



**The College at  
Southeastern**

# AMBASSADORS IN EXILE

**The Faith & Fatherhood Issue**

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## The Second Issue of *Ambassadors In Exile*



Barry Mintz

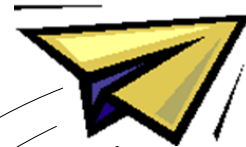
*Ambassadors In Exile* (AIE) returns with the follow-up to the premier issue from one year ago. AIE had planned to publish the second issue in January, but that ambition was postponed by the need for administrative clarity and then further delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite coronavirus restrictions, North Carolina Field Minister Program (NCFMP) students have been able to continue with classes thanks to the program's rare level of access to technology. All classes transitioned from live on-site instruction to live virtual instruction via Zoom. The NCFMP is one of the few higher education in prison programs that has been able to continue with live instruction during the pandemic.

Readers of the premier issue will immediately notice a visible difference in this issue: the inclusion of artwork. The utilization of art gives AIE an intriguing, appealing aesthetic. All artwork is created by NCFMP students. AIE is proud to serve as a medium to display this area of student talent, talent.

The theme for this issue is "Faith & Fatherhood." The first article, "Involved Fatherhood While Incarcerated," depicts how to be an involved father while incarcerated. "A Father's Cultivation" employs the cultivation to describe the fathering process. "Calling All Role Models" stresses the need of children for positive role models. "The Field Minister Mission" provides a format for changing the detrimental culture of prison. "A Heart of Service" emphasizes the necessity of the program's goal to foster servanthood. "A Paradox of Faith" explores the paradox of "righteous and yet a sinner." "Faith that Works through Love" examines the connection between faith, love, and works. "Less Like Samson, More Like Christ" challenges men in prison to adhere to the principles of Christ. This issue's Creative Composition, "My Disease," takes readers into the depths of a particular "disease," then conveys the lessons learned. As always, each article delivers insightful information and personal intrigue. 

# Involved Fatherhood While Incarcerated: A Challenge Well Worth Embracing

Kevin Smith



Fathers significantly impact the development of their children. The absence of fathers from the home not only strains father-child relationships, but also proves injurious to the well-being of children. Research reveals that paternal absence adversely affects many children in at least five key ways: (1) it nullifies the benefits of co-parenting; (2) it results in “poorer educational and psychosocial performance;” (3) it creates “emotional distress and less adaptive functioning;” (4) it generates “psychological distress in children;” and (5) it engenders “deleterious effects on children’s socio-emotional well-being and behavior.”<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the reasons for a father’s absence, innocent children suffer the detrimental repercussions of a father’s separation from the home, and consequently from the children.

Parental incarceration represents a substantial portion of paternal absence. More than half of the 1.2 million incarcerated individuals in the U.S. are parents of children under age eighteen.<sup>2</sup> Not only does four percent of the U.S. population under age 18—that’s 2.6 million children—have incarcerated parents, but “many more children have experienced a parent’s incarceration at some point in their lives.”<sup>3</sup> Roughly 1 in every 28 children in the U.S. has an incarcerated parent.<sup>4</sup> Fifty-four percent of the unprecedented number of incarcerated men in the country are fathers; that equates to approximately 744,200 fathers in prison.<sup>5</sup> The staggering number of incarcerated fathers proves that incarceration accounts for a large portion of paternal absence.

Although “empirical evidence on the developmental effects of paternal incarceration is limited,” research reveals that the adverse effects of paternal incarceration compound the effects of paternal absence.<sup>6</sup> In a study that compares the effects of paternal absence in general with absence due to incarceration, research “indicates that children of fathers with incarceration histories dis-

play significantly more aggression than their counterparts whose fathers were never incarcerated.”<sup>7</sup> Aggressive behavior includes, but is not limited to, “attacks [on] others, screams, sulks, is suspicious, teases, argues, is disobedient at school, is disobedient at home, destroys others’ things, destroys own things, fights, threatens, or is unusually loud.”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, children who suffer from paternal absence because of the incarceration of their fathers are prone to more challenges to healthy development than children who suffer from paternal absence from any other means. So the question remains, how can incarcerated fathers combat the adverse effects of paternal incarceration on their children? Incarcerated

fathers mitigate the deleterious consequences of parental incarceration on their children by maintaining involvement with their children—caring for their children physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

“Involved fatherhood” describes fathers that are actively involved in the rearing of their children, fathers who actually nurture loving relationships with their children. The role of a nurturing father is not a new invention; in fact, it “has been traced to the 1970s when proposals for the *new nurturing father* first became popular.”<sup>9</sup> Nancy Dowd insists, “Nurture means care—physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual—gauged by

one’s conduct and the consequences for children’s positive development. It is responsive to the different needs of children at different ages. Thus nurture is not a static conception. It means more than simply doing; it also means the manner in which things are done, and their results for children.”<sup>10</sup> According to this definition, involved fatherhood transcends the predominant cultural construct of fatherhood as merely biological and/or financial. Instead, involved fatherhood means both adapting to the needs of the children and prioritizing the means necessary for the children’s posi-

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tive development.

Involved fatherhood is rapidly becoming a norm in contemporary society, especially among incarcerated fathers. Cabrera points out, “What once seemed a natural pattern—a parenting model in which fathers were viewed as ‘helpers’ to mothers—is now yielding to new cultural ideals, such as coparenting.”<sup>11</sup> For obvious reasons, most intimate relationships deteriorate when one of the partners are incarcerated. Unfortunately, this breaking down of the family unit usually causes the incarcerated parent to sever their parental ties to the children, a result of the misguided perception that once a relationship between intimate partners ends, all relationships end. Many incarcerated fathers learn to maintain some type of relationship with the mother of their children in order to co-parent. In many cases, maintaining this relationship engenders pain for the incarcerated partner, especially when the mother becomes involved in another intimate relationship. However, and for the most part, many incarcerated fathers endure the pain in order to remain involved in their children’s lives.

Although incarceration complicates the practice of involved fatherhood, incarceration fails to either negate or diminish the responsibility of fathers to nurture their children physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Granted, the nature of incarceration presents fathers with formidable challenges to involved fatherhood; however, formidable does not equate to impossible. As Joyce Arditti points out, “geographic distance from family members, transportation and financial barriers, lack of child-friendly visitation contexts, and harsh, disrespectful treatment by correctional staff all impinge on meaningful contact between fathers and their children during confinement.”<sup>12</sup> Despite wrestling with the challenges of incarceration, involved fathers resolve to cultivate *meaningful contact* with their children, contact that does not necessarily revolve around physical contact. The fathers’ commitment to nurture their children supersedes limitations or challenges that accompany incarceration; these fathers are not so blinded by these obstacles that they fail to take advantage of the available resources.

In one study, wherein researchers inquired of children about their needs, the need of “physical contact from their fathers” placed last behind their needs of a role model, quality time, supportive behavior, and expressions of love, in this particular order.<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding the limitation of physical contact, incarcerated fathers nurture their children by encouraging participation in sports. For example, involved fathers assist their children in identi-

fying the sports they have the potential to excel in while assuring them that it is okay if they do not do as well in other sports. A nurturing father devotes his time, energy, and resources to developing his son or daughters’ interest in physical activities. Participation in sports and other physical activities inspires children to attend to their health.

On a personal note, when my son (William) began to mature into a young teenager, I noticed that he was developing a powerlifting type of physique. In his first year of high school, I encouraged him to both apply for weight training and to try out for the football team. Instead of football, he opted to play baseball; however, weightlifting became his passion during the entirety of his high school years. Capitalizing on this opportunity to bond with William, I not only shared my stats on the bench, squats, and deadlifting, but inquired about his also. The back and forth between us engendered some *positive* competition, spurring him forward. When I bragged about my benching stat, which was light-years beyond his, he would brag about his squats and hanging-cleans, which were slightly above my own. The competitive interaction between William and I drew us closer in relationship. By identifying and cultivating my son’s interest in weightlifting, I helped him develop confidence while also nurturing him physically.

To many individuals, incarcerated or free, sending letters, cards and artwork to children seems insignificant. I recently discovered the monumental affects that these seemingly simple acts have upon our children. Whereas my son wears his feelings on his





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sleeve, my daughter (Jacinda) conceals her feelings. William readily expresses his appreciation for even the smallest gestures, but Jacinda almost never expresses any type of appreciation. Over time I assumed that the letters, cards, and artwork that I sent my daughter were being packed away without much thought. Not too long ago, in passing conversation, my children's mother expressed how significant the accumulation of fifteen years of letters, cards and artwork means to my daughter. Unbeknownst to me at the time, Jacinda not only decorates her room with the letters, cards, and artwork that I send, but also passionately exclaims to others upon entering her room, "don't touch *my* things, they are from *my daddy*."

Jacinda's emotional attachment to me through letters, cards, and artwork is not unique. In fact, one author contends that "about two-thirds of adult inmates exchanged presents or cards with their children on the occasion of birthdays etc."<sup>14</sup> The same author not only insists that "all children like receiving and sending letters," but illustrates the point through a sixteen-year old's testimony: "we [he and his father] wrote weekly and I've kept all his letters. They [the letters] really helped me."<sup>15</sup> I am convinced that the significance of letters, cards, and artwork lies not merely in the items themselves, but in the content, thoughts, and emotions attached to the items. Although limited in physical contact, incarcerated fathers emotionally nurture our children through letters, cards, and artwork.

Another example of an emotional attachment exists in the bond of trust that my children and myself share. From the time my children were mature enough to understand the value of honesty, I have stressed the significance of cultivating a relationship built on honesty. One of my favorite lines is, "it does not matter what the



circumstance is, be honest with me and let's work on getting past it together; relationships built on lies crumble sooner or later." At times they tested my faithfulness to the commitment of honesty by asking me about sensitive matters, to which I replied, "are you sure that you want to know the answer to that question?" On other occasions they violated the code of honesty by *stretching* the truth. My children convey comfortableness in sharing their struggles with me, even above individuals who are a part of their daily lives. Counteracting the potential for unhealthy emotions requires incarcerated fathers to nurture healthy emotional bonds with our children.

Involved fatherhood requires incarcerated fathers to intellectually spur on our children. To counter the potential adverse effects on our children's educational performance, incarcerated fathers engage meaningful conversation about our children's current and future education. When the children are young this type of interaction requires the assistance of the children's caretakers. There were times when I happened to called home while my children were doing their homework. My children's mother put the phone on speaker-phone in order for me to participate in the homework session. The family initiative excited my children as evident in their voices and eagerness to engage with me about their homework assignments.

