Foolish Man

So many years I lived a dead man’s life. A life that carried a tombstone in the event the next fall becomes a place of mourning for the devil’s gospel. “You only live once so live it up!” was the sermon that held my faithful attendance. And though my eyes declare themselves to have sight, their lack of spirituality didn’t perceive buzzards congregating around such a dead body of words.

Oh, how a man with no discernment tries to fill an empty space in his life with an empty action-believing himself to be wise, though his mind has the maturity of a foolish man. And how foolish was I to bathe myself in the pleasures of the world just to reek of death.

I sailed my titan life in ignorance until it eventually struck an iceberg and the wound thereof opened its mouth to receive my drowning...Grace life jacketed me that I might have an “on the road to Damascus” encounter, that a light from heaven would blind my worldly views, that my sight would seek a spiritual truth. There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death. (Proverbs 14:12)

While I was so foolish in ignorance, I thank God for my fall. For when He stood me up the garment of foolishness lies at my feet.

Robert Wayne Holsey
Georgia Death Row
Jackson, GA

Thoughts of Peace

In the darkest gloom
As I await my doom
Imprisoned in this tomb
My thoughts race about
Flitting from doubt to doubt
Trying to figure it out
Issues of such gravity
Never before occurred to me
Until I wasn’t free
Now I have time to think
From wisdom’s fountain drink
With knowledge form a link
Religion, philosophy and mysticism

Breed only cynicism
Each man’s own relativism
Let love be our way
And peace exist today
While forgiveness leads the fray
There’s no law against these
Which create only ease?

Let us all try it, please
Terminate hatred somehow
Let go of grudges now
Remove “self” as our sacred cow
What more can be said?
Without action we’re all dead
May this poem be more than just read

Kevin Marinelli
Pennsylvania Death Row
Waynesburg, PA
Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor are welcomed from all prisoners (this includes non-death row prisoners) and the outside community.

In submitting letters, we ask that compassionate and introspective guidelines apply to your communications.

Limit size to 400 words or less. Letters may be edited for clarity and space considerations.

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Editorial:

Soul Force – The Path to Greatness

Editors Note: Happy, blessed, and prosperous 2014 to all. This is the perfect time to set goals. But first, prudence begs to reflect on last year’s resolutions or lack thereof and identify hindrances, missteps and lessons learned, if needed, to avoid a repeat performance. God speed!

Success and Greatness can be defined in many ways. Every life is a course with a beginning and end waiting to be chartered. In each lie the potential to do great things. Be great; Be it that single or married parent working full time while furthering their education, or those mentoring the youths, or ministering to the poor, sick, or incarcerated.

It appears about one in every generation, God raises up extraordinarily great emancipators-leaders, whose lives and philosophies not only alter the course of history in improving lives of the downtrodden in their own countries, but make timeless ripples throughout humanity; but not without great sacrifice.

I’m often intrigued by their inspirations and influences. 21st Century: Today the whole world is mourning with South Africa at the death of their greatest son, Nelson Mandela, who with the A.N.C., fought apartheid in South Africa; was sentenced and persevered through twenty seven long years in the worst of prisons. He entered a young man, filled with anger and hatred toward his oppressors, and was labeled “the worst prisoner.” Yet he emerged humble, vision and dignity still intact, with love in his heart, and ascended to become the first democratically elected president of South Africa.

What impresses me the most was his display of the power of forgiveness, humility and the ability to reconcile and heal a fractured, racially polarized nation. 20th Century: Rewind to consider Atlanta’s and America’s own shining prince, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who greatly influenced Mr. Mandela and impacted the world with his nonviolent philosophy, opposing war, imperialism and discrimination. His demands for social, political, and economic reform ultimately cost him his life. What I admire most about Dr. King was his speaking skills and his perseverance. The latter was most reflected in his famous “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” where he eloquently and humbly responded to the Christian and Jewish leaders’ disparaging and critical remarks telling him to quit and leave town. His influences were Mahatma Gandhi, Jesus Christ’ teachings and the Bible.

