

Where Lives The Compassion?

Frederick Mason #55487-056

USP Tucson PO Box 24550

Tucson, AZ, 85734

It is very difficult to understand how compassion works in prison. Nobody talks much about the strength it takes to care for an inmate. This is because, for the most part, society has been given the "worst case" scenario, where we, as inmates are nothing but monsters and menaces to society.

And I submit to you, there are indeed people who ought to be here, and need to be here. But I'd also suggest there are a lot of prosecutors, public defenders, and judges that are no better than some of the inmates I live with.

Having said that, there are some times I wonder why I should care about some of the guys here. It mean, it's not my responsibility to care about these guys. Am I my brother's keeper? I mean, I'm not responsible for any of them... not one.

So why am I writing this?

Because I DO worry about some of these guys.

Folks, it's easy for you, even while reading my journals and essays, to get an idea of the "typical inmate".



You've seen "Locked Up"; you've seen "Sons of Anarchy" and all those CSI shows. Television has painted a pretty deep and colorful picture of what inmates are. And to some degree, they're right.

But not completely.

Prisons do a horrid job of the people they house, treating us like 4th rate citizens, while they themselves overlook the rules and rights...and LAWS we still have... and we DO have some. One of the greatest fights inmates have is simply to keep our dignity as human beings, while rehabilitating ourselves in a pit of condemnation. And it's only by the grace of God that there's hope in the prisons. But that hope comes when somebody cares for another person.

Either a FOOL, or a person with Christ in them, can do this. Sometimes... I wonder which I am.

Some of the inmates here are like kids...young men between 20-25. Good Lord, how can somebody so young end up here, in prison? It really hurts my heart to see these guys here, knowing they're missing so much. I mean, heck, I'M missing a lot, but gosh, these are kids!

Today, I'm typing something in the library, and Sam, one of the guys I know, comes in, looking down. The kid's like 24, and has a broken wrist, but he's trying to write to his girlfriend, trying to patch things up. They get along ok, but



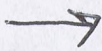
it's a bit shaky, him not being there, and with about 3 years left to do. One can easily see that he's struggling a bit with this.

I wanted to help him; he's a good kid, just needs a friend. But I was trying to finish a legal document for someone, and had to make that the priority. But as soon as I was done, I moved over to talk with him.

Sam felt frustrated; the time he was doing, issues with his girlfriend- on her birthday, and issues with a few other inmates. Sam's not the type of guy to start trouble, but sometimes he's in it. We talked for a few minutes, while he was typing on the word processor- with one hand, to his girlfriend.

In times past, I'd take the word processor and have him tell me what he wanted to say. I'm a much faster and better typist, and I can put the right words for him. We didn't spend a lot of time together, since he's on Southside, and I'm on Northside. But I wanted to try to help him see that there's value in him, and that, for his girlfriend's sake, he needed to be as productive and positive as he can be.

But without the consistency, his faith goes through a lot of peaks and valleys... often the valleys. Like today. I couldn't help but think, while typing the legal document, that he needed something positive. Although I had planned to type the whole morning, I decided to change it up: I would ask Sam





if we could hang out, either outside, in the shade, or in the indoor rec. I wanted to try to help him get out of the depression he was struggling with.

So I asked him, "What are you doing next hour"? He told me he was going back to the dorm. I wanted to be a little more aggressive with him, to get him to change his mind, but I won't force anybody to do what they don't want to do.

Sam didn't really seem interested in my suggestion, but it was clear that he needed a pickup. Yet, could I force my will on him if he is not interested? All I could do was suggest; the rest was up to him. So he decided to go back to the dorm, not feeling any better than when he came to the library.

I went outside, and sat in the shade, wondering why I even bothered to sacrifice my time with people that don't want to help themselves. I was trying to help the kid, but he seemed to not be interested. Why bother?

I could almost kick myself for caring for him, and others here.

But as I thought about how much God cares for us, and all I have done the last few years for other inmates, there was a realism that I just could not give up on the kid. Sure, he feels down today, and I had an opportunity to help him. Do I give up, just because he turned away my kindness?



I can't. He's worth more than that.

God sees his worth, as He does in all of us. God never gives up on us, even the worst of us; why then, if Christ lives in me, should I give up on Sam?

I sat there, in the heat of the summer morning in Tucson, concerned for a kid I didn't know a month or two ago, but cared for like my baby brother. It touched my heart deeply that he is worried about his loved ones, and is in a prison where there is little compassion...

But I didn't say NO compassion.

If Sam is going to get help, it won't be from the prison staff; they don't care about us. It rarely will be from the outside; they don't see the life we live, or look for the good in us. It has to come from someone who lives the same life he does or a greater Someone, Who sees all.

I can't give up on Sam, I am not giving up on these guys. God puts certain people in our paths, to help, yet too often we push them aside because we see the worst in them, instead of the best. What Sam needs is someone willing to pray for him, even if he doesn't know it, but he also needs someone to be there, to be a true friend.

So as I sat in the shade, ashamed at myself that I



could even think of giving up on him, I was so embarrassed that a few tears rolled down my eyes (good thing I was by myself, and wearing shades). If I have this much emotion for a guy I barely know, to care this much for him... how much MORE does God care for him?

If God won't give up on him, then I can't either. Gosh, compassion is a hard thing to carry, because it becomes harder the more you are about someone.

I can't imagine what weight Jesus had to carry to the cross for us. Yet, if HE loved us THAT much, then the least I can do is help Sam, and kids like him, when I can.

That is compassion at its finest.

Proverbs 17:17 "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."

PS. Sorry about the first 2 pages. Usually when I print off the NEO (Prison Word processor) I try to print double-sided; to save paper. I've many other testimonies and essays. I got your last letter, and I am thankful for what you do. I have many other essays outside the "MP3s in Prison" series, as well as journals. I hope to share that with you in the future.

