

Compassion

Written by Death-Row Prisoners

HELPING PRISONERS ON DEATH ROW LIVE CONNECTED AND FRUITFUL LIVES

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Publishing compassionate and introspective articles written by death-row prisoners.



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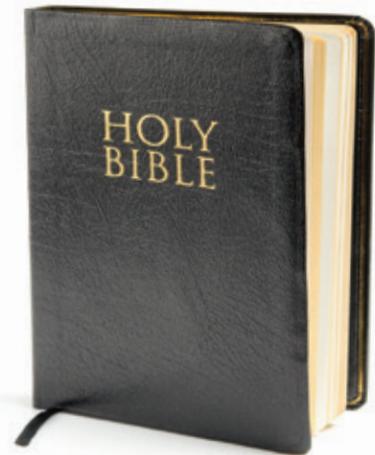
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A LOVE LETTER FROM GOD

The Bible is a love letter from our Heavenly Father to His children on earth, a title deed to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, a map showing the way to glory through the darkness of this present world, a plan for a life well-pleasing to God, a stairway leading us to heaven. It is a fountain of the pure water of life, a tree of healing, a table of heavenly bread, a chest of precious jewels, a light shining in darkness.

The Bible is a passport to the Heavenly Jerusalem, a chart to riches in the skies, an anchor of the soul, a pathway leading through the wilderness. Within its pages is a landscape of our future promised land, a mirror revealing fallen humanity and the glory of God through Jesus Christ, a key which unlocks the mysteries of creation and the heart of mankind.

The Bible is a precious storehouse of divine revelation, the touchstone of truth, an armory of weapons for our defense and our victory, the perfect rule of all justice and honesty. It is a laver for cleansing, a lamp to light our way, milk for the weak



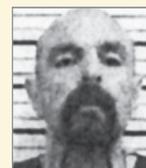
and meat for the strong, honey for those needing refreshment. It is a fire to burn away dross, a sword to pierce and lay bare sin, a seed springing up unto everlasting life. It is God-breathed; it is the living Word of the Living God.

One gem from this ocean is worth all the pebbles from earthly streams. The longer we read it the sweeter it becomes. It widens and deepens with our years. It teaches the best way to love, the noblest way to suffer, the only way to die. Between its covers

TOMORROW, I DIE

Steel and stone...and barbed wire fences.
Years on death row...lives a man with many changes...lives a man with little chances...
came in a boy.
In a bag...leaves a dead man.
Freedom lost...by crystal meth's hands.
I'm still...very much alive.
But, oh how...I think and think about wanting to die.
The syringe, the sword...and now this pen...
I write quickly for soon...comes my end.
Days of freedom...there will be no more.

I'm down to day 'five'
That leaves... 'four'...I spend it with tears...
and knees on the floor.
Day 3 is here...slowly, I let go of the fear.
Day 2 has somehow...arrived with no hope...
Tomorrow I die!!!



Antonio Serna
New Mexico Death Row
Santa Fe, NM

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.

SEND ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO:

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

EDITORIAL:

PSALM 88, MADE PERSONAL

From Compassion's Outside Board: The 150 Psalms, written by King David, cover every possible mood. Here, editor George Wilkerson personalizes one of the less familiar psalms. Let it remind us to pray for our brothers and sisters who are at a particularly dark place in their spiritual journey.

Aren't you the God who saves me?
I have been crying out to you for days!
Can't you hear my prayers?
I am overwhelmed with hunger,
and my body's wasting away.
I feel like I'm already dead;
I lack the strength to even get out of bed.
Buried in solitary confinement,
nobody seems to care I'm here.
Nobody can see my suffering,
the same way we can't see the flesh
of the dead rotting in their graves. The dead
don't pray, thus you don't answer their prayers.
You've put me in the worst place on earth,
the deepest hole, the most restrictive
imprisonment.
I can't stand your punishment!
I buckle beneath your wrath.
My friends abandoned me. My family
disowned me. I'm trapped,
miserable. My eyes are too tired to weep
anymore. I beg you every day...
Do you care for prisoners like me?
Do you hear our prayers?

