

By
Frederick Mason

Keep Your Cool

It can be so difficult to remain calm when you're in a stressful situation. In prison there will be many tests of your patience, sometimes when you're not at fault. Sometimes the devil will create a situation and use people to attack your patience and integrity; case in point:

Today, as I am coming back from recreation, I put my glasses and MP3 on the stand as I go through the metal detector, just before going outside. I'm wearing plastic shades, so it won't set off the detector. But one of the officers says, "glasses" likely talking to me. So before I go through, I take off my shades, walk through the detector, and before retreating my glasses and MP3, I put the shades back on, just before stepping outside.

However, one of the officers, Hali-Burton, doesn't see that I removed my shades before going through the detector. In fact, I put them on seconds before stepping outside. Yet Hali-Burton calls out to me, telling me, "didn't you hear the man tell you to take your glasses (shades) off?" I argued that I DID take them off, but Hali-Burton refused to listen. He made me go back through the detector. I did, saying, "this is ridiculous" as I cleared the detector again. I grabbed my shades, and before stepping outside, I said defiantly, "I'm putting my shades on!"

Apparently Hali-Burton didn't like that. So he

demanding I come back in, and made me put my items on the chair. At this point, I was seething... a lesser man would be cursing; but that's not me. Hali-Burton tried to chew me out, but I wasn't paying attention to him. While he was talking, I put on my glasses, and looked at his shirt... I told him, "I just need your name", to which he responded, "can you spell?"

I HATE it when officers feel that they can insult our intelligence. Had I resulted to insults, they would have run me to the Lt's office, where they all stick up for one another. Hali-Burton could have punched me in the face, and I would have been blamed for attacking him. Sadly, that's how it works many times.

Looking for something to persecute me with, Hali-Burton looks at my collar. I always wear my collar tucked in... like a banded collar (or the "priest" look). It looks sharp, like a dress shirt, buttoned to the top. I'm the ONLY guy on the compound that wears it that way. But to Hali-Burton, it was a point of persecution. He orders me to untuck my collar.

Really? Guys steal word processors and televisions out of the education, and these guys are as clueless as the Three Stooges. Yet he wants to worry about one guy and his collar. Most inmates break dress codes daily, and I'm being singled out for something frivolous. Only because Hali-Burton wanted to abuse his authority. Yes, I could have argued, but why? I'm not going to win an argument with him, even if I was 100%

right. The Proverb is so true, Proverb 20:3; "It is honorable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel". Pair this with Proverbs 26:4, "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him". It was wise to simply not argue... which meant doing what he said. I had to untuck my collar. He then said, "Every time I see you, I want you to untuck that collar". So now he's singling me out, of all the inmates. Now he's harassing me. I leave, very upset, but keeping my cool.

Why? Because I had a plan.

Note first, it was God holding me back; a lesser man would be cursing these officers out, and in retaliation, they would have taken me to the SHU, or Special Housing Unit. It's their "failsafe" device, when they want the upper hand on an inmate. I could not give them that opportunity. I can do more damage by writing... and that was my recourse. My plan was, as my younger brother did in the military, was to make Hali-Burton "my best friend", or "my new hobby". I would begin to write on this situation, sharing the details of the situation and how Hali-Burton is harassing me.

I started immediately, sending an email to the Warden- I don't expect him to do anything, but I need the paper trail. I wrote a letter later that evening in the library, and mailed it immediately. Even still, I'm still very upset at how these officers treated me. Now it appears they're conspiring to the idea that I DIDN'T take my shades off. Now they're bearing

false witness against me, just to cover each other's back. I want to say and do something so ungodly... but I can't give them the advantage. I have to keep my cool, because I'm much more effective when I write. But part of me wants to wear my collar the way I want, to spite Hali-Burton. There's nothing in BOP Policy that says how to wear the collar; he's using it to persecute me. But if I fight their battle, they'll put me in the SHU for no reason, but will cook up one to make it stick. So, I have to play it cool, and do things their way. However, I used the opportunity to talk to Roosevelt, one of the Christian inmates. I timed it to where I was talking about it just as I passed by Hali-Burton and the other officer... that was intentional. I WANTED them to hear me talking to somebody about the situation. I had to give in on the collar, I wore it regularly, so they would have no occasion to stop me or say anything to me.

So now, it's midnight; I've written for about an hour, to reduce the stress I'm in. I wish I had 20 stamps; I'd be sending 20 letters on this situation. But for now, it's good that I cool down, and be wise in what I do. My strength is in writing, and not playing into their hand. So, as much as I hate it, I have to go in normal uniform while in the indoor rec/library hallway. But doing that allows me to address the issue the way I want. My playground is the keyboard, the paper, the pen, the envelopes and the stamps. But I'd be a fool if I didn't say God's wisdom had nothing to do with this. I would be most wise to consider that FIRST... in other words, to pray on it. So, even as I'm angry, I need to seek God's

wisdom and direction, and ask Him to direct my steps, and protect me from wicked rulers. I'm sure I'll prevail.

This is one of many essays I've written. Most deal with my faith in God, others about prison life, and how it affects my faith. I've got many essays and over 200 pages of my journal I'd love to share, if interested.

F M.