As my children matured, I encouraged them to think about their future. Beyond the casual inquiry of "what do you want to be when you grow up?" I began to nurture both of my children the first year of high school. I noticed that William exhibited a lack of interest in school even though he desired to either become a State Trooper or pursue an underwater welding career. Discovering his goals were instrumental in helping guide the direction of his fu-

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ture. William failed to pursue a career as a State Trooper or underwater welder, but co-owns a lucrative tree service business. Jacinda begins her first year of college in a couple months. After much deliberation and lectures from daddy, Jacinda decided to pursue higher learning in social work, with a specific direction yet to be determined. To offset the detrimental consequences of paternal incarceration, incarcerated fathers intellectually nurture our children by encouraging them to prioritize education.

Fatherhood is a creation of God's original design. One author insightfully points out, "The meaning and honor of fatherhood is prevalent throughout the biblical story...is arguably the predominant way that God chose to reveal Himself to the world, and fatherhood proves strategic in many places to the means whereby God brings about His redemptive plan."<sup>16</sup> The role of fatherhood not only enjoys a prominent place in the Scriptures, but also serves as a precedent for Christians to exercise their role of fatherhood in a way that glorifies God.

The implications of a father's faith are tremendous for their children. Preceding the Industrial Revolution, society expected fathers to fulfill their role as the *moral teacher* or *guide* of the family. Consequently, "Fathers were the ones deemed primarily responsible for ensuring that their children grew up with an appropriate sense of values, acquired primarily from the study of the Bible."<sup>17</sup> According to those expectations, "Good fathers were defined as men who provided a representation of good Christian living and whose children were well-versed in the Scriptures."<sup>18</sup> The role of fatherhood began to transition from one of moral teacher and guide to one of breadwinner during the Industrial Revolution; however, many contemporary Christian fathers retain the responsibility to nurture their children in biblical principles.<sup>19</sup> As a Christian, and despite my incarceration, I embrace my responsibility to both model pure Christianity for my children and teach them to live according to God's Word.

Spiritual nurturance includes not only modeling the gospel *for* our children, but also preaching the gospel *to* our children. As Paul David Tripp points out, preaching the gospel to our children does not mean in a "Sunday-morning-sermon style," but rather "look[ing] every day for every opportunity to point your needy kids to the presence, promises, power, and grace of Jesus."<sup>20</sup> It is essential that Christian fathers who are incarcerated point our children to the grace of God. Our children need to see God's grace at work in our own lives; they need to see our resolve to stand on God's promises; they need to see our dependence on God. This type of transparency requires a ton of vulnerability, but is necessary in modeling the gospel for our children and preaching the gospel to our children.

Incarcerated fathers counter the detrimental consequences that our incarceration exerts on our children by nurturing them physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Although incarceration presents many obstacles to involved fatherhood, most incarcerated fathers nurture their children through means such as letters, cards, artwork, and phone calls. Incarcerated fathers nurture our children by encouraging them to participate in sports and to remain healthy; we nurture our children by cultivating emotional bonds such as the one my daughter and I share through letters, cards, and artwork; we nurture our children by encouraging them to do their best in school and to aim for a successful career; and we nurture our children by teaching them biblical principles and also modeling those principles in our own lives. We nurture our children with the hopes of mitigating the detrimental consequences that they are prone to because of our incarceration. However, the implications of involved fatherhood for incarcerated fathers extend beyond the scope of our own children. By nurturing our children, incarcerated fathers combat the perpetuation of intergenerational incarceration and contribute to a flourishing society. 

#### Endnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> Getek Soltis, Kathryn. 2018. "Raising Our Kids: Social and Theological Accounts of Child-Rearing amid Inequality and Mass Incarceration" in *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 38 (1), 105.
- <sup>3</sup> Turney, Kristin, and Rebecca Goodsell. 2018. "Parental Incarceration and Children's Wellbeing" in *The Future of Children* 28, no. 1 (2018), 148.
- <sup>4</sup> Soltis, "Raising Our Kids," 105.
- <sup>5</sup> Arditti, Joyce A. 2012. *Parental Incarceration and the Family: Psychological and Social Effects of Imprisonment on Children, Parents, and Caregivers*. New York: NYU Press, 72.
- <sup>6</sup> Geller, Amanda, Carey E. Cooper, Irwin Garfinkel, Ofira Schwartz-Soicher, and Ronald B. Mincy. 2012. "Beyond Absenteeism: Father Incarceration and Child Development" in *Demography* 49, no. 1, 52.
- <sup>7</sup> Geller, "Beyond Absenteeism," 62.
- <sup>8</sup> Geller, "Beyond Absenteeism," 54.
- <sup>9</sup> Kiesling, Chris A. 2017. "Oh Father, Where Art Thou?" *Christian Education Journal* 14 (1), 93.
- <sup>10</sup> Dowd, Nancy E. 2000. *Redefining Fatherhood*. New York: NYU Press, 176.
- <sup>11</sup> Cabrera, "Fatherhood in the Twenty-First Century," 133.
- <sup>12</sup> Arditti, *Parental Incarceration and the Family*, 73-74.
- <sup>13</sup> Boswell, Gwyneth, and Peter Wedge. 2002. *Imprisoned Fathers and Their Children*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 57.
- <sup>14</sup> Boswell, *Imprisoned Fathers and Their Children*, 96.
- <sup>15</sup> Boswell, *Imprisoned Fathers and Their Children*, 76.
- <sup>16</sup> Kiesling, "Oh Father, Where Art Thou?" 92.
- <sup>17</sup> Kiesling, "Oh Father, Where Art Thou?" 92.
- <sup>18</sup> Kiesling, "Oh Father, Where Art Thou?" 92.
- <sup>19</sup> Kiesling, "Oh Father, Where Art Thou?" 93.
- <sup>20</sup> Tripp, Paul David. 2016. *Parenting: 14 Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 54.



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## A Father's Cultivation: Cultivating Fatherly Relationships Beyond Fences

Anthony Smith



**T**he process of growing any plant involves much more than just planting seeds. Ask any farmer or gardener whether or not their work requires more than merely putting seeds into the dirt. More than likely, that person will look at you as if an azalea bush is growing on your face. Then, the person will tell you about the long hours of exhausting work required to grow any crop or bed of flowers, to produce a harvest. Like producing a crop or garden, cultivating fatherly relationships beyond the fences of prison requires the same dedication and effort. As farming is a call to cultivate the land to bring about its glory, fatherhood is a call to cultivate a child for God's glory.

In both agriculture and fatherhood, the soil matters—the soil matters greatly. Concerning fatherhood, fathers must be rooted in the nutrient rich soil of God's Word, so that we can flourish in the responsibility to nurture our children, to cultivate them in a manner that reflects God's self-disclosing light. God's self-disclosing light reveals his fatherhood to be rooted in holiness and love, affirming that his heavenly radiance and loving light is central to the true essence of fatherhood, a model to guide the cultivation of our children. In order to surmount the inherent obstacles of prison, to move beyond the fences of prison and effectively father my daughter, I employed three components of the cultivation process: intentionality, consistency, and vulnerability. These components allowed me to plant seeds of love into my daughter's life, seeds modeled by our heavenly Father as he grows us in the orchard of his kingdom.

Intentionality lays the groundwork necessary to cultivate a favorable environment where a seed can take root, grow, and flourish into its full potential. Intentionality is like tilling of dirt, removal of debris, and adding fertilizer. In fatherhood, the cultivation process requires intentionality to build and maintain the rich soil of a loving relationship between father and child. In order to nurture and sustain a loving relationship during a season of incarceration, fathers must identify the tools essential to development of that relationship. For us in prison, the tools available are simple and few: a pen, paper, envelopes, stamps, etc. These tools may not at first appear suitable for preparing the soil for growing meaningful relationships, particularly when compared to the tools readily available to most fathers. Nevertheless, when employed with intentionality, every gardening tool possess the power to create a lasting foundation where a loving relationship can take root and grow.

Pen and paper were instrumental tools in tending the soil for the loving relationship I desired to cultivate with my daughter. In the way a shovel is used to bring to the surface the rich nutrients of the topsoil, I used a pen to unearth my deepest sentiments on paper. Before my daughter was old enough to understand the concept of a letter, I wrote countless letters expressing how much I loved her, how much she enriched my life, and how perfect my world was because of her.

God the Father provides the ultimate model of intentionality in fatherhood. When Adam and Eve blatantly disobeyed God, he

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exercised intentionality by announcing a plan to restore his fallen children. The Father's plan for restoration takes root in the covenantal promises made to Abraham (Genesis 15:18-20), sprouts forth from the ground like a bush in Moses (Exodus 3:2-6), grows strong like a fortified kingdom in David (2 Samuel 7:11-13), then comes to full maturity in the vine of Christ (John. 15:5) in order that his intentions might be fulfilled in bearing fruit in the branches of his children. By laying down his life, Christ made it possible for us to cultivate fruitful relationships with our children. As fathers, a key part of cultivating our children is restoring them to the one true Father. Our loving Father's intentionality makes us both fruit and fruit-bearers in God's orchard.

After cultivating an environment conducive to the growth of a loving relationship through intentionality, the next step in the cultivation process is consistency. Consistency is needed to produce a loving relationship, in the same way it takes time and attention in the form of daily watering and weeding to ensure a plant's development and growth. If a broken relationship needs to be restored, consistency can nurture healing. Intentionality without consistency is ineffective, serving only to stagnate the potential of good intentions. Intentionality without consistency washes away the nutrients before they can foster growth, wasting the potential to grow a loving relationship.

Intentionality laid the groundwork for me to cultivate the relationship I desired to have with my daughter; consistency provided countless opportunities to reinforce those intentions. This phase of the cultivation process required me to look beyond the means of pen and paper to reinforce and grow what had been planted. Pen and paper permitted me to fill the mailbox of her heart with letters and cards expressing my deepest sentiments. Then, phone calls and visits furthered my aim to sow into her life. Phone calls provided chances to learn more about what was budding within the hedges of her precious heart, and visits awarded me the privilege to water the seedlings growing from our letters and conversations. During these moments, I made certain to reinforce my love by using affirmative gestures that communicated my love and her significance: holding hands while looking into her eyes, expressing how I felt, giving encouragement to her goals and dreams, speaking blessings into her life, and praying with her. Plus, hugs, kisses, and lots of laughter.