20th Century: The final great liberator preceding Dr. King was Mahatma Gandhi whose own non violent protest against the British colonial rule of his native India, was influenced by the great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy which began when he read his book, “The Kingdom Of God Is Within You,” before and while in jail, and by Gandhi’s own account, Tolstoy’s Christian example and preaching of Christ’s sermon on the mount, “Resist not evil…”.

Together they coined the term “Soul Force,” which is described as “nonviolent resistance.” “It’s activated when people believe in soul force, it enters into bodies and masses and actions – a beam of light passes into solid matter and moves it.”

Not all of us can be a Gandhi, King or Mandela, however we can benefit greatly from their rich legacies. We owe them a great debt of gratitude. With a responsibility to walk worthy of their sacrifices, however, we all still can be great. No greater example than the Great Master Teacher that called and inspired these great men, who is the embodiment of soul-spirit power. He made greatness accessible to all by teaching “The greatest among you must be your servant.”

Please go to page 6 for the Editorial from Abu Ali Abdur-Rahman.
**Letters to the Editor:**

**Return To Goodness**
Attention where are you now? (Matt. 5:48) “Be ye perfect even as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect.” Perfection is impossible, say the multitudes; you can’t be perfect. Nobody is perfect. You can however meditate and contemplate Christ in you. Choosing to strive for perfection could be the beginning of a more meaningful existence. (Gal. 2:20) “So that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” Christ is perfection within us.

What is perfection? It is complete, unblemished, innocent, forgiven, blessed goodness and more all created in the image of your Creator. Be ye as perfect as you can be.

Charles Henry Diller
Assistant Editor of Outside Communication
Dallas State Correctional Institution
Dallas, PA

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**I Need Help To Do Better**
We all agree in principle that our friends and partners have their own points of view, and their own valid perceptions. We are reluctant to accept this simple truth at the emotional level. We like to believe that the way we see the world is the way the world is. When our friends and partners disagree with us, it is tempting to think they are ill-informed or have a distorted point of view. Most people are particularly entrenched in their private view of the world. However, please realize two factors: (1) each of us has a valid way of seeing things. (2) Reality is larger and more complex than anyone will ever know. All we do is form impressions of the physical world.

O God, work on my attitudes. Teach me to be more loving, compassionate, obedient and humble. Strip away the anger, the stubbornness, laziness, pride and complacency. Help me to become more like You and to practice what I preach.

---

**I Have Seen Love Too**
Most miraculously, I have seen love in the eyes of those who had once been consumed by evil...with love, through love, and in being love they have healed with love. Many in prisons have healed through love, and become the teachers of love because they also know evil in its totality, and there is no denying it even in its whispers. They are honest when they embrace the slightest hint of evil, and are determined to choose good as much as they can. In Love’s healing they grew wisdom. They are empowered by their pain to become change agents in their worlds. Our lives can be about joy and about love. In our truest nature, we are here to know ourselves. We meticulously and unabashedly recognize evil and make a choice; not to act on it. We keep watching, determined to bring no harm to others with our evil. We watch our minds and see love. We celebrate and share that love in order to benefit others. In this way love grows and evil silently dissolves away.

Anthony Owens
Kern Valley State Prison
Delano, CA

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**Laughing At The Hurt**
They say: “This is it.” They say, “It’s the end.” They will not even let me try to make amends. I know you can’t stop crying; does it ease your pain to know that I am dying? I am a victim of the Ghetto who tried to get out. I made many mistakes of that there is no doubt. I tried to maintain my integrity and discipline, I am loyal to those I call friends. I’m headed down an uncertain path. I can still hold my head high, and I can laugh. I’ll be out of the game for a while but that doesn’t mean that I can’t smile.

Robert Ray
Colorado DOC
Sterling, CO
Choose Life

“I call Heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”

– Deuteronomy 30:19

Do we really need scripture to tell us to choose life? What person of sound mind would choose death?

So do we really need to be told to choose life? The answer is yes – one must make a conscious decision to live and not just vegetate. I don’t mean to live life in the fast lane or in self indulgence. But, to choose life is to live in a meaningful life: a life committed to values a higher purpose, to bring honor and glory to God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Ask yourself, “Did it make any difference at all, that I inhabited this planet for so many years? Will anyone really know the difference if I’m gone? Is my life productive, worthwhile?”

