination has a chequered history; the 17<sup>th</sup> century biblical translation of imagination being an evil of the human heart (King James Version 1611, as seen in Gen 6:5; 8:21). Imagination's theological reputation was further tarnished by its association to idolatry and the danger of reducing God to mere human aesthetics, thus allowing critiques such as Feuerbach's reduction of theology to nothing more than anthropology (1841). More recently, theologians such as Kelsey have argued that any reading of Scripture involves 'imagination construal' (1980: 385) because if it is to be understood in the context of Christian practice, then the imagination is required in order to construct the lived-out practices in current times. Vanhoozer (2016: 442) goes further to state 'reading Scripture theologically further requires imagination, the faculty which makes sense of things, locating particular bits and pieces within larger patterns... one needs the imagination if one is to locate everyday reality within a biblical pattern'. Imagining goes hand in hand with how we interpret the world around us. As Vanhoozer indicates, as we attempt to understand Scripture, certainly from a faith perspective, our imaginations must play a role if we are to understand Scripture's relevance to the world in which we live. The ultimate whys and hows of existence are explored through imaginative engagement with theory. The existence of hope and its meaning as experienced is dependent upon an imaginative response. The very act of hoping involves imagining a preferred outcome or imagining possibilities.

#### 4. Comprehensive views, not inflated

Experience, emotions, circumstances, society, politics, policy, environment, relationships, and faith all effect how individuals feel hope, what they understand hope to be, and the role that hope plays in their lives. Herein lies ‘the hinterland of realities, of manifest absences and othernesses, resonances and patterns of one kind or another’ (Law, 2004:143). The hinterland of desistance is the reality in which all participants in this project exist; no two realities identical, yet examination reveals patterns and similarities. As Law (2014) continues to explain, research method is performative: asking participants to photograph or create images representing hope forces them to identify sources of hope and what they stand for. Something which they may not have previously openly articulated. Participants are not merely answering questions, they are creating questions and lines of enquiry. They play an active role in guiding exploration of what hope means to them.

Understanding concepts such as hope requires deeper enquiry and reflection, ‘We need a comprehensive perspective [*una perspectiva integra*], with primary and ultimate levels, not a fractured landscape, or a truncated horizon which lacks the awe evoked by infinite distances’ (José Ortega y Gasset, 1967: 259 cited in McGrath 2015: 145). These infinite distances will always exist to an extent, however they need not remain unexplored. ‘Interdisciplinarity brings together the products of focussed enquiry to uncover broader patterns, meaningful in themselves’ (Dalke et al, 2006:4). Theology and criminology working together, informing and enriching one another allows for a more comprehensive view of realities – not an inflated vision, as McGrath warns (2015:15), but one that engages with both rational and existential questions. As previously stated, hope already holds a firm residency in theological literature as well as desistance theory. Where both can intercede, has previously gone unexamined. The aim of this research is to examine, ‘[the] undisciplined space in the interstices between disciplines’ (Moran, 2002:15) and to create order, or a re-ordering of what we already know about hope to discover broader, richer and more meaningful tools for creating knowledge.

## Chapter 5: Research Design and Positionality

*I know all hope is gifted from God. I know it, because I can feel it. I imagine hope all around, in the air, graspable, but sometimes ignored or sometimes obscured. Hope breaks through the darkness, but when coupled with the longing of actualisation it not only brings despondence but often despair.*

Sarah, researcher

*Hope deferred make the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life*  
Proverbs 13:12

This chapter outlines the way this research was designed and what informed those design decisions. Ontological considerations are explained in order to reveal the epistemological underpinnings of the research, and its findings. In dissecting ‘the world of the reader’ and the ‘world of the text’, Ricoeur proposes a ‘three-fold mimesis’, as an ongoing dialogue between preconceived ideas, imaginations and cultural encounters, (Ricoeur.1988: 171). He proposes a three-fold process of prefiguration, configuration and refiguration. This research took the form of ongoing discussion between ideas, theory and data; the process of which is outlined using Ricoeur’s mimesis; although here the concept is used to examine life rather than art. Before discussing this, it is important to outline what the research specifically sought to explore.

### 1. Research Questions

Previous research has indicated that hope, perhaps more specifically a lack of hope, has a significant impact on desistance. There is little understanding of where hope originates and how it functions. The primary purpose of this research is to investigate if hope is so vital, which I, and many others suggest it is, (Weaver, 2016, Schinkel and Nugent, 2016 and Halsey, 2017), is it possible to provoke hope in others? What creates hope in the lives of desisters? How is that hope actualised and what impact does it have on behaviour and perseverance? Is it possible to continue fuelling hope before a sense of hopelessness ensues? Can the illusive intangible nature of hope be better understood with the addition of a theological lens?

My hope, from the outset, was to discover, and be able to illustrate, that theology has the ability to shine a light on aspects of sociological research that may otherwise be obscured.

Hope is challenging to quantify and is likely to bring different meaning to different people. A number of different lenses examining the same phenomena offer the best chance at developing understanding; criminological, theological, visual, and psychological albeit to a lesser degree in this instance. The aim was to construct knowledge from inductive dialogue informed by a theological lens and in reflexive conversation with theological and criminological theory.

## 2. Prefiguration - Positioning the researcher

For Ricœur, prefiguration speaks to the preconceived ideas of how the world is, how people are and how that then speaks to what their (the reader's) expected outcomes are. I, as researcher, bring to this project a specific and personal prefiguration. From the outset I have sought to bring theology into a sociological world, without the prerequisite of religion. Nevertheless, I cannot dismiss the fact that I do so as a result of a complex relationship that I have with the idea of religion. I believe in God. I believe in a saving unmerited grace. I worship God. I regularly attend a church. I have been employed by churches. I have volunteered in churches. I have worked with faith-based organisations. The onlooker may be forgiven for assuming I am a religious zealot. I, however, determine to separate the world of religion from the world of faith. I oppose the idea of enforced religious rules for what seems a more enthralling compulsion to participate in religious behaviour. I find comfort in attending church because I want to, rather than because I feel I should. I have an ugly self-appraising sense that it is better to pray and meditate on Scripture from a place of desire rather than from a place of duty. I have countered the question, 'are you religious', with 'I believe in God, but I'm not religious' in an attempt to separate myself from pre-conceived ideas I assume 'the world' has on religion. I don't want God to be viewed as an historical entity, as something(one) to be feared or dismissed as a form of superstition. Dark (2016: 189) addresses this very quandary, 'We get to unlearn – it seems to me we *have to* unlearn - the habitual defensiveness that only ascribes religiousness to others. And along with this trajectory, I call myself religious in an effort to be more exactly honest with myself concerning what I'm up to'. This is a realisation I have personally come to during this research.

Growing up as a working-class Glaswegian brought with it an inherent idea that religion brings with it negative connotations. The expectancy that, regardless of faith or any kind of

belief system, you would identify with a specific religion (only Catholic or Protestant) which would dictate which football team you supported, was not only commonplace but an established norm. In the 1980s the area of Glasgow I grew up in was overwhelmingly white and unashamedly working class. As a child of 'Island parents' I went to a Gaelic medium school which narrowed the scope of encountering other cultures or religions even further. As a young child I attended a Gaelic Free Presbyterian Church. For me that meant, wearing a dress, a hat, learning the catechism and getting more homework. I have fond memories of incredibly kind people coupled with memories of being extremely bored and never fully understanding what was going on. I sat down to sing, stood up to pray. I had my very own 50p that I put in a bag but never knew why. I was given homework that had nothing to do with school. I wore a hat because all the females did, I didn't know why. I knew some people in the church were 'better' than others because we weren't all allowed to take part in communion: I was sent out to an extended Sunday School so never knew what communion was. I don't remember ever not believing in God, but I remember not being impressed with religion. I now go to a church where there is no dress code and no one hides alcohol from the minister/pastor or elders. Communion is explained and open to all. Sunday School is interactive and fun. No one is judged for when they sit or stand. Church is a meeting of people who all believe in the same God and want to worship God collectively. How naïve to think this is separated from religion, it is separate from the church of my childhood but as far as the non-religious world view, it is very much religious.

So, my whole worldview is inextricably linked with my faith. I believe in a God who created all things and knows all things. I believe in a God who creates great plans, who desires to use, and work with his people to bring about these plans. I know I have an underlying belief that all hope is from God. When I think of hope I imagine the God of Abraham, bringing forth a miracle in impossible situations. I believe in an eternity focussed hope; an everyday faith-experienced hope; an everyday hope, although still gifted by God, does not require to be acknowledged as such; I believe every human being is born with the capability to hope; and I imagine an invisible ever present mist of hope made available by God and accessible by all those who grasp for it. I acknowledge these musings would soon fall short under rigorous theological scrutiny. However, this is who I have been through every stage of this research. My own reasoning on hope was not disclosed to any participants, although during interview I shared that I had a faith with some when I



thought appropriate. I sought to understand hope, as experienced by desisters, in a more tangible way whilst allowing room for the less definitively explained.

## 2.1 Epistemological prefiguration of hope

This research proposal came with a pre-determined understanding, feeling, imagining, of hope. As researcher, I approached this research with the belief that pure hope, in its perfect totality, is confined only in the being of God: hope exists because God exists. This is not limited to an eschatological belief in God being the only hope for salvation and an ‘everlasting life’ type of hope. The ability and desire to hope is available only through the creator of humanity’s innermost being. It is not to say that only those who have a belief in God, can hope; hope is not selective. Hope is part of what it is to be made human. In the same way we are born with vital organs, we are born with the ability to hope. That hope may get worn down the way physical elements can get worn by illness. Hope may abound and strengthen as physical muscles are strengthened. Hope is not static or constant flowing, however, it is an ever presence, sometimes illusive, sometimes apparent, but never non-existent. It may seem non-existent in the depths of despair, but who can tell when a moment will arise that brings, even if only momentary, a glimpse of hope.

Is God’s omnipotence and omniscience invalidated by a belief that God can hope? Scripture reveals that God *is* hope and God *gives* hope, but God having hope leads to a paradox for the believer, a paradox for me: how can an all present, all knowing, never changing God hope, when he is already aware of every outcome? Yet, the believer prays to God to seek mercy, asks for God to work on their behalf, praises God for intervening, finds solace in the God who listens and understands. If God then, is a God who acts, can that acting also include the act of hope? God’s hope is not orientated towards an unknown future, or unknown outcome, it is a fundamental disposition. God’s hope is *human* centred:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but **by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope** <sup>21</sup> **that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay** and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:19-21)

This scripture suggests that God acted in hope, a hope focussed on the spiritual state of humanity. God hopes that creation (each individual human), will choose freedom, and as a

result will become his children. Scripture can be exposed further in the readings of John 14:6 and 1 Corinthians 13:7: John states “God is love”; and Paul writes that ‘love [ergo God], bears all things, believes all things, **hopes** all things, endures all things. The aim, at this time, is not to prove that God *can* hope, it is to show how I came to the belief that hope is fundamental to God and therefore fundamental to humanity, whether humanity recognises it or not. My prefiguration is faith based and personal, it engages with existing theory but is not dependant on it.

## 2.2 Insider syndrome

This project cannot be categorised as insider research: I have never worked for the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), nor have I ever experienced imprisonment. I do not share a common lived experience with prisoners or prison officers. Reflecting on the fieldwork stage of this research, I spent little time reflexively considering my positionality in terms of my prior knowledge of prisons and those who had experienced imprisonment. I was extremely aware, and cautious throughout, that my faith beliefs would not coerce answers that were not there, however I did not consider how my knowledge and familiarity with the prison environment might affect the research. Whilst designing the fieldwork and seeking ethical approval, I discussed the precautions I would take given I was a lone female researcher conducting fieldwork. However, I did not give a huge amount of consideration to how I might be viewed by participants or those working for the SPS. The most intense stage of fieldwork was with Group 1; interviewing those still in prison. Their collages were all created at the same time and I conducted all nine interviews over two days. Remembering this, and re-reading fieldwork notes, I realise that my approach and thinking both reveal that I saw myself as belonging there.

All of those in Group 1 were nearing the end of sentences in HMP Barlinnie: a prison I have visited on many occasions. I knew the layout. I knew some staff members. I knew the protocols. I knew which ‘type’ of prisoner stayed in which wing. I was familiar with the colloquialisms. As well as my familiarity, some staff knew who I was. The main gatekeeper knew that I visited Barlinnie on a regular basis and he knew those visits were with the chaplaincy team. I was comfortable with their questions and my surroundings. The relationship prisoners have with group volunteers differs vastly from the relationship they have with prison officers. A volunteer is unable to impose punishment on a prisoner.

Oftentimes, they provide free tea/coffee/biscuits/cakes. For some, they are the only non-uniformed contact they may have with the outside world. The volunteer is not part of the 'inner circle'. They are omitted from some group politics, and information on 'wing drama' is limited through fear of informing those in authority. However, volunteers often provide a comfortable space for discussion, at the very least a chance to get out of the cell for a short while. By some staff, the volunteer is embraced and encouraged, by others, they are thought naïve. Regardless, the volunteer is never treated like a prisoner and rarely treated like someone conducting a personal prison visit. Personal experience of volunteering in groups has shown that volunteers find themselves in a middle ground of acceptance and distrust; they are never fully considered insiders by staff or prisoners; however, they are both knowledgeable and familiar enough to neither be considered outsiders.

Through years of visiting HMP Barlinnie, some staff knew me by name and would shout 'hello' and wave from across the courtyard. I already had a volunteer pass so when first visiting the prison as a researcher, staff already had all my information in the system. I was now there in a different capacity but nonetheless felt connected. Although I did not realise it at the time, I viewed myself as a make-shift insider. Whilst working in community development, I also considered myself more of an insider in so much as people would share information about situations, concerns and drug taking that I knew they would not so readily share with others who were able to exercise specific authority over their lives, such as social workers and police. However, I was occasionally reminded, most apparently if the specificities of criminal behaviour were in danger of being revealed, that I too was only allowed a degree of access into their lives and that this access was always in their control.

An accepted definition of imposter syndrome describes it as the 'persistent inability to believe that one's success is deserved or has been legitimately achieved as a result of one's own efforts or skills' (Oxford Languages, 2021). For many this can lead to anxiety and affect productivity. I have titled this section, Insider Syndrome, as how I positioned myself during fieldwork reflects a similar root cause as imposter syndrome: it is a skewed view of one's own position, instead of being unable to legitimise that position, it justifies an unwarranted position. I was unable to view myself as an outside researcher, although that is exactly what I was. How I viewed my own position was tainted by my previous experiences. I spoke as someone who knew the prison environment relatively well and

therefore was treated as such. I was familiar with treatments, services and charitable organisations on the outside which may have hindered my capacity to ask participants to fully explain situations or experiences in their own words. At the fieldwork stage, I was unaware of how I had embraced an insider syndrome stance. It only became apparent during analysis and upon reflexively examining my research methods after completion. I found myself believing I was fully integrated in prison and community situations, as a result, I failed to engage with the pertinence of outsider status. I cannot be sure of the extent to which my findings would have differed had I been fully immersed in my researcher status. My familiarity with certain situations may have caused participants to view me as someone who was more relatable, however, it could have had the adverse effect of viewing me as someone they would need to be selective with in what they shared through concern of me sharing it with staff or authorities.

I was extremely fortunate to meet staff who were friendly and helpful. They shared stories of their experiences, as did I. I did not account for how they may tailor these stories or why they chose to share what they did. At the time, I felt part of a conversation almost between colleagues. I did not consider whether they may be attempting to mould my opinions or even my research. As a result, I did not scrutinise what I was told or ask as many questions of staff as I may have. It is possible that my perception at the time may have been correct. Perhaps they did see me as an insider and felt comfortable sharing any stories with me. However, insider syndrome meant I failed to consider the former scenario at the time.

Similarly, during the collage creating and interview stage I did not fully consider how participants viewed me. They arrived with a mixture of perceptions; that I was a student, a researcher, a future doctor and one was under the impression I was a medical doctor. I explained who I was and what I was doing and they received a plain language statement but, on reflection, I am unsure to what extent participants were interested in who I was or the purpose of the research. They were asked by their Throughcare Support Officer (TSO) to take part and they agreed. They may have done so as a way of showing their TSO they were helpful and willing to engage, or perhaps simply to relieve boredom. I don't have direct experience of the challenges faced by imprisoned people; however, I have worked closely with them through these challenges. I have supported people experiencing homelessness and addiction on their release from prison and have witnessed first-hand the struggles that brings. I have invested emotionally in people who have struggled with issues

that many prisoners face. I therefore have a level of understanding and empathy which someone visiting a prison for the first time may not necessarily have.

I am female and considerably older than the general perception of what a student would be. I possibly sound more Glaswegian and working class than some researchers or doctors. I understood insider jokes and prison rules. I was not shocked by collective ‘banter’ during the collage stage. However, they didn’t view me as a fellow prisoner or treat me as such. They related more to me like another practitioner who they have to engage with. At the interview stages, some asked if what they were saying was helpful or if this was all part of my course. Some related to me in the sense that they too had considered college at some stage and may again in the future. They spoke to me in a way that recognised I wasn’t part of the ‘prison establishment’. They laughed and joked with me. They opened up about their lives to me. They used terminology assuming my understanding. Collectively, these aspects of fieldwork again gave me a sense of insider syndrome. I saw myself as relating to their situations, where it was impossible for me to fully relate. My perceived status of insider, was founded in the ease with which participants seemed to share details of their lives with me, including hopes and fears and in the fact that I felt comfortable conducting the research. However, this perception meant that during fieldwork I failed to consider the gaps in information shared or the extent to which participants may have been modifying their stories for me.

Ochieng (2010), a researcher of African descent who conducted research with African families, wrote about noticing a change in her status of insider or outsider at different stages of her research. She describes being treated as someone with insider knowledge and therefore being ‘able to step into their shoes’. This was only possible for Ochieng because of the insider status which she occupied. However, she also recognises that she was not regarded as fully “one of them” (Ochieng, 2010: 1731). Edith Stein’s (1917/1989) three-level philosophical model suggests that advancing our empathy can take us beyond needing a similar experience to a place of deep listening through our common humanity (discussed in Gair, 2011, p.139-140). She goes on to explain that empathy is not dependent upon a shared experience but rather in submersive listening and engagement (ibid). During fieldwork, in particular the interview stages, I endeavoured to listen intensely and allow participants’ stories to lead my further questioning, whilst still shaping the questions in order to include aspects of hope. In doing so, my hope is that participants felt heard and therefore valuable. The extent to which I could fully empathise was hopefully

overshadowed by the closeness with which I listened and the interest I showed in them. I am unsure the extent to which my partial insider status was only self-perceived or a true reflection of how others involved in the research saw me. Whether insider syndrome improved or hindered my fieldwork is also unclear. Given I was comfortable in the environment I was in may have helped those I was interviewing to feel comfortable too. My familiarity with the prison layout and processes may have encouraged staff to trust me with both participants and information.

My experience in certain environments and situations meant I felt more proximity and familiarity than I should have assumed. Yet, I know I do not fully understand or am capable of empathising with the lived experiences of those taking part in the research. To them, even if it is to varying degrees, I am an outsider looking into aspects of their lives, asking them to divulge emotions and experiences. Where imposter syndrome skews reality and is predominantly focussed on the perception of others, insider syndrome neglects other's perception or misconstrues their perception in order to meet that of the insider. Whilst conducting fieldwork insider syndrome provided me, as the researcher, with a sense of security. However, I recognise that it may have limited the extent to which I questioned certain aspects of individual's lives and stories. Accepting what they said because of my perception of understanding where they are coming from may have prevented me from pursuing certain routes of enquiry more thoroughly – and of confronting the potential impacts of certain differences between us.

### 3. An ontological configuration: grappling with a faith-based ontology.

Setting forth an epistemological stance on hope presented challenges when confronted with the extent to which this stance, for me, is personal. A faith-based, experiential epistemology seems sufficient for a Sunday morning<sup>1</sup>, however, lacks the rigour of academic scrutiny. With this in mind, the following grapples with theological and sociological underpinnings whilst remaining true to the spirit in which the research was truly conducted. The validity of engaging with theology as an additional layer of understanding is established in Chapter 4. I undoubtedly believe in a hope filled world, because I believe in a hope creating/filled/giving God. I believe all human ability is a gift from God. I believe in a world where beauty, and the ability to see that beauty, again rests

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<sup>1</sup> the extent to which it *should* be sufficient is debatable

in a creator who chooses to give us that ability in order to share in his creation more fully. The grounds on which I can personally make those claims are based on my understandings of the Scriptures and simply faith.

### 3.1 The gift of imagination

Imagination later becomes a key theme in this thesis and therefore it is fitting that it should also speak to the ontological approach. The ability to imagine, transports us to different places, different scenarios, even radically altered existences. The place of daydreams often reveals our innermost desires, as well as our innermost fears. The ‘other worldliness’ of imagination occupies a springboard for new realities and its escape. A rudimentary look at the work of C.S. Lewis would reveal his intrinsic engagement with his imagination. On the matter of imagination, he states:

The waking world is judged more real because it can thus contain the dreaming world: the dreaming world is judged less real because it cannot contain the waking one... Christian theology can fit in science, art, morality, and the sub-Christian religions...the scientific point of view cannot fit into any of these things, even science itself. I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it, I see everything else. (Lewis, 2014: 14)

And to combat the criticism that Christianity is merely a pursuit of the imagination, he further expresses:

It looks as if the confusion between imaginative enjoyment and intellectual assent, of which Christians are accused, is not nearly so common or so easy as some people suppose. Even children, I believe, rarely suffer from it. It pleases their imagination to pretend that they are bears or horses, but I do not remember that one was ever under the least delusion. (Lewis, 2014: 2)

The act of hoping has a clear lineation to the act of imagining; hoping for that not yet actualised. Schwandt holds that, ‘We are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge’ (Schwandt, 2000: 197). I argue that not only is the mind active in the construction of knowledge; I hold that the spirit or soul also has a role to play in this construction, and in this case, it is a spirit informed and moulded by theology, by God. To those unaccepting of the belief of a spirit or soul, the reflexive imagination can act as another contributor of knowledge construction.

Plato’s allegory of The Cave, depicts a group of people chained in a cave all facing the same one wall. All that the group knew was in what they saw and heard: shadows on a wall

and no idea of the world outside the cave. This research takes a critical realist approach (see section 5 of this chapter), with a constructivist proclivity. ‘Paradigm shifts in the research process have increasingly made it apparent that methodologies no longer needed to be bound by a concrete set of rules but are ‘interwoven with and emerge from the nature of particular disciplines ...and ... perspectives’ (Lincoln and Guba 2000: 164, cited in Howell, 2016: 31). It is constructivist in the sense that the mind, spirit and imagination contribute the construction of knowledge. However, its underpinning methodological guide is in accepting and engaging with multiple levels of reality as informed by critical realism methods (see section 5 of this chapter).

#### 4. Refiguration in the ‘Immanent frame’: an epistemology of the unseen

The sociological phenomena being explored in this research is desistance, which is always situated in economic, political, social and cultural structures. I argue, that hope is the epiphenomenal superstructure from which imaginings are inspired and the practicalities of desistance both seem possible, and can be made possible. Taylor’s, *A Secular Age* (2007), is complex and worthy of far greater deconstruction than is possible here. Nevertheless, Taylor’s immanent frame theory offers a fitting epistemological backdrop to this research. Whilst admittedly inclined towards simplification, the diagram below shows the complex factors involved if life is to be understood in the Immanent Frame.

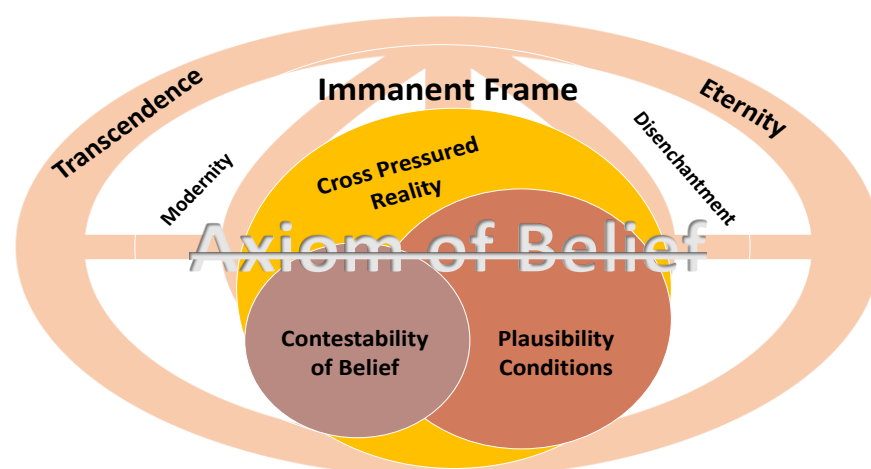


Figure 1: Immanent Frame



The diagram shows that in Taylor's theory, the axiom of belief is no longer presupposed due to the contestability of belief. This coupled with the plausibility of previously accepted faith-based traditions brings about a cross-pressured reality: the conflict arising from secularity, or even exclusive humanism, denying transcendence whilst still feeling the pull of rival stories that lead them to doubt that there is nothing more than the present reality. Although absent from the everyday of the immanent frame, transcendence and notions of eternity remain. In this, 'secular age' they are contested and even derided, however there remains a human pull towards 'otherness,' (Taylor, 2007).

Taylor explains this move away from theological exploration as being a result of society recognising itself within an immanent frame (2007). He explains this as the gradual decline in the recognition of otherworldliness, spirit world, or most directly God. For Taylor this is an unprecedented move in human history, for all ancient civilisations the order of things was incomprehensible without the involvement of God or the spiritual realm, even five centuries ago the order of things was incomprehensible without the involvement of God (Taylor, 2007). This move towards disenchantment and modernity inhabits the Immanent Frame. He goes on to develop three areas in which humanity attempts to protrude the immanent frame and sense transcendence; 1) a good higher than human flourishing (such as love in the sense of *agape*), 2) a higher power (such as God), 3) extension of life beyond the natural scope between birth and death (Taylor, 2007).

Calhoun (2008) criticises the religious limitations which Taylor seems to incapsulate in this transcendence and goes further to include self-transformation as a human aspect of 'going beyond'. This is the ability to change who we are, not to a profound degree, but enough so that we can make more of ourselves than what we originally see through self-examination. It is not simply thinking differently about a self that remains unchanged. To the desistance scholar, Calhoun's explanation immediately provokes ideas of identity transformation in existing literature, (ibid). Therefore, an argument can be made that aspects of desistance, such as identity transformation, reveal humanity's pull beyond the Immanent Frame. I argue that the ability to hope; the actions, or state, of hoping; and the transformative *power* of hope (see in particular Case Study 1), epitomise the human endeavour to protrude the immanent frame.

## 5. Ontology determining epistemology

‘The way things are affects the way in which we know them, and the extent to which they can be known... If the process of knowing modulates what is known, ontology determines epistemology, multiple levels of understanding can then result in different epistemologies,’ (McGrath, 2017). Critical realism accepts three relatively autonomous levels of reality: 1) the empirical level; 2) the actual level; 3) the ‘real’ level, deeper-lying structures and causal mechanisms (Stutchbury, 2021). The causal mechanisms are invisible but give rise to experiences or events. Hope is invisible but historically has shown itself to be a powerful collective force, and individually, can provide purpose and meaning.

In practical terms, studying what people do and why they do it will reveal social structures, and in turn, understanding the social structures will explain why they can and cannot do certain things. CR thus seeks separate accounts of structure and praxis, but recognizes that it is the interplay between them that leads to greater understandings (Archer, 1998).

This research is underpinned by critical realist philosophy. The findings support the separation of structure and agency whilst highlighting their inextricable relationship. However, I argue that yet another aspect of enquiry can lead to further understandings, a triptych of articulation. Consider the triptych artwork, three panels displaying different elements of the same subject matter and all intricately linked. Where social life is visibly affected by social structures and requires or allows agency from its actors (to differing extents); this third panel of the picture, the final image represents that which cannot easily be explained. It displays the miraculous inner strength, the unexplained coincidences, the spirit, the soul, the hope. Understanding this third element of life, arguably, may not require an acceptance of a spiritual realm of some sort, however this is a logical place to begin exploration, with theology providing both the map and tools to investigate in depth.

The ontological belief in a spiritual realm, both as can be experienced individually, and that which is regarded as omnivorous albeit experienced and understood differently, (see section 2.1 and 3 of this chapter), allows for an alternative epistemological explanation of the sociological phenomena of desistance. This in no way dismisses what is already known but rather adds another dimension that works in tandem with sociological findings. The analysis process, discussed in the following chapter, reveals slight echoes of emergent

phenomena, where higher levels of explanation are considered in addition to observed and narrated accounts. This acceptance of multi-level reality does not seek to create a different picture of occurrences, but a broader picture, accounting for a level previously under examined.

## Chapter 6: Data Collection and Analysis

*Don't know how that is, but it's kinda weird but as I say I like drawing so if I put it into pictures its more stuck in ma head... I could, I could be on one bad mood and I'll just pick up a pencil and a bit of paper and draw what I think*

Harry, Group 1

This chapter outlines the research process from its conception to practicalities. It discusses the reasoning behind participant group selection and the challenges presented. The chapter also reveals the specific method of research used, and examines why it is best suited to the subject matter at hand. There is a detailed account of the fieldwork stage of the research outlining both challenges and successes. Due to the possible vulnerability of participants and the potential upsetting nature of the research theme, the ethical considerations of this field work were of paramount importance. The considerations made, and measures taken to ensure risk and harm were at a minimum, are also discussed. This chapter concludes with an account of the analysis stage and how this informed the findings as a whole.

### 1. Grouping participants

This project was designed to understand how individuals interpret and understand the concept of hope, in particular how hope is experienced in the desistance process, and how significant hope is that process. This line of enquiry is influenced by the aspiration that by understanding hope in current desisters, perhaps methods to arouse and support hope in future desisters will be uncovered. Due to time limitations the research did not allow for a longitudinal study across a number of years following the same participants, which would have enabled a tracking of hope in desistance journeys. Examining desistance as a journey rather than one moment of change (McNeill and Weaver: 2010), three groups were created to represent various stages of the desistance process. By doing this I also hoped to uncover the different stages of hopefulness, or lack of hope, along these journeys examining the possibility of an entwined link between hope of desistance. The three groups were as follows;

Group 1 – males in prison serving the last six weeks of their sentence

Group 2 – males released from any prison between 3-6 months prior to participating

Group 3 – males who had been release from any prison 2+ years prior to participating

The groups were selected due to the existing evidence pertaining to these time frames in desistance and re-offending literature. The process of collecting data took place in three stages, a creative element, first interview and a second interview 6 months after the first.

Previous evidence suggests that on the lead up to release from prison individuals are at their most enthusiastic about living a non-offending lifestyle. They are hopeful about their release, although this is often also tainted by trepidation, yet they are positive about what they can put in place to remain crime free. Although this service no longer exists, at the time of conducting fieldwork, Throughcare Support teams were created across eight of Scotland's prisons. These teams consist of experienced prison officers who no longer work in and around the prison halls, who's aim is to support and prepare prisoners on the lead up to their release date and also offer support 3 months post release. They are plain clothed and based in offices in the prison grounds. They help prisoners with housing, finances, addiction and medical support, and also offer to accompany prisoners on their release day in order to ensure they have access to the support and facilities needed. The service is not mandatory. Prisoners are made aware of the service and are given the choice to opt in. HMP Barlinnie has the largest number of prisoners in Scotland and therefore the most Throughcare Support Officers (TSOs). The period of six weeks was chosen as this is when TSOs engage with the individual prisoners on their caseloads and meant that I would be able to recruit prisoners through the TSOs themselves, rather than a blanket recruitment approach across the prison.

The first three months after release from prison is often the most challenging period. This is particularly true of those who have had to deal with situations such as homelessness. This period is also when they are faced with huge changes in their life, first and foremost the restoration of their freedom. Up to six months, on average, individuals are beginning to settle into new routines. They often remain faced with numerous challenges but have overcome the initial anxiety of release. Considering what may be an unpredictable time for many I envisioned that this too may be a time where initial hopefulness may be lost when faced with the harshness of their reality, or perhaps new hopes found and encouragement to continue. I saw this as a key stage in desistance, where for many, offending behaviour begins again often as a result of discouragement and hopelessness. If I were able to recruit those who remained focussed on desistance despite their challenges, my aim was to

uncover what gave them the hope to carry on. On a practical level, it was also my initial intention to recruit participants for Group 2 through TSOs as they aim to continue supporting individuals 3 months after release, and for longer in a small number of challenging cases. I had contact with 4 TSOs and made one possible contact for Group 2 through them which did not transpire to the recruitment of a participant.

It is believed that once an individual has reached two years of sustained desistance their likelihood of maintaining that state is increased (Laub and Sampson, 2001). Not in all cases, but for some they will have established stable accommodation and perhaps employment or enrolled in further education. Group 3 would enable me to explore how these individuals achieved desistance thus far and the role hope played, if any, in its sustainment. Although the desisting time frame across the three groups acted as a surrogate longitudinal study, the two interview stages gave some insight into how hopes developed and the challenges that desisters are faced with. This also helped the formulation and recognition of patterns more clearly, and develop a more rounded understanding of the impact hope can have.

Group 1 was the group anticipated to be experiencing the most extreme changes in their lives, from being imprisoned to post release. It was also likely to be the group that I would struggle to maintain contact with as upon recruitment my only method of contact was via their TSO. Therefore, this group was re-interviewed 3 months after release. In theory, they would still be engaging with their TSO and therefore access would be easier for me. It also meant they would have had time to readjust to release, yet, their experiences and challenges were likely to be apparent and therefore would possibly have differing views on hope from the initial interview stage. Groups 2 and 3 were interviewed approximately 6 months after their initial interview. Again, this was in order to give time for possible changes to occur and viewpoints to change. It emerged that four out of five participants did indeed have life changing occurrences in this time; one's partner became pregnant, one's employment funding was in danger and he found himself seeking a new job in his mid-fifties, and two had been imprisoned again – one had served an 8 week sentence and was released before he was due to be re-interviewed and was therefore able to take part.

Although the word hope is used commonly and often inconsequentially, uncovering a deeper level of understanding can prove complex and often abstract. As previously mentioned, (Chapter 4), exploring hope requires metaphysical engagement such as the

origins of hope, understanding the concept of being hopeful and the seemingly transient nature of hope. For this reason, a creative element to the fieldwork was introduced. This allowed participants time to think about hope as more than just an expression, as well as giving the opportunity to freely display where they found hope and how it is experienced. This also ensured that subsequent discussions on hope would span wider than just immediate desires. Harper (2002:13) suggests, ‘images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain’s capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words’. The photography stage, more so than for those who instead created collages, gave participants time to think about where they find hope and why. They were given more freedom to select images to include and were able to select specific details which were significant for their lives.

Group 1 were more limited to what they could contribute to their hopeful images. Understandably I was not given permission to bring cameras into the prison. Therefore Group 1 were tasked with creating collage, drawing or painting pictures. They were limited by the resources that I made available to them. There was an abundance of material to choose from. However, they had only an hour to sift through images and colour to decide what they would like to include and how they would like to portray it. Once I explained what a collage was, the instructions given to Group 1 participants were to create a collage which depicts what hope means to you and where you find hope, what gives you hope. With little time to think about it, some participants struggled with this idea and instead asked if they could include things that they hope for instead. I agreed to this as I hoped it would reveal where they had previously either found or lacked hope in the past, and it would still act to provoke deeper conversation about the nature of hope during interview. I asked Group 1 participants to think if there was anywhere or anyone in prison where they had found hope. One participant responded, *there’s nae hope in here, that’s the problem. Ye should be getting us to make pictures ah hopeless stuff* (Kevin, Group 1). Others agreed and laughed. I suggested that they could include elements of hopelessness too and we could discuss during our later conversation. No one chose to do this, all of the collages related only to hopefulness, where it had been provided in the past and what their hopes were for the future.

Similar instructions were given to those in Groups 2 and 3 who used photography. I asked them to take photographs of objects, places, or people<sup>2</sup> which represented hope to them. The photographs mainly consisted of elements which had provided hope and was providing hope in the here and now. Only two participants included things that they hoped for in the future. More than revealing what participants hoped for, the photographs enabled discussion on what hope is by way of revealing its source for each participant. As Harper notes, 'photo elicitation mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews' (2002: 22). Without the photo elicitation part of the first interview, discussing sources of hope would be far less revealing and would likely provide minimal response. Padgett et al's (2013: 1441) research with homeless adults found that respondents found the use of photo elicitation therapeutic as it provided them with 'a reason to go out and a reason to reflect'. The participants in Groups 2 and 3 of this research did not find the task of taking photographs therapeutic, some spoke of feeling self-conscious, or being unsure that they were operating the cameras correctly.<sup>3</sup> However, choosing what to include caused many to reflect on how far they have come and to explore the positive aspects of their lives, one commented, *But these are things I wouldn't have dreamt of, a house and a car... So I put them last 'cause they're material stuff, but at the same time, I've achieved them as a result of the whole ... of what I've received in the other pictures* (Phil, Group 3). He recognised all his hopeful images worked together in order to get him where he is now, 8 years after his last imprisonment.

## 2. Informed consent, pseudonyms, and confidentiality

Informed consent is an essential aspect of participant research as it protects the rights and welfare of the research participants, ensuring the integrity of the research, and meeting legal and ethical obligations. At the initial meeting with participants, each were given a plain language information sheet. I read through the information with each individual

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<sup>2</sup> Participants were asked that if they included specific individuals, or groups of people in their photographs to ensure that they could not be recognised. I gave the example of taking a photograph of a child's shoe or toy so that the participant would know what it represented and would be able to explain the relevance or symbolism of the photograph to me during interview. Many participants did this and found innovative ways to disguise individuals in order that they could be included.