Is it too late for me now,
will you help one who deserves what he gets?
Can I possibly grow closer to you in here?
Can I somehow serve you in prison? What good
can I do?
Nevertheless, I beg you for help.
You're the only one who can hear me.
Why don't you answer me?
Why can't I hear you?
I've lived a hard life, but never
have I suffered like this, been so close
to death!
I feel like you're killing me!
All I think about is food. Everyone
here is eating while I sit here starving.
Not one of these guys cares, not one
who claims to be my friend will help.
All that's left is darkness. I just want
to fall asleep and never wake up.
I want to embrace the darkness.



George Wilkerson
Editor
North Carolina Death Row
Raleigh, NC

A LOVE LETTER FROM GOD *Continued from front page*

are the mind and heart of God, the eternal destiny of the believer and of the sinner, the plan of salvation for men and the revealed purpose and plans of God for His People and His universe. Here is manna from heaven to feed us, a message from God to cheer us, a rule of life to guide us. Unless we read it, we shall be in darkness. Unless we obey it, our lives will be a disappointment. God is its author, man's eternal bliss its end, and truth with no admixture of error its subject matter. It is all pure, sincere, trustworthy, nothing too much, nothing wanting. This Book, on which we can pillow our heads while dying, is the Book we must read and cherish while living.



Al Cunningham
California Death Row
San Quentin, CA

Letters to the Editor:

MY FATHER

My Father hung the sun and the moon
and danced on the stars,
gave us shelter during storms
by surrounding us in His arms.
He created the beauty of art
and gave us the ability to speak.
Though He gave us time, we wanted more –
we made loving us hard because of greed.
My Father spoke
everything into existence
and so we get to see the whole world
through His perspective.
Despite all the cruelty
it is magnificent!
So many different images
that we cried when it was finished!
My Father gave us HEART
to be brave,
then KNOWLEDGE
to change our ways.
From selfish to selfless,
lending hands to the helpless.
My Father is special,
creates miracles,
Gives blessings:
He even makes us
feel so much better
when He acknowledges our presence!



Charles Summers
Nevada Death Row
Ely, NV

IN MY HEAD

The lawn is littered with possibilities.
Dreams rust, collect dust, fall into the cracks
and recede. Paint peels, broken windows
fit my physical frame. I close
the blinds when I'm inside
so nobody can see my pain.
Most people can't relate, but I'm being safe.
City ordinances label me "condemned",
four walls pretend to be my friends:
while they do protect me from the elements
they also keep me in.
But the truth is...
I'm comfortable like this.
Gotta protect my intellectual property
so I padlock all the doors;
can't trust my own thoughts
so I even put bars
on my windows,
secured with two-by-fours.
I am a prisoner
of my own mind...



Robert Brandy
Lebanon Correctional
Lebanon, OH

LEGAL NOTES: GETTING STARTED

Note: I am not a lawyer and do not seek to give legal advice but only relay my experiences with the legal system and opinions developed therefrom.

When I first encountered the law it was so intimidating. I quickly noticed that it's a language of its own. It has its own form of logic, of philosophy as well. It can't be argued with but only argued from. I wasn't well educated so that made things even more difficult.

However, I knew I needed to do it so I just got to it. It was very slow going at first, but haste makes waste. Taking the time to learn it right the first time kept me from having to go back to relearn it and fix any mistakes I had made with a faulty understanding of things.

Persistence was everything and I found myself developing tenacity, which is something I never knew before. Despite obstacles, I was determined to find my way and not let myself be bulldozed over by the system.

Starting right allows one to finish on target. I didn't let anything distract me from the task at hand, and had to sacrifice immediate pleasures for future gains. While some guys were watching TV, I was in the law library. While others got big bags of commissary, I got bundles of legal info from the library or my lawyers. It was a process but I got through it.



Kevin Marinelli
(Paralegal/Legal Assistant)
Pennsylvania Death Row
Collegeville, PA

VICTIMS VOICE **My Brother... My Best Friend**

Compassion scholarship recipient Cali Wade's brother Tyler was stabbed and killed in his home by a neighbor in 2015. Cali submitted the essay below with her scholarship application.