A few yearly programs provided opportunities to nurture and flourish our relationship. One Day with God Camp enabled us to be warmed by the light found in each other's eyes, grow stronger in the embrace of our hugs, and, like hummingbirds or butterflies retrieving nectar from a flower, afforded opportunities for our smiles to receive sweet kisses. By the way, she has the world's brightest smile. Each year before Christmas, I signed her up for the Angel Tree program to reinforce the love of Christ in her life by providing gifts. I consistently cultivated the garden of my daughter's life—her heart, her mind, her dreams, her personality.

By reviewing God's work in restoring us unto himself, we

clearly see God's consistency being demonstrated in the lives of Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. When God promised to give the land to Abraham's offspring, he was consistent to bring about his covenant promise. God's consistency was instrumental in encouraging Moses throughout the wilderness journey to cultivate Abraham's offspring for entry into the promised land. The Father's consistency shows up in the life of King David when he affirms David and his lineage despite David's adultery and murder. The ultimate example of God's consistency is realized in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. God the Father employs consistency to cultivate his children to glorify him in the orchard of his kingdom.

In addition to intentionality and consistency, fatherly cultivation requires vulnerability. Of the three components of the cultivation process, vulnerability was the most difficult to put to use. Vulnerability was difficult to plant, not because it requires exposure without any fear of judgment, but simply because a father had not sown this trait into my life when I was a child. There was no father figure available to model for me the growth which ascends from being vulnerable. Other than my mother, there was no one to glean from when it came to being vulnerable. I did reflect upon the relationship I had with my mother in order to understand what it meant to be vulnerable in the life of my daughter. By reflecting upon our relationship, I was able to give my daughter all that my mother nurtured in me. By growing closer to the Father in my spiritual relationship, I was able to experience fatherly vulnerability and exercise this vulnerability in cultivating my daughter.

The supreme example of vulnerability is the incarnation—Christ becoming human in order provide the means of salvation for humanity. He subjected himself to all it means to be human, even dying upon the Cross. Even though we reject God and his love, he pursues us, offering repeated chances to become his children and enter the process of cultivation as his children, that we might reflect his self-disclosing light of holiness and love.

Despite the obstacles of incarceration to the process of fatherly cultivation, for the sake of our children, we absolutely must cultivate loving relationships with our children through intentionality, consistency, and vulnerability. Being incarcerated does not exempt us from the calling to cultivate these loving relationships. Incarceration does not relieve us from the duty to perform the work of cultivation: planting seeds, preparing the soil, watering, and weeding. We must not let mistakes impede our calling to fatherhood. In the same way mulch serves to protect the soil, we (fathers) are called to expose ourselves in vulnerability to protect our children and the soil where they grow. Like the familiar footprints in the sand, the root of God's love can be traced back to the intentionality of His purposeful pursuit of us, His consistency in reinforcing His intentions, and Christ's subjection to human vulnerability. Let us be the fathers God has called us to be by cultivating fatherly relationships beyond these fences.





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# Calling All Role Models: The Pressing Need for Positive Role Models

Lucas Rash

Multitalented Drake sings, “I want the money, money and the cars, cars and the clothes, I suppose I just want to be successful.” Many people follow mainstream culture’s credence of this particular understanding of the measure of a successful life. What does it truly mean to have a successful life? Although I enjoy much of Drake’s music and think we should strive for a measure of success in life, I believe determining success in life requires applying different parameters. While a person can learn what matters in life through experience, in the so-called “School of Hard Knocks,” experience teaches with harshness and costs a steep price. With only experience for an instructor, this superficial definition of success, and other faulty lifestyle instructions, might never be challenged or changed. The meaning of success—the things to value in life, things that should carry worth for a person—can best be learned by direct instruction from another person and then following that person’s example.

Child development expert John Head states, “a person needs to possess a consistent set of values and beliefs if they are to operate effectively and achieve a mature identity.”<sup>1</sup> Consider Proverbs 3:11: “I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness.” Because of this principal need for instruction, a child will find a role model. But will a child find a positive role model? If a child cannot find an immediate role model, such as a parent, the child will look beyond the immediate, possibly to a cultural icon. Considering the physical separation between a parent in prison and a child, can a parent in prison serve as a positive and effective role model? Yes, a parent in prison can positively and effectively serve

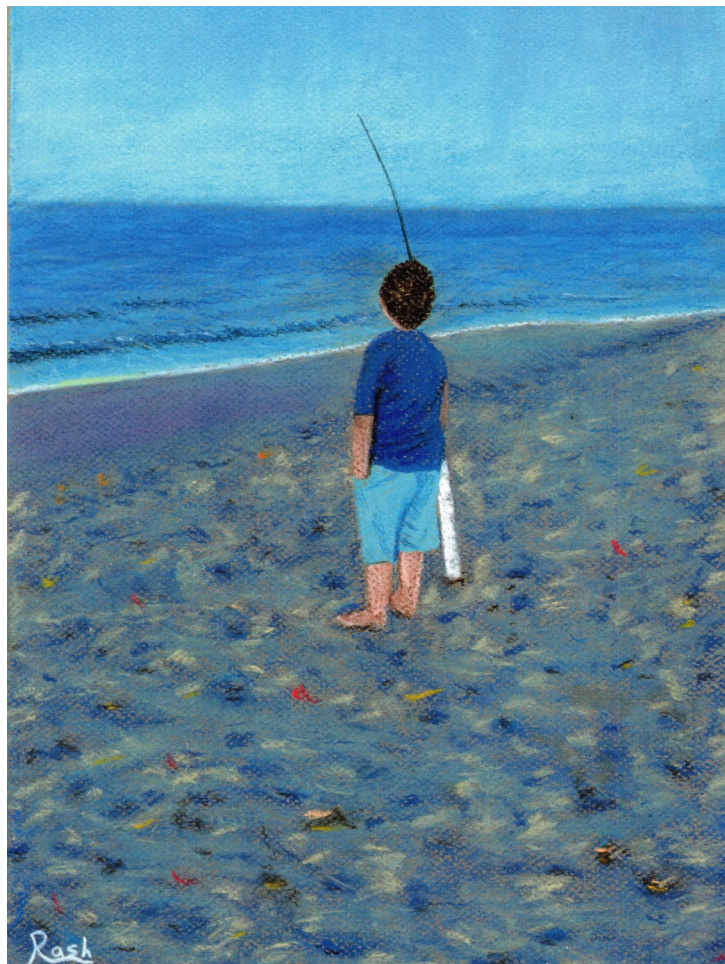
as a role model for a child when the parent understands the definition of a role model, practices to avoid, characteristics of a positive role model, and the importance of consistency, transparency, and intentionality.

Defining “role model” aids in the pursuit to understand this mission: “a person looked to by others as an example to be imitated.”<sup>2</sup> A key part of the meaning focusses on a role model’s capacity to influence the other person. The model’s way of life—habits,

beliefs, and actions—rests on full display for the other person to see and imitate. However, everyone with the platform to be a role model does not deserve imitation. Charles Barkley was both right and wrong when he insisted, “I am not a role model.” His platform as a star basketball player made him a role model, even though unwillingly, but his actions and attitude made him an ineffective role model. Because the futures of children are at stake, this business must be engaged with utmost seriousness.

Many athletes, musicians, and other celebrities have the platform to influence a number of children, but their choices should not be copied. For example, former Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver Antonio Brown went from hailed superstar to football

pariah after a series of misdeeds. Young footballers across the country admired and emulated Brown. Undoubtedly, his series of poor choices could have a severe, negative impact on these children if another role model does not warn them not to imitate Brown’s off-the-field misconduct. Similarly, countless music artists encourage drug use, violence, and other negative behaviors through their songs and lifestyles. Without a role model, especially a father fig-






ure, to contradict these flawed values and ways of living, children could be doomed to view these lifestyles as not only normal and acceptable but also as necessary for satisfaction and a measuring rod for success.

In *Bringing Up Boys*, Dr. James Dobson, describes American culture as full of men who are immature, immoral, weak-willed, cowardly, and self-indulgent. Dr. Dobson insists that men, as fathers, uncles, and friends, must stand up and invest in our children in order to assure they are taught “the value of strong character, self-discipline, respect, commitment to truth, work ethic, and an unshakable love for Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Accepting Dobson’s call and challenge, I continually strive to teach my son to value character, integrity, and honesty. Because bad role models abound, taking the initiative and getting involved in a child’s must happen today and every day. Answering Dr. Dobson’s call raises an essential responsibility for anyone and everyone who loves a child, who cares for a child’s future.

Illuminating the key characteristics of a positive role model yields further insight. In Titus 2:6-7, Paul instructs, young men must be taught to be “self-controlled in everything,” and “an example of good works with integrity and dignity.” Likewise, in 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul guides his other protégé to examine and invest in five key areas: one’s speech, conduct, love for others and self, faith, and purity of heart. Our children must be taught to speak with respect, conduct themselves in a way above reproach, have characters built on pure intentions, and to love God and others. Many counselors agree with Scripture’s consistent affirmation of the importance of teaching integrity, respect, and character. Dr. Dobson teaches, “the best way to instill [character] is through the demeanor and behavior of a father.” As a man who desires good for my son, I must embrace the responsibility to teach him how to live and flourish in life.

Effectively serving as a role model begins with the necessary knowledge, then moves to application of these truths in the effort to influence a child’s life. Mentoring from afar encounters substantial difficulty, but doing so proves possible. In fact, some are already accomplishing this undertaking. For one father, his involvement in his son’s life may be the primary reason that his son is not in prison today. This father began by changing his own behavior in order to be the best example he could for his son. Next, the father began teaching his any new truths he learned during the transformation process that he felt could be beneficial to his son and his growth. Now, he continually stays active in his son’s life. He put these principles to work when his son was in position for a mentoring program by writing the Boy’s Club to express his concerns and to communicate on his son’s behalf. This dedication speaks volumes about his love and desire for his son’s success.