<sup>3</sup> All participants using a disposable camera were given instructions and a demonstration of how to use it before embarking on this aspect of the fieldwork. Taking a photograph without being immediately able to check it caused some frustration for participants as they had no way of knowing it was working until after the pictures had been developed.



participant ensuring that each aspect was understood and answered any questions. Participants were given a copy to keep and were then asked to sign a consent form, making clear that they would be able to withdraw from the research at any stage. Participants were made aware of the risks and benefits of the study; I explicitly informed everyone that participation was voluntary and would not impact their current involvement in the criminal justice system. Establishing this at the outset ensured that participants felt full autonomy over the decision to take part.

Pseudonyms were used at the outset of the research; as soon as someone agreed to take part, I selected a pseudonym for them. The reason was to make participation *feel* easier and to allow participants to have the freedom to discuss potentially embarrassing issues or give controversial views (Bryman, 2012:667). Participants were not able to select their own pseudonym, despite one making this request. I decided that the best way to ensure confidentiality and protect the risk identification from others, would be if only I were aware of the true identities of the participants. At the interview transcription stage, the pseudonyms were incorporated, this enabled me to re-imagine individuals with their newly assigned names and helped to ensure true names were not disclosed at any stage, to anyone. Although, I didn't realise at the time, the pseudonyms I chose completely reflect my background: every name I used was commonplace in working class west of Scotland in my youth. Although not intentional, it works well with the participant sample as they too were predominantly from working class west of Scotland backgrounds.

### 3. Methodological and ethical issues

When designing the framework for this project there were a number of ethical issues to consider which would impact the methods which could be used. All of the participants in this research had experienced traumas to varying degrees, the very act of being imprisoned can be certainly viewed as traumatic. The wellbeing of all participants, particularly emotionally, was a principal ethical factor. I was asking participants to share details of their lives and explore ideas which they may not have considered in depth prior to this. I set out an ethical framework which was sent to the Scottish Prison Service and the University of Glasgow for approval. This set out ways in which I would be able to reduce any harmful impact on participants, as far as possible; such as ensuring participants were

aware they could stop the interview at any stage and take breaks. I also put in place guidelines to protect my own safety. When possible, interviews were conducted in a semi-public area, ensuring I had a safety contact for each meeting. They were aware of when and where the interview was taking place and I would check-in with them to confirm my safety.

I conducted Group 1's initial interviews in HMP Barlinnie, in office and interview spaces. Officers in each specific hall were aware I was there and checked the participant and I were both safe. The Throughcare Support Manager accompanied me whilst walking through the prison grounds between halls. All Group 1 second interviews and all interviews for Groups 2 and 3 took place in quiet areas of cafes close to where participants lived, or in rooms provided by the charitable organisation through which I recruited them. One participant, from Group 3, requested all meetings take place in his home. This required four home visits, (1) to explain the project and recruit, (2) collect camera to be developed, (3) interview 1, (4) interview 2. The first three meetings occurred without difficulty. Between the time interview 1 and interview 2 took place, this participant had served another short-term prison sentence and prior to interview 2 had been released less than a week. He was able to keep his home to return to and was keen to go ahead with the interview and insisted he was doing fine and that this sentence had merely been a blip he had been expecting.

When I arrived for interview, he had a number of people in his home, all of whom were under the influence of alcohol and other substances, by their own admission. Brian was clearly struggling. He wanted to continue with the interview with one of his friends present and asked others to leave. In a previous professional capacity, I had found myself in more extreme circumstances, however, now as a researcher, I felt inadequate to deal with the situation as I had no authority and was not in the position to offer proper assistance or even advice. I was torn between the decision to leave ensuring my safety, whilst also concerned for Brian. Concerned I would offend him or make him feel like his input no longer had any worth. I asked him basic questions regarding his well-being and recent experiences. He answered winking to my recording advice so as to gesture he was not telling the truth, but these were the details he would like me to note. For example, he told the dictaphone that he had no money and couldn't even afford electricity, I was sitting in his home with money scattered all over the floor, the tv on and lights on. Brian was already somewhat untrusting during our previous three encounters, even though I explained thoroughly that his input

would be anonymised and sought his permission for recording. He maintained a concern that people were out to get him and may get a hold of anything he told. Brian had been in the army for a number of years before committing his first offence and spoke of surveillance in all aspects of life. This undoubtedly resulted to an element of paranoia with regards the recording. Unusually Brian was in his 40s before he committed his first offence, which resulted in the first of his three prison sentences. He did not say his time in the army affected his mental health, resulting in offending. He mentioned briefly he suffered from PTSD but did not want to elaborate further than this. Due to Brian's state at this second interview stage I decided not to include what he shared in the final analysis. I felt this would give an unfair perception of him and also queried the extent to which he was fully able to consent to our conversation being recorded and included.

Groups 2 and 3 were offered disposable cameras in order to participate in the fieldwork stage. The uniqueness of using such a camera in 2019 was an aspect which I had not fully considered. One participant remarked:

*Naebody knows me cos I wasnae in any papers or that but it's just in case it was like somehow just – I dunno. Somebody might think, why's somebody takin' – an' it's also cos it's a – it's like no even – like who dae ye really see wi' an actual camera?*  
Sean, Group 3



Figure 2: Cameras

This participant was on the sex offenders register and had strong concerns of stigmatisation from others before taking part in this research. Using a disposable camera and additional

layer of othering and made him feel particularly conspicuous and cautious. He was concerned of being stopped and asked why he was photographing, and although the reason was innocent, he felt others would suspect wrong-doing resulting in possible police intervention. Participants who had mobile phones with cameras found this aspect of the research less unusual. I had focussed on the impact conversation would have on each individual rather than the process of taking photographs. I could have offered to take photographs for those participants with such concerns, however, this too would have had limitations as participants may take less time considering what they would like included or feel more pressure to include things which may not necessarily reflect hope but they think it should. Also, being accompanied by me may have made some feel a more severe sense of conspicuousness in their communities.

#### 4. Participant demographic

All participants in this research were male, over 25, serving, or had served short term prison sentences, i.e. 4 years or shorter. I had three research groups. The aim was to recruit participants who had been repeat offenders and had served two or more prison sentences. The reason for this was to indicate a desistance trajectory for those who had been embroiled in offending behaviour, rather than those who may have committed a one-off offence. The age limit was set in order to discount younger offenders who may naturally begin desistance due to maturation. The research was limited to males in order to examine like for like comparisons as far as possible. A similar method of recruitment was used for both Groups 2 and 3. The recruitment of Group 1 differed as access was depended upon the co-operation of HMP Barlinnie and further ethical approval from the SPS Research committee.

#### 5. Recruitment – Group 1

Group 1 consisted of males nearing the end of their short-term prison sentence, all of whom I recruited from HMP Barlinnie. Once I had been granted ethical approval from both The University of Glasgow and the Scottish Prison Service, I sought to recruit participants via the Throughcare Support Team. I initially contacted the Throughcare Manager for the West of Scotland who in turn spoke to a number of Throughcare Support

Officers (TSOs) on my behalf. The participants were chosen by the officers. They used the criteria that I had outlined, i.e. short-term prisoner serving 4 years or less, within the last six weeks of their sentence. Officers used this as well as their own discretion in deciding who would be appropriate to include. Four SOs found participants who would be willing to take part in this project. The extent to which participants were fully aware of what would be required of them, and who I was, varied. Upon our initial meeting one participant thought I was a medical doctor, even after I had explained what the project was about, given him a plain language statement and he had agreed to take part. When faced with collage material he exclaimed how would this help him medically. There could be a number of reasons for this, he perhaps had another appointment with a doctor later that day, he maybe agreed to anything which would get him out of his cell, he didn't pay attention whilst I explained the purpose of the meeting, I didn't explain it well enough. Whichever reason it was, he was confused and initially wanted to return to his cell which I agreed to stressing that participation was completely voluntary. However, he decided to remain and take part.

I had initially sought to meet each Group 1 participant individually to explain my research fully. Due to the movement restrictions and staff shortages at HMP Barlinnie this was not possible. Instead, the initial meeting explaining my research and seeking consent from participants was done in a group setting. I was assured that all the necessary checks had been made to ensure that it would be safe for those taking part to be in a classroom together. These checks did not highlight any difficulties, and no one was excluded from participating as a result. I had initially asked for 8 participants. On the day I arrived at the prison I was told 9 men had agreed to take part. I had sufficient consent forms, plain language statements and art supplies so this was not an issue. Those who had agreed with their TSOs to take part were brought to an art classroom together, where I introduced myself and explained everything to the group and distributed plain language statements and consent forms. They all agreed, apart from the participant mentioned above, who was initially confused, nevertheless he did agree later. Again, due to time constraints participants were asked to create their collages immediately after agreeing to take part.

When I arrived at the prison, I met with the Throughcare Manager who took me to the classroom in order to set-up all the art supplies ready for the participants to arrive. I arrived at 7.30am on 31<sup>st</sup> January. A freezing, foggy day which was snowing relatively heavily. I was dressed in warm outdoor winter clothing. The participants were brought over to the

classroom, from various blocks on the prison campus, across to the education block, in the freezing temperature, snowing, many of them straight out of bed (by their own admission), with no outdoor coats or jackets, at 8am. I did not have the facilities available to offer them hot drinks and had only one small fan heater to heat the room. They arrived tired and cold, expected to think about abstract notions of hope and then create art reflecting it. This is an enormous task to ask of anyone. Yet, they unswervingly took part. Being in the art room was perhaps better than returning to their cell; most participants shared a cell with one other prisoner. They also may be conditioned to be compliant during their time of imprisonment. Although I had no authority over them, in a sense I played the role of teacher; particularly when explaining what a collage was and asking them to complete the task. I have experience of leading support groups with men in prison so I may have adopted a similar approach which could have presented itself as teacherlike. Some may have interpreted their participation as a form of 'good behaviour' that could be added to their record. I never made any reference to this to any participants; however, it may have been discussed with their SOs at an earlier recruitment stage unbeknownst to me. Whether their participation was based on willingness, coercion, obligation or perceived mandatory; all participants fully engaged with the task at hand and were willing to meet with me afterwards for one-to-one interviews.

I brought a small suitcase filled with numerous resources in order for the collages to be created.

- A3 sheets of card
- Magazines, of various kinds to provide a wide spectrum of photographs
- Various paints and paint brushes
- Coloured tissue paper
- Coloured foam sheets
- Felt-tip pens
- Alphabet and numerical stickers
- Patterned materials
- Glue sticks



Figure 3: Collage and picture resources

Scissors were provided by the prison from the art room store in order that all pairs could be accounted for at the end of the session. The instruction given was to create a collage of how they imagine hope, what hope means to them, how they have experienced hope. This proved challenging and for the most part collages were created expressing what participants hope for in the immediate future, once released and what they hope their longer-term future would hold. Although the collages, for the most part, reflected hopes rather than sources of hope, upon reflection it was clear that the ability to hope for a better future was in itself a source of hope. Imagining what may be possible, provided hope. Hoping for the seemingly simple things opened the route to discover sources of hope. For example, one participant, Kevin, included two sheets of A3 in this collage, one of which showed a large pint of lager. He was the closest to his release date, and amongst the participants was serving the shortest sentence. He hoped for a pint, he looked forward to this first one after release. But the pint is more than a drink, it reflects calm, friendship, trusting:

*there's a chef's table at night-time and have a couple of pints on my way home, just a chill out before you go home really, I don't do it every night... but that's my social circle... just to relax... and friendly as well. There's no, it's like in here, you're always second guessing and stuff, you know? Like, what does he want, why is he being nice?*

Kevin, Group 1

Kevin worked as a chef and therefore worked anti-social hours. His partner and children are asleep when his shift ends. This pint represents a time when he can wind-down from a

stressful shift and feel comfortable with like-minded colleagues and friends. This space and time and his social circle provide the continued hope, the pint is the means through which this is achieved. Similarly, most of the collages had a superficial appearance at first glance. However, once discussed at the interview stage revealed deeper insights.

Most participants cut out images from the magazines in order to create collages. One participant used only paint, and one only felt tip pens. I asked participants to write their names on the back of each collage/picture before beginning, this was to enable me to bring the correct artwork to each interview. These names would be later disguised so as to ensure anonymity once I had left the prison. Participants were intrusted not to write any identifying words or symbols on the front. Every participant wrote both their name and prison number on the back of their art, despite being asked to only include their name. From admission into prison, a prison id is perhaps one of the most called upon pieces of information prisoners are asked for, "name and number", rarely just name. Participants in this group had varying degrees of prison experience, from those who had served multiple sentences to those serving their first. Their current terms of imprisonment also varied between four years and six weeks. Kevin was serving six weeks and was therefore provided with a TSO on the second day of this sentence. This is a rare occurrence within the prison system with most throughcare resources used for those serving longer sentences. Nevertheless, Kevin was offered support and he agreed to it. He had served two weeks and four days when he created his collage and took part in his initial interview. For Kevin, after 20 days in prison, his identity has already become synonymous with a number. The impact of perceived and understood identity, is apparent to varying degrees across all participants, in all groups; most evident in those who took part in the second interview stage and is discussed in-depth in the findings chapters.

Participants had approximately one hour to complete their collages/pictures and were then taken back to their cells. The Throughcare Manager helped to gather the pictures, many of which had wet paint on. I was unable to leave them in the art room to dry as it was being used intermittently throughout the day. I took them to the throughcare office where there was space to spread them out and a fan to aid their drying. Throughout conducting my fieldwork at HMP Barlinnie the throughcare manager and TSOs were hospitable and welcoming. They were keen to share stories about their experiences with prisoners and help me in any way they could. They all agreed to giving me their contact details in order for me to follow-up on specific individuals under their care. They were clearly passionate



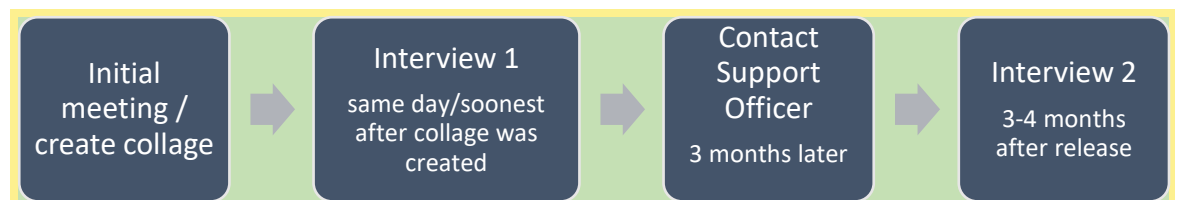
about their role within the prison service. It was noticeable in interactions I observed between prisoners and their TSOs that a good rapport was essential to their working relationship. Of the prisoners who commented specifically on their TSOs they recognised them as ‘doing their best’ and ‘alright compared to the others [other officers]’. It is recognised that the TSOs are there to help and that is respected amongst the prisoners.

First stage interviews took place over two days due to daily prison time constraints. Four interviews were conducted the same day as participants created their collages, which was a Friday. The remaining five interviews took place the following Monday. There was no noticeable difference in interview participation or recollection of creating their art between the same-day interviews and those who waited over the weekend to be interviewed. One participant commented that they had been waiting all day Friday for me to interview him and thought he was no longer included. I apologised for the confusion and explained that I too was bound by prison rules and had to leave when told, and come back when they allowed. In my response I hadn’t consciously set out to blame the prison for him not being interviewed on the Friday. However, he immediately related to me and accepted it was just another prison control issue. Although, our circumstances differed vastly, this small interaction acted as a micro-type leveller and reminded him that I was not part of the prison establishment; I too was under their control for a time, although to a far lesser degree than he was.

Each hall in Barlinnie has an administration station at the entrance; a small enclosed office space. They also have one emptied cell containing a desk and three chairs, kept as an interview space for disciplinary conversations or lawyer meetings, if for any reason on that occasion visiting spaces are out of bounds. Seven of the interviews I conducted took place in the respective meeting room cells, one in the enclosed office and one in a storage space for cleaning products and equipment as it was the only space available on that hall at the time. Two chairs were brought in for us and I had a stool to place the collage on and recording equipment. As I had had years of experience working in and visiting prisons, I was comfortable conducting the interview in these, less than ideal circumstances. Upon reflection it may have been prudent to reschedule this particular interview to when a more appropriate space become available. I didn’t fully consider how being interviewed, in what was essentially a cupboard, may have affected the participant. At this stage, he would have been unaware where any other interviews took place and was unlikely to ever know. Nevertheless, the surroundings may have impacted the extent to which he viewed the

research, or researcher, worthwhile. An office space usually set-apart for staff is more likely to signal importance. Whereas a dirty, untidy cupboard signals unprofessionalism and worthlessness. This particular interview was overall the shortest I conducted. This participant already gave the impression of disinterest from the initial stages, therefore it is not possible to correlate this directly to the environment we were in. It could be fair to suggest that the environment in which the interview took place did not act to inspire his engagement.

Once all initial interviews were concluded, I took the contact details of the respective TSOs, as they would be my gateway to organising a second interview once participants were released. I had hoped my research would follow the stages outlined below:



*Figure 4: Initial data collection design for Group 1*

However, the reality of how the research stages transpired are as follows:

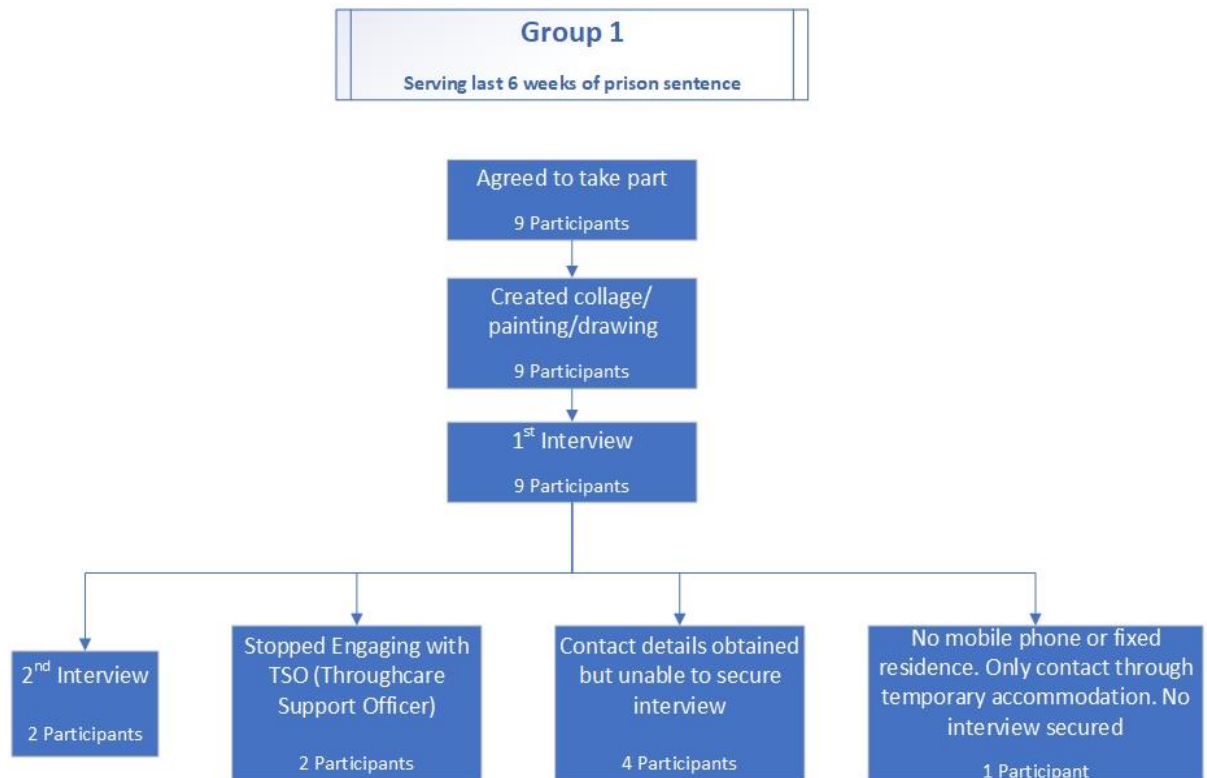


Figure 5: Actual data collection

On the approach to 3 months after initial interview I contacted the four TSOs responsible for my participants. Three out of four officers responded promptly with updates on each participant. I contacted the fourth officer on a number of occasions and did not receive a response. Whilst visiting the prison, for a purpose unrelated to this research, I met this officer in reception and he apologised for not responding to my emails and gave me an update on Kevin. He had been released after serving his six-week sentence and returned to live with his partner and children. His employment had been held for him and so was also able to return to work and therefore did not want any further contact with Throughcare or anything associated with the prison.

Eight out of nine participants were released as expected. Ian had been due to be released on tag, however, this was then revoked so remained in prison two months longer than expected. Nevertheless, he was released, and I was able to conduct his second interview 3 months after his new release date. Ian's TSO was also responsible for Thomas and David. He was particularly helpful in supporting them and this project. He invited me to join him and Ian on Ian's liberation date in order to give me a view of what both a prisoner had to encounter when initially released and to allow an insight to the work of an SO. Ian gave

consent for me to join them throughout all his meetings that day. Ian was released at 9.30am on a Tuesday. He was homeless. He did not know how to organise Universal Credit. He did not know how he could continue on his methadone program or where to arrange his prescription. He had no mobile phone or access to his bank account. Ian's journey is explored in depth in Case Study 1.

Although I had hoped to interview all participants post release, it was unsurprising that contact was challenging. During Interview 1 all participants expressed a desire to desist. Eight out of nine had served multiple sentences over a number of years and spoke of getting too old to continue that lifestyle and hoping to settle down. I had anticipated that all participants would remain in the program set out by their TSOs. Many required support with housing, finances, addiction and employment. I assumed that difficulties would arise more in the sense that participants would no longer want to engage with me, or the research, as it offered no discernible value to them. Of the four whose contact details I was given but was unable to secure a 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, engagement with their assigned TSO was limited. Once a form of accommodation was found they were less keen to continue with support. They answered calls from the TSO and gave limited detail as to how they were progressing. Their files were closed as a result of disengagement which left the TSO unable to offer full support.

## 6. Recruitment Groups 2 and 3

Groups 2 and 3 consisted of males who had served short-term prison sentences but had been released from between 3-6 months and 2+ years respectively. The initial research design set out to have 8 participants in each group. Finding participants, explaining the project, and seeking their agreement to take part was less challenging than I had expected. However, actual participation and continued involvement was far more challenging, resulting in smaller groups from which data could be gathered. Including all those who initially expressed an interest to take part, Group 2 had a total of 11 possible participants, 9 of which completed and returned consent forms. By the end of my fieldwork Group 2 had three participants who took photographs and participated in Interview 1 and only one participant who remained with the project for a 2<sup>nd</sup> interview.

Managing continual engagement was similar, though not quite as challenging, for Group 3. This group had a total of 9 possible participants, five of whom took photographs and participated in Interview 1. One of these five was involved in an incident following a football game and received a further prison sentence. The remaining four all participated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview stage. Of the four who were initially interested in taking part one received another prison sentence, one was an artist involved in full-time education and upon reflection decided the project may take up too much of his time. One moved house and in the process lost the camera containing his hope photographs. He contacted me and the gate-keeper explaining this and the complexities of his life at that time. He asked if he could still take part in the project which I agreed to and delivered another camera to him. He was uncontactable after this and also stopped engaging with community projects he was involved with. After multiple calls, texts and emails I decided that my continued pursuit of him may become intrusive and harassing so stopped contact. Similarly, the other possible participant in this group had mental health issues and had begun self-harming again and at one stage was hospitalised. I decided not to pursue him for concern of becoming too invasive and causing any further harm.

Becoming an annoyance to my participants was of ongoing concern throughout the fieldwork stage of this project. The research itself is of an intrusive nature, even in asking participants to share their ideas of hope with me. The interviews discussed life journey and in particular how they began offending, their prison experience and desisting experiences all of which included familial relationships, homelessness, dealing with addiction, feelings, experiences. I was asking participants to delve into their past and envision the future. They each revealed details of their lives which had led to a feeling of stigmatisation, hurt, shame or loneliness. When signing up to take part in this research, each participant was made aware of what it would involve and during each conversation were told they can stop at any time or refuse to answer any questions which they were uncomfortable with. Incidentally, although, some participants were upset at times, none asked to stop the interview, nor did they ask to pass over any of the questions.

I had planned the following timeline for Groups 2 and 3:

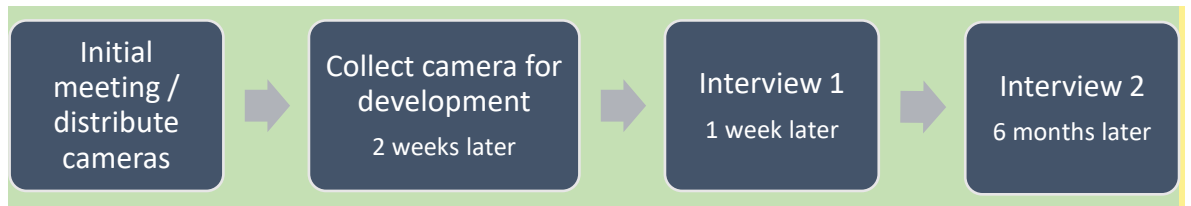


Figure 6: Initial data collection design for Groups 2 & 3

The reality of collecting the data reflected the following:

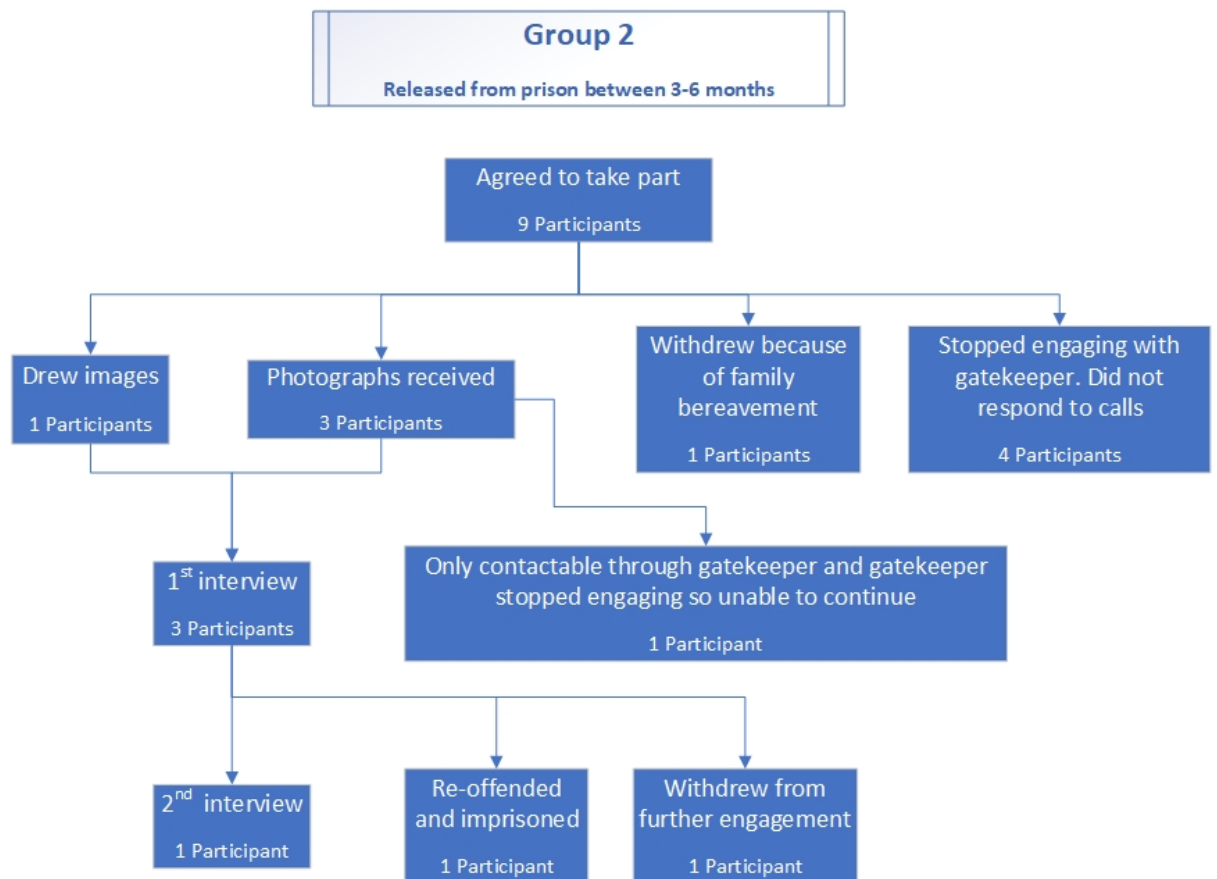


Figure 7: Actual data collection for Group 2

Groups 2 and 3 followed the same initial plan, however the actual process differed. Group 3's fieldwork process is outlined below:

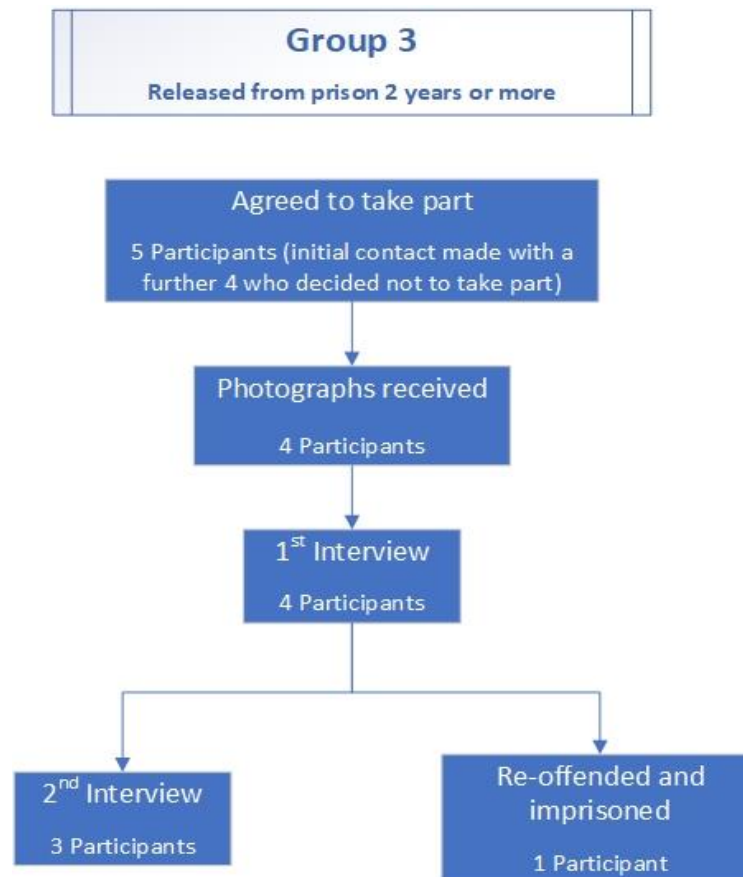


Figure 8: Actual data collection for group 3

Across both groups, the initial meeting with participants was relatively unproblematic in comparison to how the arrangement of all future meetings would unfold. As I had previously worked in various community settings, I already had professional contacts through which I was able to recruit possible participants. I recruited all participants in these groups via charitable organisations who support ex-offenders. I set up individual meetings with possible participants in either the relevant charity's premises, church café or other public café already known to the participant. Only one participant wanted to meet in their own home. He was from Group 3. All meetings and interviews took place in his home. Every other interview took place in a quiet spot of a public place.

The cameras were distributed at the initial meeting. Some participants took a disposable camera, and some opted to use their own smart device. Everyone was asked to take two

weeks collecting photographs of either things that represent hope to them or give them hope. As all data gathered is confidential, the only caveat participants were given was to ensure that none of the photos included anyone who could be easily identified, including themselves. They were able to photograph objects which represented other individuals that they could later explain during interview. One participant, across both groups, completed the photography element in two weeks, Case Study 3, Sean, from group 3. All others took much longer with the remaining timescales varying between two to three months. It was during this time I became very much aware of what Sharpe describes as a Sociological stalker, who ‘use(s) the term as a rhetorical device intended to foreground the affective state of the researcher as much as the experience of research participants’ (2017: 242). At times the term stalker seemed too lenient, for me ‘hunter’ felt more appropriate.

My objective was clear. The researcher / participant relationship is itself a selfish one. At the outset it was my hope that participants would find taking part in this project helpful. That talking about such issues would act as some form of catharsis. Perhaps creating collages and taking photographs of, what on the surface seemed a positive topic, hope, would in itself instil a sense of hopefulness or act as a reminder of sources of hope during a time which may otherwise feel hopeless. However, I was always aware that my main purpose was gathering data that could be used in a PhD thesis. This was my motivation. The extent to which this may have been helpful to participants was secondary, a reflexively difficult admission. Although it is worth noting that ensuring no harm was caused to them was a priority. In an ideal situation, participants would have collected their photographs and contacted me to collect the camera so it can be developed. However, what transpired was numerous phone calls from me to participants checking on their progress. This is a widely experienced pattern in longitudinal research.

An important issue that researchers need to consider is how much time and effort they are willing to allocate to retain individual participants. Researchers must weigh the time and cost required to retain ‘difficult’ participants versus participant loss and the potential negative effects attrition may have on their long-term outcomes.

(Patton, 2005: 15)

Although this is not a longitudinal study, the experience was similar especially when trying to secure second interviews. As the sole researcher on this project, having experienced the loss of a number of participants before completing the first and second stages of this research. I felt those who remained were illusive and precious. I feared a further decrease in the number of participants. I was aware that all participants were vulnerable to varying



degrees. Most had hectic lifestyles managing relationships, housing and addiction. I followed a similar pattern for chasing all participants on the approach requiring photos or arranging a meeting: a phone call, leave a voicemail, send a text in case this was an easier form of contact, if no response, send a text with a tone of ensuring they are ok rather than chasing them for an answer, another phone call. If there was no response at following this, I would contact the relevant gatekeepers to check if participants were indeed ok, ensuring that it was appropriate for me to continue contacting them. On one occasion, one participant and his partner had suffered a miscarriage, so I decided to stop contacting him. Another was imprisoned and therefore uncontactable. The overwhelming difficulty in contacting participants was the frequency in which they changed their phone numbers. Often, I would contact a gatekeeper and the response would be; 'they have a new number, try this one...'. Again, this reflects inconsistency and hectic lifestyle many of the participants found themselves in. Two participants from Group 3 seemed to have well balanced settled lives having been out of prison for 8 years and 15 years. Both had families, their own home and full-time employment. Although agreeing to complete the photography stage of the project in two weeks, they too took 3 weeks and 2 months respectively.

I had given participants two weeks to complete the photography stage which, now looking back, was perhaps not enough time for them to thoughtfully consider what they would like to include in their 'hope photos.' They were taking part voluntarily and understandably this was not a priority in their otherwise busy lives. Although I realise the time-scale I expected participants to achieve was unrealistic, I also believe that if I had given a lot of time to complete this aspect of the research then it would have been in danger of falling by the wayside. The two-week follow-up phone call meant the project remained in their mind and had not become a forgotten conversation.

Group 2 eventually consisted of three participants who participated fully in the creative stage and first interview stage: two participants collected photographs and one chose to draw his hopeful images. The hope was to re-interview six months after the initial interview stage. During this time, one participant was re-imprisoned, one no longer wished to continue in the project as he was struggling with mental health issues, and the one remaining participant engaged with the second interview stage. Group 3 was finally made up of five participants all of whom took part in the photography and first interview stage. Four out of five took part in the second interview. I tried on a number of occasions to

contact the fifth member of this group. The gatekeeper also attempted to contact him, however, after numerous calling and texting attempts and 3 phone number changes, I decided to stop contact. One, out of the four who did participate in the second interview, was under the influence of alcohol which made me question the validity of the interview, although it was recorded, it did not form part of the analysis (discussed earlier in this chapter in section 3).

## 7. Working with gatekeepers

By and large, across all three groups my gatekeepers were incredibly helpful in terms of recruiting participants and supporting me in maintaining contact with them. In the cases where participants fell away from the project, they had complex issues to deal with and had ceased contact with the gatekeepers, so the gatekeepers were unable to help me with further contact. Many researchers, in particular those who are students, find the power imbalance between researcher and gatekeeper challenging. Wolf (1999:5) differentiates between the constraining and directing influence authorities and organisations can have, 'tactical organizational power', and a 'relational power' which is reflected in the interactions between individuals.

All Group 1 participants were recruited under the guidance of the Scottish Prison Service (SPS). Group 2 and Group 3 participants were recruited through charitable organisations. The SPS influenced the nature of the fieldwork, in so much as I was unable to bring cameras into the prison, and therefore imaginary photography collage was used in substitution. Due to the time and staff constraints on the prison, instead of individual collage creating, which I had originally sought by means of encouraging freedom of expression and anonymity, the collage creating stage was done as a group. In hindsight, the group setting worked well as some participants encouraged each other with ideas whereas those who desired to work completely on their own and interpret the task in their own way were able to. The individual interviews took place over two days, however, if I had been unable to complete all of the interviews, I would have been allowed further access in order to complete this stage. The only contact I had with the SPS hierarchy was when seeking ethical approval. All other contact was via the Throughcare Support Manager and TSOs. Because I have had experience of visiting a number of Scottish prisons and at the time of

research lead a study group every Friday in Barlinnie<sup>4</sup>, I was familiar with the prison environment and vernacular. I was never aware of any tactical power plays by either the SPS or the Throughcare Support team. Individual officers were responsible for recruiting participants on my behalf. Through informal conversations in their office, I learned that they used their discretion in choosing people from their caseloads on the basis of who they thought were likely candidates to maintain desistance once released and also who they believed would engage with my project. I think my age, previous employment, current voluntary work, and possibly social class, allowed for a possible relational power imbalance to level out. I made clear that I was there to learn from them, but from the outset, I was treated like an insider; of course the extent to which they let me 'in' was controlled by them so I was unlikely to be fully integrated into the team in such a short space of time. Those who have chosen, and have been chosen, to work in Throughcare, all had many years of experience working on the prison hall before taking up this post. Their desire to support prisoners and their desistance was reflected in their friendly encouraging nature. Each could be described as a 'people person' which made coming into their office a comfortable environment. They recognised me as someone who regularly visited the prison, outwith this project, although I'd never met any of them before. Whilst in the office, which is surrounded by windows overlooking the staff carpark, we watched one of my colleagues' park and walk up to the prison. This then opened up conversation about what that group was like which immediately built rapport. Their years of experience far outweighed mine. However, I have worked in prison and community settings, so we were able to discuss similar experiences and joke about particular situations. The familiarity with which they welcomed me as a student/researcher made it easy for me to ask questions and also meant I was never intimidated to contact them again when attempting to arrange follow up interviews.