Simon Peter offered this advice: “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak and guide: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. (1Peter 3:10,11). The prophet Amos tells us to: “Seek good and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts shall be with you.”

My grandmother often put things in perspective for me about life. “Who is rich?” She would ask, and then answer her own question. “It is he who is happy with his lot.” Rather than worrying about why we are not standing in somebody else’s shoes, our task is to fulfill our potential at the level we are at, in the situation where we are now, knowing that even if it may seem insignificant, each of us contributes on our own level and in our way to the greater picture.

When Israel stood poised to enter the Promised Land Moses said to the nation “Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God…” (Deut29:1) The Hebrew word translated ‘stand” is Nitzavim meaning “standing firm.” This verse teaches us that today we choose life, our standing firm is conditional upon it being all of us standing together. Each of us, from the highest to the lowliest, has our part to play and our own potential to fulfill within the church of Christ.

There is no “us and them”. Anything which undermines decency and the sanctity of human life, the very fabric of our community, has an effect on all of us, whether we are directly involved or not. Each person needs to be intact, in order for us to achieve our communal potential. If one person is suffering or is otherwise affected by something, this has an impact on all of us.

So choose life, a meaningful life as a servant for the love of Christ, and to the glory of God.

Steven Wertz
Arkansas Death Row
Grady, AR

Victims Voice
Advocating For People With Mental Illness

Carla Jacobs’s mother-in-law, Roma Jacobs, was killed by her own daughter, Bette Madeira, in 1990. That ended a two year unsuccessful attempt Carla and her husband undertook to access intervention for Bette who had schizophrenia and was living on the streets with her 10 year old son. Bette was found not guilty by reason of insanity and was committed to a psychiatric hospital.

The experience made Carla a staunch advocate for people with mental illness in the criminal justice system. She co-founded the Treatment Advocacy Center and has served on the board of the National Alliance on Mental Illness and worked for years to reform mental health treatment laws.

Carla feels, “The threat of the death penalty did not deter Bette from killing her mother. In her mind, what she was doing was just and right. To then execute her would not have served any purpose. You can’t punish mental illness out of a person; the only way you can defend society is to provide individuals with treatment.”

In response to Compassion’s question about death row prisoners receiving the help they need for mental problems Carla writes, “Medical care in many prisons is woefully lacking and wanton neglect starts well beyond the prisons walls because many inmates with severe mental illness didn’t receive proactive treatment for their neurobiological disorder, treatment that would have prevented the crime and ensuing tragedy from even occurring.

Carla advises Compassion readers that “Our tragedies can lead to better outcomes in the future for other people if we all work together to reduce community conditions that lead to them. Although there is no such thing as healing from a preventable tragedy such as murder there is solace in knowing that you as an individual are doing everything you can to prevent others from going through the same pain.” She encourages you to “write letters to the editor…to change social problems that lead to crime.”

For more information visit www.MVFHR.org.

Carla Jacobs
Tustin, CA
I remember when I first moved out of my mother’s home, she got a dog named Maddy, and I remember the day Maddy falsely accused me. When I opened the door and entered my mother’s home, Maddy was stretched out on the floor taking her nap. She looked up and saw me and remembered that I was an acquaintance who had previously earned her permission to come and go at will. Neither Maddy nor I took any particular notice of the folding chair leaning against the wall next to her. When I entered, a breezy gust dislodged the chair and it then fell across Maddy. Alarmed, Maddy staggered to her feet glaring at me over her shoulder and woofing as she retreated. To her such an unprovoked attack was proof that I was no longer to be trusted.

I’m not offended by Maddy’s false accusation, and I did all I could to restore our friendship. Of course, humans, with our superior intelligence, would never jump to a false conclusion as Maddy did. Or would we?  

(Continued on page 6)

The Blame Game

Seeking Your Mercy

From the walls of merciless concrete
And steel, oh, Lord
I call out to you no matter
The anguish I’m tangled in
I look unto Your eternal goodness…

I lived recklessly and above the life and
Freewill you instilled in me so
This fate I face is warranted
To me, that’s the laws of nature…
You created it that way lord, you
“Reap what you sow”…
I planted wickedness and
Death sprung up!
Yet I still call out to you
Oh, Lord, in repentance
Seeking your mercy and forgiveness,
I have forfeited my freedom
Due to my foolishness
Yet preserve my
Eternity for your peace,
Lord, and not in the
Bottomless pit, I confess I’m
A sinner!!!
Have compassion on me
In the name of
Jesus Christ’
I surrender!!!