As a father, I have learned a few things of benefit in the endeavor to facilitate my son’s growth and development. Aside from displaying love, the next most important thing has been maintaining consistency my son’s life. Whether writing or calling, I do each regularly because the consistency shows him I care. Also, how I live each and every day possess tremendous significance. Staying out of trouble, being respectful and honest, having integrity, and modeling godly behaviors sets an example for him to imitate. Additionally, I share my missteps with him, hoping he learns to value transparency and sees that mistakes happen, but the response matters. I do not direct unnecessary anger at him. I keep my language clear of curse words. I provide him support and assurance. I frequently express my love, through words and actions, and communicate that I am proud of him. These things that I teach my son become part of who he is and serve as guiding truths for him in life.

All over, from numerous platforms, via various means—every magazine cover, television show, and YouTube video—people are vying for the attention of and the opportunity to influence our children. Positive, effective role models are becoming ever more scarce in the public arena. John C. Maxwell charges, “People who add value to others do so intentionally. I say that because to add value, leaders must give of themselves, and that rarely occurs by accident.”<sup>5</sup> Intentionality and consistency are required in order to sow into another’s life and reap a positive difference, to upwardly shift the trajectory of growth and development in life. This level of work defines a good role model, and it takes someone prepared to stand up and accept such a noble task. Think of your son or daughter, your niece or nephew; think of their future—who do you want to teach them the things that truly matter in life, the meaning of success? If you have been hesitant to get involved because of physical separation, because you have been absent for a long time, or because of any other obstacle, overcome these impediments and reach out today. Let your love be known now, because we are not promised tomorrow and because our children deserve the best future possible. 

#### Endnote

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# The Field Minister Mission: Changing Prison Culture

Timothy Johnson

The current prison culture causes significant and widespread harm. For that reason, a primary goal of the North Carolina Field Minister Program (NCFMP) is to change the culture, to initiate and influence positive culture change within North Carolina prisons. Practically every separate grouping of humanity develops its own identifiable culture—a communal collection of beliefs, practices, and principles passed from one generation to the next. People who are incarcerated acquire a culture specific to the prison environment, what many incarcerated persons refer to as the “convict code.” While this code is not written or formalized, a person entering the world of prison needs to learn the values and norms of their new domain in order to avoid overwhelming stress and frequent conflict. Rebecca Trammell identifies “three basic rules” of prison culture: “quickly learn the informal norms to stay out of trouble,” “there is a time and place for violence,” and the behavior of nearly every person involves the taking on of a persona or role.<sup>1</sup> How should Field Ministers (FMs) live in order to accomplish the goal of culture change? FMs challenge, engage, and transform the prison culture through discipleship, development of Christian character, and fellowship.

## Challenging the Prison Culture

Through discipleship—intentional mentoring—FMs challenge the customary prison culture by demonstrating a positive way to live while incarcerated. Every person new to the world of prison expends immense mental energy on the process of observation and application, observing how others live and communicate, then attempting to follow the perceived pattern. Each incarcerated person learns from others, either directly or indirectly. Individuals unfamiliar with the environment of incarceration find themselves in a foreign world, a realm with alien customs and language, stimulating a battle with depression, lethargy, insomnia, and other issues.<sup>2</sup> As all culture is learned from others within, new prisoners learn from those already incarcerated, placing substantial significance on whom a new arrival emulates. FMs have a dynamic opportunity to meaningfully challenge the prison culture by mentoring individuals and by influencing those watching.

FMs facilitate development of Christian character by challenging the traditional prison culture’s perspective on violence. Although experiencing violence is atypical for an individual in

American society, violence is a common experience for an incarcerated person; most will be involved in a violent situation and nearly every person will observe violence.<sup>3</sup> Francis Schaeffer defends, certain situations sanction a Christian to use force: when retreat and remonstrance cease to be options.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the prison culture promotes violence for the purposes of identity maintenance and in the battle for control.<sup>5</sup> By avoiding violence unless absolutely necessary to preserve life or prevent severe harm, FMs demonstrate that Christian character distinctly diverges from and challenges the culture of violence in prison.

FMs challenge the prison culture’s standard role options and

**“The Prison  
Culture  
Promotes  
Violence”**

offer the healthy role option of Christian fellowship. Role implementation mainly comprises adopting one of two options in “doing time:” either the habit of isolation in dealing with problems and stress or joining a gang for protection, power, and belonging. Many choose to isolate because of the complicated nature of relationships in prison: determining whom to trust can be arduous and separation from a friend is frequent, immediate, and often permanent due to a transfer, segregation, or a bed move. Some opt to join a gang, with motivations including fear, a desire for control, or a longing for a sense of acceptance and belonging.<sup>6</sup> Christians should choose neither isolation nor joining a gang but fellowship with the community of believers. FMs who foster an atmosphere of Christian fellowship within an institution or even in a single dorm challenge the standard role options of the prison culture by building a community of believers for individuals to join instead of either isolating or enrolling in a gang.

## Engaging the Prison Culture

FMs engage the current prison culture through discipleship by demonstrating how to live with meaning and purpose. Finding meaning in life serves as possibly the chief element in adapting to incarceration.<sup>7</sup> Regrettably, most incarcerated people flounder and waste years, devoid of any purpose. According to Schaeffer, meaning in life depends upon securing a foundation of absolute truth, beginning with God and Scripture, and developing a worldview that matches objective reality—the Christian worldview.<sup>8</sup> FMs engage with a culture devoid of purpose and lead others to live meaningfully while incarcerated by living upon the absolute truth of Scripture and teaching others to likewise build upon this truth.



Character development offers a vital platform for engaging the conventional prison culture because of the near abyss of authentic morality, not just in prisons but in much of society. Prison offers an extreme microcosm for the moral degradation of contemporary society, because individuals with a history of violating both moral and governmental laws are placed into an environment defined by deprivation—deprivation of liberty, security, goods and services, heterosexual companionship, and autonomy. FMs who demonstrate the values of integrity, compassion, self-discipline, diversity, and social responsibility stand apart from not only modern society but especially the prison culture. The departure from the norm leads not to isolation but to conversation by eliciting questions from others within the culture for why and how those virtues are preferential and possible. The development and display of Christian character generates discourse and opens opportunities for cultural engagement by FMs.

Fellowship functions as a crucial element of engagement with the prison culture. Engaging the culture through acts of love and charity makes a monumental statement in a setting that tends towards either an “every man for himself” or gang mentality. The Second Great Commandment directs believers to behave towards all others with love. Selfless giving announces the love of Christ with unmatched clarity and immeasurable volume. FMs who host coffee-and-conversation events, cook for dorm residents, or fund and arrange a Christmas party captivate their audience and entice others to join the fellowship of the Christian community through loving engagement.

## Transforming the Prison Culture


FMs who disciple fellow residents in the spiritual disciplines of Bible study and prayer transform the culture from fruitless to fruitful. Although the primary goal of penal incarceration is the formation of discipline, the current system of incarceration fails emphatically in this quest.<sup>9</sup> Training in the spiritual disciplines builds discipline in practically every fundamental area of life by extension, providing an opportunity for FMs to succeed where the system fails. Bible study and prayer are indispensable in the life of a Christian, building self-discipline and a commitment to biblical truth. FMs who disciple fellow residents in the chief spiritual disciplines of Bible study and prayer foster transformation of individuals and the entire prison culture.

FMs transform the futile culture of the realm of incarceration through development of Christian character by revolutionizing how residents think about pride and sexual desires. Many prisoners guard their pride as if it is a source of life, trying to appear threatening, which causes conflict and violence.<sup>10</sup> Concerning sexual desires, pornography and less graphic sexually suggestive

material receive general acceptance among the prison population and the occurrence of rape is enormously higher in the prison setting than in general society.<sup>11</sup> FMs who replace pride with humility and abstain from sexual thoughts or visual perusal make a resounding declaration about Christian character. FMs transform the culture by leading a revolution of morality within the environment of incarceration.

FMs transform the ineffective prison culture through fellowship grounded in the Christian tenet of forgiveness. Respect assumes immense significance for an incarcerated person. Perceived disrespect often leads to violence, or at minimum the severing of relationships. Living with a commitment to forgiveness, FMs mark a distinct contrast from the regular path of broken relationships. In an environment where many refuse to forgive friends, walking in forgiveness, not only to fellow Christians but even to potential adversaries, revolutionizes the prison culture. By exhibiting forgiveness and relationship restoration, FMs transform the prison culture by drawing attention to the unique fellowship *within* and *from* the Christian community.

## Conclusion

FMs can accomplish the mission of culture change by endeavoring to challenge, engage, and transform the adverse prison culture by means of discipleship, development of Christian character, and fellowship. FMs must first emulate the principles of commitment to truth, forgiveness, integrity, courage in the face of malevolence, and restraint of appetites, then encourage fellow incarcerated residents to practice these principles. Changing the culture will not happen in a moment, but over an extended time through prolonged dedication and consistency. Since the majority of incarcerated persons return to society, the transformation of the prison culture significantly impacts all of American society. 

### Endnotes

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# The Gallery



Lucas Rash  
The Good Life

Kirston Angell  
Freedom



Dan Edwards  
The Crossing





Jonathan Ramirez  
The Frog

Charles Ball  
The Fox



Johnathan Simpkins  
Toma x10

Barry Mintz  
Road Less Traveled





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# A Heart of Service: Developing Field Ministers

## Craig Williams

Doing easily what others find difficult is talent; doing what is impossible for talent is genius.  
—Henri-Frédéric Amiel

A warm smile, a kind gesture, a gentle word, a helping hand—all of these are ways to serve others. Although remaining humble, swallowing pride, and acting with kindness to a complete stranger can be difficult in an environment where striving to appear tough is the norm, there is something noble, powerful, and Christ-like about serving another. All have heard the Golden Rule: Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you. However, sometimes this spiritual truth gets thrown to the side and lost in the prison context. In Galatians 6:7-8 (KJV), Paul admonishes, “Be not deceived that God is not mocked for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The spiritual law of “sowing and reaping” is a concept that is applicable to service. The gravity of this spiritual principle produces introspection that results in evaluation of our service. Considering this principle, what does it take to receive a positive return on the investment of service? Investing in service benefits both others and ourselves.

A central goal of the North Carolina Field Minister Program (NCFMP) is to prepare participants for a life of service and kingdom contribution by developing a heart of service. A heart of service impacts not only the prison community, the primary sphere of influence, but also people who never enter these walls, affecting change in our families and communities. Field Ministers (FMs) are being equipped to look for opportunities to sow seeds of kindness into the lives of others. Opportunities abound in this context where we live in close proximity and are able to identify the needs of others who may be destitute, broken, hurting, or lonely.