The gatekeepers for participants in Groups 2 and 3 were all from charitable organisations who support those who have been imprisoned. Again, although I had never met them and had never worked for the same organisations as them, we had previous colleagues and acquaintances in common which helped build initial rapport. I used four main gatekeepers: one through whom I recruited the majority of participants for both groups; two took part in the research themselves, as members of Group 3, as they had previously been imprisoned

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<sup>4</sup> I decided not to include any of the prisoners who attend this study group in this research. I was aware that I didn't want them to feel like they had always been 'researched' and that that had been my motivation throughout my time with them. It was important that the relationship and rapport I had built with these individuals was untarnished by this project.

and recruited more participants through their organisations; and one who initially was keen to help, however, proved to be more challenging to contact than many of the participants.

Susan worked for a charitable organisation in central Scotland and agreed to help recruit participants for this research. She found two who she arranged a meeting with and I was able to explain the project, gain the consent and distribute cameras. One participant took photographs and returned the camera to me for development. The other lost his camera. I offered to give him another camera but instead Susan said she would take the photographs on her smart phone for him and send them to me. She asked him what kind of images he would like to include, and they arranged a date to go walking together to gather photographs and it would also act as a time to discuss any difficulties which he may need support with. After leaving this meeting with them I was hopeful that both participants would remain part of the project. I did not receive these photographs and I was unable to contact either participant. I contacted Susan, left messages and texts. She would return my calls after a few days and was apologetic and maintained that she would still support both participant's involvement and get back to me. This continued for a couple of months until I decided it was unproductive to pursue further. Susan was the contact for one of the participants as he did not have a phone. The other participants had a phone, lost it, bought a new one, changed his number, then no longer responded to my calls. 'Stalking' Susan felt different from the constant hounding which I felt I often did with participants. I did not regard her as vulnerable, as I did participants. She was a professional in her field and as a result I found the challenges of this communication particularly frustrating. From the discussions I was able to have with Susan, it was clear she had a busy caseload and cared a lot about the individuals under her care. It is completely understandable if she simply did not have time to help me. She perhaps over promised to me before realising she would be unable to deliver. She too perhaps saw little or no value in participants being part of the project. Or, perhaps participants no longer wanted to be involved and wanted to avoid telling me. All valid responses. However, I never found out the reason for unresponsiveness due to the inability to maintain communication.

The gatekeeper researcher relationship is an important one during the recruitment process and throughout fieldwork. 'Previous researchers have highlighted how identifiable commonalities between researcher and respondents can engender rapport and hence encourage trust' (Davies and Peters 2014: 41). This felt apparent in my experience with the TSO gatekeepers and the majority of third sector gatekeepers. Roesch-Marsh and

colleagues (2011) discuss how personalities and identity can also affect relationships with gatekeepers. Again, this may have played an important role in maintaining the majority of contact with gatekeepers and may also have been the simple issue which affected the one that did not work out. The gatekeepers who made this project possible had a great deal of influence and power, something which is often regarded as an obstacle for the researcher (Davies and Peters 2014: 43). However, without their influence in participants lives, in terms of encouragement and maintaining contact with them, and me, I may have been unable to conduct any second interviews. Across all Groups, participants spoke highly of their respective gatekeepers. There may be an element of fear that I would report back any negativity, but all respondents knew their answers were confidential and were reminded intermittently throughout interview that this was the case.

## 8. Analysing the data

The images created were used to initiate and inform discussion and were not originally considered for thorough analysis. As well as being a point of elicitation, they affirmed subjects that were raised at the interview stage. The interviews were the primary data source and were analysed following a process similar to that outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1) Familiarisation with the data -

All interviews were transcribed, read and re-read.

2) Code generation -

All transcriptions were uploaded into analysis software NVivo and codes were created across the entire data set.

3) Selection of case studies -

Three participants were selected as case studies, (see section 9 of this chapter for reasoning). These transcripts were then read and re-read, re-coded numerous times.

4) Produced case studies -

Extracts of dialogue giving a narrative description of understanding, and experiences of hope before, after, and during the desistance process were collated and interwoven with existing theoretical frameworks.

5) Searching for themes -

Codes were collated into potential themes led by the research question and all data was gathered pertaining to these themes.

6) Reviewed themes -

Re-read entire data set and listened to interview recordings, including those used for case study, in order to ensure possible themes adequately represented the narratives presented.

7) Defined and named themes -

Specifics of each theme refined and names generated, were informed by existing theological theory and desistance-based literature.

8) Writing up thematic findings -

The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples. Final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.<sup>5</sup>

All the interviews did not follow participants lives in a temporally sequential manner, so a narrative style analysis was used in order to uncover how participants made sense of their own experiences and stories, as well as to examine the data for hidden meanings.

Discussing analysis methods in particular reference to thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006: 80) contend:

However, nor do we think there is one ideal theoretical framework for conducting qualitative research, or indeed one ideal method. What is important is that the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions, and recognize them as decisions.

This type of analysis also works in conjunction with adaptive reasoning as it allows for constant dialogue between theory and data: the data doesn't change but the lens through which it is viewed brings into focus elements which may otherwise seem insignificant were a different lens used.

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Braun and Clarke's *Six Phases of Thematic Analysis* (2006: 87-93). I have included two extra stages, 3 and 4 above, as this project also included a case study approach.

The diagram below illustrates the different stages of my analysis process:

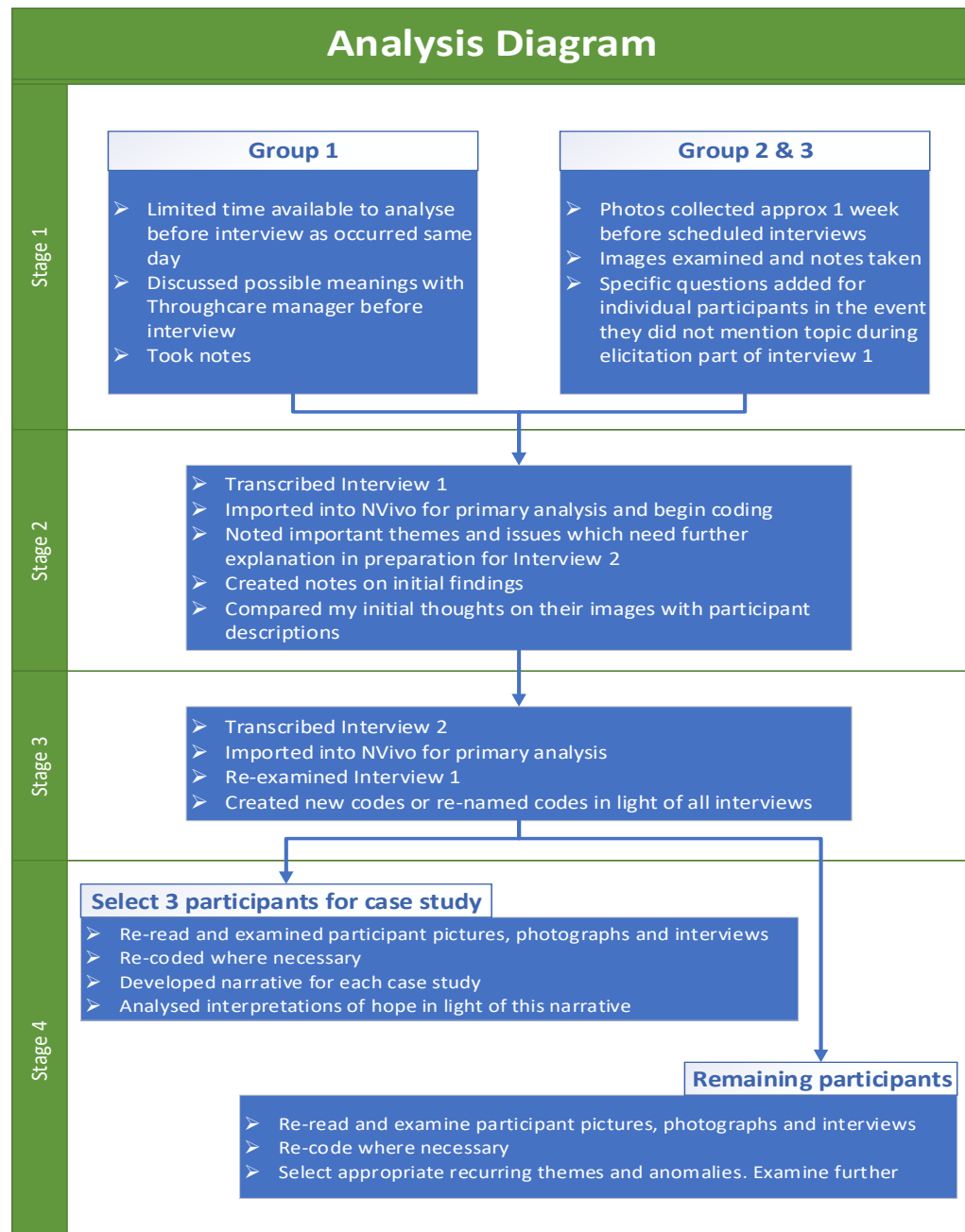


Figure 9: Analytical process

Once all the interviews across both stages were transcribed, I inputted the scripts into NVivo. Although my interviews followed basic themes and were similar, their semi-structured format meant that the initial coding themes were changed and reworked a number of times. NVivo proved to be a more efficient method of seeing patterns and made changing code names and emphasis more accessible. As the central theme of this project is ‘hope’, NVivo also created visual representations of how often, and in relation to what, that participants used the word. These representations are also useful in relation to other



specific codes as otherwise results would be marred by the frequency with which I used the word ‘hope’ across all interviews.

Although NVivo offers the facility to analyse pictures and photographs I decided to do this manually. The collages, pictures and photographs were used by way of introducing the subject matter of hope and inciting participants to think about how they experience and define hope. The images and aspects of the collages were selected by each participant. During the first interview they were in a sense analysed by them. I began each interview by asking them to describe what the photograph was of, why they included it and how it represents hope to them. As participants are faced with these images again, they are not only recalling why they initially chose them, they are also examining them for deeper meaning at that moment. They perhaps assign meaning, where at first its inclusion may have seemed merely emotional. For example, Phil (Group 3) included a photograph of a football trophy which he initially described as:

*Football's been a massive part of changing my life as well. It really has. It's something I've enjoyed doing. I've ... It's like anything like ... You go if you enjoy doing it... So I've really enjoyed it, Sarah. I'm not bad at it. I went on to coach as well there. It's ... We got to ... We won one of the cup finals and we were second in the league*

Then when asked further questions about it, the trophy and football represented far more than an enjoyable hobby:

*Something to do. A purpose. Mixing with other people was good, as well, Sarah. Definitely enjoyed the camaraderie, the interaction, and the team winning...But being part of something really felt good. Beneficial. A sense of responsibility. A sense of purpose, again. It was a direction I was wanting to go in, and I was drawn to, the people and fun aspect. It released good endorphins as well, so ... (laughs)...The exercise, probably. It was a good feel factor,*

This primary stage analysis by the participant revealed the importance of building relationships, having purpose and responsibility and the benefits of exercise. Later during this interview Phil went on to talk about how he has found it helpful to set goals and look back at what he has achieved. So, whilst analysing this with the rest of his data this trophy could also symbolise the significance Phil places on achievement and being able to measure his success. Phil has been sober for 8 years and has a box where he keeps all his ‘landmark chips’ marking the timeline of his sobriety. Again, supporting the idea Phil seeks comfort and hope in being able to look over the goals he has set and achieved. The photographs and collages across all groups elicit participant imaginings of hope which they

can expound upon and which I then analysed further through the lens of what they shared during interview.

Analysing the visual elements of data helped support findings which become apparent through the interview data. However, there is a constant danger of over interpreting the data. I was wary of attributing too much meaning to pictures and ensured that during the analysis process I took a step back to view them as just an image, before getting lost in a void of amateur psychoanalysis. Throughout the analysis I listened to some of the recordings again. This helped me to be transported back to the actual interview moment allowing me to remember and visualise the body language and gestures that were made at those times.

## 9. Reoccurring themes

After analysing the data, as outlined above, common themes emerged as a result of commonality and recognising theological significance. Three participants stories were selected as case studies, (reasoning outlined below in section 10), and all of the participants contributions, including case studies, informed the themes that are discussed in the thematic chapter. Particular themes were not established at the outset of this research. Existing theological and desistance theoretical frameworks guided the overarching research question and the questions which would later be put to participants during the interview stages. Themes that arose such as mercy and injustice, imagination and virtue have been touched upon in previous desistance literature, however, they have not been expounded in great detail. Mercy and virtue both have a well-established body of theological theory to draw from. The theme of imagination, although to a lesser degree, has also been explored by theologians in particular with relation to the interpretation of Scripture. It is argued, sparking some contention, that true interpretation can only be achieved with the use of imagination via “imaginative construal” (Kelsey, 1980).

The theme of imagination is a methodological outlier in the analysis as it was generated by examining the participants’ artwork and photographs as a whole rather than for the individual aspects which they attributed hope to. Ongoing analysis, listening and re-listening; reading and re-reading; coding and re-coding brought about an in-depth knowledge of the data. Re-listening to the interviews accompanied with reading fieldnotes

allowed for a deeply immersive experience whilst remembering the environmental sights and sounds during interviewing and the demeanour and non-verbal communications of participants. As I engaged with my imagination to relive the fieldwork experience, I became aware of the extent to which I had required participants to engage with their imaginations, particularly during the creative stage of the field work. I examined the artwork and photographs as whole contributions rather than as individual conversation prompts.

When one perspective fails to shed light on what is happening other perspectives are tried, and if none of them works, the question is changed and maybe too, the modes of knowing and recognition. Perhaps a metaphor sheds light on what has previously been so puzzling; perhaps there is a sudden awareness of a glaring absence in the text. (Carlen, 2016:21)

Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010:3), speaking specifically about collage as a qualitative research tool, identify three ways in which they contribute to a data collection, “as a reflective process, as a form of elicitation, and as a way of conceptualizing ideas”. This observation is also true for the collection of photography. At the outset, all collages, pictures, paintings and photographs were collected for the sole purpose of elicitation; to allow participants “thinking time” to conceptualise for themselves what could be an abstract idea and to promote the articulation of this conceptualisation at the interview stage. In this project, each participant was given an opportunity to discuss their pictures in detail and explain the significance of each aspect. However, that does not negate the possibility for non-verbal expressions through their artwork or photography. There is an unspoken creative property in this research; unspoken in that the extent to which any participant would probe imaginatively into how they represented their experienced hope, and the extent to which they would allow themselves to imagine future orientated hope. The process of creating these images required a degree of reflexivity from participants as they chose what to include and exclude.

Writing about the role of arts-based interventions in desistance, McNeill et al (2011: 89) conclude although they may be insufficient in supporting desistance, ‘they can play a vital role in enabling prisoners to imagine and to embark on that [desistance] journey’. They ‘may help prisoners to imagine different possible futures, different social networks, different identities and different lifestyles’ (ibid). This raises the question, to what extent does a person’s ability to engage with their imagination affect their desire to desist, their

belief in their own ability to desist, and their ability or desire to be hopeful. With these three questions in mind I examined the transcripts alongside the artwork and photographs looking specifically for indicators that would highlight significance between imagination and desistance; and imagination and hope. The suitability of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures, but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Patterns were found, although not conclusive, as the most simplistic answer may be that some participants were less interested in participating in the creative aspect of the research. Nonetheless, the patterns were strong enough to enable the exploration of imagination as a theme. This theme in particular did not passively emerge from the data, ‘the final analysis is the product of deep and prolonged data immersion, thoughtfulness and reflection, something that is active and generative’ (Braun and Clarke 2019: 591).

## 10. Why Case Studies?

At the outset, the focus was to collect data that could be used to create generalisations which could be made across significant junctures of time in the desistance process. Originally, each research group had the same number of participants and it was expected that themes would emerge. During analysis, common themes began to emerge forming a picture of generalisability. However, as the research focus is on desistance journeys, the extent to which these observations could be measured across time became more fragile. Some participants were not available for second interviews, which meant similar time frame journeys could not be compared. Some disengaged with me and their support networks, this was particularly apparent in Group 1. Although the tendency is to assimilate disengagement with negative outcomes; re-offending, homelessness, addiction and/or broken relationships, this is of course unverifiable. The diversity of Group 3 tended towards forced generalisations which felt unrepresentative.

Case studies can be selected for their typicality, or at the opposite end, their contrasting extremes (Denscombe, 2003). The selection process used in this case has elements of both. The analysis stage reflected that of a standard thematic analysis (see chapter 6 for detailed description). The emerging themes, discussed fully in Chapter 10, highlighted specific individuals for whom elements of hope, or desistance, were most apparent. It also highlighted those who spoke in greater depth about the themes. Participants’ in-depth

reflection opened the gateway to a more reflexive analysis. Where the majority of participants relied on descriptive dialogue, those selected for case study engaged in a form of self-analysis during discussions. This made for richer data, and enforced deeper reflexive engagement on my part. Those selected as case studies created a 3-dimensional data source of their own volition, generating a receptive basis for both theological and criminological investigation.

It is important to note that these case studies cannot be regarded as typical examples of desistance; accepting the extent to which a *typical* case can exist is debateable.<sup>6</sup> In many ways, the case studies represent the extremes in this data set (note, not extremes across the whole possible spectrum of offenders or desisters, just of this specific data set). Case Study 1, Ian, had served more prison sentences than any other member of Group 1. It would later emerge that he also had the most striking ‘hope conversion’. Andy, from Group 2, amongst all the participants involved, had a distinct view on his offending behaviour, and is also the only participant to have identified as having a faith prior to offending therefore came to this project with a theological basis to his understanding of hope. Overall, Group 3 participants proved to be the most diverse group. Despite 2 years being a significant point on the desistance journey, where a return to offending is least likely, at the second interview stage, one participant was held on remand. Another had served a short sentence between interview stages and was intoxicated at the second interview stage. Two other participants displayed the greatest stability, had been out of prison 15 years and 8 years and were no longer battling, to a gruelling extent, the challenges of desistance. Whereas Sean still very much identified as an ex-offender, a desister. He recognised himself as still being on a journey rather than having arrived.

Where Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019a, 2019b, 2021) follows thematical analysis steps, such as Braun and Clarke’s six-stage framework (2006; 2019a; Clarke & Braun, 2013), it also requires critical reflexivity on behalf of the researcher. Indeed, Braun and Clarke’s method was followed in order to analyse the themes across the whole data set (see beginning of chapter 10 for discussion on this). However, the selection of these case studies is reliant upon a two-step reflexivity. The initial step instinctively taken by the participant and the second by me, as I sought to understand their life stories,

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<sup>6</sup> HM Inspectorate of Probation recognises that ‘the desistance journey is different for everyone.’ Online resource, <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/research/the-evidence-base-probation/models-and-principles/desistance/>

as well as how they attributed meaning to specific ideas or events. Describing atypical case study selection, Denscombe (2003: 33) notes that ‘a specified factor is seen in relief – highlighted in its effect’. Where art presented in relief allows for different viewpoints; what can be seen, and what is hidden, is dependent upon the vantage point of the observer. The data presented in the following case studies allows me as researcher to recognise my own reflexive vantage point, to engage with theoretical viewpoints, and bring these into conversation with participants’ own reflexivity.

## Chapter 7: Case Study 1 - Ian's Hope Journey

*Aye, hope's overrated and trusting people is overrated.*

*[Hope] it's the pinnacle, you know, an' all these other good things kinda branch out hope... It goes together, you know, tae make something better.*

### 1. Ian's offending background

Ian joined the project whilst serving the last six weeks of an 18-month prison sentence in HMP Barlinnie. When I initially met Ian, he had been planning to be released from prison on electronic tag, however, between this meeting and his first recorded interview he found out that he had been denied early release and would serve the remainder of his sentence in prison. From this participant group, there were another two individuals who had thought release on tag would be possible, to later be told that their application had been denied and that they would remain in prison for the duration of their sentence. Like the others, although initially disappointed, Ian resigned himself to accepting this decision as just another aspect of life that was outwith his control. Although no longer qualifying for early release, Ian was willing to continue with his participation in the project.

Ian was encouraged to sell and take drugs by his father as a child. Due to instability in his home situation he moved away from his parents to live with his grandmother from the age of 13. *Been doing it from when I was 13. Put out of my ma's at 13 and my granny's, stayed with her. But emm all my family used to like sell drugs and stuff like that so I just took them do you know what I mean?* Between the ages of 18 and around 30 Ian engaged in prolific criminal activity, during which, for the most part, he was homeless, *that's been my life, hostels and jail.* At around 30 he began working on the railways and describes this as, *that period was like the first time I can remember being drug free.* Following a tumultuous relationship break down Ian was reintroduced to drug taking and he *went aff the rails.* Ian began getting more involved in harmful drug taking, eventually resulting in him losing his job, home and cars, *'cause I had like a Land Rover, I had a Mercedes and it was the first time in my life I had worked hard to get all that stuff and then it all just went. Six year to get it all and six months to lose it all.* Ian's life then spiralled into criminality and further drug use. Ian, unable to recall for certain but thinks he has served 7 prison sentences in total and *loads of remands.*

## 2. Initial participation stages: collage and first interview

As Ian joined the project whilst still serving his prison sentence, I was unable to provide him with a camera to capture images depicting hope. Instead, Ian was provided with various materials in order to create a collage which represented hope for him.<sup>7</sup> He was asked to imagine places or objects which provided hope for him. Initially, he was unable to think of anything that provided hope for him at this stage in his life. Prior to entering prison on this occasion Ian was unemployed, homeless, his relationship with his partner and step-daughter had broken down, contact with his mother and sister was limited due to pressures which Ian's criminal behaviour and, in particular, his struggles with substance abuse had placed on these relationships too. These were all aspects of Ian's life which I learned later during the first interview stage, which occurred after he had made the collage. The only information I had about Ian was passed on from The West of Scotland Throughcare Support Manager who himself had little to do with Ian. All he knew about Ian was from case notes and conversations with Ian's specific Throughcare Support Officer (TSO), who I met only after meeting Ian. Like all the participants in Group 1, Ian was chosen by his TSO and agreed to take part. Due to the time constraints and accessibility limits placed on prison-based research I had to seek consent from potential participants and complete the collages on the same day. I explained the nature of my research to Ian, went through the plain language statement, sought consent, and he agreed to take part. I then had to go straight into asking him to create a 'hope collage'. I was unaware of Ian's circumstances, his frame of mind, his past and his present, except that he was in prison and he met the participant requirements I presented to Throughcare. Ian and I were strangers, no proper rapport established, very little common ground, that we knew of, yet were surrounded by art and craft material discussing hope.

Ian sat amongst the group of participants. Six out of nine grabbing for the magazines to find the best pictures and ignite inspiration; one wavering as to whether creating a collage or picture of any kind was "for him"; one quietly drawing with intent, uniquely creating exactly the only collage that reflecting hope inside the prison walls, which was Ian staring at his surroundings. I asked him if he would like a magazine to give him ideas, he didn't. He just wanted to think. Ian didn't cut pictures out of magazines, he didn't point out his

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<sup>7</sup> A detailed description of the materials used is given in Chapter 4



dream partner, his dream car, or dream dinner, as much of the discussion with the others unfolded. Ian picked the three primary colours and began to paint, a blue house with a red roof, a blue car, red grass/gravel outside the house, a red mobile phone, himself as a red stick man waving, a yellow sun, a yellow bicycle and yellow weights. Hope, for Ian was in normality:



Figure 10: Picture, Ian (Group 1)

*It's just my own house, eh, just having normal things like a phone and a bike and going to the gym and being happy. Emm and maybe getting my license back. That's kinda it... Just normal things. Aye. Nothing extravagant.*

It was in what he once had, what he saw others having, and what he hoped to have once again. Ian's collage was unique in its simplicity however, his collage reflects the hopes of all participants in Group 1: similarities that can be explicitly seen in some of their collages, some who only revealed these specific hopes through interview. For those who had never been homeless, home was a source of hope, rather than a thing hoped for; for those with positive family relationships these continued to provide hope. For Ian, it was something he hoped for. Cars featured in six out of nine collages, four of those were high range versions of what was waiting for them at home, one showed car parts representing a broken car which the participant longed to fix and a hobby that brought purpose and joy, another drew his car which he also looked forward to fixing, and Ian's simple painting of a car, something which he had once owned and lost, but hoped to have again. Although Ian's collage has many common features with other participants in his group, he is the only person to depict himself in the collage. He paints himself waving, and when describing his

collage, refers to this aspect as, *being happy*. In the first stage of interview he talks about happiness, *Sometimes, nah, sometimes I beat myself up and other times... the now... I'm happy here you know. I know that sounds sad but I'm just happy here*. Ian had been moved onto a quieter, smaller wing of the prison and no longer had to share a cell with anyone else. This environment helped him feel more settled. Happiness for Ian was the absence of additional aggravation caused, for him specifically, by younger prisoners.

Aligning with both offending and desistance theories, Ian's criminality was most apparent as a young man, until during a prison sentence which he served into his 30s, he decided to embark upon working towards gaining all those images which he included in his collage and live a life without criminality. He was able to achieve this. Upon being released from prison he enlisted himself on a residential drug rehabilitation program with Phoenix Futures which enabled him to overcome drug abuse, *this is going to sound strange right but that period was like the first time I can remember being drug free*. Although in some ways the relationship with his partner provided stability and 'normality' it turned into a 'crazy relationship'. Ian didn't elaborate on the 'crazy' nature of the relationship during interview, however, he referred to it during the time I spent with him on his release day. His partner was in well paid employment and her family were wealthy. His partner began taking drugs recreationally which made her life more chaotic. Her family took her daughter and paid for her to go to boarding school in order to protect her from her mother's behaviour. During this time Ian witnessed his partner taking drugs, however, remained able to remain drug-free himself. He attributes a large part of this to the unsociable hours that he worked at the railway, meaning he simply spent less time with his partner. This relationship eventually broke down around the same time as Ian got a promotion to a managerial position, he describes it as, *I was only working two hours a night and then clearing a thousand pound a week:*

*I didn't know what to dae wi myself, I just end up taking drugs again and then I get into that kinda circle, do you know what I mean? Then when I was meant to be at work for only two hours that I had to be at a certain bit on the railway line and I was using and then I ended up, all the trains were delayed for Gourock to Glasgow man and all of that. But eh I didn't get the sack for that, I went in and they put us back in the squads and I tried to pull it back together but I went, it was a Saturday night and went out pure rough and I couldn't do shit... I couldn't do the, the work so I just walked off. I tried. Do you know what I mean?*

He gained employment with a railway company and worked his way up through the ranks, he bought a house, had two cars and a steady relationship, becoming step-dad to his

partner's daughter. Ian was able to sustain this for approximately six years, until as he describes, *I lost the plot, I just went bonkers*. Desistance theory often highlights relationships and employment, as not only desistance triggers but also life factors which facilitate the sustaining of desistance. For Ian, however, from his perspective, these also prompted and enabled his return to drug taking, and in turn criminality. His six years of desistance were followed by nine years of criminal behaviour and periods of imprisonment.

### 3. Ian's liberation day

During the fieldwork stage of this research I kept in contact with all the TSOs who were responsible for the participants in Group 1. The main reason for this was so that I would be able to contact participants in order to arrange a follow-up interviews six months after release. Ian was released later than we had initially expected when first agreeing to the take part in this project, so timescales differed slightly for him. However, I was able to meet with Ian on the day of his release, along with his TSO, and I was then able to arrange his follow up interview for six months after that date. As previously stated, Ian was unemployed, homeless and, having been addicted to heroin, was on a methadone script which he would need to arrange himself once out of prison. Ian and his TSO allowed me to spend the day with them as they organised housing, benefits and medical arrangements. I did not record conversations at any point during this day, nor did I arrive with pre-prepared questions for Ian. Instead, I used this time to observe and experience what it was like for someone like Ian leaving prison with essentially nothing. Although Ian began the day very anxious and quiet, unsure of what lay ahead of him, as the day went on he became more relaxed and opened up about his fears and aspects of his past. It was during this time that I learned most about Ian's previous term of desistance, which he had spoken briefly about during interview but was less keen on elaborating on details. As we travelled around Glasgow to the homeless medical centre, his sister's house, Shopping Centre, Job Centre and finally to where Ian had been given temporary accommodation, he pointed out the kind of home he used to own, showed us the cars he had previously owned, described life with his partner and reminisced over what his life had been like. He emphasised a number of times he didn't want that particular life back, he just wanted to be ok, predominantly to have a roof of some sort over his head.

Ian was released just after 9am and his accommodation had not been confirmed until 3.30pm that same day, so it is of little surprise that this would have been his principal concern, although he had no expectations of what his accommodation was likely to be or where, he spoke of the sun being out so the street wouldn't be too bad, he knew he could present himself at Glasgow City Mission as homeless and would be provided with a sleeping bag. He hoped for a bed and a roof, but this hope was mixed with doubts and resignation. Ian, the TSO and I sat on a wall enjoying the sunshine whilst waiting for Ian's allotted time at the job centre. As we were now in late afternoon, I too began to lose hope in Ian finding accommodation. There was a tangible sense of relief and joy amongst three of us as the call from the prison housing officer came to confirm Ian did in fact have somewhere to stay, even if only on a temporary basis. Immediately Ian began making plans as to how he would now spend his first evening out of prison. He didn't want to associate with anyone who he knew from before his last sentence. His family were reluctant to spend any time with him because he had previously caused them a lot of distress and relationships were now strained.

Ian wanted to go for a walk and go to the cinema on his own, no hassle from anyone else, just to relax, feel *normal* and watch a movie. As we listened to Ian talk about his plans for that evening, all three of us became more hopeful. The positive call from the housing officer made the visit to the job centre feel more relaxed. On the short walk to the job centre Ian began working out how he could travel between his accommodation and the *homeless doctor* where he had to collect his methadone each day until details could be confirmed with a closer pharmacy. He began planning where he could go each day, he remembered the travel routes that he could take. He decided what he would have for dinner. This one step, albeit a huge step for Ian, sparked a completely different outlook towards everything. From this one call he began to make plans and have ideas, all of which were non-existent prior to knowing where he would stay. This is perhaps unsurprising given the huge burden that comes with the fear of homelessness; when faced with spending the night, and possibly many nights, in a sleeping bag on the streets planning anything else would seem futile. A somewhat hostile reception at the job centre and some confusion over who Ian would be meeting re-ignited Ian's feelings of being unable to rely on anyone and being discriminated against. Once all his applications were processed, we returned to the car with Ian remarking, *she actually turned out to be alright*; about the job centre advisor. Still a little on edge about what the coming days would hold, Ian was settling into no longer being imprisoned.

Traveling from the medical centre to the shopping centre, I sat on the backseat of the car attempting to give Ian some space to speak to his TSO and only join conversation when I felt appropriate. Ian asked me how I was getting on with my project and if people from the prison were helpful. He then went on to tell me he hated talking to me that day. I apologised. He hated talking about hope because he had no hope. He told me that after I had interviewed him, he went straight back into his cell and closed the door. Ian was on a smaller protection wing and therefore was allowed privileges such as being able to walk around the wing and interact with others, he was not on the 23-hour lockdown type regime that most in the prison were. He chose to sit alone in his cell and close the door behind him, shutting out the rest of the wing. He didn't enjoy thinking about what he once had and had then lost. I apologised again and thanked him for allowing me to be there on his first day out of prison. He told me it didn't matter to him if I was there or not, Ian was familiar with having little or no control over who he would speak to, although his permission was sought prior to me joining him on his liberation day. He explained, that although he hated the interview that day, he later realised that it did him good to think about these things, to properly think about coming out of prison. Hoping for too much made him angry, all he hoped for was to be left alone, for trouble to leave him alone.

#### 4. Ian's first interview: the pains and absence of hope

Returning to his first interview after creating his collage Ian was asked if he could name even one source of hope, anything that could provide hope, he answered, *I don't know. I cannae answer it... Because I don't know. I don't know.* Searching his mind for a reason to hope, he was unable to articulate or imagine even one. An inability to locate in one's mind where hope could arise coupled with an inability to imagine anything worth hoping for, in terms of believing that those hopes could be actualised is the very embodiment of hopelessness. Ian was one of nine participants in Group 1, all of whom, during the collage creating and first interview were serving the last few weeks of their prison sentence. Towards the end of every interview participants were asked if they had to name their main source of hope, what would it be. All referenced family members, mostly their children, who gave them hope in the sense that they believed they would be able to stay out of prison for them. Their desire to support and provide for them was a catalyst to encourage both desistance and produce hope. Ian didn't have children, or any family members that he

could pinpoint as providing hope. His grandmother, who he had lived with from the age of 13, would visit him, write to him and send him packages during the prison sentences he served as a younger man; she was his main family support until she died. Ian had limited contact with his mother and sister and no longer had any intimate relationships.

Although, given the choice, Ian would choose to be on the outside, he did recognise that, for him, prison offers opportunities that he would be unable access on the outside:

*'It's usually the jail which saves us... 'Cause then I came off the drugs and I start coming back down, then I'm alright... I've been cutting down my methadone and seeing things clearer. Go to the gym, you know, see trying that out there when I'm on drugs, it's difficult... I just see this as my house.'*

This is also reflected in how others perceive Ian in prison, *they* [Ian's sister and brother-in-law] *hink I'm happier in here than what I am out there. Because it's a misery out there.*

During his second interview Ian looked back to when he was initially released and how he missed aspects of prison:

*'it's hard work out there. I said, I know I like isolatin' but it's like I've got – I dunno It's no pals but people I can talk tae an like havin' big Stu an' a' that an' a few o' the other boys I was close tae, you know, an' I missed that.'*

When in prison Ian didn't talk about having friends or anyone that he could trust whilst in there, however, once he had been released, he realised that he had developed a small network of relationships around him in prison. There were those he could trust albeit within limits, and there were the younger men who he encouraged to sort their lives out. The outside was a much lonelier place for Ian. When asked if there was anything in prison which provided hope, Ian answered, *in here? Nothing.* Yet, the jail saves him, for Ian, although prison is void of all hope, it remained his saviour. Life on the outside was so troublesome for him that prison was, on occasion, a better option for him. Because the chaos and criminality which he was involved in was as a result of drug abuse, prison provided an environment where he had to come off drugs and the onus was not on him to seek help alone. In prison, he no longer had to deal with the craving pains that drugs caused and the constant struggle to find money and more drugs. He wasn't fearful of who might be sleeping next door as he was more secure and protected in prison than he had been previously in hostels he'd lived in. Ian was familiar with prison and that made prison feel safe to him, however, prison could not provide hope for Ian's future. He had stability

in prison, but resignation and a complete lack of agency left him unable to envision anything better, or even anything different for his life.

## 5. Ian's relationship with hope

At this stage in Ian's life he desired desistance but could not hope for it. Ian's outlook seemed bleak and finding any trace of hopefulness or even a hint at hope language seemed impossible; concluding that Ian had no hint of hope at all would have been a fair deduction. Yet, in the midst of his own despair, hope existed, at that time, as Ian saw it, not for himself, however, he was able to see hope not *in* others, but *for* others, *Aye, I talk to people. I more support people... I just try and tell them that it'll be alright (laughing)... I know I'm just like that, I'm a pure hypocrite.* I laughed at this revelation too, I asked if he believed it would be alright for others, and if so, why not for him. He explained that as they were still young enough to change, life was more likely to be alright for them. I asked what his response would be if someone told him it would be ok and his demeanor immediately changed, and his voice, *What do you know?... Are you goin' to give me a job? You goin' to give me a hoose?* Ian's idea of hopefulness was contained for those in prison who were younger than him, he could see possible opportunities for them that were, in his mind, beyond impossible for him. The juxtaposition of utter hopelessness for his own situation, met with hope for others who may be able to 'change' once they have been released, highlights the practical emphasis that Ian, at this stage is placing on hope. Here he was equating their youth with hope, in his mid-forties, hope for him seemed redundant, a folly<sup>8</sup>. Yet, Ian could not be described as without hope; his attempts to encourage hope in others coupled with the belief that there was hope for them, was a feeling or a mindset within him, even though, as discussed earlier, he was unable to label the source of this hope.

Given Ian's circumstances; imprisoned, isolated, no family support, no real friends, homeless, unemployed and battling addiction there were no realistic social opportunities for Ian to glean hope from, 'hope, expectation and confidence fade quickly on an empty stomach' (McNeill and Weaver 2010:4). At the earliest stage of possible desistance, Ian lacked the influence of hope: during a time when hope is of most significant to the desister

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<sup>8</sup> The folly of hope discussed in Chapter 2

(Farrall and Calverley 2006; Lloyd and Serin 2012). Often the initial hope is simply based on desire and feelings before concrete aspirations are formulated and hoped for. For Ian, although he had desires and aspirations, he was unable to imbed them in reality because the current reality he was faced with brought such uncertainty. Ian described the drug-taking, criminal activity times in his life as, *pure misery*. Looking towards his release from prison, he indicated a desire to change, a desire not to return to criminality, however, given the reality he faced once released, it would not be unreasonable to describe this too as 'pure misery.' At this stage, Ian's options seemed to be between two different miseries, both void of any manifestation of hope. Why then would Ian choose what may seem to be the harder road of going straight? Perhaps, Ian did not see his life in crisis, but is instead faced with an identity crisis, a dissatisfaction with his life and who he is. Gillespie (1973) described the precursor to religious conversion as 'wishing you were one thing and knowing you were another [which] is severe and produces tension' (Maruna et al, 2006: 177), suggesting the release of this tension is found in the experience of religious conversion. Ian showed no inclination to any religious affiliation, yet if his desire to desist lies in desiring a new identity, the one illustrated in his collage, this tension, unable to find release, becomes more taut and the struggle between what is hoped for and its seeming impossibility becomes more fraught and frustrating.