After losing my brother on November 2, 2015 I thought my life was over. I thought there was no way in hell I could live my life without my best friend by my side. Watching the one person who understood me the most and looked out for me die took a big part of me away but it also opened up my heart and allowed me to see later what compassion really is.

I never really felt or knew what compassion was when I was younger. After my brother passed away, I got a lot of it from friends to family and even people I didn't know. That is when I started to know what compassion was.

My compassion towards others has grown so much throughout the years. I never noticed it until my close friend's brother passed away. I always wanted to look out for him and make sure he was okay, because feeling like the world is against you is the worst thing and I did not want him to know how I was feeling. I still look out for him to this day because I know from first hand that even after my brother passed away that I still have low days. I still feel like someday that I could have prevented what happened and he would still be here and it is my fault. I still have those days 5 years later. So I look out for

him and his family and check up on them and see how they are doing.

My compassion towards others has come a long way, from barely knowing what it was to comprehending it and understanding it today. I never want anyone to feel how I felt all those years. I want them to have someone to talk to and be there for them unlike me, because I know what it feels like to be alone and it's horrible. So I want to make sure no one is ever alone like that and they always have someone.

Cali Wade
Tomball, Tx

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Precise communication among pilots is vitally important. To reduce the risk of misunderstanding between the control tower and planes cockpit, a controller is forbidden to tell a pilot to "hold for takeoff" The mere mention of "takeoff" could trigger a response in the mind of the pilot and cause him to push open the throttles prematurely. The correct command is: "taxi into position and hold."

This is just one example of how important proper communication is. Poor communication is the biggest cause of errors and financial loss in any business. It is also the main culprit of relationship issues that arise in community settings and in



the home. It doesn't matter how good someone is at communicating, there is always potential for misunderstandings. History suggests that we don't always do the best job of communicating our thoughts and objectives.

There are many factors that can sabotage effective communication. Probably the most common is a lack of clarity. It is always a good idea to think through what you're about to say before opening your mouth. What do you want the message to accomplish? Once that is clear in your mind, you can then organize your thoughts in a logical sequence that will get you to that destination.

Not listening is probably the most costly mistake. Listening is more than just hearing the words. It requires a desire to understand them and develop an attitude of respect and acceptance. Be willing to open your mind today and see things from the other person's viewpoint. Listening requires a high level of concentration and energy. True listening requires evaluation, approval and suspension of judgement.

We bring our preconceived ideas to the moment of dialogue. When we filter the dialogue through such images, biases and assumptions – distortion and wide separation are the result.

Effective communication is the glue that holds organizations and families together. As John Baldoni says: "It is the means by which we exchange ideas, learn from each other and perhaps most importantly, connect with each other."

"We can't control the way people interpret our ideas or thoughts, but we can control the words and tones in which we choose to convey them."

Never underestimate the power of a single word and never recklessly throw words around. One wrong word or misinterpretation can trigger a war. And one right word or one kind word can begin peace proceedings and open many doors.



John Robinson
Kansas Death Row
El Dorado, Kansas

NO FILTER

I have always been an open book and so serious about everything I say and do. I was always the one you could come to for an honest answer, the one to speak my mind no matter what the topic was about – and could care less how you felt or took it! I have always lived my life with 'No Filter'!

So it's no surprise that, for the most part, I never really had many friends who were men. If I didn't like something you were doing or something you said, I'd call you on it and I always wanted the same treatment. A lot of my relationships with the ladies were more platonic than anything. They loved to be around me, but hated to date me! Even my mom and I would get into it a lot because she would try to lie to me about things

she didn't know that I knew and I would call her on it! So I've become known as "Mr. No Filter."

As I get older my unfiltered self is starting to realize that having a filter would have kept me out of prison. But the fact still remains, even after more than 20 years, I still struggle to filter what comes out of my big mouth.

If you are someone who DOES have a filter, just know that you are one of the lucky ones! When someone like me tells you to just "keep it real," sometimes it's best that you just keep your mouth shut.