Service bears import because service is attached to God’s love. His love should have no conditions. In this setting where many tend to view wrong as right and right as wrong, a collective effort from FMs is required to serve, especially owing to the common feeling that the odds are stacked against us. NCFMP Junior Johnathan Simpkins states, “As Field Ministers, our service, or lack thereof, matters to everything. Jesus is our example of service, for he came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. I believe we should live by Christ’s example. This is what make us stick out. We were once viewed as unworthy of service, but look who we are in Christ today.” Service

reflects Christ and fulfills The Great Commission.

Service possesses an amazing power to soften the heart, to initiate change. NCFMP junior Jimmy Smith recalls, “Over the course of 30 years of incarceration, I have witnessed some of the most hardened criminals and socially reclusive men transform and develop, becoming better men because of service—the bestowal of simple acts of kindness to them.” Jimmy shares a story in which he invested daily time and encouragement into an older gentlemen named Lee:

Lee and I had some good horseshoe competitions at Hyde. We used to joke back and forth as we played. As Lee and I battled daily, I noticed that the duration of his incarceration had hardened him, leaving him bitter and angry. We developed a close relationship, and he allowed me to speak life into his life:

“Man, you’re playing hard today, old man,” I told Lee, bending down to pick up the horseshoes. Having thrown another ringer, Lee retorted, “I’m going to show you who’s old when I whip your behind today.” Lining up for the potential game winning toss, I taunted, “All I need is to score another ringer and you’re done—a cooked old goose.”

I let the horseshoe fly. *Ting!* As the dust settled, someone called, “That’s a ten. That’s game.” Lee and I walked down for a closer look. I smiled when Lee conceded, “That’s it. You got me. I haven’t been beaten like that in a long time, you must have a rabbit’s foot in your pocket or something.” I expressed, “I told you that you can’t beat me with Jesus on my side! Work Jesus!” Lee countered, “There you go again with that Jesus stuff! You act like that’s all you know. Jesus didn’t pitch not one horseshoe, and if he did, then he had a lucky rabbit’s foot.” We both laughed.

Seizing an opportunity, I urged, “Hey Lee, why don’t you come to church with me on Saturday night? We’re gonna have a good time and you’ll like the speaker.” Lee resisted, “I don’t know man. Church has never been my thing. I tried one time and it didn’t work for me. All that praying and stuff don’t work man.” I admitted, “I used to feel the same way before I gave my life to Christ. Nothing made any sense to me, but the more I went to church, the more I realized just how messed up my life was. I was really tired of going round and round in circles in my life and not getting anywhere.” Lee confessed “I know the feeling. I feel that way all the time. I feel as if my life has no meaning or purpose—like I’m just existing. Just the other day I was on the phone with my daughter and she

**“Opportunities  
abound in this  
context where  
we live in close  
proximity”**



asked me when was I going to get my life together and stop going to prison. I felt so small—like a maggot.”


As we took a seat on a bench by the basketball court, I continued, “Jesus wants us to have an abundant life—a life with purpose and meaning. It takes Jesus pouring his love into our hearts for us to change, for us to be the men that God has called us to be. We continue to do the same things because the devil has a stronghold on us; only the power of God can break those strongholds. We may stop something for a while, but eventually we find ourselves doing those things again.”

Longingly, Lee said, “I feel you man. I definitely want to be better for my family. They need me to be there with them, not in here. But look at you man: You have been in prison over two decades and God still hasn’t let you go, and you go to church all the time.” I admitted, “You’re right. At first I felt the same way. I kept saying, *God why don’t you let me go home to my family? I serve you all I can, but you don’t move on my behalf. I see all these other guys who don’t serve you getting help and going home.* I began to feel bitter, but the Holy Spirit spoke to me: *God is still God, and in His time, He will set you free.* Then I realized that while I’m in prison, I can tell people about the love of God and His greatest gift to mankind—Jesus—just like I’m doing with you, you old heathen.” We both laughed.

Lee consented, “I’ll think about coming to church on Saturday, but don’t hold me to it.” Joyously, I expressed, “Remember Lee, Jesus wants to give you a new life; all you have to do is accept Him as your Lord and Savior, and He will begin to change your life. I wish I would have done it a long time ago. My family is excited about my new life. My children are going to church and reading their Bibles.” Lee assented, “It seems you are happy all the time. You have a smile on your face, as if you have the world by the tail. I’ve been watching you, and you have definitely changed for the better. How do I get this new life?” God used me to lead Lee into a relationship with Him. Lee accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.”

The education, training, and experience provided in the NCFMP fosters such a heart of service.

It is imperative that we show people we care for them, as opposed to only telling them we care for them. We can talk about love and service all day long, but when we love people by living a life of service, by making a positive contribution in their lives, this service changes and transforms lives and even revolutionizes the culture of prison. Additionally, service positively transforms the life of the server by providing life with meaning and keeping the moral, human aspect of the soul alive, which is

vital in an environment that desensitizes and dehumanizes. *The Grace Effect* author Larry Taunton directs, “As one experiences grace in his own life, he extends grace to others. Through the inward transformation of the individual, there is a corresponding outward transformation of society. This is what I call the ‘grace effect.’” We seek to serve others in such a way as to build relationships with them, so that we may help them know God and help them build better relationships with their families. Service involves love in action and a commitment to others. Developing a heart of service is foundational for every Field Minister. 



Robert Odom

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# A Paradox of Faith: Righteous and Yet a Sinner

Johnathan Simpkins

Faith stands as a stark paradox in relation to life's inherent or self-inflicted adversities. A paradox can be defined as "a tenant contrary to received opinion" or "a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true."<sup>1</sup> For example: God uses the messes people make in their lives to highlight His Message of transformation. Contrary to popular belief, there is strength in the most debilitating weakness, hope when all seems hopeless. God longs for a relationship with every soul on earth and desires to use life's tests as a testimony for Him. During my years of incarceration, I have witnessed Jesus Christ transform convicted murderers into lifesavers both literally and spiritually, take crooked men and women and make them honest, change hustler's hearts from always scheming to giving their last to someone in need. Faithful men and women defy human logic by resting on the logic of God, the truth of Scripture. By the Lord's divine providence, I am a member of the North Carolina Field Minister Program (NCFMP), a partnership with the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS), which has formerly held or currently holds my mother, father, grandfather, uncle, sister, cousin, and friends in various facilities. My position as a Field Minister (FM) presents a prime example of the paradoxical nature of faith in opposition to life's situations and circumstances. For most, especially within this prison environment, conceiving sin as anything but a complete contradiction to righteousness seems impossible based on our littered pasts and unpleasant realities. Herein rests the beauty of the paradox: righteous and yet a sinner.<sup>2</sup>

The paradox of righteous and yet a sinner can only be understood by examining the effects of sin that deter every human being from a personal relationship with God. The realm and culture of prison often generate a smile at the accusation of being a sinner, causing the effects of sin to get overlooked and go unnoticed. Countless souls cycle through the prison system without ever giving any thought to sin being the culprit responsible for the suffering that results from poverty, racism, addiction, sex abuse, violence, gang life, and imprisonment. Cornelius Plantinga Jr provides a thought provoking perspective of sin: "Self-deception about our sin is a narcotic, a tranquilizing and disorienting suppression of our spiritual nervous system. What's devastating about it is that when we lack an ear for wrong in our lives, we cannot play right or even recognize them in the performance of others."<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, many incarcerated men and women are unconscious of being born into this self-deception of sin or having grown callous to the wrong in their lives. They do not realize, "sin attaches to intention, memory, thought, speech, intelligent action—

to all the special features of personhood—and transforms them into weapons".<sup>4</sup> By offering sobering reminders of how deeply ingrained sin is in humanity, I can speak of a God that declares us righteous by our faith despite our sinful natures.<sup>5</sup>

As a FM, explaining the paradox of righteous and yet a sinner to another resident of prison presents an extensive challenge. Even the idea of righteousness is intimidating to a person who has always been counted as a misfit, a person who has repeatedly fallen short. However, a shift begins upon realizing that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us in order to declare us righteous and saved us from the wrath we deserve.<sup>6</sup> The intimidation of righteousness fades when a prisoner realizes the presence of a Savior who accepts them regardless of their crime, past transgressions, and internal pain.

Transparency goes far when building relationships as a FM. By sharing the personal effects of my mother's repetitive cycle—in and out of jails and prisons—and my father's brain aneurism due to substance abuse, I offer the rare dual perspective of a family member how has been hurt by someone living a godless, sinful life and a person who has hurt others. Most of us who are incarcerated go through life accepting what is not normal as normal and not being conscious of the impact our past has on us until we get ourselves into a world of mess. The narcotic effects of self-deception concerning our sin is more poisonous than any narcotic pushed out of a dope house, a narcotic that promotes murder, prostitution, theft, and poverty, hindering parents from investing godly morals and principles into their children. Peace comes from knowing the Lord has reserved a crown of righteousness for those of us who have long suffered from self-deception, feelings of inadequacy, and overwhelming regret.<sup>7</sup>