Moltmann's theological theory of hope is focussed on what hope can provide for the Christian as well as the Christian's vocation or necessity to hope. For him, hope presents itself in the hopeful reconciliation of mankind with God alongside a future hope to see God's intervention in the world bringing his divine work to completion. This theory is far removed from any notion of hope which Ian may have, however, Moltmann's theory can provide helpful insight in to one area of Ian's hope or hopelessness. Moltmann describes hope as a 'patient and persevering action' (Hoover-Kinsinger, 2018). It is not a passive state of wishful thinking or imagining, it is not acceptance of what will be will be, hope is an action, an action of the mind, will and body. For Ian, although understandably feeling hopeless, given the situation, perhaps his greatest barrier to hope was passivity. Passivity was apparent in how Ian describeed both his past and his thoughts to dealing with situations is the future, *I know, aye. And I didn't know what to dae wi myself, I just end up taking drugs again and then I get into that kinda circle, do you know what I mean? Then when I was meant to be at work... I ended up...* The language Ian used to describe his return to drug-taking, *I just ended up*, shows a reluctance to take full responsibility for his actions but also highlights a lack of agency. He doesn't go into the circle; he finds himself



in it. His identity in drug-taking, in criminality, was saturated in loss of control and agency. He was aware his actions are hurting himself and others. He can see himself lose everything; money, home, employment. However his language showed a desire to disassociate, things are being lost, his life is being changed, however, he did not articulate it as “throwing everything away” or choosing criminality. There is a language switch when he briefly points to his attempt to continue working with a re-established drug habit, *I tried to pull it back together*, this is no longer passive, his trying is active. His attempt to regain control and remain in the life he had created for himself is an autonomous act, the identity of “going straight” allows agency. As he recognised himself as that drug taker, or criminal, once more he reverts back to an identity without any sense of agency. Ian was still in prison during this initial interview, his passivity reflected his self-image as criminal, carried through when discussing life after he had been released, *I don't know, see what happens*. When talking about the possibility of living in a hostel, his past experiences and the fears that accompany that possibility he concludes:

*What's for you is no going to go by you, is it? No point running about with swords and knives and all that, there's no point... There's no point in doing that, if somebodies going to do something to you or you're going to die or whatever then its goin' to happen... Aye just deal wi it then*

We discussed whether or not he saw this as his last time in prison, if he desired to, and can imagine desistance again and regaining a life similar to that when he was crime-free for 6 years:

*No point I've said that a million times ... I don't know... I just don't know ... so I'm nogoin tae lie I don't know, do you know what I mean? I don't want tae [return to prison], I don't want to 'casue I know how painful it is getting up every day and needing to go out and then needing to steal or break into places and its horrible, that's horrible doing that... I know its horrible but I'm not going to beat myself up about it.*

Ian has said he'll never do *it* again, and he has. He knew what it was like to come off drugs and live in recovery and he knew how it feels to return to drugs. He recognised that breaking into homes and stealing is horrible, yet he knew the desperation when that seems to be the only solution. Detachment from his criminal identity and the activities that produces it, enables him to cope with discussing what he sees in himself as wrong. The Apostle Paul speaks of similar struggles:

I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it

is sin living in me that does it. I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Rom 7:19-25a

Many who describe a conversion experience in prison, some of whom have participated in this study, allude to a fresh understanding of themselves, identifying as children of God, coupled with a spiritual understanding of God dwelling within them, prompting right (lawful) decision making as a catalyst towards desistance. Their conversion is life changing because it is perspective changing. They now view their lives through the Scriptures which talk of freedom from sin, saving grace, mercy for the sinner, forgiveness, love and acceptance. At a fundamental level, these same principles are basic human concepts that having meaning and consequence to everyone regardless of religion or belief. Paul separates mind and nature, the law-abiding mind verses the sinful nature, an idea commonly recognised, although articulated differently. This notion is reflected in Ian’s, *I don’t want to* verses *I don’t know*, he could end up reoffending and imprisoned once again even though it’s not what he intends. A tension of sin and nature joins an already established tension of identity. Overcoming the power of the sinful nature, for Paul, requires something greater, better, pulling in the opposite direction. Something which provides a better alternative, not a solution, as the sinful nature does not disappear. For Ian to beat submission to the ‘sinful nature’, desistance must provide a viable and more attractive alternative. The yearning of the normality that Ian desired, shown in his collage and discussed in interview, must overcome the lure of drug addiction and criminality. The identity tension which Ian faced is both external and internal. Once released from prison he would still be identified by many as a criminal and/or drug addict, whilst still taking methadone he was unable to participate fully in Narcotics Anonymous on the outside, as one of the requirements is to be completely drug free, so amongst those who have experienced similar situations as Ian, he felt identified as lesser.

## 6. Ian’s journey towards hope

Throughout the time Ian had been a participant in this research he did not experience a spiritual conversion to Christianity or any religion. During his last interview he referred to

God but did not confirm a belief in any god or indicate a reliance upon any higher being. However, the concepts mentioned above influenced this first stage of Ian's desistance journey and were apparent in his second interview which took place almost four months after his release from prison. Ian's second interview was virtually in direct contrast to his first. The principles outlined by Paul, although not articulated as such, could now be seen in Ian's life. Ian did not attribute to this theological significance, or faith-based transformation, however there is a clear transformation in his circumstances, his outlook and, in turn, hopefulness. Freedom, in the sense of no longer being physically in prison was the foremost change in Ian's life. His physical freedom was apparent to him and to others. I joined Ian on his release date where late in the afternoon the housing officer had found temporary accommodation for him. His TSO and I dropped him off at the accommodation. Ian had already spent many years of his life in hostels and temporary accommodation and was already familiar with the building. He was content to have a roof over his head in an area he was familiar with, but also far enough away from acquaintances who he deemed as 'trouble'. This part of Ian's hope journey, and desistance journey, began with freedom.

Ian's first few weeks post release were fraught with struggles as he attempted to find his way in the outside world. He had a shared bedroom with just a bed each, no tv, no radio or access to anything he could use to pass the time so he started taking drugs again. Whereas before Ian may have passively described this as *ended up taking drugs*, now he states, *I started takin' drugs again*. Taking ownership of his actions, although describing a distressing period in his life, his mindset had shifted towards agency, life was no longer happening to him, he was an active participant in his life. He spent 3 weeks taking drugs, *feeling fuckin' hopeless, isolated*. He was arrested for throwing a brick through a car window, but was given bail. *The hostel were really supportive. They kept ma room open cos they're no really meant tae... Cos it's emergency. So they kept it opened*. After this incident he re-engaged with his DTO (Drug Treatment Order), however, he was *still dablin'* with drugs, in particular 'street valium' which resulted in him getting arrested for theft by finding, carrying an offensive weapon and trespassing. He was put on remand for five days until his court date:

*Judge wasnae convinced tae let me oot but the lawyer an' the DTO person really spoke up well for us. Got me oot that day. And then again, the hostel kept the room open for me, which is like, wow! Really were supportive. So went back there. And then just kinda got masel' intae gear, know what I mean. An' fae then, I've just been*

*goin' tae meetin's, doin' voluntary. See, cos I wasnae daein' anythin'. They kinda – well, a month an' a half, 2 months, whatever, I was just in that hostel doin' nothin'. So noo, I kinda – I go tae a hing called Recreate an' goin' tae Charlton an' cut hedges an' mow lawns an' stuff for old folk. An' then on a Friday, I go intae Social Bite an' gie oot sandwiches, coffees, meals an' then dae the dishes an' what not. An' then go tae maybe 3 – oh, aye, an' I dae a day service called Second Chance.*

This short summary Ian gives of his first two months out of prison shows a turning point in his desistance journey. There were acts of mercy<sup>9</sup> that sparked hope and inspired motivation. His lawyer and DTO person *really spoke up* for him, the hostel kept his room, *wow!* Both of these acts changed Ian's outlook and attitude; Ian was experiencing mercy; kindness which he saw as undeserved; support from people in authority with whom his previous recollections proved negative. Mercy is a deliberate act to withhold punishment. It is reflected in the lawyer's and DTO representative's petitions, the judge's decision and the hostel's response. These acts of mercy influenced the transformation of a man, both isolated by others and self-isolating, who had quickly returned to drug-taking and criminality, who can now list the groups and activities that he is involved with. Ian began trusting a little, he began attending groups, and working towards desistance. Others recognised his efforts *an' then a guy left a single flat an' they put us in that... I know them all fae meetin's cos I've been tae all o' them. So they're dead supportive an' wan o' the lassies in there, she ended up gettin' me a TV.* A further unexpected act of kindness not only benefited Ian, but motivated him to continue in his acts of service in various groups and receiving support from groups. He was able to see his efforts paying off, he could then see a reason for getting up each day and had somewhere that he no longer dreaded coming home to at night. Through the Second Chance group Ian was given the role of supporting another attendee who was from England, a wheelchair user and was currently living in a rehab centre. He was unfamiliar with the Glasgow area and struggled with access to transport and buildings which Ian helped with. Ian recognised this as having immense responsibility because he didn't want to let him down. He described how knowing that he would later be responsible for this person, now his friend, also encouraged him to remain drug-free for fear of hurting him in any way. He also recognised that they were both addicts and therefore he needed to ensure that they didn't become co-dependant, so where at first, they would meet almost every day of the week, they then limited this to 3 times a week. Recognising this risk and adjusting accordingly is a marked change for Ian, where,

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of mercy emerged as a significant finding across all participant groups. The terminology, and its significance is discussed more fully in Chapter 8

at one time, a fear of co-dependency may have resulted in him choosing isolation, he then recognised the value in friendship, supporting one another, but also being responsible for oneself.

Ian was in a much more stable situation at the time of the second interview than he was at the time of his release. This was the first time he expressed a recognition of his situation, *I don't like accepting that I'm an addict or whatever, I've just no got the emotional capacity tae deal wi life, normal life*. Everything else from this second interview pointed to a person who had finally found the ability to deal with 'normal life,' so it is in acknowledging this inability and perhaps his own fragility that Ian found a way of integrating his life into what he sees as normal. Referring back to the collage he made in prison, which at the time he described as hoping for, *just normal hings*; the desire for normality remained, but later he also saw these 'collage hopes' as realistic goals that he could aim for, he had moved away from the passive resignation of *who knows*:

*Realistic stuff like what I drew, you know, car, house, mountain bike, whatever, you know, family, stuff like that. An' just believe in maself. I'm a wee bit better than what I was in prison, you know, but I've still got a wee bit tae go or a big bit tae go (LAUGHS). A big bit tae go. Hopefully within the next 8 months or so, I could be workin' an' stuff like that. Dae you know what I mean?*

This was a marked shift from his initial thoughts on his collage; *I [pointing at collage], I don't know, I kinda, I do hope for that, I do really hope for that but I cannae see it*. I asked Ian if there was one group activity that he found particularly helpful since he had been released:

*No, it's the kinda just combination, you know. It's like I'll kinda run through what I done on Monday. Like Monday mornin', right, Monday night, there's an Ibrox group. So Monday mornin', I get up, went tae ma volunteerin', done ma gardenin', then came intae town, met Danny, then met Lorraine another pal, went shoppin' wi' her for her kids stuff for school, trainers an' stuff like that. Then fae there, went tae Ibrox recovery, got somethin' tae eat, had a meetin', boys shared aboot stuff, we could gie them feedback an' we spoke aboot our own experiences. An' then a game of bingo... Which was – it was a laugh, you know, cos it kinda – the guy that was the caller just, he was bonkers, just mad, and stuff like that just – know, that day, efter a' that, an' I was just sittin' back an' I was like that, that was a really good day... I didnae need tae spend a penny, I didnae have any stress. It was just goin' with the flow, you know, an' the toon was good that day an' all for some reason, I don't know why It was like there was bands playin'.*

Although not explicitly voicing it, Ian's hope was in community and a sense of belonging and purpose. Through attending groups aimed at supporting him, he made friendships which last outwith these groups and in turn helped others. He has a voluntary role which gave him motivation to get up in the morning. As he "goes with the flow" Ian is increasing his social capital through every stage of the Monday he has described, desistance is occurring in and through the relationships he is building and the social contexts in which he found himself, or placed himself. Much of what Ian is experiencing mirrors part of McNeill's desistance paradigm of, "Collaboratively defined tasks which tackle risks, needs and obstacles to desistance by using and developing the offender's human and social capital" (McNeill 2006:56). The only compulsory task for Ian is to comply with his DTO, with regular visits to the health centre and providing samples. Though seeking support from Social Bite, he was asked if he would like to volunteer and he agreed which then provided a further opportunity for him volunteer as a gardener:

*Wi'volunteerin' wi' Social Bite an' stuff like that, I go in there an' get a breakfast every mornin' for free, you know, which is good. An' all sorts of like recovery cafes in Glasgow, they'll gie you a dinner an' they also – like within the last 6 weeks, I've had like 5 massages.*

The groups provide support and a chance to share experiences with others struggling with similar issues, however the game of Bingo not only provides entertainment or distraction but also facilitates social interaction and the building of friendships. Weaver (2016: 78) describes social capital as "relational goods of social trust, solidarity, and social connectedness." These were three "goods" which Ian lacked throughout his offending, drug-taking and imprisoned life. Ian believed trusting anyone would inevitably result in disappointment; he chose to isolate through fear of getting involved in the wrong crowd and didn't want to rely on anyone other than himself. He had no one who could describe as a friend, he didn't want to get too involved with his family again as he knew they struggled to accept and trust him, now his days are filled with social connections, he was part of groups, he was someone's support, he was someone's friend. He experienced a sunny day in the city centre as part of society, no longer feeling outcast and alone.

Speaking about the support groups he attended, I asked Ian why they work and how that support manifests itself. For Ian, identifying with others and recognising his own position in the groups were of principal importance:

*a guy's came in an' he was oot his nut. He was talkin' in the hall sharin' aboot – an' in there, you're no meant tae name names but he was namin' names...An' it reminded me how emotional an' how crazy an' how fuckin' out there I could be. An' then so there's like me in the middle that's just tryin' tae get mase' sorted oot an' then there's like chaotic people an' then there's people that are just livin' the dream, daein' the deal, whatever you want tae call it. Dae you know what I mean? Bein' responsible. An' I hink you need that mix sometimes, you know, an' it's ma choice whether I choose tae hang aboot wi' this dude (indicates to the left representing the chaotic people) or hing aboot wi' that dude (indicates to the right representing those "living the dream"), you know. It's always aboot choices, in't it?*

He later described this as the *yin and yang*; the reminder from the past coupled with the possibilities which the future may hold. Those who are still “using” reflected how Ian saw his own past, yet he recognised that he was not yet at the stage of *living the dream*. His position was in the middle and which way he went is dependent upon the choices he made and the relationships he chose to develop. Introducing the concept of choice is again a move away from the dissociated inevitability lens through which Ian had previously seen his life and actions. He later firmly identified as an active agent in his own life. Agency and hope are closely intertwined in the desistance narrative. In Weaver's (2016:97) research one participant highlighted that opportunities for new experiences, ‘in the context of the hopelessness they had previously felt - generated hope and an enhanced sense of agency’. This is also reaffirmed by McNeill and Weaver (2010:4) where they identify the realisation of goals as a particular vessel through which hope works in increasing personal agency and confidence. Agency and hope work in tandem with one another; one does not simply fuel the other. An increase in agency is one way in which hope manifests itself, hope allowed Ian to see that he was able to make changes because he could see the positive impact of the changes he had actively already put in place.

Ian talked about positive relationships in his life, one in particular who he had known for some years:

*I've got mase'f a sponsor who I know who works in the care field who has had similar background tae me, he's been in – I met – I knew him in hostels an' I've seen the way he used tae use drugs an' stuff an' then I've seen him the day an' it's like a different guy.*

Ian saw transformation in his sponsor. He knew him when they were both homeless and involved in drug taking. He could relate to him, and his journey helped him see where he could be. His sponsor gave him hope that if he can change his life then this too was a

possibility for Ian. He looked back over time when he could have previously maintained his recovery but found himself unable to:

*Cos that was a big hing for me when I was workin' that I never done anythin' that I should have cos I would have been maintainin' ma recovery an' it would have been like 12 years or somethin', you know. A guy that was at a meetin' last night, he worked for NHS an' he's worked for the Street team, he's worked for this, worked for that. An' when he came intae rehab, I was sharin' a room wi' him and buddying him, dae you know what I mean? An' it's like I see him an' it's like I could be there, you know.*

Meeting the man who he had previously shared a room with whilst in recovery encouraged Ian to reach that stage too but it also brought with it a sense of disappointment and regret. He explained that although that helped him see what might be, he also can't dwell on it because he will only reflect on how he has failed before and would talk himself into failing again. When asked about hopes for the future in his first interview Ian's attempt at hopefulness seems, to him, futile; *I try to. Emm, but it's only disappointment if I think of the future. So I just try and stay in the here and now.* For Ian, hopelessness was not simply resignation, it is a learned state. His experience of repeated disappointment meant, for Ian, hoping equates to disappointment rather than realisations. In many way, although still facing many challenges, Ian was in a better position to regain control over his life than he had been for some years. He was on the lowest dose of methadone he had ever been on and was otherwise in good health. He had the support of a TSO who had worked with him previously and already had an established relationship with; he had agreed to meet with his TSO on the day of his release in order to sort out healthcare, benefits and housing. This meant that all of these were more within his grasp than if he were to tackle every stage on his own. He knew of organisations that offer support on the outside and he had contacts; although he was not keen on seeking help, he knew there was some there.

Ian was also already building contact with family who he had steadily distanced himself from. Although these relationships remain strained and he knew he would be unable to live with his mother or sister, family ties were not completely cut off. Two weeks before his first interview as a participant in this project, his sister and brother in-law visited him in prison. His sister also kept his bank card for him whilst he was serving his sentence and ensured there was a little money in his account for when he was released. All these are positive steps in sustaining desistance, for Ian, life outside of prison brought with it very real complexities, such as homelessness, un-employment and the risk of drug-taking. The



situation Ian faced was not an easy one, it was not filled with hope, however it was not completely void of hope, positive steps could be seen, it was more affirming than the “nothing and nowhere” scenario first imagined and described by Ian.

## 7. Ian’s thoughts on hope

Ian first agreed with his TSO to take part in this research when he thought he was going to be released on an electronic tag in five weeks. However, this did not happen and in fact he would end up serving a further four months in prison. I was only made aware of this after the collage making, and during the first interview. Unbeknownst to me Ian was being asked to create a collage about hope shortly having been given disappointing news in the knowledge he was participating with others who would be released in a maximum of six weeks. As he looked back at our first interview he reflects on his state of mind at that time, *I hink when you came tae see me, it was mair aboot the timin’ really and like just ... fear o’ the unknown... didnae have much hope... and scared... loads o’ fear roon aboot it.* Ian wasn’t just fearful of hoping for what may not be realised, he was scared of the reality he was facing. He didn’t know where he would spend his first night out of prison, queuing up for a sleeping bag from Glasgow City Mission was a very real possibility for him, one which he was aware of, and he hoped for good weather in case of this eventuality. Both Ian’s known reality, coupled with the unknown surrounding it, caused fear and an inability to see hope. However, this may more accurately also reflect the difference between optimism and hope. For Ian, optimism towards his circumstances once released from prison was understandably difficult to summon. Kelly explains that hope can only exist when optimism has reached its conclusion, “Hope is at home in the world of the unpredictable where no human logic or expectation is in control” (Kelly, 2006:5). Aligning with the theological precept of ‘hoping against hope’ developed from the Abrahamic promise, Kelly’s theological argument suggests that hope can only exist where the impossible is suggested and unsupported by logic. However, to hope for the impossible, whilst having faith in a God who Christians believe can do the impossible, could be argued as being logical. As Ian moved towards his final months in Barlinnie, he had reached the end of optimism. When he was first released, and during the first couple of months post-release, optimism remained lost and with no source from which hope could derive Ian was unable to go beyond his own predominately fatalistic logic, resulting in a return to chaotic behaviour and two brief periods back in prison. As Ian tells he revealed a clear turning

point in his journey towards hopefulness and desistance. A lawyer, a judge, a DTO representative, a hostel manager, all made decisions that changed Ian's perspective and he exclaims, *wow*. People he would naturally associate with hostility took a chance on him. Which resulted in him avoiding another prison sentence and leaving a short term on remand knowing that he still had somewhere to live, with the knowledge that standard protocol would have been for the hostel to give his bed to someone else. Hope does not manifest alone, "Authentic hope needs to be underpinned by reasons" (Eagleton, 2017: p.3). For some, those reasons may be faith in a miraculous God, for others, such as Ian, the initial reason is found in others who chose to act seemingly illogically, or certainly counter to how Ian expected. "Hope does not engage in positive thinking *against all odds* but in relational depth, personal trust and intimacy, notwithstanding the positive or negative outlook of a particular situation" (Jeanrond, 2020: p.6). Ian, who had previously favoured isolation, experienced a modicum of trust and recognised the foundations of relationship, albeit at this stage still at a client/professional level. These were professionals who had spent time with him and knew him, who prioritised his welfare over punishment.

I asked Ian if he still believed there was no point in hoping as he had suggested in his initial interview:

*No. No. No, I hink hope contributes tae like motivation and kinda self-belief an' all that... it's the pinnacle, you know, an' all these other good things kinda branch oot hope... So if you've got hope, then you've got aspirations, then you've got motivations, you know.*

Hope had moved from being a useless pursuit to the pinnacle from which all other good things develop.

*Ian: I forget sometimes, you know, because I can make all these wee things like hope an' all that, can twist them up an' throw them away. But if I dae that, it just affects a whole big pile o' hings. So aye, no, it's important. It's important tae have hope, you know, an' a wee bit of faith. An' it's nice for people tae say, it's gonna be alright, you know, an' me tae believe, you know.*

Sarah: And do you believe that now?

*Ian: I dae, aye. But if I don't have hope, I won't, you know.*

At this stage, Ian had been out of prison for almost four months, the first five weeks of which were turbulent; returning to drugs and criminality. He had now been drug free and

crime free for approximately ten weeks, therefore still in the very early stages of desistance. As previously discussed, hope can have its most profound effect at the outset of desistance, which is reflected in Ian's words, describing hope as the motivating factor for all good things. Although Ian had experienced the disappointments of hopes unrealised in the past, he was then willing to allow hope into his life. Where he would once scoff at encouragement, he was then prepared to believe it. Ian had found hope in the relationships he had built around him, but also recognised that on occasion he can *twist* hope and *throw it away*. Given his situation, Ian was likely to face further trials and disappointments which may not only diminish his hope but could lead to further offending (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016). The sustaining of Ian's hope was likely to be the continued support of the groups that he attended alongside continued involvement in voluntary work, creating meaning in his day to day.

Ian's story reflected the biggest change from hope-less to hope-full. There was a huge difference in Ian's words and demeanor from first interview to the second. He seemed proactive and light with an understated expectancy of good happening. Ian is unique in this case across all participants from all three groups. The desistance journey can be littered with encouraging highs; however, the danger lies in that this then increases the pains of lows. The fragility of desistance, and fragility of hope, is perhaps most significant in the mediocre times, in the mundane. This is where the stores of hope accumulated will enable sustainment through discouragement.

## 8. Concluding summary

Ian's story showed the most dramatic change from someone seemingly completely hope-less to someone experiencing and able to articulate meaning in hope. Ian's offending journey had been prolific and the outset of his desistance journey proved unstable. For Ian, the most profound way in which hope was restored to him was through the mercy shown by those who otherwise had power to further punish him. This mercy was the impetus for reengaging with his desistance journey. Ian went from someone who saw no reason in hoping to someone who placed hope at the root of *where all other things come from*. These acts of mercy introduced hope, but that hope was sustained through the relationships Ian had built outwith the addiction and criminal communities he once knew. He sought hope from support groups, and in turn, supported others, and became a source of hope for them. At the time of the second interview Ian was still in the early stages of desistance, he had

been out of prison just three months. I don't know where Ian's journey has taken him now. Ian's life still had many challenges, permanent housing, being able to come off methadone completely, building familial relationships, and eventually finding employment: many aspects of life where he could become discouraged and have hope stores depleted. Continual engagement with the groups Ian had been attending is likely to be the best resource for Ian to find hope to sustain him through the disappointments which may arise during his desistance journey.

## Chapter 8: Case Study 2 – Andy’s Hope Story

*You were still being continually defined by the worst mistake that you’ve made rather than who you were and what you had to offer. And it just kept you in the mind set of hopelessness and despair*

*So it is a hope knowing right now both work, vocation and career and a satisfying personal relationship, lifetime lifelong commitment are just really a wee bit ahead, just outta reach at the moment. It’s one of the things that you realise they’re just ahead of you, it just keeps you going. Keeps you going.*

### 1. Overview of Andy’s offending behaviour

Andy has two criminal convictions; both for downloading and possessing sexual images of children. The journey towards each offending incident was very different. He described his second period of offending being fuelled by his need for serotonin during a significantly challenging period in his life. For him, at that moment, his offending behaviour was the antidote to despair and depression. He described the preceding circumstances to his first conviction very differently. Andy had a secure job, home, family around him and a fiancé; he was content in his life. Yet, it was during this time he began offending. Two very different pictures, one of utter despondency, the other of complete contentment, nevertheless, both resulted in the same offending behaviour. Andy did not describe his initial step into offending. As the focus of the research is hope in terms of desistance I did not want to probe further than he seemed comfortable to disclose into how he began offending. Throughout the interviews he referred to offending behaviour as an *addiction*, *surrendering to impulses* out-with his control, *being in a state of depravity*.

#### 1.1 Andy’s initial offence

*So I had a pattern of offending between about 25 and 30... I was starting to come out of that pattern in my early 30s and start to – as I moved forward in life, I was starting to come away from the circumstances I was given and life was starting to move forward... Unbeknownst to me, some of my offending behaviour patterns had been noticed by people in authority. So, within 5 days of getting engaged and returning from America and thinking that I’d put my past behind me, I gets a knock on my door one morning to say, we’d like to speak to you about this. They did and it took them a year and a half to fully investigate the extent of my criminality... I was like so full of hope for the future and I thought mentally and emotionally I was like, do you know what, I’ve moved on from this now, this is behind me. But call it karma,*

*call it whatever you like, it caught up with me and quite right that it caught up with me because actually, looking back, if that hadn't happened, I'd be in a really, really horrible place at the moment. I'd still be living a lie.*

Andy's offences had all been related to accessing, downloading and storing child pornography. He had a number of images stored on a USB memory stick which he left in work. His colleagues accessed the memory stick in order to identify who it belonged to and consequently found the images he had been storing. They then reported this to the Police and, because his job required him to work with children, he was unable to return to work from the day the Police knocked at his door, and throughout the one and half years of investigating before he was charged and subsequently imprisoned. He was applying for jobs during this time and was able to keep employment for a couple of months before the pressures and strains of the ongoing investigation took over and he had to leave, *'I was like a skittish animal that's waiting for the next thing to come round. So, it meant I wasn't a particularly nice guy, I wasn't good at being reliable enough to work'*. Andy plead guilty at court and was sentenced to 10 months, he served five of those in prison and the remaining five in the community.

## 2. Participation in this research

Andy is one of the participants from group 2 and when initially agreeing to take part in this research had been out of prison for just over 3 months. He was able to take part in photo elicitation and had a disposable camera in order to capture some images of how he imagines hope or of things/places where he finds hope. He had the camera for a couple of months and during that time struggled with some relationships and had to move to a different house. At times he was concerned about taking part in this research because he felt judged for the crime he had committed and wasn't comfortable discussing it. I had some knowledge, from his gatekeeper, about what he had been imprisoned for but was unaware of the details and assured Andy that this research was not about the specifics of criminality but rather just his insights into the meaning of hope and how imprisonment and subsequent release may have affected that outlook. In moving house, Andy lost the disposable camera and asked if he could send me images via WhatsApp instead, Andy did not have a phone that had this facility at the time, so his mum contacted me and sent all his images to me.

### 3. Hope images and stories

Andy's images could be split into 3 categories, hopeful experiences, hopeful words and hopeful relationships. His hopeful experiences all related to the past, before he had been in prison. He had since served two prison sentences for similar offences. Before interviewing any participants about their photographs, I printed them out and asked him to place them in order of what he found most hopeful. Some participants agonised over this a little for fear of diminishing the "hope value" of particular images. Andy was more concerned about ordering his photographs in such a way that he would find easiest to discuss or that told a hope story, for him this meant ordering them chronologically. Andy sought inspiration from the past as well as looking to current aspects of his life where he saw hope. He included 7 photographs from the past in his compilation, along with 6 which he had taken since agreeing to take part in this research. All of the photographs from the past were from before he had been convicted of his first offence, however, during the interview it became clear that he was engaged with criminal activity at the time these photos had been taken.

Andy often replaced the idea of hope with the word inspiration, *what I did with the whole thing [this project] is kind of look more at the things in life that inspire me, encourage me, give me inspiration*. A theological etymology of 'inspiration' points to divine guidance, or to breathe life or spirit into a human; 'when you are inspired, you are etymologically having an idea breathed into you' (Merriam-Webster, 2021). This is reflected in Scripture in one aspect of God's relationship with humankind, 'then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being' (Genesis 2:7). 'But truly it is the spirit in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty, that makes for understanding' (Job 32:8). Andy's use of inspiration hinted at the root of all hope being the very breath of God, from the beginning of creation through to present, individual everyday life. Taking God out of the equation the significance of 'inspiration' remains noteworthy, suggesting the ability to hope is inextricably linked with breath, existence. The relationship between inspiration, hope and imagination is explored more fully in Chapter 9.

#### 4. Hopeful experiences

All of Andy's hopeful pictures from the past related to experiences. Two of these pictures were of times of danger and fear: one showing his first car after he had driven over the side of a bridge and written it off; the second of an alligator which he approached whilst on holiday despite being full of fear. In these images Andy remembered times of overcoming adversity and prevailing. He reflects on disappointment of losing his first car and how it resembled so much more than a vehicle to him: *'At that particular time, I'm 21, I'm still young an' that meant so much about my freedom, my independence, gettin' around, goin' tae work, socialisin'*. All of which he felt he lost when he no longer had his car. He described the first 4-6 weeks after this happening as *feeling down and despairing*. This image reflects hope for him because it allows him to remember how he was able to continue living as he was after what he deemed to be such a devastating loss, *massive setbacks, stuff that ye don't plan for, chaos happens... ye can actually turn that around an' ... an' focusin' on movin' on from it, no matter how – what impact it has on ye*. After completing all stages of data collection, during analysis it became clear that this initial hope story reflects much of how Andy views his life, his offending and the future. Andy later shows indications of detachment from his offending echoing the above quote; he did not plan to offend, he did not plan to get caught, he hints at his offending behaviour being something that happened to him and, in turn, prison being something that happened, something which he now has to move on from.

Psychological research shows that there are, 'striking similarities between remembering the past and imagining or simulating the future' (Schacter et al, 2012: p.1). In their research Schacter and colleagues argue that there is a common 'core' brain network which provokes both memory and imagination. Agreeing that a link exists between remembering the past and imagining the future, it is believed that a key function of memory is to provide a basis for predicting the future via imagined scenarios and that the ability to flexibly recombine elements of past experience into simulations of novel future events is therefore an adaptive process (e.g., Boyer, 2008; Schacter & Addis, 2007; Suddendorf & Corballis, 1997, 2007). Andy has learned from the past images he has presented that he has been able to adapt to changes that he would have felt unable to before he encountered them. This provides hope that not only will he be able to repeat his adaptive behaviour for this scenario, but that he can learn new behaviours in order to meet the circumstances that he now finds himself in.



The rest of Andy's experience photographs depict scenes of nature which had previously evoked *happy and peaceful* emotions within him. He explains: '*An' I suppose it represents the fact that I would like to feel that way again... I feel far better out in the open an' outside than I do when I'm in the inside an' I'm lost.*' Andy had previously worked as an instructor in an outdoor activity centre. He refers to appreciating the outdoors in his early 20s as an *emotional awakening* which allowed him to engage with both his brain and feelings. His remaining experience photo shows a snowman that he and friends had built at a previous place of employment, *it represents a time when one o' ma sorta biggest goals in life, given how I felt as a teenager bein' isolated, alone an' bein' lonely, when I was around people an' was just enjoyin' life, havin' fun in life an' felt reasonably secure.* The photo reflected a time when Andy felt part of a community and accepted, his hope being, *I wanna feel like that again.*

All of Andy's experience photographs, along with his explanations, highlighted the significance of emotion in his hope journey. The process of remembering these photos as a source of hope allowing hopeful reminiscing in the present; however, this does not necessarily transpire into hopeful imaginings for the future. Andy does express a desire and hope to once again experience these same emotions, however, as the interview continues it is clear this hope is obstructed by doubts and fear, and a transitory belief that his hopes were achievable. Where memory and imagination can work together to provide hopeful pathways, Andy also has to deal with the harmful memories which conjure more destructive imaginings, thereby obscuring the hopeful picture he would like his future to reflect. How Andy viewed and remembered his past, influenced the extent to which he could imagine positive outcomes in the future.

## 5. Hopeful Words

Andy took three photographs showing just words, all of which were biblical references. The first he spoke about was a New Testament and Psalms book he was given during his first week at secondary school, *Even just carryin' it on ma person at times, as I was startin' tae sort of grow an' develop, this became symbolic of what faith meant tae me.* Andy was not affiliated with any faith group when he received the book, yet he describes that he had a respect for what the book represented even at a young age. It was the only

Bible he had access to when he began attending a youth group at a local church and embarked upon his faith journey. In the photograph the binding of the book is falling away and the cover a little damaged:

*speakin' in terms o' metaphors – the stuff that's inside it has never changed an' that's like a constant. An' for me, I suppose it's symbolic of one of the ways in which I view ma own life... ye're battered, ye're bruised, ye've done life, ye're still doin' life but inside o' you, there's still somethin' very valuable, somethin' very important, somethin' that has, ye know, has an awful lot tae offer an awful lot o' people.*

Andy finds hope in the consistency which the scriptural words provide. Andy has a faith in God and therefore the words therein represent truth and life to him. He uses the book as a metaphor for his own life, recognising that he too is valuable on the inside. Andy views himself as valuable and having value for other people, *an awful lot tae offer and tae an awful lot o' people*. His assuredness of this reflects how a person of faith views how God can use anyone to do 'great things' despite their past or present failings. His language echoes that which is spoken and preached in many church settings who may conflate Scriptures such as, 'But we have this treasure in clay jars' (2 Corinthians 4:7)<sup>10</sup> and 'for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart' (1 Samuel 16:7), emphasising the arbitrary way in which 'the world' views people in comparison to the reality experienced by the believer. This idea is reflected throughout the interviews when Andy discussed the way in which he believed society views him as a result of his particular offence. Holding on to the thought that, regardless of how he is viewed by others, he still contains 'treasure' which allows Andy a way through the negative opinions he experiences and imagines.

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<sup>10</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:7 is often paralleled with the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, 'The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: <sup>2</sup> "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup> The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. <sup>5</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to me: <sup>6</sup> Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, <sup>8</sup> but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it.'" (Jeremiah 18:1-8). Despite the outward appearance of the clay vessel it can be used to fulfil the purpose God has for it.

2 Corinthians 4:7 is therefore interpreted as clay jars representing the human body and the treasure being the unique power that is available within, due to relationship with God.

The third photograph Andy provided resembled a tattoo he had. It was a tattoo of the Hebrew symbols YHWH, pronounced Yahweh, translated as Lord in English. He got the tattoo after he was released from his first term of imprisonment as a reminder of his faith and God's faithfulness to him, *because of a mark indelibly on ma body, even when I don't feel like I'm close tae God, I'm down an' depressed, feelin' hopeless, that actually there is a hope, there is somethin' more than what I'm experiencin' right now.* Andy's faith did not make him immune to hopelessness, but it dis provide stability. To Andy, his tattoo was *part o' ma identity an' part o' who I am an' a part of what God means tae me an' what I am tae God.* Andy's identity in God is encompassed in his tattoo. He sees himself as one of God's children. As being loved by God, regardless of the offences, sins, he has committed. Because of how he understands God, irrespective of how he is viewed by society, he has a sense of acceptance. Identity is a major theme in how Andy talks about his offending life, his time in prison and his desistance endeavour, and will be examined more closely later in this case study.

The last 'word' photograph Andy took is of a page of scripture which tells the story of Saul's 'road to Damascus' conversion (Acts 9: 1-19).<sup>11</sup>

*I see an awful lot o' maself an' a lot o' part o' ma early walk in ma life. I see someone who on the outside, an' I was very much a well-respected Christian, I was workin' in fulltime Christian ministry, people looked up tae me, people asked me for advice, I had lots of practical gifts an' talent an' knowledge an' on the outside, things were great. But underneath inside o' me was somethin' very, very destructive, somethin' that forced me tae do some pretty horrible things. Well, it didn't force me but somethin' which allowed me tae, cos it's me that did it. I wasn't forced by it, it was me that did it...when I look at what God did with Paul, I am hopeful, more than hopeful, I am faithful in ma belief that God will do amazin' things with the rest o' ma life*

Andy did not talk about having a conversion experience the way Saul did. However, he found hope in the fact that Saul had a transformative experience. Andy did not hope for a faith transformation, but rather that he would experience an end to his impulses to offend, *ma faith is important an' that has the power tae transform who I am.* Andy's description of this particular Scripture is in direct contrast to how he describes himself metaphorically

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<sup>11</sup> Saul had spent his life persecuting those who followed Jesus. Approximately 4-7 years after Jesus' crucifixion, Saul was travelling to Damascus and had a miraculous encounter with Jesus. As a result of this encounter he was transformed from one who persecuted believers to someone who preached the saving grace of Jesus. When the disciples first encountered Saul, they were wary of him, questioning whether he truly had been transformed. (See Acts 9:26)

when explaining his reasoning behind the New Testament and Psalms book. He likened his current state, after offending and imprisonment, to the book: battered and bruised on the outside, but treasure within. Whereas his offending life, before being convicted, conjures the opposite image: faultlessness on the outside and destruction within. Again, Andy's struggle with his inner and outer identity is explicit. Later, during both interviews he describes his compulsion to offend as an addiction out-with his control. Here, however, he hints more at giving in to compulsion rather than being overwhelmed. This is the only occasion during all my encounters with Andy that he hinted at responsibility for offending separate from addiction, although it could be argued that the *something* Andy referenced could be an allusion to addiction. However, the *it was me that did it* statement is the most apparent acceptance of responsibility that Andy expressed during both interviews. This acceptance of guilt is perhaps more relevant to Andy when thinking about transformation and how he viewed his comparisons to Saul: he needed something to transform from, as well as transform into.