Paul Sanchez
Nevada Death Row
Ely, NV

THE PREDATOR'S PINCH

It sits there staring at me
I do not know what to do
I feel the weight of its gaze
As it begins to bore through

As I get up to walk away
It furtively comes for me
Musty air whispers on my nape
And darkness is all I see

I feel its claws brush the cloth
Which is now covering my back
In the shadows it sits poised
And it is waiting to attack

Is there hope fighting a foe
Which I have not eyes to see
How do I keep this creature
From slowly dismembering me

How do I know when to guard
When I have not ears to hear
How can I struggle back against
What is made of only fear

I'm left here in the shadows
Laying in tattered shambles
I'm tangled in time's embrace
Pierced by its thorns and brambles

Original Art Work for Scholarships



Untitled By John Sexton 6" x 8" / Ink on white paper To purchase make your check
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Johnny Calhoun
Florida Death Row
Raiford, FL

THE FOUR

Air, Water, Food, Prayer They're Germane!

The four elements of life, that
can never be denied.

Each one holding its own
unique necessity.

The four components one must
obtain to continue in life.

These four hold the very existence
of continuance.

None of them can be foregone,
except for the briefest of moments.

They all command
acknowledgement and
recognition,

Whereby if any quality of life
is to be had,

Fulfillment, happiness,
joy, delight.

The four are inevitable!

Air, Water, Food, Prayer

They are indeed sustenance
for sustainment.

All else is merely secondary.



Al Harden
North Carolina Death Row
Raleigh, NC

DEAR READERS,

SOMEONE ONCE SAID, "TO LIVE IN THE PAST IS TO DIE IN THE FUTURE..." WHAT FUTURE?

DO YOU HAVE A FUTURE? I DON'T...

I ASK YOU THIS, TO TAKE AWAY ANY HOPE OF A FUTURE FROM ANYONE, TO TAKE AWAY HOPE ITSELF, ISN'T THAT A FORM OF MURDER?

IMAGINE BEING TOLD "YOU ARE CONDEMNED TO DEATH AND AT SOME POINT IN THE NEAR FUTURE YOU WILL BE TAKEN TO A PLACE OF MY CHOOSING AND PUT TO DEATH"... THEN YOU'RE LOCKED IN A 7 X 9 FOOT CEMENT AND STEEL BOX, IN LIMBO FOR 30 OR 40 YEARS GIVING YOU NO HOPE OF LIFE NOR EVEN RELIEF THROUGH THE DEATH PROMISED YOU... YOU GROW OLD AND SICK AND RECEIVE LITTLE HELP IF ANY... AND WITH A JOY BORN OUT OF SOME SADISTIC NEED, GUARDS POKE YOU WITH A PROVERBIAL STICK THAT NOT ONLY CAN BE FELT BY THE BODY, BUT THE MIND AND SPIRIT AS WELL... THEY DENY YOU EVERYTHING POSSIBLE, ALIENATING YOU FROM MOST HUMAN CONTACT. THEN, TO ADD INSULT TO THE INJURY, YOU'RE APPOINTED A 'DEFENSE ADVOCATE' WHO IGNORES YOU AND YOUR HAPLESS PLIGHT YEAR AFTER LONG YEAR WHILE BLOWING SMOKE AT YOU ABOUT HOPES AND DREAMS THAT NEVER SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY, NOR WERE THEY EVER MEANT TO, THEY WERE LIES AND HOPES OF A FUTURE THAT THEY KNEW WAS NOTHING MORE THAN AN ILLUSION MEANT TO LULL YOU INTO A STATE OF SUBMISSION.

TELL ME, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHAT NAME WOULD YOU GIVE THIS WORLD THAT I'VE CONDEMNED YOU TO?

WHAT HORROR COMES TO MIND? HOW ABOUT, "NIGHTMARE ON CORRECTIONS STREET, BURIED ALIVE"? FOR ALL THEIR KINDNESS, IF A PERSON HASN'T WALKED A MILE IN THESE SHOES, THEY CAN'T TRULY UNDERSTAND "HELL ON EARTH..."