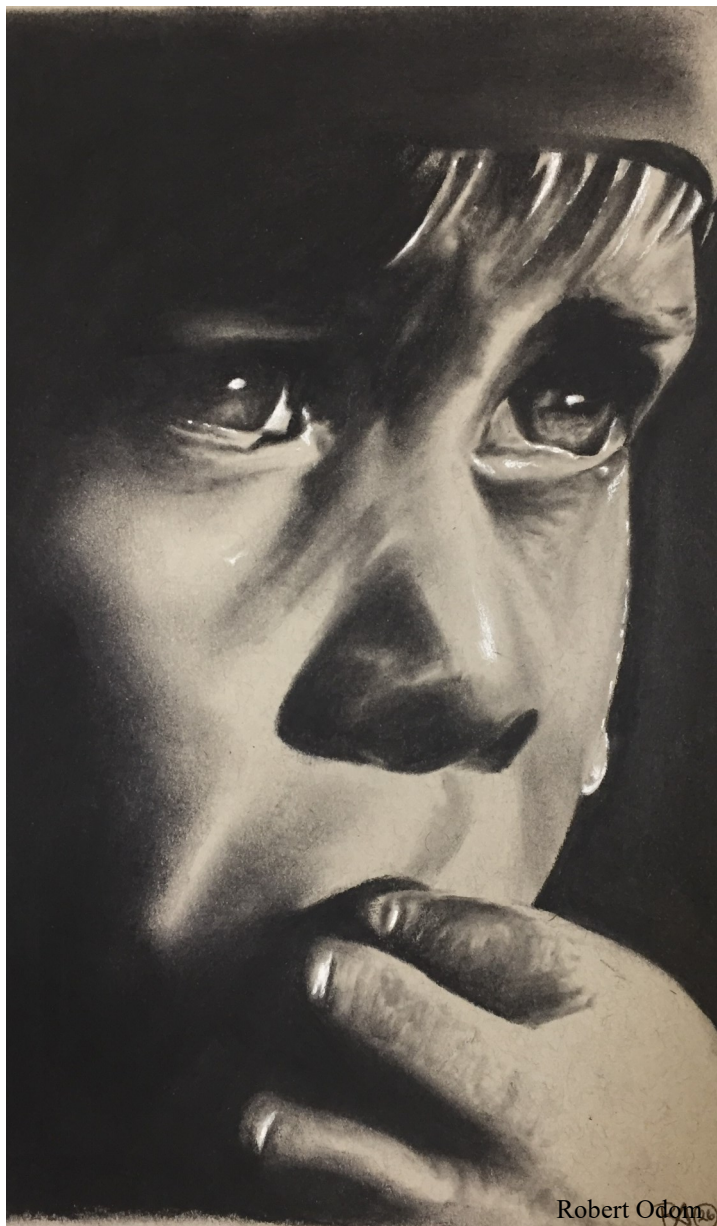
After acknowledging the paradox of sin and the Lord's righteousness, even within this broken prison system, I am equipped to discuss the unconditional love that once went unnoticed, and the hurt I caused to my family and friends. These conversations do not purpose to generate anger and regret but to reveal the transformative nature of the gospel, because I can attest to the change in my mother and father and the change in my relationships with family and friends. I observe the power of Jesus Christ in my mother's letters and in her voice, in her eagerness when asking biblical questions, in her sobriety, and in being able to pray with her for the first time in our lives. I hear the power of Jesus Christ in every tearful word from my father when he hears my voice on the phone, because there was a time when he was never expected to talk again. Every time I pray, lead Bible studies, or hear "I'm proud of

you” from my aunts, uncle, and cousins, I run to rejoice in fellowship with my brothers in Christ. The transparent relationships within this broken penitentiary flip the “blown chances” of school, jobs, and relationships from a focus on “the one that got away” into a thankfulness for the people and things God has placed in our lives today.

Our testimonies have everything to do with the paradox of being righteous but yet a sinner. In the Lord’s righteousness, we are ever conscious of our rebellion, our sin. When open and honest with ourselves and others, we develop a keen awareness for the sins that have traumatized our families and deterred us from the faith. We must help each other bear the psychological tug of one’s past and the heavy mental weight of a prison sentence, helping each other learn to cope with sin and trust in God’s sovereignty. Having my brothers encourage me rather than judge me every time I fall short strengthens me for the task and eases the burden of the load.

Unfortunately, walking in the righteousness of Christ through these prison corridors can often be a lonely trek, because others cannot make sense of a life that has turned from everything they know. Often in this prison environment, officers and inmates wait eagerly for sin to rear its ugly head, for the opportunity to confront a Christian. The accusatory mantra, “you’re supposed to be a Christian,” reveals a misconception of the Christian life, in which perfection is expected. Within such misconceptions and criticisms, a perfect opportunity arises to witness to the accusers by admitting what happens when a Christian operates out of their own self-righteousness instead of the righteousness of Christ. And there is a peace in knowing that even “though a righteous man falls seven times, he will get up.”<sup>8</sup>


No matter the criticisms of the past or the shortcomings of the present, we continue to “rejoice together, mourn together, labor



Robert Odom

and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body.”<sup>9</sup> For some, being a part of this prison community of believers offers the first time experiencing the love of Christ and the true sense of family that operates in love, camaraderie, and acceptance.

Jesus Christ reshapes us in the paradox of righteous and yet a sinner, clothing us sinners in His righteousness, forming us to be pillars in this prison community. Ravi Zacharias proclaims, “God has a way of taking even some of the bitterest moments we go through and making them into something of great significance in our lives.”<sup>10</sup> A certain paradox enters in the fact that the forgotten souls of the penitentiary are the very ones that implement a positive change into not only the broken environment of prison, but also in the ones on whom they once wreaked havoc. Sometimes a person needs only a beacon of light in the midst of their darkness from someone who has found a way through the same

darkness. Whether a mother, friend, co-defendant, or co-worker, every person can attest to the truth of a changed life. 

#### Endnotes

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- <sup>5</sup> Philippians 3:9.
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- <sup>7</sup> 2 Timothy 4:8.
- <sup>8</sup> Proverbs 24:16.
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# Faith that Works through Love

Kirston Angell

Being by his faith replaced afresh in paradise and created anew, he (the believer) does not need works for his justification, but that he may not be idle, but that he may exercise his own body and preserve it. His works are to be done freely, with the sole object of pleasing God.

—Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty*

Almost every believer has been told some version of “God loves you and you love Him, just have faith, God will work it out.” While intending good, such comments often lead to increased frustration and confusion for a believer in the midst of dealing with difficult problems, situations, or people. The Bible contains a vast array of statements on faith, love, and the performance of good works, but how can the numerous statements, statements that sometimes seem at odds, be integrated and understood? What is the connection between faith, love, and works? It is essential for the individual believer, guided by the Holy Spirit and the corporate church, to connect the dots on how these three operate together.

## Faith, Love, and Works Defined

The author of Hebrews illustrates that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen... and without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him”<sup>1</sup>. Although believers have not physically seen Christ, believers are called to love and serve him with joy because through him is made possible the attainment of salvation.<sup>2</sup>

A variety of Greek words are used to describe different types or aspects of love in the New Testament: *phileo* (friendly love), *philautos* (self-love), and *agape*—the universal and unconditional love that God has for man, and which God calls believers to display to the rest of creation.<sup>3</sup> *Agape* love transcends and perseveres regardless of personal feelings or circumstances. Understanding the meaning of *agape* love and recognizing that God graciously gives this type of love to underserving sinners should fuel the mission to pass on this love to others who are undeserving.

Good works encompass many acts, from charity with finances and material goods to charity of heart through a loving attitude and words to charity of physical labor. Loving God provides the necessary foundation for loving our neighbor. We cannot love our neighbor without loving God, and we do not truly love God if we do not love our neighbor.<sup>4</sup> When we love our neighbors out of our love for God, then we have the proper object of our faith (God). Faith produces love; love produces works; works generated by



faith and love please and glorify God. Every time a believer forsakes their own self-interest and intentionally sacrifices to perform a good deed for another person with hopes of glorifying God, that is faith working through love.

## Connecting Faith, Love, and Works

Since Jesus is Lord and he loves and died for each believer, it naturally follows that they should love and trust him by obeying his commands. In fact, Jesus says, “if you love me, you will obey my commands.”<sup>5</sup> With many commands throughout the Bible, a simple summation would be helpful. Jesus offers such a summation to all of His commands in a conversation with a scribe who asked, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “the most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: “‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”<sup>6</sup> True faith generates love for God and neighbor and results in obedience to Christ’s commands.

Although differences of opinion exist amongst believers concerning the relationship between a believer’s personal works and salvation, almost all believers understand that good works naturally flow from a healthy faith in and love for God. In argua-

bly one of the most controversial passages of Scripture, James posits, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?”<sup>7</sup> Initially, it may seem that James is arguing that a Christian attains salvation by their good works; however, James is not arguing for a personal works-based faith, he is illustrating that true faith in Christ will be evidenced by good works.<sup>8</sup> God’s love is demonstrated in “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”<sup>9</sup> Believers love God because he loved first and sent Christ to die a death that provides the means of salvation, a death that makes faith possible, restoring relationship and fellowship.<sup>10</sup>

Christians know Christ has saved them *from* the punishment for their sins and an eternity spent apart from God in the confines of hell. However, many believers fail to realize what God has saved them *for*: God has graciously saved believers to glorify him by proclaiming his Word and performing good works for others out of love. Love is an expression of faith. Works are a demonstration of love and faith.

### Expressing Love through Works


In these turbulent times, followers of Christ have plenty of opportunity to express love for both God and neighbor. With COVID-19 restrictions shutting down much of life, isolating people and inciting fear and anxiety amongst the population, and with the unjust killing of citizens by those sworn to protect them, Christians must work harder than ever to find ways to communicate and demonstrate Christ’s love to a world in turmoil. Followers of Christ should seek to do what Christ did: serve their community.<sup>11</sup> Believers can express love by being charitable with money and goods, by offering emotional or relational support to the hurting or isolated, and by helping distribute items to frontline workers or the more vulnerable communities. The world needs individuals willing to perform the good works of kindness, love, compassion, and selflessness to others.

Although we are required to exercise social distancing during this pandemic, we should work to avoid relational distancing. We have to find new ways to stir one another to love and performance of good works, not neglecting one another, but offering encouragement to each other.<sup>12</sup> Many churches have utilized online platforms to continue holding services, while some have even held services on projector screens in the church parking lot. Others have setup food pantries for anyone in need, not just those that belong to that church. The love of God can also be seen shining in the midst of the prison system during these dire circumstances.

All *Ambassadors in Exile* authors are incarcerated. Incarcer-

ation does not shield us from being impacted by current events, such as COVID-19 and repeated occurrences of police brutality. In fact, the impact on the incarcerated population is often intensified. Fear and worry about contracting the coronavirus increase significantly in an environment where it is impossible to practice “social-distancing.” Police mistreatment and killings of minorities even further strain racial tensions and mistrust, driving a wedge in the effort to develop the trust that is necessary to build relationships and demonstrate love.

In spite of the intensified challenges encountered by believers behind the walls of prison, some successfully live a life grounded in faith, operating in love for God and neighbor by extending love, support, charity, and encouragement to others. Daily, prisoners who have been transformed by faith demonstrate love to the ones who society has deemed detestable, incorrigible, and irredeemable. These faithful workers prove and pass on the redeeming power of Christ despite the heinousness of crimes once committed by themselves and the object of their witness, even crimes such as child molestation, rape, and murder, by being willing to just sit down and listen to a person’s story and struggles, by offering biblical support and encouragement, by pointing them toward a forgiving, merciful, and loving God. By sharing very limited possessions and resources—hygiene items, food, or even stamps—to anyone in need, the believers in prison demonstrate faith through works of love.