The Saul narrative again speaks to Andy of identity, *I see in Paul is that ... when he went, still called Saul, when he went to the other followers of Jesus and they said, look I'm changed. They all went aye, so you are, aye, fair enough.* Those people Paul encountered were unconvinced that he had changed, and sought proof. In the same way, Andy feared that people would not believe that he had changed. Andy describes Saul as having to change his circumstances and change his name to Paul in order for people to take him seriously. Although this is not entirely scripturally accurate, it does reflect how Andy places himself in this narrative. Upon being released from prison the first time, he chose to adopt a new name and live in a different area as it seemed to him the only option for attempting to establish a life distinct from his offending identity. Andy did not focus on this. His attention was fixed on Paul's successes describing him as the, *most significant, significantly influential missionary and ministry that there has ever been.* To an extent, Paul was able to leave his old identity behind, although his new identity brought about different persecutors, imprisonment and it is thought his execution too.<sup>12</sup> Andy's struggles with identity were more complex than the linear conversion of Paul: although Andy's offending behaviour had stopped, because he viewed this aspect of his life as an addiction, an innate tendency to which many males are drawn, he cannot be completely free from his old identity.

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<sup>12</sup> Paul's execution is not told in Scripture, however, historians believe he was beheaded, a martyr for his faith.

## 6. Hopeful relationships

The first photograph Andy shared to represent a relationship showed a teddy bear. He explained that he took a photo of the bear to represent the first present he bought his niece, who due to the nature of his convictions he was no longer able to see, *it represents very, very hopeful feelin's that I have that that relationship, familial relationship will one day improve*. Andy remained close to his parents and they has been a great source of support to him. During this first interview stage Andy had not spoken to his brother for some time. Between the first and second interviews Andy's father had become unwell and was hospitalised which opened the door of communication between Andy and his brother. Therefore, at the second interview he was more hopeful of the possible restoration of this relationship. He knew that building a relationship with his niece would remain problematic, *I think I'm emotionally hopeful about it. But I think rationally ma brain almost accepts that I won't get the kinda level of closure on that one that I'm expectin' but I still – it's still a hope for me*. Separating the emotion of hope from the actualisation of hope is significant and is most commonly associated with hopelessness. Blind hope: with no justification for that hope, or hoping against hope; maintaining hope when the 'natural' evidence suggests the contrary.

Andy also used a photograph of nature to depict the positive impact others can have on his life. The photograph depicted a sunrise with rays of light breaking through large trees with bare branches:

*when I'm hopeless, when I'm despairing, when I'm down, when I'm depressed, that there is light beyond where I'm at, at the moment, an' there are things in people and life that shine through. People that are encouragin', people that, ye know, light wants tae come in an' reach me an' help me tae be lifted an' be better.*

His description, although not explicitly faith orientated, did reflect scriptural and common theological themes. *Light beyond* has after-life connotations, again mirrored in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4, 'For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all' (v. 17). Andy used *Light wants tae come in* to symbolise God or the Holy Spirit working in his life. His understanding being that God was able to reach him, help him, heal him, and enable him to be a better person. The idea that other people

shine through is also portrayed in a photograph Andy took of all the members of his church reaching out their hands to form a circle. Like everyone involved in the study, Andy was advised not to take photographs of any individuals, including himself, as all the participants would be anonymised. For this reason, he included only hands. Andy found acceptance and support in this church and felt comfortable there as there were only a small number of members and their meetings take place in a home. More significant for Andy though is how he sees God guiding him to this particular church:

*So bein' in that church is just one o' those crazy, crazy God things that just – I can't explain it. Like I can explain it to you but I don't really comprehend just how it's happened. It's just like it's beyond my comprehension the way it's worked out. It's just so amazin'.*

He had been attending one church where rumours of his offending had spread, and he felt unable to continue going there. He happened upon this church group which, previously unbeknownst to him, was run by a prison chaplain who he was already familiar with and a prison fellowship volunteer who he had met during one of his sentences. He described it as immediately having a sense of familiarity which enabled him to also sense belonging. Andy still struggled to get involved with some aspects of church life. He had been asked on a number of occasions to help at the Community Garden which was set-up by the church but also welcomes volunteers from the wider community. Because this involves contact with people out-with the church Andy feared they may ask questions he is unable to answer. Or that his past would be uncovered, and those volunteers would judge him more harshly. Andy described the church he attends as an extremely positive experience, however, he is also familiar with an adverse reception from churches he has attended in the past, describing them as judgemental, unaccepting and superficial. Andy's experience with church, and how he describes those experiences is again very much entrenched in his ideas of identity.

## 7. Identity – the greatest hope and the greatest barrier to hope

There is a wealth of criminological research advocating the importance of identity transformation, or identity reconstruction, in supporting the desistance process (Maruna, 2001; Farrall, 2005; Vaughan, 2007; Paternoster and Bushway, 2009, 2014; Rowe, 2011; King, 2012). McNeill (2014) explores this further highlighting the relationship identity has to belonging, arguing that identity is not confined to how one views oneself,

but is in combination with how one is seen by others; how the individual views their place in society. Weaver (2016: 85) describes identity formation as a constant dialogue between personal and social identity requiring ‘a primary agent (me), a corporate agent (we) or social actor (you)’. The social actor aspect of identity is constructed through social interactions and not simply an idea of how society may react (Donati, 2011). This too is reflected in theological theories of identity, ‘Whereas individuals are defined in terms of their separation from other individuals, persons are understood in terms of their relations to other persons’ (Vanhoozer, 1997: 172). Andy had a clear view of himself as a primary agent, he described himself as a *child of God*, as previously stated he believes he has much to offer others. Andy’s construction of ‘we’ is more complex, as he navigated his corporate agency in relation to different groups: he is a Christian and belongs with his church group; however, he also identified with others who have committed, or feel the urge to commit similar offences as he has. He saw this as a misunderstood aspect of society which in turn impacts his life as a social actor. He feels forced to hide his offending past in order to be accepted by any other societal group.

*1<sup>st</sup> interview - I feel every so often in life, particularly when I’m comin’ in tae new situations like the other people’s baggage in response tae what – in response tae mine – rears its head.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> interview - One o’ the biggest barriers that I have is I worry that, even though there’s an awful lot of good in me, that if I get involved wi’ someone, my baggage will be too much for them, they’ll not be able tae cope with it.*

Andy cited his sister-in-law’s reaction to his offending as a prime example of how another person’s *baggage* ill-equips them to deal with his *baggage*. She had been abused as a child so Andy felt that as she hasn’t been able to deal with her past, this made her reaction to Andy more extreme. She was adamant that she, her daughter and Andy’s brother should have nothing more to do with him. Andy’s licence would prevent him from spending time with his niece regardless of his sister-in-law’s wishes. However, he believed her reaction was a huge factor in the breakdown of his relationship with his brother. Andy’s description of the situation along with the language of other people’s response as a result of their baggage, as well as a response to his conviction, highlights an important factor in existing in community. Reciprocal acceptance and understanding is essential on many levels, however may not always be possible. This was particularly challenging for Andy who believed at some point across all relationships he would have to disclose his offences whilst placing the onus on the other party to, *see all of [him], not just the worst of [him]*. He wanted to move away from being *defined by the worst mistake that [he’s] made*, yet views every

relationship as a journey towards the eventual disclosure of that mistake. He found acceptance and support in his current church relationships, yet was anxious about creating new bonds as he feared many will not be as compassionate. If all of Andy's relationships required an element of compassion from 'the other', this makes relationship building more complex, as it can negate a mutuality, an even playing field. Andy was left with the knowledge that he was a *good person*, conflicted with a belief that others would not recognise this because of one aspect of his life. His fear of acceptance was accentuated further when he pondered the possibility of intimate relationships, as he believes this will require him to be fully open and honest about all aspects of his life.

### 7.1. Identity challenges within society

For Andy one of the greatest sources of hope was the knowledge he had of who God says he is; *forgiven, worthy, useful, loved*. Yet the greatest barrier to his continued hope is how he deemed society perceives, or will perceive him. Andy had extremely strong opinions on how society views him as a result of his particular offence, namely that society cannot accept him until such times as there is an open conversation regarding mental health in terms of sexual offences, particularly against children. Andy's concern was not so much on transforming his own identity, but rather in transforming the way in which others identify and relate to him. He saw his past behaviour as wrong and had a desire not to act upon impulses in the future, however, he viewed these impulses as part of his identity. Rather than shedding his offending identity, Andy's aim was more aligned to a societal shift which sees a change in how his particular offence is identified. He believes sexual offending against children should be understood in terms of addiction and mental health rather than perversion or violence. Andy did not view his identity as 'spoiled' (McNeill, 2014) and in need of restoration as a result of offending. He accepted his offending as part of his identity, whilst recognising that for many individuals, and society as a whole, it cannot be accepted. It is for this reason that, for Andy, finding somewhere where he feels fully accepted is hugely significant in his journey:

*As I say, the folks there are aware that, ye know, that I've had problems again this year, well, last year, an' they do their best just tae be real an' genuine an' treat me with as much dignity an' respect an' everythin' else. So I get massive, massive encouragement by that, tae be able tae go to – an' take part in something, tae have ownership an' tae feel a part o' somethin' [feel] so at home when in so many others in ma life, because o' the situation, things are in turmoil. It just makes me feel*



*normal an 'it's massively encourgaing' tae go tae some place an' just be accepted for who I am an' tae see people in reality acceptin' me for who I am an'.*

Andy's faith was an integral part of his life and he placed great emphasis on his relationship with God. He credited God in protecting him and aligning specific events for his good. However, here, when describing his church, he did not mention communal worship or authentic teaching as important in his positive church experience. It was the environment the existing individuals had created and their willingness to accept him into this small community that was most significant to him. Throughout both interviews Andy returned to his struggles with how he imagines others may perceive him.

In McNeill's four forms of rehabilitation model (McNeill, 2012, 2014, 2015), social rehabilitation is the social environment in which the desister is surrounded, in particular that of social capital resources. Andy talked about society being unable to accept the type of crime he committed and described it as a taboo subject. Andy was living in a society he felt is ill equipped to accept him, 'While the state cannot and should not force one citizen to offer re-integrative hospitality to another, it can and should provide resources to help us all provide that shelter and support' (McNeill 2018: 18). This is reflected in society at both a micro and macro level: Andy's smaller communities, such as church, sports groups or new one-on-one relationships, would potentially be required to understand a crime which is severely vilified in the media, and for many conjures images of extreme offending. Andy's time in prison also reflects society's views on the crimes he has committed, his Hall segregated from all other prisoners as it is thought this crime has the potential to evoke anger and violence from other prisoners. His perception is that of being categorised as a *monster* alongside those who he believes have committed far more heinous offences: differentiating himself from those who have committed more direct sexual offences against children. He separated himself from these offenders and talked about meeting others in prison who had *struggles just like me*. Spending time with those who had been imprisoned for similar offences to Andy, may have fed into his views of those with similar urges are more common than anyone dare imagine. Although Andy called for more acceptance for those who have committed similar offences, it is unclear if he believed those who have committed what he deemed, more serious offences, are to be more widely accepted too. I didn't question Andy further on this as the interview was in danger of straying too far from Andy's own experiences. Andy had a longing to be accepted by society, this longing was both a source of hope and hopelessness; he hoped for a day that this could happen but often believed it to be impossible.

## 8. Andy's faith journey

Andy was the only participant to talk about having a faith in God before, during and after offending. Around the age of 15 or 16 Andy had been involved with a group of friends who had been caught drinking alcohol and his parents grounded him for an indefinite amount of time. He had experienced bullying at high school. He described feelings of isolation and loneliness being accentuated further after being prevented from seeing the few friends that he had made. He described his parents as over-protective and, for a number of months, he was unable to leave the house without them. He was, however, allowed to continue attending his fencing class and it was there that he made a friend who was part of a local church. He invited him to come along to a youth event one Sunday evening. He was still grounded but his mum let him go. He describes her reaction as, '*Ah well, how much trouble can it be? I suppose it's after – it's many months, I can trust ye tae let ye oot tae go tae that, I mean, ye're goin' tae church*'. He then became a regular at the youth group:

*it became clear that, in some way, there was somethin' in these people that just didn't – it was different about them. There was somethin' about the way they conducted themselves that set them apart from others. They were very supportive, encouragin' an' everythin' else... It was like, well I want that, I want that for ma life, I want that in ma life. So that was kinda the beginnin' of having faith.*

Andy continued in the exploration of Christian faith resulting finally in full-time employment as a youth worker for Christian churches and then for a faith-based organisation. Andy continued to be active in his faith throughout his life. He talks about having a relationship with God. He spoke confidently about the Bible, displaying scriptural knowledge. He portrayed a strength in his faith despite set-backs he has faced.

## 9. Life in prison and hopeful encounters

Overall, Andy talks relatively positively about his time in prison despite occasionally referring to it as the *darkness* or *hardship* and describing the first two days as being scared and shocked. He spoke of finding a group of five men on his wing who had similar life experiences as him and who had committed similar crimes and he was able to spend

recreational time with them. He seemed to have generally positive relationships with staff, *‘the staff in most prisons will treat you with dignity as long as you’re not – if you’re not an asshole, they won’t be an asshole to you’*. He had a job which he described as *‘not terribly good’*, however he did not associate it with negative experiences. He found comfort in attending faith services and groups inside the prison and made contacts which he would then carry on outside once released. Being able to cope was partly due to his belief that for this moment in his life, it was God’s will that he would be in prison and because he had family and friends who stood by him and supported him; *‘there was plenty of people from my life were still willing to be part of my life and come in and see me and encourage me’*. His parents regularly visited him in prison, his own church pastor visited him 3 times and he remained friends with a family of which the husband and wife frequently visited him in prison too. His fiancé had returned to America during the time Andy was imprisoned, however they remained engaged and she continued to support him by writing regularly:

*She wrote to me. As I say, that was one of the dark – that was the biggest single thing in jail that gave me hope and inspired me and helped me... Getting her letters and reading her letters... And writing back to her, having that correspondence. That was the biggest. If I didn’t have that the first time around, if that wasn’t – I’d have been lost. I would absolutely have been lost. I’d have had nothing to lose.*

*...despite of my depravity and despite of things that go wrong and despite of hardship, somebody was still willing to love me.*

A continued connection with the outside world helped ease the fears of what he would eventually face once released. He had a strong belief that God loved him no matter what mistakes he had made, and he knew his family and fiancée still loved him. Andy had these relationships before offending, during the offending period of his life, and they continued during his imprisonment. He does not speak of any offending networks with which he may have been involved with, although his offending behaviour largely took place online. He described his offending as secretive and done alone. He had lost friendships and work relationships once his offence had been made known, nevertheless, had kept a core support network around him. This connectedness is a crucial component in desistance and one Andy both recognises and appreciates, *very fortunate that some of my family and friends have been able to look beyond what has happened and see who I am... And see all of me, not just the worst of me*. This idea of “seeing all of me” was particularly significant in Andy’s life. After the publication of his crimes and subsequent difficulties he faced in work and community, Andy had to change his name. I assured Andy that I would also be

using pseudonyms for all participants throughout this research, as he voiced his concern over anonymity, and it seemed more pertinent to him than to any other participant. He was faced with the juxtaposition of desiring anonymity whilst longing for acceptance for who he is and had been. He was concerned about making new friendships or the possibility of an intimate relationship as he felt there would inevitably come a time when he would be required to disclose his former identity.

Andy described his release from prison after his first conviction, *you're getting released from prison, but you have no idea what you're getting released to... getting released out prison at half past 10 in the morning and not knowing where I was sleeping that night.*

Andy had more support than Ian (Case Study 1), as his parents met him on his liberation date and accompanied him to the various appointments in order to secure housing and benefits. Although his parents were supportive, he was unable to live with them due to the nature of his conviction and therefore was faced with the same fear of homelessness. At this stage he was given temporary accommodation and then later permanent housing. He was still in a relationship with his fiancée. His parents remained in close relationship with him. The relationship between his sister-in-law and her child was completely broken, however, there remained a vestige of contact between him and his brother. He took a short break from attending church, as he feared disclosing his conviction but was soon able to overcome that and began going to a local church.

Whilst in prison Andy attended and completed a Sycamore Tree course which is based around biblical and restorative justice principles, involving admitting guilt and a desire to cease future offending. So, Andy seemed to be taking steps towards desistance. He described himself during the first weeks out of prison as *a skittish animal, on my guard, utter turmoil, [yet he] was still in denial about how serious it was for me and how serious it was for – how badly it had all harmed me... I just thought I'd still get away with it, given the chance.* Andy's initial desistance attempt seems to have been prompted by a fear of getting caught again, rather than a definite desire to change his life.

Nevertheless, the subsequent 5 years reflect a desistance journey. He found the first 6 to 8 months challenging and was unable to find work. Eventually he began voluntary work which he continued for almost a year until the company offered him paid employment, which he accepted. He continued working there for approximately 2 years, *that enabled me to sorta build up friends, family, social life, have a nice wee flat that was in good*

*condition*. During this time Andy's relationship with his fiancée had broken down. Although upsetting, this was not a major set-back for him as they began to see their lives taking very different paths. Although Andy had completed both social work and church process in order to attend public church meetings and met their conditions, he eventually had to leave due to other members of the congregation being made aware of his conviction and raising safety concerns. What could have been a valuable support network for Andy, instead became another source of judgement and exclusion for him. Despite these setbacks, Andy described this as an overall positive time in his life, *The present starts to be positive, so you begin to think that your future can be positive as well*. He was able to cope with challenges because he was still able to hope that the future would be positive. He described himself as growing, his hopes growing, and the future growing all in tandem, producing positive outcomes.

Although he faced considerable challenges during this period of time, Andy did not cite these as catalysts for his return to offending. He identifies 3 key moments which diminished his hopeful outlook. Firstly, he met someone who wanted to become romantically involved with him which for him *created a bit of a problem*. He does not elaborate further on this situation. Secondly, because Andy's conviction had been reported in the newspaper at the time of his court hearing, information regarding the nature of his offence was widely available. One of his colleagues found out about his conviction and began spreading rumours eventually making his position there untenable, so Andy was asked to leave his employment. Thirdly, approximately 3 months after his employment being terminated, someone living in the same community came to his door accusing him of further offences related to his conviction, *Within 2 days of that, police intelligence phoned me and they said they'd received intelligence that there's people gonna come to your door tonight, get out, leave, go*. Andy had to leave his home and find somewhere safe to stay. He was able to stay with a friend temporarily. He visited his parents to explain the situation to them, *10 minutes into dinner, the chap to the door came and there was a vigilante mob*. Although neither Andy or his parents were physically hurt, the emotional damage was huge. He described it as having a massive impact on them, contributing to ill health and leaving them distraught. This also created a strain on the relationship Andy had with his parents, as he was now fearful of creating more trouble for them and they too were unsure how best to deal with the situation. Andy described this event in particular as being the catalyst in his return to crime:

*That was everything in the last 5 years that I'd worked towards, all of the practical things that I'd put in place, safety structures, accountability, got smashed simply by forcing me from my home. And that was hopelessness and despair and that was a lower point than the first time around and that was one of the major precursors into reoffending... so within about a 6 week period, almost straight back into the offending behaviour and that's just because so much of the present runs through the past, just the way to numb the pain of that and the way to stop feeling like I was always on edge was to just get into offending behaviour patterns that would release serotonin into my system.*

Andy saw everything that he had worked toward building being stripped away from him. His present seemed hopeless and full of despair, therefore, his future did too. He made links to this experience as having a detrimental effect on his mental state. Andy also believes that mental health struggles have contributed to his offending patterns.

#### 10. Offending interrelated with mental illness and/or addiction

Andy viewed his offending patterns as meeting a physical and mental need and therefore described it as an addiction. For Andy, his offending was his source of serotonin. Andy used addiction language when referring to his offending throughout the interviews. Describing a period of desistance: *So I was free and clear and sober for nearly 5 years;* and describing his return to offending; *the way to numb the pain of that and the way to stop feeling like I was always on edge was to just get into offending behaviour patterns that would release serotonin into my system.* When asked if he left prison, on the first occasion, with a desisting mindset, he referred to his offending being out-with his control, *I was well aware that it is to do with addiction and it is to do with not being able to control my own forces.* He also speaks of how his offending harmed him, not just the victims, *I was still in denial about how serious it was for me and how serious it was for – how badly it had all harmed me.*

Andy also views his addiction as an unmentionable subject in wider society and therefore feels this particular addiction is judged more harshly than any others:

*There is still – it's still taboo an' people are still condemnatory about it an' that doesn't help anyone, ye know. If you segregate somebody, isolate somebody, villainise somebody, think that they're a monster, then actually, ye know, that person'll start believin' those things an' they're actually more likely tae be nearer doin' somethin' wrong again. An' I feel that there's – I'm not excusin' ma behaviour*

*or anyone else's – but I feel that, in the same way that we had discussion in society about a whole lotta issues from mental health tae heterosexual or homosexuality an' all that sorta stuff, actually, there needs tae be a discussion. People need tae sit down an' have a chat about it. Because if ye look at the statistics, it's only happenin' more. People are gettin' caught more an' more frequently an' it's becomin' a much more bigger problem an' yet nobody's actually got – ye don't get an answer cos they're no talkin' about it... Like one o' the things that has been – in the last 5,10 years is mental health an' people try tae encourage men tae speak more openly about mental health. And one o' the things that I honestly feel that society as a whole is still not ready for that because there's still an awful lot of ugly things inside of men's emotions about just they're not ready tae discuss an' if they express them, then they are, ye know, oh you're bad, you're evil, ye know. So aye, society just needs tae start tae talk.*

The latest edition, of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5: 2013) states that the “extensive use of pornography depicting prepubescent children is a useful diagnostic indicator of Paedophilic Disorder” (p. 698). However, it also gives diagnostic guidelines as to when this could be considered a sexual orientation rather than disorder. It is far out-with the scope of this case study to determine whether Andy's offending was as a result of addiction as opposed to orientation or mental disorder. It is unclear whether Andy found comfort in the idea of many men dealing with the same emotions or urges as him. Or perhaps he is making a comment on judgement: society should not judge him harshly when behaviour similar to his is so prevalent. Assigning his offending to a form of illness may help him to accept behaviour, he would otherwise find intolerable. Andy developed a new identity in so far as he had changed his birth name, moved to a different area to live, and had chosen to embark upon desistance. The adaptation of this identity is multifaceted as Andy's hope is that his previous identity is more readily accepted whilst doing all he could to distance himself from that identity.

Using addiction language may in part, allow him to justify his behaviour, or understand it: he did make clear that, *I'm not excusin' ma behaviour or anyone else's*. Although he described his offending state as that of *depravity*, he also viewed it as a *hardship*. When talking about sharing his feelings and struggles with a male chaplain, who he then meet on the outside, he explains *cos the chances are, as a man, he's experienced somethin' similar in his life*. His language shows an attempt to somewhat normalise his behaviour and signal that although he has been convicted of an offence, there are many who feel the same as him but may not act upon it, or may not get caught. This is again reflected in his desire for society to speak openly about child sex abuse in a similar way that he has seen mental health awareness brought to the forefront. It is noteworthy that his impetus was not in

warning or protecting the public but rather his desire was to lessen the villainization of those who have committed sexual crimes against children. Andy was all too aware of how he was identified by others who know the details of his criminal conviction. He had both imagined, and experienced negative reactions towards him as a result. Because his name was published in the newspapers after his first conviction Andy took the decision to change his name. A very outward expression of changing his identity from offender to non-offender. His new name allowed him a sense of safety and created a starting point for rebuilding his life. However, it did not change who he saw himself to be and how the authorities dealt with him. It did not alleviate his fears of being ‘found out’. He still had to disclose his offending to any church he wanted to join and still felt the oppressive weight of carrying the identity of offender or prisoner:

*I still feel that I walk around with ma ball an’ ma chain an’ that ball an’ chain bein’ all of the burdens that come with bein’ in prison and what I was in prison for. And I concern myself at times where I’ve folk round about that I’ll meet an’ come in contact with will see that ball an’ chain. An’ having seen that ball an’ chain, will they be able tae accept that I want tae break free from that an’ I am breakin’ – I’m in the process o’ breakin’ free from all o’ that.*

Andy recognised that leaving offending behaviour behind him and leaving his old identity behind was a process that continued to unfold and required work. He was the actor in this scenario, only he can break himself free from his *ball an’ chain*. However, a huge part of the process was in how others reacted towards him, and whether they are able to accept him. Andy believed that eventually for him to have any depth in his relationships, he would inevitably have to disclose his offences and his imprisonment. He did not want to hide his past in this sense, what he longed for is a society that will accept him as he is, and how he has been.

The pathway, and maintenance, of desistance from sex-offending has parallels to that of general desistance, however, there are significant differences which suggests its distinctive nature (McAlinden, Farmer, Maruna: 2016). McAlinden et al found that the differences were most apparent in the initial stages of desistance, in that more general desistance theories suggest that new relationships or gaining employment result in a turning point in the individual’s life, resulting in a transformative journey towards long-term desistance. However, for sex-offenders, although employment and relationships were significant to their lives, they did not reflect the turning point stage reflected in general desistance but instead provided stability in supporting desistance. It is also important to note that although



sex-offending is often used as an umbrella term, it covers a wide array of offending behaviours which result in many different sentencing types which also affects the pathway into desistance.

Andy still had to attend regular police supervision meetings as a result of his previous conviction. In what could be described as a further attempt at maintaining desistance and distancing himself from criminal behaviour, he decided to confess to the officers that he had engaged in offending behaviour, during his supervision meeting, *rather than go, OK let's get you support – they went, OK, give me your wrists*. Andy was immediately arrested. He was on remand for four months and then sentenced to a community payback order:

*the day that I was arrested and knew where I was going and knew was happening, I couldn't wait to get into that prison cell and shut the door and the door locked. I could not wait. Life in the 6 or 8 weeks prior to that happening to me was so – it was so much turmoil, there was so much things going on and things that I just couldn't deal with... just to get to the safety of that small room with a locked door where I don't need to speak to anybody if I don't want to and it's just peace. Peace. Like, that was just – for me, that was a relief.*

Andy's safety of the prison cell echoes Ian's *it's the jail that save us*. Both Andy and Ian found solace in imprisonment, not because of what was available to them there but rather because of their inability to deal with life on the outside at those particular times. Prison provided security and a structure which was not available to them on the outside. The relief of imprisonment that they both speak of accentuates the miserable nature of their experiences outside. For Andy, he had spent 5 years building a life for himself after his first term of imprisonment. He had a job, home, and friends, all of which he lost in quick succession. He had lost all the aspects of life which he had previously described as positive, those which provided hope and belief that future could be positive. Without these, Andy's present was hopeless and unbearable, therefore his future too reflected this hopelessness.

Andy's idea of hope differs from Ian's as he had a faith before he began offending, during his offending behaviour, and whilst imprisoned. As a result, he sought out faith groups in prison and attended faith services, *even at that point, even though I'm in complete and utter turmoil, there's a bit of me knows that engaging with church, engaging with God and faith services is a hope for emotional and mental and spiritual wellbeing*. Although he

knew in his mind seeking out faith groups would help him, he has at times struggled with the sacrifices that are required for faith. Discussing times of distress and hurt, Andy questioned whether it is worth being hopeful and mentions the sacrifices of hopefulness along with the effort it requires. The sacrifices he envisions are specifically linked to his faith:

*there's times where you go, is it really worth it? Like, is it really worth it?... my crisis of faith is more along the lines of – is it worth being hopeful, is it worth the sacrifices, is it worth the continued effort, is it worth it, what's the point of it? You know, surely I'm just comfortable cruising along without it. You know, that's more where my kinda - how I question.*

For Andy hope resides in the idea of God's faithfulness but receiving God's faithfulness is dependent upon Andy living as he ought with continued connection to God, denying his own desires and looking to what God requires of him. For Andy it was hard work especially as he does not see immediate results. His struggles came in the waiting and in the trusting. He mentioned throughout both interviews, times where he acknowledged that God brought about the right outcome in order to ultimately make Andy right with Him:

*God told me I was gonna get the jail. It just became increasingly clear to me over the course of that 7 weeks that I was gonna get the jail...I remember the night before about 3 nights before, my car broke down and that was like the final confirmation that I was having things stripped away from me. I was being made ready, all the ties that I had to this life in the real world was sorta being put on hold or was being severed.*

Andy looks for God's sovereignty over all areas of his life. He saw the events leading up to his imprisonment as part of God's preparation. He sees God at work in him being caught with the memory stick, he sees this as best for him and for the community surrounding him. He recognises the severity of his offending behaviour although ensures that it is made clear that he has never physically assaulted anyone in any way. This is an important distinction for Andy and allows him to see himself as a lesser criminal than others; he is a sinner and has committed awful crimes, but he's not as bad as others, particularly others on the same prison wing as him.

## 11. Concluding summary

Andy's story was very different from Ian's. His offending behaviour differed as did his previous experiences with desistance. For Andy the main obstacle in hope was in his juxtaposed concept of identity: feeling the need to change his name and identity to protect himself and his family, whilst longing for society to become a place where those who had committed offences similar to his were accepted. Andy had a long-lived faith which continued to provide hope. He had a supportive parent and a new church community from whom he was able to find encouragement and hope. Andy found comfort in his faith and in being accepted by God despite the criminal offences he had committed. For Andy hope was a continuum of his faith; both providing a way out during times of desperation, and allowing him to continue looking forward to a positive future. Andy is reliant on God to show him direction in his life, yet fears what the future may hold due to the nature of his offences. He grapples with thoughts of being unable to desist due to the addictive nature upon which he assigns his offending. Ian's hope is found in his identity as a child of God, yet his perceived greatest obstacle to desistance is society's view of his 'true identity'.

## Chapter 9: Case Study 3 - Sean's Hope Story

*I had nae hope before*

*the hope that I've got roon' about wi' the people in ma life...I feel a bit untouchable because if somethin' bad happens tae me, they're irrelevant tae me, ye know. That's how it feels. So nothin' bad can really happen.*

### 1. Sean's background and offending history

Sean's last offence, and term of imprisonment, was when he was held on remand for resisting arrest. His last prison sentence had been between 2011 and 2012. Sean has a prolific offending past, mostly due to gang related behaviour. From the ages of around 13/14 to 19, Sean was involved with a local gang and worked for *the main drug dealer*. He was responsible for delivering drugs, collecting money and committing violent acts when asked to. His lifestyle and gang affiliation meant he was frequently engaging in criminal activity and frequently arrested. He notes that he was fortunate to get so many warnings and community sentences and to have served only 5 prison sentences in total. As a result of his behaviour outside of work he struggled to keep a job and was unable to see the value in remaining at college:

*I was there for about 3 month an' getting' like 70 quid a month. I had like pals like daein' nothin', right, getting' like £140 a fortnight an' that. I'm up there – it was a fulltime course. So I've no got like family that are heavy loaded or anything' like that, so it was, tae me, I just ended up hinkin', well, I'd be better aff daein wit a shouldnae.*

He was also ordered to attend prescribed group work which he describes as an *anger management group* and an *alcohol one*. Through attending these groups Sean was exposed to *career criminals an' that*, for the first time. His previous offences had been related to violence and under-age drinking. He describes himself as drinking once a week at the weekend, albeit excessively, and never having a drug problem until his probation required his attendance at these groups. *I actually found that I was makin' a lot o' contacts like through this group, through these groups an' getting' stoned an' that before the group... an' a' the guys there were on probation an' I think I was the second youngest there.* Sean became overwhelmed with gang involvement and left around the age of 19. He described this time as leading a quieter lifestyle. He had a girlfriend, a full-time job and spent less

time socialising with friends and more time at home with his partner. Sean was around 21 years old at this point. In his early 20s Sean moved to another job and was regularly going to the gym, he was still in the same relationship, but he began having psychotic episodes, *it wasnae through drink or drugs... I started ma mental health... I started no leavin' the hoose an' that, self-harmin*. As a result, he became completely isolated as he no longer had any friends. His relationship with his girlfriend ended so he felt the only person he had contact with was his mum. Sean's mental health continued to worsen:

*An then I was on a' the wrong tablets an' that. Then I got a diagnosis, had a good psychiatrist, got put on anti-psychotic that used tae just knock me out an' like just I couldnae dae anythin'. An' then wan night, I'd no been in trouble for about 3 year, wan night I just – I don't know really what happened. I went oot an' I've got a bit o' a cheek still tae live in ... but nobody seems tae know me. I tanned about 100 cars wi' stones, just a stone. I hink people seem tae think it was a knife but even the polis said I didnae have a knife, it was just a stone.*

Sean was given 8 months for this offence, despite a psychiatric report stating that he was unfit for custody. He did note that he came out of prison feeling better, as the support was better in Saughton. His Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) was able to visit him in prison as well as his own psychiatrist. His psychiatrist made arrangements for him to be moved to a *cushy hall* with its own gym, in comparison to his previous prison sentences, Sean described this as *brilliant*. After his release he knew that his mental health had improved, however, he still had feelings of anxiety and described himself as feeling a bit unsafe for the first 6 months, fearful of repercussions that may arise from those whose cars he damaged. He felt like he had settled into life outside, at one stage had 3 separate CPNs as well as a psychiatrist. Then:

*Self-harmin'. It came back the worst ever. Overdosin'. it just came oot the blue. An' then I was – what else was I daein'? Just hearin' voices, wasnae leavin' the hoose cos I felt that people outside were – like I thought I had like a' these contracts on ma heid an' that for like debts I had when I was younger, like just nonsense.*

He would go periods of around 5 days without any sleep and was prescribed Temazepam intermittently as his psychiatrist had concerns he would become addicted. During one of these periods without sleep Sean took a bus to Glasgow and began wandering around the streets. He ended up in Kilmarnock, so got on the bus to come home:

*ma heid was a' fuzzy an' a' that, I can remember I just felt weird. An' then basically that's when I got done wi' breach o' the peace but wi' a sexual motive. I was just*

*sittin' on a bus, eyes red raw wi' no sleepin' an' supposed tae have – well, I plead guilty tae it but repeatedly starin' an' lookin'. That was ma charge... An' because o' that, someone would feel alarm.*

This was Sean's last offence and the last prison sentence he has served. He plead guilty and served a 6-month prison sentence. This was not the longest prison sentence Sean has served, but it was the one that affected his life most dramatically and continues to affect him. For him, it was not the most severe offence he committed but it is the only one that resulted in years of community supervision and continued listing on the sex offenders register.

When talking about his life, Sean separates his life into three distinct times: being a young offender in a gang; attempting to go straight but let down by his mental health; being transformed by becoming a believer in Jesus. Sean is one of three participants who talk about a time before and after faith alongside his offending and desistance journeys. All three attribute God as their main source of hope and as being responsible for the change in their lives. This change does not occur in isolation, however. This case study looks at the various aspects of life that are affected by being involved in a specifically Christian community. Andy, from Case Study 2, is a Christian but does not have a story of transforming faith in relation to desistance; he committed his offences whilst having his faith. Sean tells a story of faith transforming his life and that being the reason that he is able to cease offending behaviour. These three stages of his life portray very different hope stories. Like all participants Sean began with the creative element of the research.

## 2. Initial participation stages: photographs and first interview

Sean was one of the first participants to sign up to take part in this project. I met Sean through introduction from one of the gatekeepers who ran a faith-based support group in Glasgow. Sean approached the project with a sense of being willing to do anything he could to help me. As I was unable to pay any participants for their time, on each occasion I met with them, I bought the participant lunch or a snack or in some instances just a coffee or soft drink. Sean is the only participant not to accept anything; he would insist on paying for his own drinks every time we met. This may have been because he viewed me as a 'poor student' or he may have been establishing the idea that he is now able to look after himself, something which he revealed whilst discussing his photographs. Sean was also

one of the quickest to return his camera, across all research groups. He replied to texts and answered calls efficiently. When meeting a participant, I ensured that I would arrive at the meeting place early in order to secure a suitable place to sit and so as to avoid causing any participants to wait on me. On every occasion Sean was there before me. Conversations with Sean reveal that he feels a sense of duty and is committed to anything he agrees to do. He has a relatively new-found faith and through that faith views himself as having purpose, even if that purpose is simply being on time.

Sean was also the only person who highlighted a significant aspect of participating in this research, *who dae ye really see wi' an actual camera?* A disposable camera is an unusual sight in 2019 with almost everyone having cameras on a smart device. For some, the only hurdle caused by the disposable camera was re-familiarising themselves with the idea of pressing an *actual* button, and winding the spool forward after taking each photo. For Sean, however, the use of the 'unusual' camera made him feel more exposed than usual. He felt that others would be suspicious of his intentions. The only disposable cameras I was able to purchase were bright yellow and dark purple, adding to their conspicuousness. Sean already had anxiety over how other's may perceive his everyday actions. Participating in this research made him feel like his behaviour was outwith the norm and therefore could rouse suspicions in onlookers. He specified that people around his community would be unaware that he was on the sex offenders register. Nevertheless, he feared that other people's suspicions could lead to a call to the police, which would in turn lead to a further conviction, or at least an extension to his time on the register – which had already previously been extended. Despite having these concerns, Sean used the disposable camera to take his hope pictures. Sean was also the only person in his participant category to include all new photos. Other participants included images from the past which provided a story of hope for them to share. Sean's hope images were all based in the present.

Sean's hope photographs can be split into three distinct categories, environment, relationships and faith.