THERE ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THEY CAN SAY A FEW WORDS, GIVE A SMILE, AND YOUR WHOLE WORLD WILL BECOME BRAND NEW AND EVERYTHING WILL BE OKAY...

YES, I AM AMUSED WHEN ALL THOSE VOLUNTEERS COME TO VISIT AND WANT TO PRAY FOR ME. DON'T GET ME WRONG, I AM A CHRISTIAN/CATHOLIC, AND I KNOW THESE ARE GOOD PEOPLE FOR THE MOST PART, AND I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THEIR HEARTS ARE IN THE RIGHT PLACE...

BUT DON'T I GET THE FEELING THEY ARE CLUELESS. GOD BLESS THEM THOUGH. I APPRECIATE THEIR EFFORT, AT LEAST, FOR LIKE ANY DROWNING MAN I REACH OUT FOR WHATEVER HAPPENS TO FLOAT BY.



Richard Rhodes
Florida Death Row
Raiford, FL



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If you want to share someone else's work, please be sure you include the name of the author or its origin.

PRISONERS OF DEATH ROW YOUR ASSISTANCE WILL BE APPRECIATED

7 SUGGESTIONS AND GUIDELINES

1. Write about an experience that impacted you.
2. It doesn't have to be religious. Here are some themes: anger, apathy, beauty, betrayal, boredom, change, complacency, courage, fear, friendship, growing older, jealousy, pride, purpose, vices, and wisdom.
3. Use sensory details – the smell, who said what, its color, how cold it felt. Sensory details connect your experience to your readers.
4. There's no need to use big words when a simpler one suffices: leave your ego at the door with your case: this isn't the place for either one.
5. Look for ways to unify; help; and solve problems.
6. Be authentic. Be yourself. No one's perfect.
7. Try to limit it to 400 words or less, and if possible enclose a photo of yourself.

As there are numerous submissions it may take up to eight months for selected articles to be published.

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REFUGE

Flashes from the past
They come, then fade away
They are only momentary
They never come to stay

Though they are always welcome
Like a winding road up on a hill
Like sun upon my face
Their words are warm embraces

It is just a trinket lost in time
A smile, a song, a tale
The day we stormed the gates
and won
Friendships we thought would
not fail

It's the flashes from the past
Illuminating the road to another day
Secret shadows hidden in our minds
Are today's sunny fields to stay

It's youths fresh cut fields of grass
Or a young man with sand
between his toes
The scenes and souls dancing
through my mind
The laughs and loves held in
those shows

Though such blissful moments
are fleeting
The memories seem never to
go away
They create warm places in my mind
Where my heart can go to stay

Johnny Calhoun
Florida Death Row
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CHANGE DIRECTIONS

One evening I was among a group of friends who followed the map on a flyer to arrive at an all-night dance party in an unfamiliar city. Proud of my navigational skills, the next morning I led our caravan home by reversing the exact route we'd taken the night before. After I made a key turn, my girlfriend said, "I think we're headed the wrong way." I retorted, "No, I'm certain this is the street we took to get here." She responded by pointing at road signs on both sides of the street: all we could see were the backsides of the signs... which meant we were facing the wrong way.

I had turned the wrong way down a one-way street! Thank God there was no oncoming traffic yet, because somebody could've gotten seriously hurt. Immediately, our train of cars did a U-turn.

Spiritually, for many years, I firmly believed that "all roads lead to heaven" – specifically, the

heaven of the Bible. It's ridiculous now when I think about it! Think, Satanism is a religion that is absolutely against the God of the Bible, wants no parts of a Biblical heaven. Other religions have their own gods. All religions do not lead to the same destination... If I want to wind up in the Heaven of the Bible, then I need to get on the right road.

Similarly, the pleasures of sin will lead us down dark and dangerous paths. I thank God regularly for bringing people into my life who told me about Christ when I was lost – and encouraged me to read the Bible. God's word gives us clear directions that help us leave our old lives behind and point us toward heaven: the right direction. Home.

Amen.

George Wilkerson
North Carolina Death Row
Raleigh, NC