Good works are the evidence that accompanies and proves our faith and love for God and neighbor. If we were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence, enough works of love, to convict us? Over time a multitude of evidence should shift the scale obviously and decidedly to prove our faith and love for God. May each of us be found guilty of loving God and our neighbors. 

### Endnotes:

Hebrews 11:1-6, ESV.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 1:8-9.

<sup>3</sup> Kohlenberger, John R., editor. 2010. *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance Of The Bible: Expanded with the Best of Vine's Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, s.v. “agape,” s.v. “phileo,” s.v. “philautos.”

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 3:11-15; 4:7-21.

<sup>5</sup> John 14:15; 1 John 2:3; 5:2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Mark 12:28-31.

<sup>7</sup> James 2:14.

<sup>8</sup> James 2:18.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>10</sup> John 3:16-18, Hebrews 4:15.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 19:10; 9:23.

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 10:24-25.

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## Less Like Samson, More Like Christ

### Anthony Smith

Samson is a perplexing figure. Samson had incredible potential, but sadly, he failed to actualize that potential. When we reach Judges 16, we have read that Samson was called to be a Nazarite unto God from birth. The Nazarite vow had three parts: no razor was ever to touch his head, he was to abstain from drinking wine or other fermented drinks, and he was to avoid touching anything dead. Samson was to keep himself ceremonially clean, because God was going to use him to begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines. In chapters 14-15 we observe how Samson continuously broke this Nazarite vow and jeopardized his purpose. Like many of us, Samson often chose worldly living over godly living, doing what he wanted to do in a moment rather than what God called him to do. Taking matters into our own hands without any regard to being a living witness to God's Word leads to destruction. Why do we take matters into our own hands rather than resting faithfully in God's hands?

Poor judgment leads to destruction. One day while sitting in the dorm, I observed two men arguing about something that had transpired outside on the basketball court. As I approached to see what was going on, I noticed that one of them involved was a Christian brother who regularly attended church. In the very instant I tried to separate the two, the other man involved shouted something that as a Christian I do not care to repeat, something that warranted a physical response according to prison culture. Without any hesitation the Christian brother punched the other man in the face. We pulled them apart without any further harm and without either going to lockup, but the Christian brother walked away feeling as though his actions were justified because of the verbal offence committed against him. He felt that if he did not respond physically, then others would feel able to do likewise. How many times have we justified a negative response? To be specific, why do we permit prison culture to supplant godly character or godly culture when our reputation is on the line? Samson's justification for seeking revenge upon the Philistines in 15:1-8 directly leads to the poor judgment that causes his destruction.

In the opening verse of chapter 16, Samson's poor judgment is on full display when he seeks to spend the night with a prostitute. This man of immense physical power and strength has a debilitating moral weakness, a weakness for women. Giving in to this weakness causes him to spend the night in oppositional territory. With his whereabouts known, the people in Gaza waste no time

in laying siege against him. Although he initially outwits his would-be captors, Samson's heightened arrogance obscures his judgment. Beginning with verse 4, we read how Samson falls in love with Delilah, a Philistine, who betrays his love. After repeated and blatant attempts to trick him, he reveals his long hair as the source of his strength. Samson's moral weakness and subsequent poor judgment cause him to disclose a truth that should have been guarded.

Returning to the brother in Christ who felt justified in punching the other man in the face, how could he have used better judgment, godly judgment? Obviously, he could, and arguably should, have just walked away instead of giving into the prison culture's primary response of violence. This brother failed to hold firmly to what Jesus taught in response to being confronted with cultural norms. Jesus addresses this issue in Matthew 5:38-39: "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Had both Samson and the Christian brother first acknowledged that God can be glorified through the offense committed against them, they could have responded according to godly principles and avoided meeting destruction due to poor judgment. To this very day the Christian brother bears the weight of feeling he destroyed his witness.

His burden provides a key lesson for us in the prison setting: If we succumb to the responses persuaded by prison culture, we risk the chance of destroying our witness before others. We risk being effective witnesses for the body of Christ. Our mission to witness is too vital to let poor judgment stand in the way. In order to prevent such a defeat, we should ask ourselves daily, "Are we promoting Christ-culture or prison culture?" If the answer is the latter, then we are failing just like Samson. If Christ-culture is to guide our thinking and behavior, we must be willing to die to ourselves.

As with poor judgment, yielding to presumptions leads to destruction. A presumption is a thing presumed or assumed to be true by a person. In Judges 16:18-21, Samson gradually yields to presumptuous behavior. Despite Delilah's three attempts to discover and use Samson's source of strength, Samson's arrogance causes him to presume that Delilah is merely being flirtatious. Perhaps, that explains why Samson fails to guard his secret, eventually entrusting his lover with the source of his strength. After Delilah cuts



his hair, Samson awakens to find that the Spirit of the Lord has departed from him.

Reflecting on Samson's presumptuousness, consider the offended Christian brother. He initially tried to justify his striking the other man according to the presumptions of the prison culture instead of the principles of Christ. His attempted justification defies not only what Christ stated in Matthew 5:38-39, but also the actions of Christ when he demonstrated longsuffering in the face of mockers and ridiculers. Where are we actively putting our faith in times of conflict? Are we trusting our ourselves and the culture, or are we trusting God? Both Samson and the Christian brother trusted their own strength and cultural presumptions rather than God. Because of that misplaced trust, both yielded not only their strength but their purpose and headed towards destruction.

Defiance against God leads to destruction, but repentance leads to deliverance. In the closing verses of Judges 16, Samson experiences a turning point, repentance that leads to deliverance. In verse 22, the word "however" signifies a turning point in this drama. Although Samson's eventful destruction at the hands of the Philistines is imminent, his hair begins to grow, an outward sign that the Lord's Spirit still purposes to use Samson to deliver the people of God. When the Philistines gather together to sacrifice to Dagon, their god, they send for Samson in order to ridicule him. Samson prays for strength, for God to use him to destroy the Philistines.

Until Samson's defeat by the Philistines, he had never experienced weakness. He had never hit a brick wall without breaking through. Samson's defiance led to destruction, but his repentance leads to deliverance. God forgives Samson for his past mistakes of poor judgment and yielding to presumptions. God delivers Samson from the destruction of the past and uses Samson as a means of deliverance by empowering Samson to pull down the temple and slay three thousand of the enemy with this one act.

Again looking at the Christian brother, this time considering

Samson calling out to God: If the Christian brother had responded quickly to his poor judgment and yielding to cultural presumptions by calling out to God to be delivered, that repentance would have been a powerful witness for Christ and the principles of Christ.

We must remember poor judgment, yielding to presumptions, and defiance against God lead to destruction, but repentance leads to deliverance. With these lessons in mind, let us meditate within our hearts about what Christ is calling us to do in moments of conflict, moments when our witness of the gospel is at stake. Guarding our witness, our gospel credibility is essential because the stakes are immeasurable—the stakes are eternal. Consistent,

effective gospel witness is a demanding calling, especially in prison. The prison culture will always attempt to influence how we live, think, respond, and talk. However, as Christians, we should walk according to God's Word. We should live, think, respond, and talk according to the principles of Christ.

I challenge each of you to stand firm in the faith that has been entrusted to you. Fight the good fight of faith, not with physical action, but by standing on the promises found only in God's Word, the source of true strength. Do not let poor judgment, yielding to presumptions, or defiance against God stand in the way of your mission, your purpose, your calling to glorify God. When you fail,

repent and be delivered. When you do these things, God will empower you to accomplish his purposes. Like Samson, we have been called to be set apart from the ways of the world, from anything unclean. We have been called to be set apart when Christ-culture diverges from prison culture. Poor judgment, yielding to presumptions, and defiance against God lead us to places where the enemy can execute a plan for our destruction, but when we repent, die to ourselves, and live according to the principles of Christ, Christ is glorified. Let us be less like Samson and more like Christ.



Dan Edwards

# — Creative Composition —

## My Disease

Timothy Johnson

In considering my plight, a well-known phrase from “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” comes to mind: “Water, water, everywhere / Nor any drop to drink,” the last line of which often gets quoted as “But not a drop to drink.” Samuel Taylor Coleridge utilizes this phrase to describe the irony of the mariner’s hopeless situation, for he finds himself surrounded by water but dying of thirst because the salinity renders the ocean water undrinkable. For me, the phrase morphs into, “People, people, everywhere / Nor any less lonely.” Although surrounded by people to the point of suffocating due to the vast numbers and proximity, I feel utterly alone, like no one knows my pain. In order to understand my pain, you need to know I have a debilitating, progressive disease.

What is my disease? Please, pardon me for temporarily withholding the disease’s name. The official label of the disease is a certain misnomer, and a few simple letters cannot capture the all-encompassing meaning. An explanation of the disease emerges through a description of the causes, symptoms, prognosis, effect on quality of life, and present treatment options.

I must be transparent: my lifestyle choices caused the disease. Like a smoker with emphysema, I bear the burden of causation. Rather than decreasing the psychological toll, this burden increases the pain, because this flood of guilt exacerbates the mental and physical symptoms. The guilt stems not only from the personal impact of my horrible choices but even more from the impact on the people who ache and suffer every day because of my choices. Sharing the suffering magnifies the weight of loneliness, hopelessness, and pain. Withhold sympathy, because this self-caused disease causes others to suffer.

The symptoms progress toward incapacitation. At the onset, I staggered and stumbled repeatedly. Walking and breathing, activities I had always performed without thinking, became labored. My feet bogged down in quicksand; my respiratory system strained

from the boulder on my chest. My speech slurred; my grip on objects and essentials weakened. A consuming state of weariness took root. The world around me became hazy. My body became both imprisoned and a prison.

The short-term prognosis offers progression, and the long-term prognosis promises fatality. The disease assails my body in a brutal, relentless campaign. In vain I try to resist, to fight away the inevitable. Every person lives with certainty of death, but the disease converts this *when* not *if* to an immediate concern, bringing death’s shadow close enough to seem tangible. Although some days are better than others, the disease persists its steady march to dominate, to decay my neurological and psychological faculties.