## 2.1 Home and surrounding environment

Sean's first seven photographs were all scenic views which he took near to where he lives. He talked about the various paths that he enjoys walking along. He describes encountering

deer, swans and ducks whilst out. He finds peace and sense of freedom in experiencing nature. Sean's surroundings are important to him and he identifies a link between the environment he finds himself in, with his actions and mental health. Describing the difference between where he lives now as opposed to his previous address he explains:

*where I used tae live before that, I hated it, like really hated it. I know that's a strong word but it just – it was a very negative area...An' there was some nice people an' that but it was just like, it was just like, it was just a horrible place tae even look at. There was nothin' in it, it was just wi' people drinkin' a' the time, all ages, right up tae like old men, gamblin', a' sorts o' stuff. So it's quite hard, ye know, quite a hard place tae live, getting' intae fights an' stuff.*

Moving away from this area allowed Sean to separate himself from these negative influences. Enjoying the outdoors became a pursuit which was easily accessible for him. He also includes a photograph from inside the home he has now, *This is just ma livin' room, so this is just like obviously like it's better bein' there than in a prison cell.* Sean later goes on to describe how his surroundings during separate prison sentences differed greatly. He specifically looks to his last prison sentence, served in 2012:

*They put me in E Hall. Well, first of all, I was in – I was mainstream. I refused, I refused protection an' it was fine, it wasnae in any papers or anythin' an' then after about a month, they were like, the unit manager – is it unit manager? I dunno. But basically was in charge o' the hall, no the discipline but who's in charge o' the hall, he says, ye're movin' tae E Hall an' I was like, no I'm no, I said, trust me, I'm no movin' so I was in the digger for about 3 days an' then eventually I just went.*

He found that no one there believed his charge and pressed him for details of a crime he maintained he had not committed. He describes how the other prisoners seemed offended because his crime was not severe enough. Sean knew that he could handle a six-month prison sentence, because he had done it before. This did not faze him. What he struggled with was who he would be surrounded by in prison and how that would in turn influence how others, outwith that particular hall, would view him.

Unsurprisingly, after having served numerous prison sentences, freedom and independence is of great significance to Sean. His photos reflect this in a signpost, *It's just a little sign... An' it just takes ye out, so like ye could come over here or ye could walk down tae the doctor's say, or ye could just keep walkin' that way... ye know, it's a good thing tae go – either walk it or cycle it even.* He includes a photograph of the train at his local station,



*that's the train I get when I'm goin' tae Glasgow... That's the exact line.* One of the support groups Sean attends is based in Glasgow city centre. When he first began going one of the organisers would pick him up and take him to the group and drive him back home again. Sean's anxiety prevented him from traveling on his own. This was accelerated by the fact that his last offence had taken place on public transport. Now Sean feels able to travel alone:

*it's just like obviously goin' on the train mase' a lot o' good hings have happened, I've met a lotta good people an' stuff like that an' it's also a bit o' like personal achievement as well...I was that guy at the time maybe getting' a lift but noo I seem tae be – I'd say I stay the furthest away definitely an' I'm sorta able tae get there an' get back on ma own, ma own 2 feet sorta hing.*

The journeys Sean took by train not only made the rest of the country more accessible to him, it also reflects the personal journey he has been on. From being imprisoned, to being fearful to leave his home, to only leaving when accompanied and then able to plan, and make journeys on his own. Sean no longer felt the same burden of being limited by the authorities or by his own mind. The sense of freedom that Sean experienced allows hopeful expectations by reinforcing his sense of achievement as well as widening the scope for building relationships and eventually gaining employment.

## 2.2 Relationships and Community

At the end of every first interview each participant was asked what their main source of hope was. For Sean, his was in relationship, predominantly the relationship he had with his mother, and another which he had developed with one of his support group leaders, David. One of the stipulations given to each participant was that they would be unable to include photographs of other individuals if they could be identified. As a result, Sean did not include photographs of his two main sources of hope. However, the idea of relationship is clearly reflected in his photographs. He wanted to include a photograph which reflected his church, explaining that although he recognises he may have a very different background to the majority of those attending, he has been made to feel welcome there and has established friendships through attending,

*I was quite wary aboot – I dunno – I felt I was daein' somethin' wrong takin' these pictures at time, although I wasnae. So I took some pictures near ma church but I*

*didnae take any in ma church or outside cos ma church is held in a school... I'm on the register for a breach o' the peace, again, it was an adult female but the stigma an' stuff that comes wi' the register... I wouldnae have done this anyway but I wouldnae hae minded takin' one maybe halfway through the service or somethin'. I have seen people daein' that on their phones but I'm no, I'm no daein' that.*

Despite feeling accepted in his local congregation Sean still felt paranoid about taking a photograph in the church. The pastor and other leaders are fully aware of Sean's past and his previous offending behaviour and have welcomed and supported him into their community. Yet, Sean has a continual awareness that his actions could be interpreted wrongly and that he would be judged more harshly than others. He talked about his church as a place of support and did not mention any occasion where he had been judged or faced any kind of adversity in this church, so for Sean this fear could appear to be irrational. However, he was fully aware of how others may interpret his presence on the register and assume he is guilty of what he would deem to be a much more heinous crime than that which he committed.

Sean has found the pastor of his church and a local couple particularly supportive and included a photograph near their house:

*Stephen and Jess, that's – they run a – like they run that group on a Thursday night but they've been really nice and the first time I went tae the church up there, I actually was welcomed by Jess. I was wi' David (support group leader) at the time and, aye, just nice people an' like Stephen's got his own story as well.*

Sean goes on to explain that Stephen had previously struggled with alcohol addiction which resulted in the breakdown of his first marriage. Although Stephen's past differs greatly with Sean's past criminal behaviour, Sean still found comfort in hearing the struggles of others and learning about how they were able to overcome them. The kindness of strangers allowed Sean to experience acceptance, facilitating a hopeful probability that he would be able to form new friendships. Identifying with the struggles of others meant Sean was able to witness how another person's life can be transformed, providing him the opportunity to consider that this too could be possible for him.

From attending the support group in Glasgow city centre Sean built friendships there that continued outwith the group. He talked about one man, Ally, who he met through the group. Sean helped him with some work and had since become friends with his family;

*But I know his family an' that now an' I've met different people. Like he's got a couple o' sons just a wee bit younger than me, I've met his wife an' he's actually ma plumber now as well...Cos we're havin' a lotta problems wi' plumbers comin' like at late times at night an' stuff an' Ally was a plumber, so it just made sense tae ask Ally.*

Sean linked his mental health issues to isolation and believed he needed interaction with others to keep his mind healthy. He also needed this to keep him on the straight and narrow – not specifically with the law but his emphasised was now more on behaving in a way expected by a Christian;

*Aye. It's like Matt, havin' Matt, havin' Ally. I think it a' goes back tae – see when I – cos I used tae be really sociable, right? I dunno for sure if this is it but I think it goes back tae see when I lost a' ma pals an' a' that right? Cos I used tae go tae a lotta parties, night clubs an' a' that, right? I used tae dae straight hings, right? An' ye're gonna laugh, like I would dae anythin', right? Just ... like when I sorta pulled away fae a' that, I just had tae be roon ma ma, right?*

Sean made clear that he appreciates that his mother has always been there for him, but also acknowledges that he requires more than that one relationship in order to survive. Sean began involvement in the church that he then attended when he got a flyer through his door advertising the church to the local community. He spoke to David about it and he encouraged him to visit. Although Sean never had any restrictions, he had concerns about his convictions being revealed to the church, or Police seeing him there and assuming the worst and arresting him. So, Sean phoned the pastor of the local church and explained his situation to him. He also told the Police that he intended going to church. He was anxious to go alone so David accompanied him on his first visit. Since that day Sean regularly been attended Sunday services and other groups during the week. Sean felt accepted and welcomed in his church, however, because of his distrust of the police and authority, not associated with church, he feared the extent to which he could be fully involved in church life. He was asked to be part of the welcome team, welcoming attendees at the door on a Sunday morning, *I said tae him, we'll see how things go, I said, but I'd have tae – I said, I've no restrictions or that but if I feel there's an issue wi' that.* He feared the judgements and accusations of others. He feared another prison sentence. He feared returning to psychotic episodes. He feared losing his place amongst this new-found community. All of Sean's supportive relationships originate from church or faith-based organisations. These relationships not only supported his faith but opened doors of opportunity that provided both hope and ways of sustaining desistance. Sean's faith was important to him, but it was the community of believers surrounding him that has sustained his desistance journey.

### 2.3 Sean's faith journey

Sean included one photograph which symbolised the beginning of his faith journey:

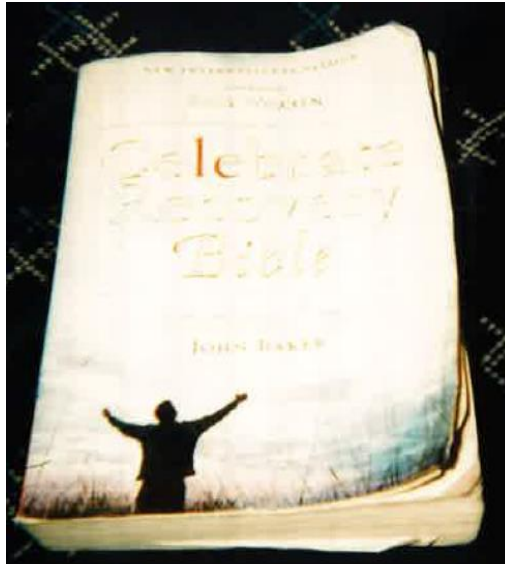


Figure 11: Photo, Sean (Group 3)

This photograph was of particular significance because it was the first Bible Sean had. It was given to him by the support group worker, David, who has since provided continued encouragement and support to him. When Sean agreed to take part in this research, he had been part of his church for almost two years. His first encounter with Christianity was during his last prison sentence when he started attending Prison Fellowship groups after being invited by the person he shared a cell with. He found these interesting but did not experience any faith transformation. Once out of prison he was struggling and began visiting a church but found, *it was the wrong church for me*. He was then referred to David and found out about his group. It is unclear how Sean was referred or by who, but he began attending his support groups and soon found himself:

*...basically I came through it as I knew who Jesus was, I'd heard like the name Jesus, like Easter, Christmas, I've heard basic stuff but I didnae know anythin' about Jesus. I didnae know any character, further characters in the bible or any people. I didnae know, I just maybe knew Mary an' that was it.*

The more Sean learned about the person of Jesus, the more he began to believe that he existed as a person, but also that he was God's son who died for him. Sean talked

knowledgeably about Jesus, God and his faith. Sean was now completely committed to living what he sees as a Christian lifestyle. All the support groups he attended were faith-based. As well as attending his own church he regularly visited other churches and had been asked to share stories about his journey to their congregations. Between the first and second interviews Sean had been baptised. Where he was initially anxious to be part of the 'welcome team', by the second interview he had joined the team. He had been distributing sandwiches and socks to homeless people in Glasgow City Centre. His pastor asked him to think about further outreach work that he could be involved with. Sean recognised God working in all areas of his life. He tells a story of failing his driving test and his instructor being unable to give him a lift home, so he had to get the train. At the station Sean saw a man who had taken 20 Valium pills and was attempting to jump on the tracks. Sean stayed with the man ensuring he wouldn't jump and called 999. Sean believed he was meant to be there at that moment in time:

*The weird hing is, fae a selfish point o' view as well, actually, completely for that next couple o' days, a' I was thinkin' aboot was him. So I wasnae even thinkin' aboot failin' ma drivin' test... So I think I was definitely meant – well, I was – I shouldnae hae been there that day. So that was like quite an experience.*

He also saw God's timing in when he first visited the church he had become a part of:

*I believe as well that I was meant tae go tae that church. I believe although it's been there a while, it wasnae ma time tae go there, 4, 5 years ago an' that's why I was in Glasgow for 2 years.*

The pre-ordering of situations and belief that God is in control allowed Sean to see meaning in his circumstances. When faced with obstacles he tried to focus on how God can use the situation. As well as meaning, this offered comfort to Sean when situations seem outwith his control. He believed that God acts in response to prayers:

*She [a member of Sean's church] prayed wi' me basically just handed everythin' we done over an' that, I felt this weird feelin' in response tae this - goosebumps. I wasnae cold or anythin'. It was head tae toe an' when I was walkin' home that night as well it was just – I felt like I was floatin'. Like I know that might sound strange but it's like I was just floatin'.*

*People like gie ye hope that are the right people an' also prayin's important as well I think. Cos I'm no sayin' a' ma prayers are answered but some o' ma prayers – quite a lotta ma prayers have been answered an' some o' them have no been easy prayers.*

For Sean, God was not only in control but he was actively at work in and around people who spoke to him. This could be viewed as Sean relinquishing agency to a higher being leaving Sean with an almost fatalistic outlook on life. French philosopher Blaise Pascal, in relation to faith most widely known for ‘Pascal’s wager’<sup>13</sup>, posits that ‘God instituted prayer in order to lend His creatures the dignity of causality’ (Pascal, *Pensees*, 1670). This theory suggests that rather than God acting on behalf of human requests, instead God chooses to involve humanity in his work. For Sean, in praying for his life situations, or praying for others, he was given the sense of being actively involved in bringing about change in those situations. In seeking God in those circumstances, he was also able to see more clearly how he should act or think differently. Sean’s increased sense of agency coupled with the belief that no matter the outcome, he has a higher being working things out for the best. This allowed him to have hope for the future and continue on the journey he was now on.

### 3. Faith and Identity

Sean had a complex relationship with his own identity and how he is viewed by others. As mentioned in section 1, Sean’s last charge was for breach of the peace with a sexual motive. The latter aspect of this charge continued to trouble Sean causing him a great deal of anxiety with regards to how he was viewed in society. Although he pleaded guilty to the charge, he was adamant that he would not spend any of his time in prison with others who he deemed had committed more serious sexual offences.

Sean had to share a cell with someone who had committed a sexual offence and he found this extremely challenging. This was the same man who invited Sean to his first Prison Fellowship group, the group that instigated Sean’s initial faith journey. Although Sean spoke frequently about God’s timing and being in the right place at the right time, he did not mention God’s pre-ordering of events with regard to sharing his cell with the man who is responsible for his first encounter with the faith he became dependent on. Sean did not want to identify with anyone else in E Hall. He struggles with the sexual element of his offence and views his charge as an injustice.

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<sup>13</sup> Pascal argues that people should endeavour to believe in God based on the rational that if he exists then believers will be eternally rewarded and avoid eternal loss. If he does not exist, then believers have lost nothing.

The leaders in his church were aware of his background and he believed most of the congregation were aware too. Sean was keen for people to understand that although he was on the register it was not for the crimes that people would normally associate with a sex offender. At the time of his second interview, there had been a lot of press coverage about historic sex crimes at the hand of sports coaches. Sean was particularly concerned that people would associate him with something similar:

*like cos folk know me an' a' that an' they know I was a bit unwell an' I've showed folk ma paperwork an' a' that. They're like that, no that's – this is just what they say – they say, no that's no a beast. Right?*

*I say tae them, I'm a Christian now. Right? I say tae them. An' then they'll be like – I say, so I don't dae stuff like that noo. An' if I don't dae them – sorry, if I am are daein' them, I try not tae dae them, dae ye know what I mean?*

At church, he found comfort in the knowledge that everyone has sinned and therefore are unable to judge him:

*Although like I've been in prison an' stuff like that, that's the thing as well, it's like everybody – like obviously we're a' sinners, right? Now, I'm no – it's no that I'm sayin' any better or any worse than anybody but I could be talkin' tae somebody up there an' I'm no sayin' this happens but maybe works as a banker – there's an example, right? A bank manager maybe gets 100 grand a year, right? But I don't know if he goes home an' drinks whisky or if he's on his laptop gamblin', ye know.*

The sins that Sean choses for his example here are drinking alcohol and gambling. This is indicative of the teaching of some Christian churches and particularly some denominations. Although Sean feared not being accepted in society, he had in many ways rejected much of what is accepted in wider society for a community which has views which could be seen as counter-cultural. Sean had stringent opinions which he felt are supported in his church community. These were not views held by all church communities and they caused Sean difficulties when attending other faith-based organisations. Sean was the only professing Christian in the project not to quote any Scripture but he speaks clearly about the Bible and its authority, *Pastor will make it very clear every week at the start o' the sermon that at... we stick tae the Bible. If it doesnae say it in the Bible, tae me, it's just false preachin'. Right?* He used this stance to explain his beliefs about homosexuality, the transgender community and those who drink alcohol or gamble. Sean was comfortable sharing these views with me,

perhaps because he knew I also had a faith<sup>14</sup>, so perhaps assumed I would share his views or perhaps he is always comfortable sharing his views as he is assured of his convictions.

Sean's hope was embedded in beliefs that lead him to exclude himself from the culture around him. His criminal past excluded him from many aspects of society. He had lost friendship groups as a result of distancing himself from criminality and felt unable to associate with others who no longer engage in criminal behaviour but who choose to socialise in the pub. Mouw (2001) discusses theologian Austin Farrer's quandary, where he would reason the validity of meeting his non-Christian friend on the way home from an evangelistic service to join him for a drink at the pub. He enjoyed his friend's company, even though at times irreverent, but saw spiritual weakness in himself by virtue of being in a pub and also because the conversation did not turn to Godly matters, about which he had been so enthused at the service. Mouw describes this inner dilemma as, 'The old saying about desiring heaven for the climate and hell for the company' (p.32). Describing a pub as hell, or indeed Farrer's friend as hell is a severe comparison, which Mouw admits, however it mirrors how some Christian are taught to view the world; those not 'chosen', or those not committed to following the ways of Scripture to the letter. Sean is bound in the idea that things and people of the world that are outside of Christianity can bring no good into his life. He has found comfort in his church surrounded by only believers and is reluctant to build relationships outside of this believing community. In doing so, he is empowered by the Scriptural theology that all things are possible with God, whilst limiting his own possibilities and even his own spiritual growth or experiences.

Sean had a specific perception of who can be a Christian, e.g. they must be a straight, non-drinker, non-smoker, adhering to the letter of Scripture with limited cultural interpretation. Does living within these boundaries mean Sean was hindered from fully experiencing what a life outside of prison, and criminality, can offer? Did he create an intellectual and spiritual prison for himself, one of comfort, nonetheless, one that restricts his life? Analysing Farrer's quandary further and comparing it with the friendship of George Whitefield (Calvinist evangelist) and Benjamin Franklin (a religious sceptic), Mouw (2001) concludes using this illustration; 'When a foul-mouthed major league outfielder leaps high into the air to make a stunning catch, we can think of God as enjoying the event without necessarily approving of anything in the agents involved' (p.37). If we assume

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<sup>14</sup> I had previous work colleagues in common with the gatekeeper through which I recruited Sean.



God only delights, and cares for, his chosen people and not all creation, excluding humanity who don't recognise Him, then we are minimising the totality of God as omnipotent creator. This reasoning brings forth an underlying theological argument of infralapsarianism vs supralapsarianism which is a debate far outwith the scope of this project. What is of significance is the possible effects that Sean's infralapsarian leaning could have on him fully integrating into society, and in turn his continued desistance. Research has shown the importance of identity, social bonds and destigmatisation has on supporting desistance. Sean's identity transformation seemed to have occurred over three stages; one, from criminal to non-offender; two, from non-Christian to Christian; three, from Christian to 'If it doesnae say it in the Bible, tae me, it's just false preachin.' This tertiary level prompted his chosen exclusion from building new relationships with those outside his own network. For Sean, beauty or joy could not be found in anything or anyone not directly linked to God. This is not theologically problematic in itself, adhering to the belief that all good things originate from God: the flaw could be seen in the humanistic selecting of what is deemed good.

This black and white way of viewing the world and society seemed to be encouraged in his church and perhaps allowed Sean the ability to make sense of his life up until that point. When looking back over his life he saw an uncertain chaos:

*it's the longest time in ma life that I've no been in trouble. it's the longest time an' that's no doubt in ma mind coincided wi' everythin', ye know. Cos generally if I was oot o' trouble for 18 month, it was an achievement. I mean, it was generally petty stuff in recent years but it was still happenin'. Sometimes I used tae just hink – how is this like? Like if I was in the polis station, I would think, how am I even – like I know what had happened but I'd be like, what am I even in here for? Cos I felt that I wasnae that kinda person.*

Now he has a faith in God he describes himself as being *assisted* in all aspects of life:

*Whereas noo, I see hings completely different, ye know, completely different an' I feel assisted in everythin' I'm daein', even barriers an' stuff like that, I feel totally assisted. An' a lotta the time, there's no actually much I need tae dae when I'm havin' problems. There's not a lot I need tae do. Very little I have tae do an' it just settles itsel' out an' even if it didnae settle itsel' oot, the hope that I've got roon' aboot wi' the people in ma life, David, John, even the people I've met at church, it's no – this isnae a bad – this isnae like an egoistic way or anythin' like that – but I feel a bit untouchable because if somethin' bad happens tae me, they're irrelevant tae me, ye know. That's how it feels. So nothin' bad can really happen*

For Sean, the hope is in the people who he could turn to for support, the relationships he built. When he spoke of being assisted this was in reference to God. It is interesting that when things fall into place he attributed it to God but when *didnae settle itsel oot* he turned to those who have offered him support before. For Sean, his faith in God undoubtedly made a huge impact on his life and his outlook, but arguably the biggest impact has been the other people of faith surrounding him. The impact of being part of a community which supports pro-social relationships was so powerful for Sean that he feels *untouchable*. Across the three case studies, and later revealed in chapter 8, the relational aspect of belonging to a community is crucial to the provision and sustainment of hope. When the difficulties of desistance arise, those who feel they belong to a community or group, have hope provisions that those going it alone struggle to have access to.

#### 4. Sean's perceived injustice in the system and distrust of authority

In Ian's story, Case Study 1, there was a distinct turning point when he was shown mercy from those who had the power to punish him. For Sean, there were no moments like this. Across both interviews he showed a distrust for authority and felt like he was excessively punished for his crimes; he believed he should be punished, just not to the extent he was. At times this seems to overwhelm him, yet there are also times when he can almost be philosophical about his situation:

*So there used tae be a time that's a' I used tae hink aboot, I cannae believe I'm on the register. Like this would be for years, I cannae believe I'm on the register. I cannae believe, I cannae believe this has happened tae me, I cannae stand people – that's what I used tae hink. An' then I'd be watchin' like the news or somethin' in a paper an' ye'd see some stuff an' I'd be like, I cannae – that's disgustin', that's the bracket I'm in an' that sorta just took over ma though process. Then there was the guilt o' this lassie an' a' that. Aye, it was just like a bigger an' bigger hole. Then I just wasnae gettin' – an' then, oh we're applyin' for an extension. I was like, wow, applyin' for an extension? An' then ye see some people what they've done an' they're on it for 3 years an' a' that. An' I'm hinkin', wow. It's just, ye know – an' then there was obviously a wee part o' feelin' sorry for masel' cos I'm gettin' an extension, ye know.*

Sean had a profound distrust of those in authority, largely because he did not understand why he had been on the sex offenders register for so long. He later said that he was deemed as high risk because of his mental health issues and because he was unemployed, but this still did not make sense to him. He found visits to his home deliberately disruptive; *I was*

*gettin' a lotta visits at 8 in the mornin', maybe I wasnae up, maybe I havenae had ma breakfast*, which contributed to his anxiety. He felt unable to question decisions as anyone in authority did not explain his situation in a way he understood, *I've tae play the game, he's tae play the game but he's the referee*. He believed one of the reasons that his time on the sex offenders register had been extended twice, was because of one occasion when he questioned the reasoning behind it. During his second interview, a man came into the café; Sean was distracted, stopped talking, and kept watching to see where he was going. I asked him if he was ok and if he'd rather we continue the interview elsewhere. He explained this man had been his CPN (Community Psychiatric Nurse) some years ago and described him as the *Dodgiest guy goin'*. Sean was happy to continue with the interview but kept a sporadic eye on his previous CPN throughout.

*The polis said tae me, what have ye always got a bag wi' ye for? I said, how would you know I've always got a bag wi' me? Have ye got me under – have ye been – cos there was a guy came up tae ma church once an' I know he was in the polis an' he's never been back an' I know he was a CID... I was talkin' tae this guy an' I knew straight away he was a CID cos I'd never seen him in ma life, he just looked like wan an' he was sittin' – under his glasses, middle, aboot 50, lookin' at me fae a distance an' then I watched an' watched an' watched him a wee bit mair withoot him knowin' an' I said, I'm gonna go over an' talk tae him. So I went over, shook his hand. He's like, what's your name an' that? An' I was like, Sean, what's yours? Then we spoke a bit an' I started askin' him like, what dae ye work as an' that? Aye, he was definitely... He was like, aye I live in Linlithgow. I said, what part o' Linlithgow? Em, eh, ye know where, dae ye know where – cos he won't stay in Linlithgow – dae ye know where the loch is? An' I'm like, aye. I know where the loch is in Linlithgow. What dae ye dae for work? Em, I'm in the postie, I'm in the post. Oh right. A postie that stays in Linlithgow. Aye, fair enough. I was like, so what part o' the post are ye in? What depot are ye based an' a' that? I can spot the undercovers. No for me, like just the general ones goin' aboot. I can just tell. They've a' got backpacks an' just – ye can just tell an' sometimes they'll have like somethin' like a Poundland bag in their hands but they just don't look like a Poundland person.*

This is one of many stories Sean had about being followed or watched. Perhaps he was being monitored occasionally, perhaps paranoia is as a result of his mental health issues, or medication he had been taking. This distrust in authority gave Sean a sense that he may be charged for something he has not done. Or that an excuse will be made in order to justify yet another extension to his licence. Unlike Ian, Sean does not have a stand-out story of when he has experienced mercy from anyone who has the power to punish him. He talks about the Bible and Jesus having authority, *Well, I'm no under their authority, I'm under his [Jesus] authority, ye see*. Viewing authority in this manner could act to accentuate

Sean's distrust as sees himself as being under a different, better, authority that which restricts him.

## 5. Forgiveness

Sean had a complex relationship with his offending past and the idea of forgiveness or reconciliation. At times he seemed to accept his past actions and the punishment which followed. At other times, he seemed trapped in a sense of the severity of his punishment far outweighing the seriousness of the crime he committed: he only felt like this about his breach of the peace with sexual intent offence which had resulted in him being placed on the sex offenders register. He did not question any other sentences he received and seemed to accept that he was deserving of them. At one stage during the second interview Sean spoke about meeting the owner of the bus company on which his offence occurred:

*Was up there an' then I said tae him at the end, like I said tae him, like see aboot 9 year ago, I said, I was on one o' your buses in Glasgow. He shook ma hand an' that an' said, that was brilliant. An' then I said, like ye know, I was talkin' about the fightin' an' drinkin' an' a' that, but also I said, see aboot 9 year ago, I was a wee bit ill an' what not an' done a breach o' the peace on your bus an' that. I said, an' it was classed as breach o' the peace but in brackets sexual. I said it's no a sexual offence as such but under an Act it can. An' eh - I apologised an' that. He was like that, that's fine. Like, he was cool aboot it. So I felt a sense o' like that was good that I was able - Aye, aye. A bit o' closure maybe... I was hinkin' like if that had have been just say somebody I maybe - which is still bad but maybe beat up a guy, ye would possibly get a hing called restorative justice. Obviously wi' a sexual offence, that's never gonna happen cos that can just cause mair damage tae the other person but I think that's aboot as close as I'll get tae ever apologisin', ye know... an' I also felt that I was meant tae meet him, ye know.*

*I did plead guilty, but she could be hinkin' tae this day like what if I see him again?... She doesnae know that at the time I was really - ye know what I mean [Sean referring to having psychotic episodes]...But there's nothin' I can really dae aboot that. Obviously, she was really upset an' stuff like that. So, the kinda stage I've gotta now is that I cannae really change it, so I feel bad, like I've made somebody feel like that, especially a lassie but like I don't know.*

Sean felt it was important to apologise. He felt he was meant to meet the owner of the bus company. Apologising to the owner of the bus company may seem irrelevant to the offence that Sean committed, however it facilitated an element of *closure* for him. It allowed him to offer an apology that he knew he would never be able to offer his victim. Whilst telling this story he also displays empathy towards his victim. He recognised that although his

intent may not have been sexual, the intent did not alter the way he made his victim feel at the time. This offence in particular had the greatest impact on Sean's life. The extent to which he felt forgiven is not necessarily clear, the extent to which the owner of the bus company could offer forgiveness is also debatable. Sean believed that God had forgiven him, *I've been forgave the earthly things* but he talked about still being troubled in his soul and not allowing this to overtake him.

## 6. Sean's hopes

Sean's hopes reflected those of almost all the participants in this study. He hoped to have his own home one day, a job and a partner. One particular person who attended the same group as Sean, who received a life sentence at the age of 52 for murder and was released from prison at the age of 66, became engaged. Sean finds great comfort in the fact that if this older man who was imprisoned for murdering a woman, can come out of prison and begin a new relationship, then it must also be a possibility for him. He also finds it encouraging when he sees changes in those who had previously been affected by addiction or mental health issues:

*It's sometimes good as well just tae see somebody come back fae a rehab an' remember how chaotic an' boisterous they maybe were before an' the problems they were havin' an' they come back fae rehab, it's like meetin' a new guy.*

He also considered himself fortunate when comparing himself to other members of the support group he attends:

*some o' the guys at the group, some o' the people – some o' them have been through a lot an' some o' them have got nothin' compared tae me. Like I used tae think I was nothin', right? I used tae hink a' this, wi' the register an' a' that, right? Some o' them have got nothin', like literally, honestly, nothin'*

Being in the support group environment rather than his church environment, although both faith-based, allowed Sean a change of perspective into his own situation. In church, Sean feels accepted but he is also aware that he stands out, *Ma church is quite middle-upper class, it's no even middle class, it's quite middle-upper class... Like I'm the only adult that doesnae work*. In his support group he could see how far along the desistance journey he

had come. He viewed himself as fortunate amongst the group as he had a safe home and a support network around him.

Sean's relationship and understanding of hope was grounded by his faith in God. He believed God was working on his behalf, protecting him from situations and giving him the ability to deal with any barriers he faced which stood in the way of his continued desistance. Sean had an assurance that all would be well, he saw meaning and purpose when things went well and when he had struggles. Sean's hopeful outlook towards his future were summed up by his words, *But I think it will come. It will come and things will be good.* Sean's faith in God overrides his fear about society and distrust of authority. He found support in both church and groups; support which has continued over his past 9 years. This regular, continued hope enabled Sean to store hope, strengthening him when he comes up against obstacles. His 'hope store' did not become depleted, because his support is sustained, feeding his hope and enabling continued desistance.

## 7. Concluding summary

Like Andy, Sean too was a professing Christian, however he made the journey towards faith alongside his desistance journey. Sean had found a new identity and new community which accepted him for who he was. His faith, and faith-based community was a source of all hope for Sean. He viewed God as acting on his behalf but did not relinquish all agency, he maintained an active part in his own desistance by engaging with groups and through diligently praying. Sean had a transformative faith story of how he was then, as a non-believing offender, to how he is now as a faith filled desister. Despite the immense support surrounding Sean, he continued to be plagued by a sense of injustice over his penultimate sentence, which meant he was placed on the sex offenders register. His subsequent interactions with officials resulted in his time on the register being extended on two occasions exacerbating his sense of injustice. These setbacks intensified Sean's mental health struggles, which in turn affected his desistance. Sean felt he had never been given a proper explanation for his continued presence on the register and therefore continued to struggle with the sense of injustice. Ensuring punishment and penalties are understood by those experiencing them allows for hopes to be built on realistic terms, thereby reducing the number of additional potential setbacks.

## Chapter 10: Emerging Themes

*Years and years ago I was hoping for a lot but when I got into the jail I wasn't hoping for anything cause I thought nothing, I thought "this is it man, this is bad".*

Harry, Group 1

*I think ye have tae have the belief in the hope that America's there, ye know, because we're told it's there, ye know. So ye've gotta take that bit o' belief but then ye've gotta get the realism in as tae how ye're gonna get there, ye know. So the hope's the end o' the journey. The realism's the boat that ye're gonna get on that's gonna sail ye over.*

Richard, Group 3

### 1. Every voice matters

This chapter considers the contributions of every participant and highlights the main themes that became apparent and that I identified as most significant, across the whole data set. This chapter draws upon the stories and images from participants out-with those selected as case studies, to provide a bigger picture of the hope experiences amongst desisters. It is important to note that these themes are also apparent in the case studies: every contribution was analysed in order to produce these findings. The proceeding chapter also engages with the wider group of participants stories and created images. This not only acts to give credence to the themes discussed, but it is also indicating a personal recognition of those who contributed to the research but whose input was discounted for case study analysis.

### 2. Reflexively discovering themes

Crucial to Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis is the principle that themes do not simply emerge from the data (method stages outlined in chapter 6). They assert, "An account of themes 'emerging' or being 'discovered' is a passive account of the process of analysis, and it denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes" (Braun and Clarke, 2006:80). Even in cases where neutrality is sought and when any degree of interpretation, preconceived ideas or existing theory is required, the overall research question guides the researcher. The data inspires roads of enquiry sparking new ideas or re-affirming existing hypothesis, all of which exists through the

filter of the researcher, “If themes ‘reside’ anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them” (Ely et. al., 1997: 205-6). Reflexive thematic analysis is an approach to analysing qualitative data which allows the exploration of both broad and narrow research questions relating to experiences, views, perceptions and representations of given phenomena. ‘This not only demarcates it as a particular TA [thematic analysis] approach, it emphasises the importance of the researcher’s subjectivity as analytic *resource*, and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation’ (Braun and Clarke, 2020).

### 3. Imagination forming hope

Participation in this research required the use of imagination from the outset. Participants were asked to create collages and paintings reflecting what hope means to them. They were given cameras, or used smartphones to find images which reflected hope for them. Every participant was instructed not to include photographs of specific individuals in a way in which they could be identified so they were required to use imaginative ways of depicting those that gave them hope. Every participant completed this stage of the research. Some collected over 20 photographs and others found it more challenging including only around four. To a degree, the first stage of participation required an element of creativity which some may have felt they didn’t have. This stage would have certainly come more easily to some than others, dependent on existing talents and interests. Regardless of the artistic qualities of the pictures created, there appeared to be a correlation between the number of images, or the detail of those images, and the extent to which participants placed value on hope, or felt hopeful. This may reflect the degree to which some participants felt they wanted to engage with the overall project. However, it is possible that the extent to which participants were able to imagine hopeful outcomes, or re-imagine past instances of hope, informs the extent to which they are able, or willing, to experience hope. Analysis also found that past experiences affected the extent to which someone would be willing or able to hope, with some unable to break the negative inevitability through which they viewed their lives and future. The extent to which participants saw themselves as playing active roles in their own lives also impacted the extent to which they could be hopeful. Those with more fatalistic leanings described scenarios that limited their autonomy and therefore saw hope as irrelevant; all of their actions or thoughts were useless as the world around them happened regardless. An exception to this can be seen in Harry as he was nearing the



end of a five-month sentence. During this time in prison he was away from his two children and the rest of his family over the Christmas period. Harry drew his hope picture freehand describing one aspect as follows:

*I really miss Christmas, all that, so Christmas lights it- they cheer me up. I tend to. When I'm writing my name I do Christmas lights or something round it... And they [Harry's children] love Christmas and it was as if I wasn't away... It was just like things that brighten me up, I think, and they make me think of good things wi my weans 'n that.*

Harry (Group 1)



Figure 12: Picture, Harry (Group 1)

Harry's picture was created at an allotted time in the prison so he was unable to fully complete it as he would have wanted to. At first glance his picture seems to point to gambling, games and music. However, during interview stage it was realised that Harry's picture was the most symbolic from all the photographs taken and all the collages and pictures created. Each element related to experiences with people, predominantly different members of his family and how both remembering them and imagining his future with them acted as a source of hope. Harry was able to turn missing out on Christmas, which caused him great pain, into a source of hope by imagining his family, *I kept on thinking about them and I knew exactly what they were doing so I was cheered and aye... just cheered us knowing exactly what they were doing and they were happy* (Harry, Group 1). Remembering and imagining each moment of his family's Christmas day allowed Harry to have a sense that he too was experiencing it. Harry's ability to use his imagination in this way, to transport him to a place of joy meant that he wasn't plagued by feelings of regret or "missing out".

Harry also had a positive attitude toward the concept of hope. He saw worth in being hopeful whilst also believing that a person must act in order to maintain hopefulness.

*I use that word a lot, I hope this, I hope that, but it's down to yourself. It's really down to yourself whether hope is going to happen. If you say I hope this is going to happen, you go and do it, that's you done it, it's happened.*

Harry, Group 1

*I was hoping for this to happen, or I was hoping for that to happen" it's no going happen 'cause it's all down to yourself if it's going to happen, definitely, because you're the one that's got the legs to actually go out there and do it and that's all I done.*

Harry, Group 1

Harry's ability to hope seems inextricably linked to his ability to imagine positive outcomes as well as imagining himself as the actor enabling these outcomes to materialise. This was also notably reflected in another Group 1 participant's collage.



Figure 13: Collage, Gary (Group 1)

Gary's collage was more self-evident from the pictures and he also wrote specific notes on it. The picture in the top right corner is the only one without a title. Gary explained this picture was to symbolise socialising with friends and having a laugh. Although this collage uses less symbolism than Harry's, Gary has created a rounded picture of his sources of hope and what he hopes for. This still required Gary to engage with his imagination as he

sought pictures which best resembled what he wanted to express. He too had a strong ethos of playing an active role in finding what is hoped for:

*No really. I hink if you put your mind tae it, you get a job. Dae you know what I mean? I know. Thank God, I just got on wi it. Just put ma heid doon, get back oot there. Dae you know what I mean? Instead o' sittin' aboot feelin' sorry yersel'*  
 Gary, Group 1

Gary's demeanour was different than that of Harry. Where Harry romanticised the idea of hope to a certain extent, Gary's hope was firmly placed in his ability to work and changing his circumstances by working hard and earning as much as he could.

Those whose collages appeared sparse, struggled more with the idea of representing hope in picture form. During interview they also talked about the futility of hope and were more inclined towards fatalistic ideas and were less inclined to hint at personal agency.