Anthony Dent
California Death Row
San Quentin, CA
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Death Row Prisoners Please Write To Help Youth!
Compassion is gathering essays written by death row prisoners on words of advice on how juvenile offenders can best avoid going back into prison. Recidivism rates are very high among youth and your words of encouragement and wisdom may save a young person from having to reenter the prison system. This book, like “Today’s Choices Affect Tomorrows Dreams,” will be sent without charge to at-risk youth in juvenile detention facilities throughout the United States. Send your submission to:
New Book Compassion 140 W. South Boundary Perrysburg, OH 43551

To Our Readers:
Anything death-row prisoners write may jeopardize their future appeals. Knowledge of these facts may limit the scope of a prisoner’s expressions.

All stories are subject to editing for grammar, sentence structure and clarity.

There are people who have been bruised from events in their lives, and bruises, whether received physically or emotionally, take time to heal. Serious bruises can impair the way you walk, talk, and feel.

I’ve been traveling within my soul, searching, observing, contemplating, and rejuvenating. The average person suffers all day long, and it is a rare moment when I’m not doing battle. Battle we must encounter, if we are to ever rise from the darkness of our imaginations, ideas and purpose.

I understand the heart is where the two poles of our consciousness meet; it’s the point of balance between the two. Here in America we hear that it is important to open the heart and live from the heart-which is true—but unless the heart is rooted in the ground of your being, the essence will not be supported.

The 5th century B.C., Greek philosopher Farmenides laid down the procedure of Western thought when he said: “Don’t trust the senses. The senses will deceive you. Only reason can lead you to the truth.” He went on to reason that nothing could move, despite the fact that our senses tell us the world is constantly in motion. His reasoning tells me, reason can mislead us every bit as much as the senses can. So, one must find his or her own balance. To achieve balance one must be willing and determined to do battle within the soul. It is there you will find the undiscovered Spirit and self worth. Peace be with you.

Abu Ali Abdur Rahman
Co-Editor
Tennessee Death Row
Nashville, TN

The Blame Game

(Continued from page 5)

Now that I think about it, the other day I saw two inmates whispering, and I was sure they were saying evil things about me, but they were not. I also sent a message for a neighbor to visit me before yard call, but he never did. Until I learned that he hadn’t received my message, I was certain that he was upset with me. I remember seeing a guy here strutting around with his chest puffed out and I thought, “there goes a very proud man.” Later I learned he lives with back pain, and that is why he walks the way he does.

How many beautiful days are spoiled by our ugly thoughts? It would do us all good to keep in mind the reading Philippians 4:8; “…whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Dorian O’Kelley
Georgia Death Row
Jackson, GA
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An Apology

These words are from God
It takes a real man to apologize
It takes a real man to ask
Someone to forgive him
God said always think before
Saying something out of your mouth-
Because sometimes we say
Something we are not sure about
That’s why it is always best to
Pray and let God do the thinking
For us this way
We can’t go wrong—
From one brother to another

Raymond Burgess
Georgia Death Row
(Died of natural causes Sept. 2012)

Editors Note: Although mentally challenged Raymond wrote me the above note after I had reproved him. – M.W.

Heart To Heart

Too many of our youth suffer from a deficiency of love. Over time these children may develop feelings of anger and resentment. Without treatment their lives will begin to reflect how they feel, propelling them down a path of self-destruction. Some may commit suicide to escape their internal prison. Many others will get lost in the institutional shuffle, ousted by society and labeled as felons, housed in prisons and forced to accept their new identities.

The solution is love. Discipline will teach them right from wrong. But love will teach them compassion. We have tried every type of punishment to adjust our children’s behavior, including lethal injection. It’s time we try the most powerful drug known to man – Love.

Justin Anderson
Arkansas Death Row
Grady, AR