Day-by-day, month-by-month, the disease decomposes the traits of my humanity.

Quality of life encounters total degradation. The deterioration ended my ability and desire to dance.

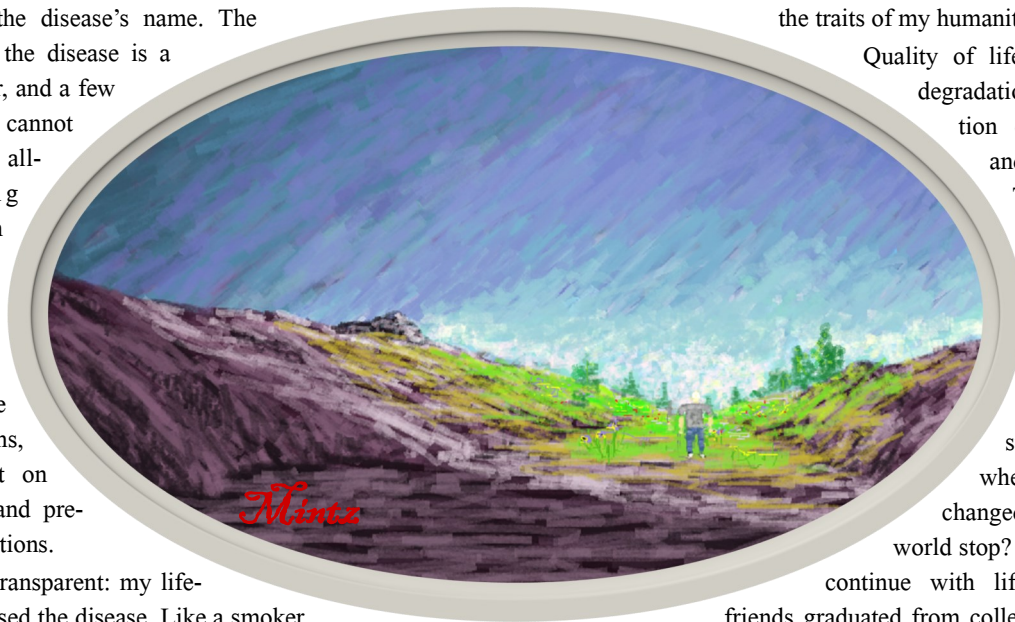
The continuing normalcy of the rest of the world shocked me to the point of paralysis. How could everything still be the same when everything had changed? Shouldn’t the world stop? How could people continue with life as usual? My

friends graduated from college, got jobs, married,

had children. I knew nothing but taking one tiny step at a time in the swirling blizzard of the disease. I was trapped inside multiple levels of an incapacitating daze, like an inner Russian nesting doll left outside in a Siberian winter with each outer figure frozen within a separate sheet of ice. My own flesh was an iceberg; my environment was the arctic circle.

The few treatments prove futile. In fact, the few treatments currently available do nothing to relieve the illness or the mental health effects and do not even attempt to stabilize or reverse the morbidity process. The treatments offer minimal relief and temporary comfort measures.

Although the symptoms are progressive, prognosis is fatal, quality of life is thwarted, and treatments are few, reasons for hope





emerge. Ironically, the looming shadow of death generates an awakening, which illuminates the true essentials of life and refocuses the mirage-like significances of life. These lessons depend upon a choice: Do I mindlessly shrivel up and await death, or do I determine to make the best of my plight and the most of the life that remains to me? Choosing to no longer mechanically exist, but instead to exert every effort to live to the fullest under the present constraints starts the flow of life lessons.

Dying understandably produces sadness, but dying does not represent the saddest state of existence. What's worse than dying? Living without meaning, purpose, hope, joy, love, and humor. When the mixing pot of life is void of these ingredients, life remains bitter. With these essential ingredients, a dying person can concoct the incomparable recipe of a life infused with satisfaction.

Life lacked meaning because I strived for the wrong goals—materialistic things. Trek after trek, I journeyed toward aspirations that vanished like a desert mirage upon reaching the destination. Materialistic ambitions promised the cool refreshment of a mountain spring but delivered tepid, muddy water. Replacement of the mirages with tangible destinations came from the unveiling of what truly matters: people matter, relationships matter. By devoting myself to loving others, to building relationships, I found meaning in life, meaning in my dying.

Purpose inundates life with vitality. "Dying" does not have to be synonymous with "useless." In fact, dying can open a floodgate of usefulness. Walking the high-wire from life to death provided a view of life with unprecedented clarity, a view that revealed the existence of the dam and how to release the flow of purpose. Serving as a conduit for the message that meaning is found in people and relationships flooded the plains of my life and produced an oasis of purpose.

In "The Shawshank Redemption," Andy wrote to his friend, "Remember, Red, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies." Hope transcends physical reality. When I let the disease strip away my hope, I lost an entity worth more than health or life. Absence of hope left me feeling completely alone and almost convinced me to give up. A single ember of hope encouraged me to hold on. As I persisted, the tiniest crack formed in the prison of ice, allowing in the minutest ray of light, causing the ember of hope to ignite and spread. Hope became a fire and then an inferno.

People search for happiness, but joy surpasses happiness. Happiness depends on immediate circumstances; joy itself forms a foundational element of life. Happiness requires a full cup; joy fills the cup to overflowing. When I lost the right to care for myself, to live alone, to manage my own affairs, I saw only the forfeitures, a myopic focus that demolished every fragment of joy. The igniting of hope formed a bedrock of joy, helping me see past the

losses to the many blessings still in my life: the rare citadels of purpose and meaning, family who loved and supported me through all of the mess, a mind that now functioned lucidly. When joy transformed my countenance, the smile led others to ask how I could be happy. I explained that my smile rose not from happiness but from the overflow of joy.

People wonder whether they deserve love, but love does not center around merit. In fact, love means the most when least deserved. At first, I felt entirely unlovable and the darkness enclosed me. I blindly stumbled along, reaching out for something solid in strange surroundings. Recognizing the love pouring in lit my entire world in a brilliant array of colors. Without the love of my family and friends, I would never have found my way. The darkness would have engulfed me forever. As a result of their gracious love, light pervaded my life and my world.

Life without humor likens to a cancerous state of existence. My mother's voice echoes: "Laughter is the medicine of the soul." The ability to laugh with cheer and kindness fosters the healing the soul needs because of the pains and pitfalls of life. Formerly, I wondered if I would ever truly laugh again. Oh, I still laughed, but merely for two reasons: to cover up the decay of my soul at moments when laughter was expected and as a cynical response of frustration at my condition and situation. The return of hope, joy, and love brought back authentic laughter. The return of laughter facilitated much needed healing for my ailing soul.

Returning to the question, "What is my disease?" My disease is commonly called "Life without parole," but this label fails to capture the true meaning. An accurate label for the condition is "death in prison," which communicates the inevitable result. Although the descriptions of causes, symptoms, prognosis, effect on quality of life, and treatment options do not entirely exist in a literal sense, the figurative sense barely examines the observable tip of the iceberg. Like the Ancient Mariner, an albatross weighs upon my neck, the albatross of guaranteed death in prison. I am no longer the person who merited this sentence. The looming shadow of death spawned my awakening, my transformation.

*Nearly fifty thousand people in this country struggle under this disease, but I still feel alone. Maybe each person with this disease feels alone, even in a setting swamped with people. Frozen in my own flesh, on a crumbled foundation, surrounded by interminable darkness, I considered giving up. Now, I am thankful that did not happen. Awakened and transformed, I can be a productive member of society, contributing in a variety of positive ways, evidenced by my current mode of living. Every day, I choose to concoct a life with the essential ingredients of meaning, purpose, joy, love, and humor, the savor of which makes me actually thankful for my disease.*



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## Creative Cuisine

### Tortilla-Crust Pizza

#### Ingredients:

- 10-pack of 8" tortillas
- 4 oz. pasta sauce (preferably Italian style)
- 6 packs of ketchup
- 1 single-packet of sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$  tsp. garlic
- 4 oz. mozzarella cheese
- 1.75 oz. of pre-sliced pepperoni
- 3.5 oz. (summer) sausage

**Makes:** 8 slices

**Need:** microwavable pizza tray & bowl (approximately 1.6 qt.)




—illustration by Barry Mintz

#### Directions:

1. Start by making a microwavable pizza tray: Measure the inside of the microwave, then cut piece of cardboard to fit (can simply cut around microwave's plate/try, if available). The Cover with a piece of plastic from a garbage bag.
2. Crust Preparation: The tortillas will form the crust, after being made doughy with water. Fill bowl halfway with warm water. Put two tortillas into the water until slightly doughy. Gently squeeze out excess water. Repeat process, two tortillas at a time, until all tortillas prepared. Place tortillas on tray, evenly spreading out 9 of the 10 tortillas, overlapping each other, and about 1" hanging over edge of tray all around. Place the 10<sup>th</sup> tortilla in the center. Flatten out with hands, molding together tortillas and getting rid of any air pockets. Roll the overhang to form the edge of the crust and press down with fork or spoon. Cook for  $3\frac{1}{2}$ -4 min.
3. Sauce Preparation: Mix pasta sauce, ketchup, garlic, and sugar. Stir. Heat 30 seconds. Stir. Heat 30 seconds. Stir.
4. Spread sauce on crust.
5. Grate cheese, then scatter on top of sauce.
6. Distribute pepperoni.
7. Cut sausage into pieces of desired size, then distribute.
8. Cut into slices before cooking.
9. Cook in microwave for 6-8 minutes. Let cool enough to eat. Enjoy!

#### Anecdote:

Everyone loves pizza. Well, maybe not everyone, but that one naysayer is just weird, and mistaken. Pizza offers versatility, with an array of crust types and styles and a list of potential ingredients limited only by individual taste and imagination. I once had a pizza topped with shark and alligator (Thank you Pie Works). Also, pizza offers premium simplicity, for its ease of serving and handling. Making a pizza tray from a piece of cardboard, covered with a piece of plastic from a trash bag, may seem like an absurd joke, but "necessity is the mother of invention." Remember: In prison, improvisation is a way of life. Likewise, the limitation on ingredient options necessitates making the pizza crust from tortillas. While this crust may seem bizarre, the taste delivers, and this ingenuity makes possible the enjoyment of pizza for the countless pizza lovers in prison. 

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## A Special Thanks From AIE to All of the People Who Make the NCFMP a Reality



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