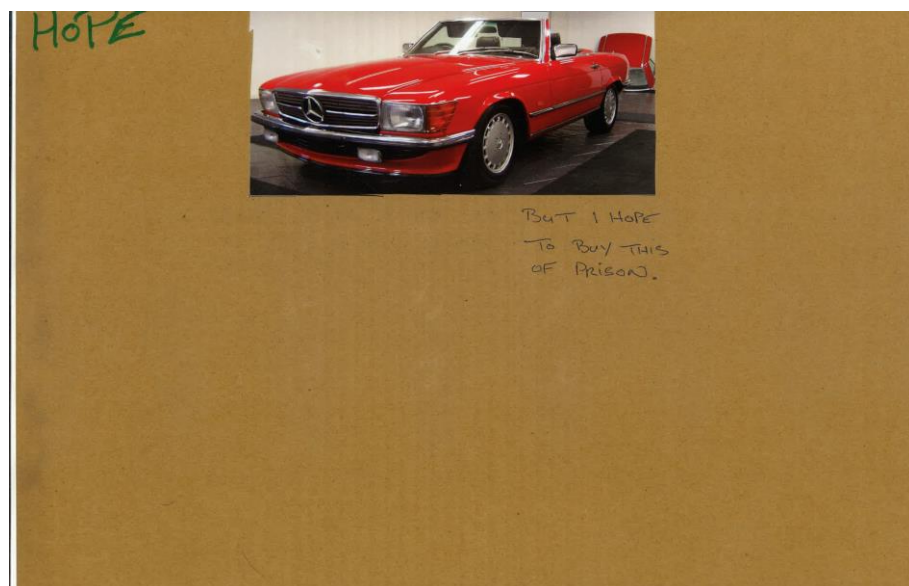


Figure 14: Collage, Stephen (Group 1)

Stephen's collage consisted of one picture, a bright red Mercedes convertible. During the interview I asked if he genuinely hoped to get this. Stephen's answer was *No, that's pie in the sky... I'll be lucky to get an old banger*. Stephen had a prolific criminal past with periods of desistance. He was now approaching his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and his main priority upon release from prison was finding a space in a *decent* hostel, for which he was relying on support from his Throughcare officer.

Stephen: *like see the Persistent Offenders, I worked wi them but at the end of the day they ended up doing nothing for me. I worked wi them for about five, six year and he just drapped me like a ton of bricks.*

Sarah: What happened?

Stephen: *Because I was beginning to get into more serious crime when I went but I thought that's what yous were there for. If I was getting into crime they were meant to help me. Oh, no, no. So got dumped, and ended up getting the jail here again.*

Stephen, Group 1

Stephen struggled to imagine a different life and better circumstances. He felt let down by life and by those around him. His first experience of prison came when he was 14 and he had lost count of the number of sentences he had completed since then, he describes himself as having spent around 40 years of his life in and out of jail. In his late teens, early twenties, Stephen had his own home and business and had stability in his life. From around age 22 this all changed, during the times he wasn't in prison Stephen only lived in temporary accommodation from this time onwards. During the interview the only hope that Stephen shared was to have a roof over his head and he saw this as a space in a hostel, hopefully leading to a council house, *just as I say just get a roof over my heed, get settled in my own hoose, get it done up to my own standards and then if I'm that old and my mental health is kept away then I'll be content to sit in the hoose.* He doesn't want friends or relationships as he sees this as leading to trouble. Stephen believes his desistance can be maintained as long as he keeps himself to himself. Stephen finds it easier to imagine trouble than anything positive coming into his life.

David's collage had more images than Stephen's, yet still only focussed on two ideas, far fewer than the others from Group 1. His thoughts were concentrated on working on his car and getting back to *his woman*.

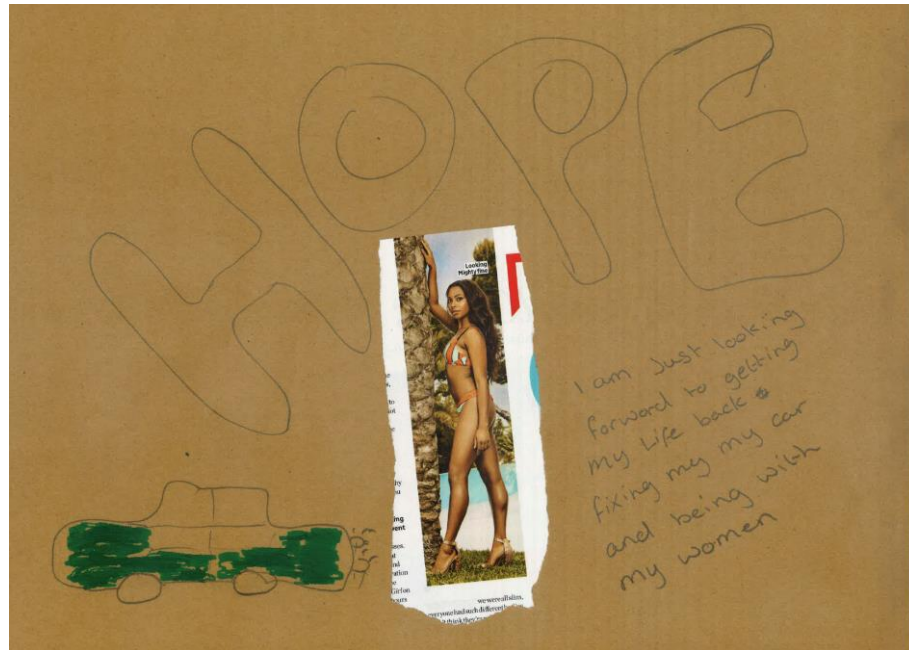


Figure 15: Collage, David (Group 1)



Figure 16: Collage 2, David (Group 1)

*People always tell me my attitude stinks sometimes, right, but it's just the way I've been. I've had to grow up hard kinda thing so I don't know, it's made me hard faced. I don't know. I think my attitudes alright but other people don't see it... This is how I think, I'm going to end up coming back here again, so, and I don't want to... Aye, something will happen. I know something will happen, 'cause I'm not—I just- I can't keep my mouth shut and I know they [David was serving a sentence for assaulting shop owners close to his home] all know. See I-I've-- Even if I just walk past them, ignore them. I can only do that for so much and I'll probably end up back in here, but-*

*- 'Cause they'll get me, they'll do it deliberately for to get... I- I hope- I hope it doesn't, aye but I just canny see it.*

David (Group 1)

Both Stephen and David seemed to have little use for hope. They could not recall moments in their life when they had been hopeful. They found imagining sources of hope challenging. They did have hopes for when they were released but put these outcomes down to chance or luck. They recognised that they needed support and saw this support as overriding any sense of control they had of their own circumstances or attitudes. They had both spent many years in the criminal justice system. They felt let down by the system, by agencies and by relationships in the past and this blocked any prospect of having a hopeful outlook. They were unable to imagine things working out for them, even for the most basic of hopes; e.g. David was homeless, he did hope for his own accommodation, he hoped for a space in a hostel, he named his preferred hostel recalling painful experiences he had in others. His main hope was for a place in a specific hostel but felt it inevitable that he would end up in one of the others.

Group 1 were perhaps at a disadvantage as they had less time to think about what they could include in their collages, they then had to find pictures to represent their ideas on hope. The other two groups were given at least two weeks to take photographs, giving them more time and arguably an easier creative mode. These groups followed a similar pattern in terms of the number of photographs taken and the extent to which participants engaged with the idea of hope. One prospective participant for Group 2 took three photographs and then withdrew from further participation; John took eight photographs, two of which he forgot why he included them; Ryan did not want to use a camera so drew symbols and images on 12 post-it notes; Andy, case study 2, took 14 photographs all with detailed explanations and engaged with the prospect of hope more than the others. The suggestion is not that for hope to exist individuals must be able to represent it visually. Rather, patterns in these findings indicate that hope requires an imagining of something better. Where this cannot be imagined, hope too is experienced to a lesser degree.

This has intrinsic echoes in desistance literature. Giordano and colleagues' (2002: 999-1002) theory of cognitive transformation, includes the envisioning of an appealing and conventional replacement self. Paternoster and Bushway (2009) highlight the imagining of a self with a job and successfully avoiding crime as a crucial factor in the identity

transformation from offender to desister (p. 1114). Hope is future focussed on something not yet seen, or not yet available, therefore requires imagination. Engaging with the imagination can be an important factor in the desistance process, however, it also has the ability to disappoint. The sometimes fragile, nature of hope is influenced by the limitless boundaries of the imagination. Talking about one of the young people he supports, Richard (Group 3) explains:

*There's there's youngsters, you know, who ... I- I'll give you one. He wants to be a lawyer. You know, he's desperate to be a lawyer. He's got a string of convictions as long as his arm. You know, so it's probably not ... And he's got no qualifications. He's got a huge journey ahead of him, and, you know, we've been working with him, to see how to bring in a reality, almost. To, you know, a hope has to have a reality in it as well. And it's not a case of saying, "No, you cannae be a lawyer," but it's a case of saying, "Right, your hopes of being a lawyer, now here's the steps. Right, you know, so can we set a goal to get to step one, you know? Right, and when you've done that, we'll go to step two and step three," you know. And sometimes their hopes will be dashed, because they'll get to step one and go, "Do you know what, Richard, that's too many steps away," you know. And that's a case of saying, "Right, fair do's. Okay. So you've learned all that. What can we use that for? How can that transfer into you know," sorta. What new hope can introduce, you know, that you can, you can go for this maybe only two steps away instead of five steps away.*

Richard, Group 3

Richard works carefully to manage expectation and put in place methods of dealing with disappointment. Although doing all he can to support this young person, he seems certain that he will be unable to reach the goal of lawyer. For the imagination to work best in the desistance journey, as Richard states, *a hope has to have reality in it as well*. Boundless imagination runs the risk of eventual disappointment and hopelessness; whereas neglecting the imagination can convey entrenched hopelessness. Much like hope, the imagination can also be fickle and tempering it can be a complex task. In the example above, Richard shows he works alongside people to modify their hopeful focus towards each step, rather than to a huge overall goal. Having hope requires activating the imagination in order to have something to work towards. However, without guidance and support from others, that which has been imagined can become a source of pain and disappointment as it begins to seem impossible.

#### 4. The necessity of virtue?

The title is taken from a Shakespearean reference from *Two Gentlemen of Verona*: a source used by McNeill and Farrall (2013) where they suggest, 'While it seems unlikely

that such exposure to virtue could be a sufficient condition in and of itself for producing positive change, there are reasons to suggest that it might nonetheless be a necessary one.’ (2013: p.3). The idea that virtue or moral behaviour may be ‘catching’ could be considered logical, in those ideals, beauty can be seen (ibid). This chapter discusses later the impact that acts of mercy or good deeds can have on the outlook of the offender. The concept of virtue, however, resonated in this research by way of participants recognising virtue in themselves and how they told stories of instances where others recognised virtuousness in them. ‘Virtue-based approaches to ethics have experienced something of a resurgence in recent years (Pence, 1991), suggesting a shift in moral thinking from the question “what ought I to do?” to the question “what sort of person should I be?”’ (McNeill, 2006: 52). This research highlights an additional question which could be considered “how would I like others to view me?”

The term virtue was not used at any time during the fieldwork. It was recognised and coded at the analysis stage when terms such as “I’m a good guy”, “I was alright inside”, “they recognised I wasnae a dafty”. Some participants identified times when those in a position of power, e.g. prison staff, lawyers, judges, recognised them as good people and this in turn caused them to take certain actions, *listen ye need tae get that boy out there cos, know what I mean, they obviously seen the goodness in me an’ they knew what they were like, know what I mean* (John, Group 2). This recognition from others most often added to a pre-existing belief that they were good people. Talking about being allowed to take various art classes Harry (Group 1) explains, *She’d seen that I was a nice enough person, and she was being nice back to me*. He goes on to talk about the importance of respect for others in terms of possible causation of his previous hopes being realised:

*If they don’t give you it back always respect, it’ll come good your day one day, so that’s what I’ve done...everything I’ve hoped for I’ve got and I don’t know if that’s out of me showing respect back and doing, not doing as I’m told, but doing what people expect out of you.*

Harry (Group 1)

As noted in the previous section it also became apparent that those who made reference to themselves as ‘good people’ from Group 1 included more detail in their collages. Those in Groups 2 and 3 who made positive reference to their own character not only took more photographs, they also had more in-depth explanations behind the meaning of each photograph. It could be, those who recognised an element of virtue in themselves were also



more inspired to engage with the desistance journey. Or, they could have been anxious to make clear to me that they were good people by way of seeking an element of recognition of their commitment to desistance. It could be that those who recognised themselves as ‘good’, or who recall being identified as ‘good’ by another, were in fact kinder and more willing to be a helpful participant in this project. This project does not seek to assess the extent of the virtues of each participant. In fact, it is important to note that across all groups, participants were given very little incentive to take part: for those in prison approximately 2 hours in total out of their cell; for those already released a free lunch, cup of coffee or snack. I had no influence over any aspect of their release dates or terms. Gatekeepers did not request feedback from me regarding participants’ behaviour or willingness to take part. Participants under supervision orders could use their participation in the project as an aspect of their commitment to desistance, but the extent to which that would be valued by parole officers is likely to be negligible. Those who chose to participate and engage more fully did so willingly.

The pattern of participation shows that those who specifically identified themselves as having virtuous qualities are also the ones who participated more fully in the creative stage of this research and were also able to envision hopes for their future. The reason for this cannot be definite, however the pattern is interesting. The ability to self-identify as ‘good’ or to be recognised by others as ‘good’ may have unlocked the door to positive future possibilities. They could identify as someone who did a ‘bad thing’ but not as a ‘bad person’. Recognising good in one’s identity perhaps allows for an expectant hope that good will be actualised in the future and returned, in a karma like fashion. This notion also feeds into the idea of wanting others to recognise that good, as this may influence other peoples’ reciprocal goodness in return.

The role identity plays in desistance has been discussed in Chapter 2, however, in terms of those who made indications towards virtue there is a recognition of what wrongs they have done, and their desistance journey is not separated from that. Although they are eager to ‘go straight’ (Maruna, 1997), they maintain a sense of personal identity rather than rejecting the old for a new and better self (Maruna, 2001:87). Identity is also a key theme in Christian theology with the predominant theme being the concept of being ‘born again’ and ‘created anew’:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

The new spoken of here speaks to a cleansing from sin and a reconciliation to God.

However, Scripture also reminds believers to remember what they once were: they are not separated from their former selves, they are forgiven, redeemed, the old-self no longer has the power over them that it once had, instead this new, additional aspect of their identity means they are able to now live as someone reconciled to God, with His power living in them:

Remember that at that time you [Gentiles by birth]<sup>15</sup> were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:12-13

The redemptive script of the 'Gentile' on the journey to believer is reflected in the journey from offender to desister. 'A particular identity narrative may be the most personally and culturally persuasive, meaningful and enabling for the person who is trying to desist' (Maruna, 2001:87). Rather than a 'schizophrenic' denial of one's past (Rotenberg, 1978). Those who appear to be more hopeful speak about goodness being recognised in them by others despite their past behaviour. It could be suggested that the source of the virtuous behaviour is irrelevant, unless examined from a philosophical moral stand point, the result is the same; a desister engaging in non-criminal activities and seeking to do good.

#### 4.1 An anti-virtue: the plague of injustice

Traditionally, justice is considered to be one of four prime virtues. Kraut explains Aristotle's view of the significance of justice, 'the person who most fully exercises such qualities as justice and greatness of soul is the man who has the large resources needed to promote the common good,' (Kraut 2018). Martin Luther King's renowned quote, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere' has become widespread and symbolic

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<sup>15</sup> This passage of Scripture speaks about the reconciliation and of Jew and Gentile. The Gentiles had not been born into relationship with God the way the Jews had. They had been previously been excluded from any notion that knowledge of, or relationship with, God was possible.

particularly in recent times. Everyone has a sense of justice, although what that looks like may differ. I did not ask participants anything related to justice, or injustice. However, for some participants, it seemed important for them that I was aware they had experienced injustice both through the justice system and in personal relationships. Those who focussed on injustices they had experienced, or were currently experiencing also leaned towards more fatalistic standpoints and seemed less hopeful about the future. Thomas had broken a tooth and had been waiting for a dentist appointment:

*But, nothing's going to be different, 'cause nothing changes in here. I've been waiting about 3 month for a dentist, I've got half a back teeth, they got me 6 x-rays round about November before Christmas and New Year and I'm still waiting on a dentist, d'you know what I mean?*

Thomas (Group 1)

Thomas goes on to give a fatalistic view of all things in prison and life afterwards. The injustice of being unable to book a dentist appointment impacted his view of everything in 'the system' being against him. This injustice contributed to an overall feeling of hopelessness, which may likely have been compounded by any pain his tooth had been causing too. Thomas was released from prison the day after this interview took place. He was leaving prison to live with his partner and one of his five children. He has varied access to the rest of his children due to strained relationships with their mothers. His hopes are to restore relationships with his children and to eat *proper grub*. He talks about growing up without ever remembering a time when he hoped for something. He did not recall having any ambitions, even from a very young age. Thomas' first job was as a cleaner when he was 27. He saw no need to work before because he lived with his grandmother. Speaking about his family he says, *I never seen one of them wi an actual jo... but it was always ma granny for everything... My Granny gave me everything, paid for haircuts, paid for bus pass, pays for phone*. Thomas blames being unable to see his oldest son being the trigger for returning to crime:

*Then next thing you know, I wusny getting him at the weekend. The other weans were going to stay wi my ma at weekend, so I was drinking more at the weekend. So I was like that, if I didny stop taking Sean at the weekends, then I would have still been in at the weekends and I wouldny have been mad wi it 'cause obviously nae weans, plenty of time on my hands so you're just going round getting a couple of beers, before you know it, it's a couple of bottles of wine, before you know it, it's like a couple of grams a coke.*

The breakdown of relationships and added stress are of course obstacles which many find have a negative impact on their desistance journeys. The significance of relationships for the participants in this research is discussed later in this chapter. Of significance here, is the injustice Thomas felt having been prevented from seeing his son and then other children. For him, this injustice led him physically and emotionally back towards alcohol, drugs and then crime. Framing consequences and life struggles as injustices impacted the extent to which Thomas was able to imagine a different future for himself.

Injustice was also entwined with a sense of corruption for some participants. Again, participants who focused on these issues in their narratives had fewer hope images. Both of the participants below took the least number of photographs across both groups 2 and 3. John had served prison sentences all over the UK and was familiar with court process and differences he saw in policing:

*Yer not meant to get done wi' trespassin' in Scotland, know what I mean, but then that just shows ye the corruption by the Scottish courts.*

John (Group 2)

*But then even there, January, New Year's Eve, I got arrested because I had a shoppin' trolley, a hammer, a roll o' carpet, gloves an' a torch. But they didn't realise I have bad circulation as well with the gloves. I found the carpet an' the hammer an' used the trolley tae carry it up the road cos I was tired... An' plus, why would I walk past the polis station if I had somethin' tae hide? Know what I mean? But that doesn't mean that – I see that as a blessin' from God because they done me wi' the wrong charge. They done me with like goin' equipped to steal an' I was just laughin', I was like, they've got this so wrong. I was like, listen, I've been done with theft of a shoppin' trolley, know what I mean, how many dae ye see in the town when ye drive through somewhere? Know what I mean? An' how many times dae ye see like an old dear usin' it tae carry her shoppin' hame? They don't say anythin'. But that was me.*

John (Group 2)

When describing the story, John found it bizarre that a person with a shopping trolley, hammer, carpet, gloves and a torch might look suspicious. He felt the injustice of being arrested but he is the only participant who credits God with immediately correcting an injustice. Crediting this to supernatural intervention gave John a sense of security in that God was on his side. John has known suffering and hardship through his own criminal activity but also as a victim of human trafficking. Yet, it is the authorities he trusts least and attributes them as the source of injustices he has suffered. Experiencing injustice from those in power or authority, or from family members, is perhaps more painful because

these are people who we are taught to trust. The injustice suffered, or at times perceived, by their hand, breaks down a fundamental understanding of how society operates.

At the time of his first interview Brian, (Group 3), had been out of prison for just over two years. In that time, he had acquired a home and had completed short term work contracts. He had surgery on his eye which meant he was unable to continue working until fully healed. His eye surgery was a major experience in Brian's life and was initially unsuccessful leaving him with poorer vision in one eye compared to before surgery. Understandably upset at this, he was anxious for further clarification as to why this would be the case and to find out whether there was an error made by hospital staff. This could have been a huge source of injustice for Brian, and he did express his concerns. However, far more significant for him was his distrust of the Police and injustices he perceived he had suffered as a result of their interventions in the past.

Brian: *I've heard them [Police] lyin', I've seen them lyin'.*

Sarah: So, see what if something happened to you, would you feel safe in going to the police about it?

Brian: *I wouldnae speak tae a policeman. Ye're only obligated tae give yer name, address, date o' birth. I don't trust them. They're liars. They're only oot for themselves. It's a corrupt system... There ye are. Chief Inspector says yes, I've seen these videos an' it's actually I could see the other ones that we seen before are much clear but ye can also see this lassie here had a glass. She said I had a glass in ma inside pocket. Now, the jacket I got lifted in, I brought doon fae Bowhoose. There was nae inside pockets in ma jaiket. Total fabrication. But it just shows ye I could quite easily have got 4 year.*

Brian (Group 3)

He also looks back on a previous offence which, because of what he sees as its unjust categorisation, has affected the rest of his life:

*Do ye know ma sentence, I grabbed ma boy for doggin' school once, right? Chucked him oot the hoose. He went tae his wee bird's greetin'. I got done wi' a section 1 offence for hittin' ma child. A' I done was grab him. I got £120 fine for that but I wasnae allowed tae see ma wean for 6 month tae the court case came up. Now, see in Barlinnie, when ye got a section 1 offence, it sounds bad cos folk think it's a paedophile or whatever. But I went, so you can check this oot – I was puttin' in for courses for gettin' oot, JCB tickets an' that. They said, oh no, ye cannae dae them cos you've got a section one offence. I said, yes, but ye've got that on file, it was – I was just grabbin' ma child at the time cos he dogged school. I know but it comes up section one offence. I said no, but that crackpot there that's swallowin' heroin every*

*day, hit an old wumin wi' a hammer an' yet he's tae get it. It's wrong.*

Brian (Group 3)

Despite being able to sustain his desistance for over two years Brian appears to torture himself going over past injustices, *that's hauf the time I cannae sleep an' a' cause I'm thinkin'*. He hoped for better relationships with his children and now grandchild, but could not see a way to make that happen. Brian had glimpses of hopeful thoughts about gaining employment on the railway and saving money for his future, but those thoughts were often squashed by dwelling on the wrongs he believed were made against him. I met with participants in Group 3 six months after their first interview. In this six-month period Brian had been arrested and served another short prison sentence. He saw this short sentence as yet another injustice compounding the struggles he was already facing.

This project cannot attest to the fact that those who were hopeful had never faced any injustice. They likely felt that they had been unfairly treated at some stage during their lives, however they did not dwell on these instances, they were not plagued by ideas of continual injustices. A prolonged sense of injustice leaves little room for hope. Cultivating virtuous behaviour to do good, or even be recognised as good, is tarnished with a belief that injustice will ensue regardless. The extent to which hope can be experienced where virtue cannot grow is surely limited. The relationship between injustice and negative fatalism leaves hope rendered obsolete. Restoring a sense of hope can also prove problematic where such deep distrusts have become embedded; here is where mercy can play a crucial role.

## 5. The gift of mercy

The term mercy is probably most commonly associated with theology and used in Christian faith-based settings. It is used to remind Christians that their salvation is not gained through merit but only through the kindness, goodness and love of God: the creator of all things chose to show mercy to people, 'he [God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy' (Titus 3:5). The word mercy was never used by any of the participants, or me, during this project. I did not ask about mercy nor did I set to gain insight to merciful experiences. The collages and photographs did not speak directly to the idea of mercy, however upon analysing the interviews it became clear that

for those whose hope increased, either between interview stages or by their own admission as they shared stories from the past, each had defining moments where unexpected kindness was shown which gave them motivation to continue, or re-join the desistance journey. The word kindness does not fully encompass the situations participants describe. Mercy is more descriptive and pertinent because, by definition, it is kindness or compassion shown by someone who also has the to power punish.

Mercy has a profound effect on participants and their relationship with hope because individuals recognise that a person in power actively chose not to punish, even if rules dictated that punishment was due. Instead, they recall moments where expected punishment was replaced by unexpected kindness, mercy. The most notable example of this is shown in Case Study 1, Ian's story when he described a turning point in his life because of the mercy shown by the staff at his temporary accommodation after being arrested, *the hostel kept the room open for me, which is like, wow! Really were supportive. So went back there. And then just kinda got mase' intae gear.* (Ian, Group 1). After a couple of months living in a room there Ian was offered a small flat and again was shown an unexpected kindness, *they're dead supportive an' wan o' the lassies in there, she ended up gettin' me a TV.* Ian makes a clear link between this initial act of mercy, keeping his room, and his ongoing desistance journey. As seen in Case Study 1, Ian's understanding, experiences and attitude towards hope had changed completely between the first and second interviews. There are a number of factors that sustained this hope for him but this act of mercy was the starting point.

Acts of Mercy were particularly poignant when they were shown by those in authority:

*I was getting bullied aff of two English screws they called it, eh, and this teacher stepped up and said "here this is oot a order every time he's in the class you pull him oot and slap him all about the place and I'm not putting up wi this anymore." And it was through this, it was a man teacher, it wusny a woman teacher, through this man teacher doing this it got stopped.*

Stephen (Group 1)

*I done the interview wi' him, he gave me the job. 2 days later I said, listen mate, I need tae come clean, I need tae be honest, I've got like court cases tae go up for but ma partner's pregnant an' I'm desperately tryin' tae change ma life. This was a turnin' point. In fact, this gave me a lotta hope as well. I should hae took a picture o' that cup. He actually gave me that cup recently. It's a cup I designed way back then. When I went tae visit him, he gave me that cup an' there's a coaster as well, a couple*

*coasters there. In fact, I could do that as well, if ye like, take some pictures o' them. But that's his cup oot there. I was messed up. So he gave me that cos that is like one o' the first logos I designed for him an' he still uses that tae this day. I need tae visit him. It's quite sentimental. He's like, here, I want ye tae take these, dae ye know what I mean?*

And describing a time when he was expecting a further lengthy prison sentence:

*I remember his face (the Sheriff), he was starin' lookin' over the tap o' his glasses... his demeanor had changed an' he's like that, we're gonna let ye oot noo. I was like, wow!*

Patrick (Group 3)

Kevin had been expecting to lose his job after being sentenced but found out 2 weeks before release that they had decided to keep a position open for him to return to:

*I'm lucky, I've got my job kept though, so I don't ... I'll not be head chef when I get out though. I'm gonna be sous chef.*

Kevin (Group 1)

These acts of mercy had a profound impact on each of these individual's lives. These moments became turning points in their desistance narratives. Hoping became possible because through an act of mercy gave rise to the possibility that someone in a position of power had even a glimmer of hope for them. The idea of mercy within the justice system is complex and for many reasons may not always be possible. Incorporating an element of mercy may be solely reliant on personal characteristics rather than considered judgement. Deciding where mercy is the correct course of action and when it may not be also brings an element of risk, with dangerous consequences. Yet, mercy makes a difference, as Ian, Patrick and Kevin can testify to.



## 6. Immediate hopes: perceived conventional norms



Figure 17: Collages, social norms

The majority of participants included aspects of life which they viewed as being fundamental social norms; hopes to be like everybody else, and live a 'normal life'. This follows previous desistance research (Barry, 2006, 2013; Jamieson et al., 1999; Shapland and Bottoms, 2011). Some in Group 1, found hope in the fact that they had a secure home

to go out to and a family waiting for them. Others were estranged from their families and were unsure whether they would be able to find somewhere to live once they had been released from prison, so their most immediate hopes were for somewhere to live and their favourite take away, *KFC are doing a 9 piece of chicken for £5.99 on a Tuesday and I'm oot on a Tuesday so my days planned oot, canny wait man.*

Thomas (Group 1)



Figure 18: Collage, Patrick (Group 3)

Patrick explains how significant having his own bank account was as part of both his desistance and hope journey:

*So aye, I was a ghost for ages. I had an account wi' Lloyds TSB, I had like massive debt an' like everythin' was like, oh, I'm never gonna get this back, how am I gonna get actually settled tae mase', even the idea o' a bank caird, minimal tiny wee things like that. Finally I got roon aboot gettin' ma idea, gettin' ma birth certificate sorted cos I was an adopted birth certificate, so it was a battle gettin' through that. Tiny wee thing. Maiste people would look at this an' think, och, it's only a bank caird. But that was hope for me even gettin' that.*

Patrick (Group 3)

Opening a bank account proved challenging once he had been released from prison especially with the additional complications of sourcing his birth certificate. The bank account was much more to Patrick than a way of managing money. It was another sign that he was recognised as a part of society and no longer 'a ghost'. When I explained that to include the picture of his bank card in the project, I would need to cover his name and the card numbers, Patrick was disappointed and made clear to me that he didn't mind who would see it. Despite his protests, I covered the identifying letters and number and he accepted that was part of *the rules*. Patrick was proud that he had been able to set up his

own bank account and later refers to this as one the *milestones* in his life. For Patrick, this was a marker that his desistance journey was headed in the right direction. He was recognised as a member of society and he was now able to function financially the way he saw the rest of society functioning.

The complications associated with banking post prison release was a factor for many participants. Participants from Group 1 who were nearing release from prison were concerned about opening a bank account and being able to register for Universal Credit. They felt intimidated by the new process of claiming benefits and were aware of rumours that they would now have a lower income.

*'cause my bank account's knackered, 'cause of over drafts, and bills that's have no been paid... So they're (Throughcare Support Officers) meant to be getting me a bank account, 'cause I need it to get that Universal Credit... Aye, it's mental man. I'm no looking forward to it all man... it's going to be crazy this Universal Credit man*

Thomas (Group 1)

Thomas was computer literate yet still dreaded the process of setting up an account and registering for Universal Credit. Others had less experience of using computers or online methods of form completing and were therefore extremely anxious about it. For many, receiving support in this application process was the main support they were seeking from their Throughcare Support Officer (TSO) as it was one of the most daunting aspects of their release. TSOs offer many other forms of support with housing, job applications, medical registration and general support and encouragement, although not all participants engaged with further support.

Although not directly represented in the images, during interview some participants talked about seeking employment or finding something to do to occupy their time once released. Although not represented in any of the images participants created, many spoke of needing something to keep themselves busy; for some this was very much focused on paid employment, others spoke of different support groups they could attend and seeking voluntary work.

*So, I bought a wee car to work on, to keep myself busy when I was out there 'cause I had nothing tae dae.*

David (Group 1)

*But, I like saving up magazines with cars and that. It just keeps me busy. I just always try and tick boxes to keep my day busy, basically.*

Peter (Group 1)

*Just hoping a job and that's that. That's my next step. I had it all up and running as well and it's just all away. But there's jobs everywhere, so... I always-always keep myself busy....Aye but it's only the job and then I'll be brand new, just a wee job.*

Harry (Group 1)

*A couple week after I just started daein' jobs for people an' that, then it just built fae there. People put me on to other people, then the jobs came in. I've got a driver cos I cannae drive but I've got 2 vans on the road, so I've done good, man... Aye, just get your heid doon an' get on wi' it, instead o' fuckin' usin' that as an excuse tae be in the jail, know what I mean? Sayin' I cannae dae this, if I was in jail, naebody'll gie me a chance.*

Gary (Group 1)

*Aye, I think that's the long term. I've been askin' that since I was inside because I knew I needed that structure, I knew I needed that purpose, I knew I needed a sense of give an' receive sort of idea, of doin' somethin' tae get ma own self-worth up an' get ma head up again. But I just know that won't be happenin' for a wee while. I'm still hopeful about that sort of idea that I'll be able tae do somethin' like that. Any opportunity, I'm tryin' tae keep alert tae things like that, whether it's via David or the City Mission or somethin' like that cos I've spoke tae a couple o' people down there.*

Ryan (Group 2)

*I did. I don't – I see a lot of it's for me is cos I'm not got nothin' tae do. Cos if I've got nothin' tae do, then I'm just gonna go straight back tae jail an' then if I start drinkin' more days than I'm not, then I'm just gonna be sittin' there.*

John (Group 2)

This was a common theme across all the groups. The above examples from groups 1 and 2 highlight the need that is felt to be distracted from offending patterns and the fear of having nothing to fill the void of time. The common trope, 'the devil makes work for idle hands', although not entirely scriptural, has echoes throughout the concerns spoken of above. Employment for some, such as Ryan, was a way of increasing his self-worth, recognising a purpose in his life. Ryan had been in steady employment for a number of years before he began offending and saw this as an aspect of his life that had been completely diminished after having spent time in prison. He knew he was capable, but was anxious about not being accepted as a result of his offences. The barriers of employment

experienced by desisters are widely known (Hlavka et al., 2015), yet employment continues to be a major factor in supporting desistance (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Uggen, 2000; Wright and Cullen, 2004). As well as providing a sense of self-worth, a job can provide routine and introduce new social networks (Wright and Cullen, 2004; Shapland and Bottoms, 2011). Employment is also one of the main aspects of life people choose to identify for themselves. Voluntary work can also support in a similar manner to paid employment by achieving tasks and providing experience which may help find future employment.

Two out of five participants in group 3 were in full-time employment and cited this as a factor in sustained desistance. Another participant in Group 3, Patrick, was in full-time education; another, Sean, was engaged in voluntary work; and the final participant in this group, Brian, had temporary jobs but was unemployed at the time of participation. Those in full-time employment had also been out of prison the longest, 15 and 7 years.

*It was, "This is a job I can get." I've always loved working with young people. I've done Boy's Brigade all my life, so, uh, you know... coaching and mentoring young people, aye ... it was always something that I always liked to do, and then suddenly, you know, this advert said here's a job, and it's helping folk, and I thought, "D'you know, aye, I think I could do that."*

Ian (Group 3)

*So I went to the college there, I was about two and half year there, but started doing that. Within ... I met somebody in that course. They wanted me to do a placement. So, normally they would say to someone in recovery, normally its at least a couple of year away from everything, so it was a private residential drug and alcohol treatment centre, my placement was... within a couple of months they offered me sessional work, and then a full-time post.*

Phil (Group 3)

Both participants chose roles where they were helping those who had also experienced imprisonment, or young people who were engaged in behaviour that was in a perceived danger of escalating into criminality. They used their experiences in order to help others and found fulfilment in such work. Sean continued in voluntary work and was given further responsibility there. His social networks had widened through this work and he had gained varied experiences. Sean felt his main barrier to seeking paid employment was his mental health, although at the time of second interview he felt this was improving. Both Patrick and Brian returned to prison between the first and second interview stages; Patrick for 18 months, and Brian for 6 weeks. Brian did participate in a second interview, although

discussion from it was not used in the analysis (see Chapter 5). This is discussed further in section five of this chapter.

## 6.1 Relationships and community

Across all groups, those who had children cited them as a source of hope:

*I think the baby's an' that's brought hope for the future. I think family an' friends, the relationship an' the bond wi' them gets stronger an' stronger is a bit o' hope for the future.*  
Phil (Group 3)

Sarah: If we look to the future or look just about life just now, is there anything that gives you hope?

Ryan: *My kids an' how well they're doin' ... It just saddens me that I'm not part of it.*  
Ryan (Group 2)

*Just think more concentrate, like when you get oot, they cannae hold you forever, you've got the weans to look forward to once you get oot. That's like my project everyday that's kept me going.*  
Thomas (Group 1)

They looked forward to seeing their children again and hoped that their children would have a better life than they had. Where individual hope may have wavered, participants were able to project hope onto the lives of their children and experience hopefulness vicariously.

Relationships were a crucial aspect of almost every participants' life. The participants in the project who could be considered the least hopeful were also the ones who struggled with any kind of relationships. They spoke of hiding away from the world and not getting close to anyone else as the past had taught them other people bring trouble and hinder their ability to desist. Ian from case study 1, during his first interview, was very much of this opinion and was adamant that he was better alone without support or friendship from others; although, his painting included a picture of a family and two children. He was the only participant from Group 1 that I was able to conduct a second interview with following his release from prison. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview stage Ian's outlook had changed dramatically, and he was finding great strength and encouragement from the supportive communities he had surrounded himself with. He too had begun restoring relationships with his family. Had I been able to conduct 2<sup>nd</sup> interviews with other group 1 participants perhaps they too would have had differing opinions, although perhaps if this had been the case, gaining access for a second interview would have been less problematic. For those in

Groups 2 and 3, with the exception of one Group 3 participant, relationships played a central role in their desistance narratives. This predominantly focussed on family relationships and professional and peer support from various kinds of support groups. Participants found hope in the restoration of family relationships which they had at one point thought impossible to rebuild. They found comfort and encouragement in group situations where they learned from others who had similar experiences to theirs. This was particularly significant for those who had been dealing with addiction issues.

This is unsurprising as familial relationships and the creation of new social bonds is a well-established contributor to desistance. Although not all participants would refer to themselves as Christians, many found encouragement and support from faith-based organisations once they had been released from prison. However, involvement with these groups was perhaps most significant for those who had a shared faith, a shared source of hope. A shared faith has been found to allow the formation and sustainment of positive social bonds and a positive life-script (Ward and Maruna, 2007; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Braithwaite, 1989). This is more than a common belief or bond. Churches or faith-based organisations can fill a communality void which enables a sense of solidarity and a sense of belonging. This sense of community can also be found through outreach programmes and organisations such as SISCO, who run recovery initiatives for those who have experienced imprisonment; however, there are fewer opportunities available due to limited funding and time constraints. Church communities already exist so when those who have been imprisoned join, there is already an element of reintegration. Churches often encourage forms of service which allows desisters to also view themselves as helpers, contributing to the well-being of others and the community (Bazemore and Erbe, 2003: 256). This acts to build and strengthen bonds with those of varied backgrounds creating a network of pro-social bonds. For example, Sean (Group 3) had never previously been near a farm but met a farmer at church and subsequently began doing some jobs for him and learning new skills.

## 7. Interruptions in desistance

In Laub and Sampson's (2001: 29) study, 'Desistance was defined as no criminal involvement for at least two years prior to the interview'. The bench-marks, and therefore group divisions for this research, followed Laub and Sampson's example conjecturing that desistance would be more established in those who have managed to remain crime free for

two years or more. Therefore, to qualify as part of Group 3 participants were required to have been out of prison for two years or more. For two participants this was just over two years, the rest had been out for 5, 8 and 15 years at the time of recruitment. Patrick and Thomas, the participants who had been re-arrested, were also those who had been out for little over two years. During his first interview Thomas described some struggles he had been facing with his health and with finding employment, although he spoke about work which he had heard was coming available and he was positive about getting involved with. He lived alone and relationships with his family remained strained. As seen earlier in this chapter, Thomas had very few hope photographs and was haunted by memories and experiences of perceived injustice. Patrick's outlook during his 1<sup>st</sup> interview was very different from Thomas'. He had included many hopeful images and spoke freely and openly about hope sources and how he viewed hope at specific times during his life through to the present day. He was involved in a full-time diploma course in which he had already been encouraged by his grades. He took part in weekly voluntary work. He spoke candidly about his relatively new-found faith and how that had helped transform his life. He now had what he described as a strong church community around him supporting him. Two seemingly very different stories yet both ended up re-offending and back in prison.

I do not have information regarding the offences committed or sentences that either participant received, except that Thomas' sentence was in the region of 6-10 weeks. It is likely that Patrick's sentence was longer than this, as he was uncontactable for some time. Although Thomas had achieved two years desistance, from how he described his life it was clear that he not yet reached what McNeill (2016) describes as tertiary desistance. This refers to how an offender locates themselves in society and the concept of belonging to community, both morally and politically; the idea of how oneself identifies and is recognised by others. Primary and secondary desistance are precursors to the tertiary aspect of desistance: primary being the identification of a crime free gap in an otherwise criminal career and secondary involves assuming a more positive crime free identity (Maruna and Farrall, 2004). Tertiary desistance alludes to the fulfilment of all that was hoped for in the previous two aspects. This may include a *making good*, 'to give something back to society as a display of gratitude' (Maruna 2001:87), but McNeill stresses that it must include the availability and receiving of social goods, 'enjoying fair access to all the resources, rights and opportunities routinely afforded to other citizens' (McNeill and Graham 2018: 436; see also McNeill 2012 on 'social rehabilitation'). We know that this is rarely the case and as a result discrimination and post-punishment disqualifications



continue leaving some desisters unable to achieve this state of tertiary desistance. This is where Thomas found himself. He was already distrustful of society and in particular any form of authority. He continued to have strained relationships with his family. He did not trust people who were being friendly towards him. His main hope was to gain employment and had been unable to fulfil this. He believed the main obstacle to his employability and the extent to which he could fully immerse himself in society, was the nature of the offences with which he had been charged. A charge which he believes to be classified unjustly and therefore its repercussions, for him, are all the more unjust. The little hope that Thomas had stored was diminished. There was a *hope gap* which contributed to an interruption in desistance.

For Patrick, it is less clear what caused the interruption in his desistance. His photography collection and initial interview seemed positive and hopeful. He gave in-depth descriptions of how his photographs represented hope and how hope has worked in his life. He was in full-time education and fully integrated into a church community where he found support and encouragement. His *hope gap* cannot be easily pinpointed. Without the details of his offence and the circumstances that surrounded it, determining a reason behind the interruption in desistance can only be conjecture. Across all the data gathered from Patrick; his hopes, his friends, his support, his education, his time, indeed his whole life was very much focussed on his faith, Scripture, God and his church community. He gave very few examples of sources of hope which were not related in some way to his faith, the two exceptions being his first bank account and one of his previous employers. Throughout his interview he spoke of God and often quoted Scripture. He had been asked to speak about his life at church events and had even contributed to the recording of a new Christian worship song. All of Patrick's hopes came from interrelated sources, centred on one main source, God. Patrick was relatively new to faith and had gone 'all in'. Internally Patrick may have found great strength and hope from God, the manifestation of this hope was confined to one specific church organisation who provided his support groups, education and voluntary work. Having all his hope confined to one organisation meant that a disappointment in one area would have had a knock-on effect on all of Patrick's hope stores. It is important to note that there was no indication Patrick had a negative experience from any aspect of this Church community. However, given his desistance narrative to this point, it should be considered that in order for hope to be sustained then perhaps more than one source is needed. This may sit uncomfortably with Christian theology where God is seen as the source of all we need. However, if all activity is confined to one network this

can create a sense of alienation from the rest of society. For example, Patrick's education, voluntary work, worship, support and friendships were all centred around the same building.

From this study both participants who re-offended had very different desistance narratives and very different hope narratives. It is unclear what the impetus here was to reoffend. Halsey et al. (Halsey et al., 2017: 1042) examine these interruptions to desistance as 'fuck it' moments:

frustration in the desistance process and describe how the emergence of fuck it episodes—often perceived by outsiders as heat of the moment and highly irrational events—are in fact more typically the out- come of cumulative setbacks and perceived injustices. We argue that such moments arise not from individuals' intentions to cause more harm, but from the lack of effective channels for resolving difficulties in the struggle to desist.

Most often, desistance is not an easy journey. What may seem as small set-backs can accumulate and increase a sense of helplessness. Even with, what appears to be, supportive structures in place, desistance can be fragile. The ability to withstand set-backs may come with time and may be easier with support. However, a hopeful resilience is only possible if alternative, positive outcomes can be imagined; outcomes that have a realistic foundation.

## 8. Thematic conclusions in relation to hope

The search for themes was concentrated on higher level concepts which the data seemed to allude to and therefore hierarchical nodes were created. Two of the themes selected, fundamental norms and relationships, had by far the greatest number of occurrences during coding. This suggested that they were the most significant sources of hope and recognisably important keys to sustaining desistance for participants: this was shown across all the research groups at various stages of the desistance journey. These findings are aligned with existing desistance literature and therefore were unsurprising. The themes are nonetheless noteworthy as their importance to participants reiterates existing knowledge, whilst also examines the extent to which these aspects of life provide hope in the continued journey of desistance. These are not mere stepping-stones towards desistance but form part of the foundations which facilitate the sustainment of desistance, as revealed through participants pointing to these as having been sources of hope as well as providing

future orientated hope, or being something which they hope to find. Interruptions to desistance was also an unsurprising theme given the existing research which has highlighted the many challenges that desisters face. The account above shows that these interruptions are still experienced by desisters; it is rarely a smooth journey. Desistance's fragility is perhaps only steadied through experiencing a deep level tertiary desistance where belonging and recognition of *change* is fully realised.

It has been suggested above that there is a correlation between those who displayed more engagement during the initial creative stage of this research and those who spoke more hopefully about their situations. It has also been suggested, although unverifiable, that the more detail in the collages and artwork, or greater number of photographs, may be a result of being able to imagine better circumstances for themselves. Ward and Maruna's Good Lives Model (GLM) (2007), indicates that offender rehabilitation can be supported through the development and implementation, of meaningful life plans that are incompatible with reoffending. Pycroft and Bartollas, (2022:16) helpfully recognises GLM as a version of virtue ethics. There are clear reflections in the focus on the importance of cultivating virtues, such as responsibility, empathy, and self-control, as a means of achieving a good life. There are also similarities in the importance of adding meaning and purpose to that life. Pursuing positive goals is key in the GLM. I suggest that these goals are more likely to be created if there is a hope that they can be achieved, hope too can act to establish perseverance whilst pursuing these goals.

Phrases and stories which spoke of being "a good guy" or having values, "I always show respect": viewed through a theological lens highlight notions of virtuousness although not attributed as such in the raw data. Themes of virtue already have an existing relationship with desistance too. McNeill and Farrell, (2006: 157) suggest, for example, in the pursuit of desistance, some desisters change the focus from, "what should I do?" to "what sort of person should I be?". They conclude that desistance requires the acquisition of intellectual and moral virtues, but that acquiring these virtues is likely dependent upon the desister's ability to demonstrate the virtues intellectually and morally (ibid, 160). Thinking of oneself as possessing moral qualities is not sufficient, acting virtuously puts both behaviours and reasoning to the test. The data in this research suggests that rather than being in pursuit of virtues, particularly those beginning their desistance journey, some participants want to emphasise that they already possess these virtues, that they have what it takes to desist,

hinting at aspects of tertiary desistance and belonging to a moral community (McNeill, 2014).

The theme of mercy became one of the most compelling to me as researcher during both the analysis and writing stages of this thesis. Mercy is often described as an expression of God's love and compassion for humanity, even in the face of our sins and shortcomings. It is the recognition that God forgives us for our mistakes and offers us a path to redemption and salvation. Through mercy, God demonstrates his infinite compassion and willingness to forgive those who repent and seek forgiveness. That this is replicated in human nature is powerful, and even more so because none of the participants highlighted acts of mercy in relation to repentance or forgiveness. The acts of mercy referred to here were experienced perhaps before desistance was even considered, or in the early stages of the desistance journey. The language used in The Message biblical translation of Romans 5: 6-8 depicts the Christians ultimate picture of mercy,

He [Christ] didn't, and doesn't, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready. And even if we hadn't been so weak, we wouldn't have known what to do anyway. We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice. But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him.

It is in the darkest of times that God provides mercy and instils hope in the *sinner, the weak, the rebel*. Hope here is a powerful expression of compassion through no effort, or deserving of the receiver. Those in this research who had experienced mercy felt the power of that undeserving compassion from a person who had power over their lives. The hope was more meaningful because they recognised that the same individual had the power to exacerbate punishment rather than offer mercy.

## Chapter 11: Conclusions and Recommendations

*I'm sick of hoping for stuff 'cause then it doesn't happen...to be let doon more, aye 'cause obviously you're like that, I hope... I hope... d'you know what I mean? Then going oot and then no getting it... My hope is just to get out and better myself... But I know I'm just going oot to stay oot man. If the worst comes to the worst, I'll just lock myself in the hoose, just to stay oot of this place. I'd rather be locked up in the hoose, than locked up in here man.*

Thomas, Group 1

### 1. Objectives

The objectives of this project were to uncover the role hope has in the lives of those embarking on, or continuing on a journey of desistance, examining how hope is created and supported. The aim was to learn from desister's experiences, and their understanding of those experiences, in order to uncover ways in which hope might be introduced and supported in lives of future desisters. The journeying aspect of desistance informed the idea of tracking hope experiences over three stages; creation of hopeful images, first interview, and a second interview 3-6 months after the first. The initial purpose was not to create case studies, however during the analysis stages, it became clear that particular participants 'delved more deeply' to uncover meaning in encounters of hope (see Chapter 6 for justifications). These same participants were willing, and able, to commit fully to the research, participating in all three stages of data collection. All participants had important stories to tell though. Everyone played a role in creating the picture of hope that this thesis displays. Prominent themes began to emerge that were important to understanding the wider construct of both desistance and hope. Case studies alone may well have been adequate, but a desire to represent and acknowledge all those who participated solidified the decision to present findings that represented the data set as a whole. More, crucially, emerging themes were common across all participant groups therefore reflexive thematic analysis incorporated all those who took part.

### 2. Exceptional Individuals: the power of one

Many of the stories examined in this research highlight the impact specific individuals had on desisters. This is particularly apparent, and influential, when acts of kindness, or mercy

are shown from those in a position of power (see chapter 10 for discussion on mercy). The inclusion of Group 1 in this fieldwork was only made possible with the help of the Throughcare Support Officers (TSOs) at HMP Barlinnie; a service which was put on *hiatus* in the summer of 2019. Their help was invaluable to me as a researcher, however more crucially they had significant impacts on those they were supporting through the initial stages of desistance.

Officers (TSOs) were given a mandate of supporting prisoners on the six weeks prior to release and 3-months post release. It is true, even as this research has shown, some disengage from support completely once released and therefore block their chances of accessing continued care. However, although not instructed to do so, Throughcare Support Officers, mostly because of their wealth of experience, engaged with some prisoners at times throughout their sentence, long before 6-weeks prior to release. Outside of prison, some ex-prisoners tapped into throughcare support for longer than the agreed 3-months. However, staff were not given lighter caseloads, or paid over-time. They recognised those who needed the greatest support and who were really trying to remain crime-free and invested in them. These officers believed that change was possible and shared that belief with individuals through their actions and words. They knew, desistance wouldn't always be possible. They had known frustration and disappointment in their roles, but they persevered, *hoping*, that at some point the change would come.

I was visiting HMP Barlinnie in a different capacity on what turned out to be, unbeknownst to me, the last day of the Throughcare Support team there. I happened to meet three of the officers who had assisted me with my research as I was leaving the prison. They informed me that the throughcare program had been suspended, not cancelled, but that there was no indication of when it might return. They were to return to the halls to work. One of the team, felt disillusioned by the change and opted to leave the prison service altogether. Others were disappointed and pessimistic about the likelihood of the return of their support roles, but were prepared to return to their previous roles. During that conversation I got a sense that the officers felt let down. I did not have any positive interactions regarding the end of the Throughcare Support Programme, albeit my interaction with TSOs was limited to a few acquaintances. In their very specific roles, they had been given a unique opportunity to show encouragement and compassion to those who might otherwise have very little in the way of positive interactions.

Andy (Group 2, Case Study 2), gives an example of an officer having a positive impact:

*you know, that prison is Addiewell, so it's meant to be like a whatever they call it, it's like a learning jail, it's an academy rather than just, you know, a job and things to do. You know, in there, you're not a prisoner, you're a resident or a service user, so it's part of its ethos. I remember one particular gentleman, one particular staff member who worked in the halls and was like – he was in the hall all the time pretty much and he was like one of the most – well, there's a lot of guys are just, aye, whatever. Know what I mean?...They'll say things to you in order to acquiesce and get you but this guy would actually go that extra mile to sort things out for you if you were genuine and in genuine need of it, he would follow through and, you know, watching him, seeing how often he was in and seeing how a lotta people treated him and a lotta people looked up to him and a lotta the idiots in jail also were rude to him and treated him, he just had a massive way about – a really good way of dealing with it and actually to be around him was – made – practically made my life easier in that hall because he was really good... to realise that at least one person in there treated you with dignity and gave you value.*

Andy, 1<sup>st</sup> Interview

Anecdotally, amongst participants in this research, and others that have experienced imprisonments, this is a sentiment that I have often heard echoed at conferences and small group sessions with prisoners. A turning point, a gradual change, or an awakening often begins with an interaction, or interactions with one person. One person can make a difference, this seems pithy and insignificant, worthy of a tea towel slogan or a social media meme (depending your point of reference). Positive relationships are vital. As Andy illustrates above, one staff member in Addiewell made a specific impact on him. It's worth noting that this is the only positive thing Andy said about any prison, or criminal justice staff/professionals. For Andy this staff member:

1. Gave him value, treated him with dignity – helped rebuild autonomy
2. Went the extra mile – showed small acts of mercy
3. Kept his word – was faithful
4. Made his life easier because of his manner and skills – was consistent
5. Was skilled at dealing with challenging behaviour from others – led by positive example

The case studies and themes that arose from this research show that remarkable individuals exist, like the officer mentioned above and like the person who kept Ian's space in his temporary accommodation. If professionals were given greater opportunities and capacity to interact with prisoners and desisters in value asserting and mercy giving ways, then this has the potential to transform many peoples experience of desistance: it is a big ask,

however. Those working in the criminal justice system often do so with stretched resources and already overwhelming caseloads. The call for investment in people and resources is not a surprising one, nevertheless in the current economic climate, is not at the populist forefront. With greater investment, the hope would be that staff would feel less burdened and more valued, which in turn might stir compassionate inclinations; there is of course no guarantee. To ask those who frequently engage with those embroiled in offending behaviour to be more hopeful, believe change is possible, to show mercy and create value is a huge undertaking. The re-establishment of the Throughcare Support Programme, is one way in which professional value could be recognised and valued. It gave experienced officers an opportunity to be removed from daily hall duties enabling specific workload capacity to focus on supportive roles.

The impact of exceptional individuals is highlighted above conversely, Andy also makes the following observation:

*We used to joke that some of the staff in that jail were working in Asda last week, you know. We used to joke about that because some of them - you know... you see staff members and you think they would never be working in SPS... a young woman who was 23, 24 years of age. How on earth do you want – why do you want to be in here at that kind of age?*

Although Andy highlights the officer's age and sex disapprovingly, this research in no way advocates that young females are unable to be excellent prison officers. This officer may well have been the 'exceptional individual' for another prisoner or prisoners. What could be of more significance in Andy's observation is the lack of experience some prisoners may assume in officers. This raises the age-old, but valid, question, how can someone be experienced if they are unable to work to gain that experience? A shadowing system for new officers may only highlight their inexperience and make them vulnerable. Could training be extended? Currently, officers can be as young as 18 years old and undergo a 12-week training programme before beginning a role on a prison block. Changing entry requirements, the starting age and adapting training would be a costly process. When funding is sparse throughout the service, this is unlikely to take precedence. Allocating staff according to their skills and expertise is a smaller change but nonetheless can be impactful, to an extent this is already practiced but with resources thin on the ground, is not always possible. Prisons officers who feel valued are more likely to attribute value to



others. If officers are given more capacity to invest in individuals, then the possibility for change becomes more apparent.

Alternatives to prison for non-violent offenders, adequate treatment for those battling addiction issues and early age intervention can all help reduce our offending populations. Making large systematic changes requires a top-down shift in punishment ideology, but crucially also requires a bottom-up acceptance that prison is not always the answer. This is challenging when many may believe that harsh punishment brings about justice, whereas supportive or reformatory methods might be viewed as unjust. The key is shifting the narrative to one of crime prevention rather than punishment.

One way in which society could display a hopeful response would be through employment opportunities. Currently, for sentences of 12 months in prison, once released individuals are required to disclose their conviction to employers for 3 years. For some crimes, and places of employment this is more understandable than others. Reviewing whether the disclosure of crime is always necessary, has the potential to have a huge impact on the most crucial stages of desistance as a significant limitation is immediately dealt with. Leaving prison knowing that you need not always be defined by your crime has psychological, sociological and practical benefits. In Barry's 2013 research on desistance they found that, 'many of the respondents in [the] study gave up crime in the *anticipation* of something constructive happening in their lives rather in *response to* something already having happened' (Barry, 2013: 62). Barry's participants lived in hopeful anticipation but were met with no real opportunity for change. Making employment more accessible is only significant, thought, if more basic needs are first addressed, such as health and housing. Convincing employers that not disclosing past criminal behaviour could be challenging to say the least, as safety measures need always be considered. Could simply knowing that future employment is more accessible be a source of hope? If so, that coupled with the support, such as that offered by TSO's, and *exceptional* professionals could both produce hope and make the journey of desistance attainable and desirable.

### 3. Hope as a Teachable Skill?

After the completion of this research I became aware of concurrent research occurring in the North West of Ireland. Kirby et al (2021), explored the efficacy of 'Hopeful Minds' a

programme created by Kirby and colleagues, which consists of a 12 week ‘hope based school intervention’ for 11-14 year olds. They examined the experiences of 153 school children using a one-group pretest-posttest design to establish if participants experienced changes regarding their hope, well-being and a range of known ‘protective factors’ (Kirby, et.al., 2021). They concluded that ‘hope was found to be significantly associated with improvements in each of the well-being scores of anxiety, depression, resilience, positive emotion, reduced negative emotion, emotional control, stoicism, social support seeking and self-care’ (Kirby, et.al., 2021: 504). They found teaching hope also had a positive impact on mental ill health and suicide. As well as offering many insights, they conclude that hope *is* teachable and deem their research proves this. There are limitations such as lack of control group and being unable to account for natural occurrences. Nevertheless, a program that equips children with coping mechanisms and promotes positive impacts on mental health has the potential to make a huge difference in young people’s lives. The pertinent question here is, can this programme be adapted for adult age groups, and of specific interest here, to those embarking upon desistance. This is an area worth further exploration and development; requiring an adaption, or creation of a similarly ethos based program and of course participants willing to engage at developmental, testing and practice stages.

The participants in this research show that hope levels can, and do, change through different experiences and encounters. Situational hope is important; being given hope, reacting hopefully, and future orientated hope. For some, hope may be a more natural proclivity mixed with an optimistic outlook. Others may have to dig deeper, or begin *hope storing* from square one. Taking the most significant hope transformation in this research, Ian, (Case Study 1); he moved from a place of utter hopelessness to one of understanding hope as being key to his survival. The extent to which Ian’s journey could be viewed as the acquisition of hope skills is worthy of further enquiry and development.

#### 4. The Hope Collective: A lethal Injection of hope

The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU), established in 2005 by Strathclyde Police, sought to reduce violent crime across Scotland, particularly in Glasgow which has been dubbed the murder capital of Europe at the time. The SVRU in partnership with social work and third sector organisations initiated a number of projects aimed at addressing

poverty needs, building community and ultimately reducing crime. Having previously been a chief superintendent and director of the SVRU, Niven Rennie has most recently left to take-up directorship of Hope Collective. His new organisation facilitates partnerships across relevant sectors to address poverty with the belief that there is a direct correlation between poverty and crime, particularly apparent in young offenders. Hope Collective ask young people to suggest ideas for addressing various issues that arise in their communities with a view to, ‘co-design(ing) solutions to drive long lasting change’ (Hope Collective UK, 2020). Desister, Callum Hutchinson, wrote a Blog entry for Hope Collective entitled, ‘A Lethal Injection of Hope.’ In it he describes his violent offending past and an interaction with a Police Inspector; ‘for the first time in my life I felt that someone believed in me regardless of my past and was willing to give me an opportunity to change my life but also my kids life too. I felt a lethal injection of hope’ (Hutchinson, 2022). He ends the blog with the words, ‘BE A HOPE DEALER!’ (ibid). Callum’s story echoes that of those participants who had found hope in this research. The findings of this research provide additional evidence in support of the value and power of hope. This thesis shows that hope is not merely an undertaking for the young but is needed, sought after, and powerful for those more mature in years and those with an extensive offending past. Niven Rennie affirms, ‘Hope is a vital ingredient in public health approach’ (Rennie, 2022). Having over 30 years policing experience and community engagement Rennie has now clearly invested in the significance of hope.

This thesis could act as a possible source knowledge for The Hope Collective when engaging with political and criminal justice agencies. The findings established here echo many of the issues that the collective aim to address. At the moment, their focus is on young people at risk of becoming involved in criminal behaviour. This thesis adds an insight into the ever-present need for hope, the value it can provide for those trying to escape criminal lifestyles, and the many obstacles that pierce the hope stores of desisters.

## 5. Strengthening the relationship between theology and criminology

This thesis speaks of using a theological lens to direct the collection of data and to enable its analysis. Anything that can add another layer of understanding creates a bigger, fuller, picture of whatever subject or phenomena is being examined. Theology is possibly not a natural inclusion for those with no prior knowledge of it, or those without a faith. It is

likely that few would view themselves as protruding the ‘immanent frame’ in a bid for transcendence but the idea of otherness or spirituality still exists. The Sociologist seeks guidance from social theoretical concepts, many of which are deeply rooted in theological concepts, or at least can clearly be linked to them. The most prominent example is perhaps The Frankfurt School, who although often associated with critiquing religion, produced scholars such as: Ernest Bloch, seeking the reconciliation of Marxism with the spiritual dimensions of religious thought, (Boldyrev, 2021); Walter Benjamin who brought Jewish theology to the ‘concept of history,’ (Osborne, 2021); and Max Horkheimer who argued both reason and faith was necessary for a truly critical approach to social and political issues, (Berendzen, 2022). Engaging with theology for matters other than those which explicitly related to religion has the potential to widen and enrich the knowledge generated by researchers.

Criminology and theology already have a long-lasting relationship, particularly in the UK, where The Church was, historically, the law maker, disciplinarian and punishment dispenser. The research in this thesis has engaged in interdisciplinary dialogue, recognising the value and relevance of each discipline. For the most part, the focus here has been on how theology can speak to criminology and the process of desistance with the emphasis on theology as a guide and lens through which to view criminological theory and participant experience. The next section makes recommendations for the reversal; exploring theological concepts using criminological and wider sociological perspective.

This thesis provides a conceptual framework that has the potential to facilitate communication and collaboration between criminology and theology. Taylor’s immanent frame refers to a worldview where autonomy and human reason is a defining feature: the natural world is seen as self-contained; the divine or supernatural exist completely independently of it. Arguing that this brings about disenchantment and alienation, Taylor exposes a clear opening for which criminology can engage, namely when examining experiences of those that have been affected by the criminal justice system. Although Taylor does not frame his *A Secular Age* from a Christian perspective, he does identify as a Christian; a Christian looking in on the immanent frame. An outward looking, secularised view *from* the immanent frame could bring forth an insight to the spiritual realm, or ‘transcendence’ previously not considered.

Using theology has also allowed for a more personally meaningful reflective account of the researcher. I use the term 'personally meaningful' as this is not to suggest that it is more meaningful than another researcher, rather it required me to delve more deeply into what I believed and why, again, with the help of the aforementioned additional lens. Theology also offered another way in which I could acknowledge existing limitations and biases. This is not limited to faith-focussed reflection, but also lends itself neatly to engagement with that which is not tangible, for example the imagination. This shows one way in which theology does not need to be confined to the 'believer'. It can be used by any researcher to stimulate more nuance in evidence-based understandings of crime and criminal justice.

## 6. Future Research

Of particular interest to this researcher is the notion of hope being a teachable skill and the possibility of transforming a child orientated program into one that speaks to adults, in particular those who have experienced imprisonment. Whether such a programme is possible and teachable is the initial step; examining its longitudinal impact could prove exciting and life changing, as the title of this work observes, *if I had nae hope, I'd be locked up, or died.*

Hope is related to human agency in the capacity for individuals and communities to act intentionally and purposefully to bring about positive change in the world. In Christian theology, the concept of "co-creation" suggests that humans are called to participate in God's ongoing work of creating and redeeming the world; bringing about social, political, and environmental change. Theological views of hope and human agency also recognise the limitations and fragility of human existence when considered alongside concepts such as humility, compassion, and gratitude as essential virtues for cultivating hope and promoting human flourishing. In this sense, hope is grounded in a recognition of the interconnectedness of all beings and a commitment to justice and the common good. Agency is also regarded as an important aspect of desistance; the re-acquiring of, and recognition of agency. This would be a logical area for further research to build upon the findings from this thesis. The case studies hint at ways in which the participants relate to agency. For example, at times Sean (case study 3), almost seemed to relinquish all personal agency to the will of God, whereas Ian (case study 1), recognised a lack of agency and hopelessness which developed into an acknowledgement of the role he plays in his life

outcomes coupled with a more hopeful outlook. A future research topic may be examining the extent to which agency and hope grow exponentially together.

This research refers to theology as a tool and lens through which to view the criminological concept of desistance and the role hope plays in it. There is a constant dialogue between both disciplines. However, were Criminology the lens through which emerging themes such as mercy and virtue (due to their already firm theological standing) were examined, the result could be a richer understanding of the concepts, but arguably more importantly, a richer understanding of the experiences of those immersed in them.

## 7. Concluding thoughts

During my time at Queens University Belfast, one somewhat unconventional lecturer, Prof Scott Boldt, often told us as undergraduate students, ‘writing begets writing, just start writing anything’. I have kept that sentiment with me through the years and have found it to be helpful: it has certainly proved to be helpful whilst agonising how to frame certain aspects of this thesis. At various stages throughout this PhD project I have also pondered upon the extent to which this expression can be reasonably extended. It seems logical to me to suggest, ‘anger begets anger’, ‘peace begets peace’, ‘hope begets hope’. Without the addition of rigorous research for the moment these remain theoretical. Existing desistance research does highlight the importance of positive relationships though, and the perils of returning to the same offending fostering situations.

We need conduits of hope, ‘hope dealers’, as Callum Hutchinson expresses above. Perhaps a hope revolution is on the horizon; could teaching hope skills to children raise a generation of hope equipped adults? Possibly. What is certain, is that even if well stocked in an abundance of hopeful skills, there is a fundamental need to ensure individuals have something tangible to hope for. An emotional, spiritual, or even cognitive relationship with hope will go some distance to support endurance through hardship and disappointment along the road of desistance, but hope stores are rarely limitless.

Exceptional individuals are needed to top-up depleting reservoirs. These conduits of hope also need their hope reservoirs maintained and replenished. This coupled with a wider society that addresses the practicalities of giving hope to those leaving prison; re-

integration mechanisms, housing and future employment prospects, have the chance to make a real difference to the lives of desisters and make moves in reducing recidivism. This of course cannot happen overnight, but if hope truly does beget hope then maybe some hope, anywhere in society, has the power to snowball into hope deposits throughout society.

## 8. Final reflections

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another  
Hebrews 10:23-24

My hope was to ‘uncover’ the secret of hope for those embarking upon desistance, instead I am left with an anti-climactic sense of the impossibilities of creating and sustaining a hopeful process which will see individuals through the arduous journey of long-term desistance. The fieldwork for this research was completed in 2019. Since then, everyone’s world has changed as we have all adapted to living through a pandemic. Factors which often embody hopelessness such as isolation, loneliness and unemployment have become more widespread and experienced to greater degrees. The prison community in particular have known a lockdown unfathomable to the rest of us, retaining any form of hope must surely have been beyond gruelling. The participants in this research largely found prison a place void of any hope resources. They had hopes for the outside world but feared how they would manifest. One participant from Group 2, Patrick, was re-imprisoned before I was able to conduct his second interview and in all likelihood spent at least a portion of his sentence in complete lockdown, unable to leave his cell, all visits cancelled; his hope story once full of possibilities as he studied, volunteered and found support in community now challenged to extremity.

Without the pandemic, researching hope in desistance over the past two years could likely have looked very different, but it is not unreasonable to surmise that the outcomes would have been very similar. Those in prison would likely have still hoped for the same conventional norms. Those in Groups 1 and 2 would likely have suffered greatest with access to support groups either completely cancelled or moved to online variations. The

impact of small acts of mercy would have still plausibly have provided glimmers of hope. However, in an environment where forming new positive social bonds and transforming self-identities is key, small glimmers of hope would only go so far.

I began this section quoting a scripture from Hebrews because, for me, it embodies how hope needs to be experienced in order for it to have a positive effect on the *hoper*. For the Christian ‘he who promised is faithful’ speaks to the faithfulness of God. Outwith faith, it speaks to the significance of providing meaningful hope. Providing an expression of hope without a solid reason for that hope is more likely to cause distress and hopelessness. If we are to provide hope for those embarking upon desistance, then it must be rooted in a real expectation that what is hoped for is possible. The instructions, ‘Spur one another on’, ‘encouraging one another’, remind us that hope exists and happens in community. For the believer, hope is built in relationship with God and with other believers; for the non-believer hope is still best cultivated in relational communities. The support of others creates an environment where depleted hope resources can once again be filled and shared with others. Travelling hopefully surely requires patience at times, and endurance through hardship. Hopeful endurance, however, should not be gritting of teeth as suffering envelopes; rather it is the hopeful assurance that another, better, outcome is possible. For the desister this kind of hope can only be experienced if they are given something to desist into, free from excessive punishing limitations.



## Appendices

## Appendix 1: University of Glasgow ethical approval



College of Social  
Sciences

2 November 2018

Dear Sarah

**College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

**Project Title:** A criminological and theological exploration of the role of hope in the desistance process

**Application No:** 400180005

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: **ONCE APPROVED BY THE SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE AND SUBJECT TO ANY FURTHER CHANGES THEY MIGHT REQUIRE** \_\_\_\_\_
- Project end date: **1 October 2020** \_\_\_\_\_
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences. Permissions you must provide are shown in the *College Ethics Review Feedback* document that has been sent to you.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research: ([https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_490311\\_en.pdf](https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf)) (Unless there is an agreed exemption to this, noted here).
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The *Request for Amendments to an Approved Application* form should be used: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/>

Yours sincerely,

Dr Muir Houston  
College Ethics Officer

**Muir Houston, Senior Lecturer**  
**College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer**  
Social Justice, Place and Lifelong Education Research  
University of Glasgow  
School of Education, St Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street  
Glasgow G3 6NH  
0044+141-330-4699 [Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)

## Appendix 3: Participant information sheet - Group 1



College of Social  
Sciences

### Participant Information Sheet

#### **A criminological and theological exploration of the role of hope in the desistance process**

*Exploring what is meant by hope and the impact hope has on individuals embarking upon, or involved in desisting from crime*

**Researcher:** Sarah Kennedy  
The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research  
University of Glasgow

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

The purpose of this study is to identify the role that hope can play in the desistance process, i.e. is hope important for those trying to lead crime free lives. By taking part in the research you will be asked questions about what gives you hope, what hope means to you, and if hope does play, or has played, a role in helping you stop committing criminal offences. The first stage of this research will involve asking you to imagine things, or people, that have provided hope for you whilst you have been in prison. You will then be asked to create a picture depicting the images you have thought of. You can draw or paint the image, or create it using collage, which I will provide images for. The picture can include as many sources of hope as you like.

The images you have created will then be used to start a discussion on what hope means to you. Although called the interview stage, this will take on more the form of a conversation, or discussion, where you will be given the opportunity to explain why you chose those specific images. This will be in the form of a discussion about the pictures and the role hope has played in your life which should take approximately 60 minutes. Six months following this discussion, a follow up meeting will take place where I will return with the images you created and ask if your opinions or experiences of hope have changed since we last met, again this is likely to be in the form of a 40-60 minute discussion. The interviews will be recorded and stored as an audio file, which will then be transcribed in order to allow analysis. The images and transcribed interviews will be analysed in order to discover the relevance of hope in individual's lives and the importance of its meaning. Once analysed, the significant discoveries will form part of a PhD thesis.

If, at any stage during the project, you would like to withdraw from participation, you can do so without providing a reason. Participation is entirely on a voluntary basis and you are under no obligation to continue with the project if you no longer wish to.

All information shared is entirely confidential. You will not be identified in the final writings of this project, instead, pseudonyms will be used in order to protect your privacy. Any personal details will be kept confidential, by the allocation of id numbers. Only I will have access to your personal details and this will be stored securely, electronically. Images and researcher notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, where I am the only key holder. Once the project is completed all stored personal data will be destroyed and permanently deleted.

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger or harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

This project is funded by The College of Social Science, University of Glasgow and has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow.

Should you require any further information please contact me, the researcher,  
Sarah Kennedy, email: [s.kennedy.3@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:s.kennedy.3@research.gla.ac.uk), phone: 0141 330 6344 (ivy lodge office),  
mobile: xxxxx xxx xxx

If you would like further information from the University of Glasgow, or if you would like to file a complaint please contact,

Dr Muir Houston  
College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer  
[Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)

## Appendix 4: Participant information sheet - Group 2 and 3



University  
of Glasgow

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College of Social  
Sciences

### Participant Information Sheet

#### A criminological and theological exploration of the role of hope in the desistance process

*Exploring what is meant by hope and the impact hope has on individuals embarking upon, or involved in desisting from crime*

**Researcher:** Sarah Kennedy  
The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research  
University of Glasgow

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

The purpose of this study is to identify the role that hope can play in the desistance process, i.e. is hope important for those trying to lead crime free lives. By taking part in the research you will be asked questions about what gives you hope, what hope means to you, and if hope does play, or has played, a role in helping you stop committing criminal offences. The first stage of this research involves taking photographs of objects or places which symbolise hope for you. I will provide you with a disposable camera in order to take part. For photographs to be admissible in this research they **must not** contain images of yourself or any other individuals. If a photograph requires you, or another person to hold a particular object, this image will only be used if the individual photographed **cannot** be identified in any way.

These photographs will then be used to start a discussion on what hope means to you. Although called the interview stage, this will take on more the form of a conversation, or discussion, where you will be given the opportunity to explain why you chose those specific images. This will be in the form of a discussion about the pictures and the role hope has played in your life which should take approximately 60 minutes. Six months following this discussion, a follow up meeting will take place where I will return with the photographs you took and ask if your opinions or experiences of hope have changed since we last met, again this is likely to be in the form of a 40-60 minute discussion. The interviews will be recorded and stored as an audio file, which will then be transcribed in order to allow analysis. The photographs and transcribed interviews will be analysed in order to discover the relevance of hope in individual's lives and the importance of its meaning. Once analysed, the significant discoveries will form part of a PhD thesis.

If, at any stage during the project, you would like to withdraw from participation, you can do so without providing a reason. Participation is entirely on a voluntary basis and you are under no obligation to continue with the project if you no longer wish to.

All information shared is entirely confidential. You will not be identified in the final writings of this project, instead, pseudonyms will be used in order to protect your privacy. Any personal details will be kept confidential, by the allocation of id numbers. Only I will have access to your personal details and this will be stored securely, electronically. Photographs and researcher notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, where I am the only key holder. Once the project is completed all stored personal data will be destroyed and permanently deleted.

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger or harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this. If any of the photographs on the cameras include illegal behaviour or anything which causes harm or danger to yourself or others, where appropriate I will contact the relevant authorities.

This project is funded by The College of Social Science, University of Glasgow and has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow.

Should you require any further information please contact me, the researcher,  
Sarah Kennedy, email: [s.kennedy.3@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:s.kennedy.3@research.gla.ac.uk), phone: 0141 330 6344 (ivy lodge office)  
mobile: xxxxx xxx xxx

If you would like further information from the University of Glasgow, or if you would like to file a complaint please contact,

Dr Muir Houston  
College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer  
[Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)

## Appendix 5: Participant consent form



College of Social  
Sciences

## Consent Form

**Title of Project: A criminological and theological exploration of the role of hope in the desistance process.**

Name of Researcher: Sarah Kennedy

Name of Supervisors: Prof Fergus McNeill and Dr Doug Gay

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to interviews being audio-recorded.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my employment arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

- All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.
- I understand that other authenticated researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form

I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Name of Researcher .....

Signature .....

Date .....

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