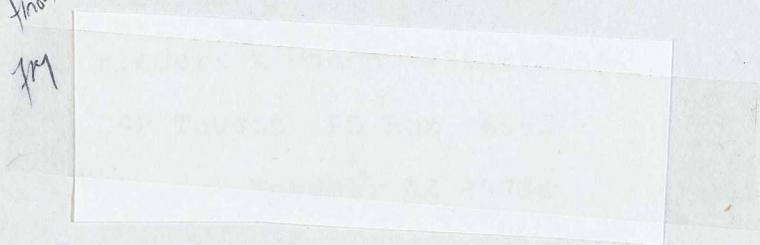


American Prison Archives,

Why Do Inmates Need Money

(Second Essay)

*✓ Forgive the typos,
Had to type fast to finish
try*



If you haven't read it, you can find my first essay on this subject. It gives you a general idea of why I believe it is good for inmates to have money...

"But inmates are criminals! They don't deserve..."

Hold it right there! Now, I'll admit there are people who deserve to be here. Guys that broke the law, knew they did, and didn't care about anyone but themselves. And while they're DOING time, they get worse and worse, caring for nobody, and using anyone and everyone to get gain. YES, there's a lot of guys like that...

But not every inmate is like that. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, policemen, ministers, businessmen... all types of people here who made a mistake, and are paying for it.

But unless your occupation is GOD, and know every detail of every person, you don't have the right to judge. If you're gonna read my blogs, be mindful that there's always 2

sides to any story, so please be considerate of what I share.

Or simply stop reading. Ok, let's continue...

Guys, my hope, when I write, is to create sympathy and understanding FOR inmates; of which I am one of. One way is to share what we go through, and what helps us. It kinda leads to the title, why do inmates need money.

I am sure... being an inmate, that money is a very strong reinforcement to a person's well being, and self-control of his life. True, prison controls much of an inmate's life, but not all- nor should it. Money empowers, and even inmates need to have that feeling, because it also gives inmates purpose in life.

For example; tonight (May 7th, 2016) I'm eating Vanilla Wafers, spooning peanut butter on some, Nutella on others. It's 11pm at night, as I listen to Jazz on my radio, in the cell with a night light on. I ate a Cajun Chicken Ramen, with diced Jalapeno wheels and Nacho Chips. Before I go to bed, I'll put my MP3 on, and listen to New Age music, to relax before I go to sleep.

All those things I mentioned, the food, the radio, the MP3, the night light, the bowl and spoon I ate with, the watch and the mechanical pencil I'm using to write this (although to be typed later) all require money. And because of it, it helps make my time more manageable.

My hope, when I came to prison, was to study and apply the Word of God in it's purest form; by loving my neighbors. And I started out that way...

I HATE these mechanical pencils; they keep BREAKING...

Anyway, I started out trying to do that by reading the Bible and taking dozens of Bible courses.

But that costs money to mail. And my hope was also to have money here to get the things I need and want- then do it for other inmates. Folks, you have no idea the gratitude of people who don't have, when someone blesses them with stuff. Even a shot of coffee is very powerful in the act of kindness to one who doesn't have.

Simply put, you can't bless others without money. How then, do you expect inmates to know kindness and the love of Christ, if nobody ever gives? When I get money (not as often as you might think), I try to buy enough for me and some here that don't get support from the outside.

The other day, I told a guy (22 years old) that I was going to bring him a Pop Tart the next day. He was like, "you know how long it's been since I had one of those?" A box of Pop Tarts...wait, let's be accurate... it's called "Toast Em's, cost us \$1.70 a box (of course 3 packs, each with 2.

pastries). Overpriced? Absolutely! Prisons gauge us by overcharging everything. But that's beside the point.

I know a lot of guys who don't get money at all, and are forced to eat in the prison cafeteria. Now, the food here at USP Tucson isn't bad, I just don't like having to go there to eat. I want to be in control of when, and where I eat. If I have money, I can buy snacks, and stay in the dorm, instead of going out to the chowhall, walking in 100+ heat, to sit down at the table with guys who curse more in one sentence than I have in the 3 years I've been here...

(Honest guys, I don't curse. Maybe 5 times since I got here 3½ years ago.

If you're a college student, (or have been) think about your dorm room. When I was in college, if I had money, I'd buy food so me and my roommate didn't have to go eat in the cafeteria. Or, we'd go to a restaurant. Or order pizza.

These actions are YOU taking control of your life, the therapeutic attempt to make your own decisions, to be your own person. I understood that, because when I was in college (Go Cats!) I knew what it was like to be broke, and having to go to the cafeteria. Not that it was a sentence, but the idea that you had to go if you wanted to eat was almost... controlling.

But, if you have money, things would be different.

You could order a pizza or sub sandwich, taking control of your time.

Can you understand then, how this also works in prison?

Money has a direct and profound impact on an inmate's morale. If I went 4 months without money, then 4 months with money, there would be a significant boost of morale. Some of the best days here is Commissary Day. Here at USP Tucson, it's when we get to go to Commissary, or Canteen, even Concessions, if you'd prefer, to buy items.

Each dorm goes once a week; at the time I'm writing this, my dorm goes Wednesdays about 1pm. Everyone who has money is getting their large net bags, ready for the call to go to canteen. I like to call Commissary, "Be my friend... or PAY UP" day, because guys are either asking favors from those going- or expecting them to pay their debts.

So money is important because it gives inmates empowerment over the circumstances. Look, prison life can be very hard, and extremely stressful, but to be able to go buy a pint of ice cream once a week really helps out. Or, to put food in your locker, so when hard times come, you have something to fall back on; it really helps.

I had a cellie who was like a little brother to me. He was 23, and loved eating peanut butter straight out of the

jar- MY JAR! But he only did it when he was stressed. I'd let him scoop a few spoonfuls out, as he was like a kid eating peanut butter on his bed. I was glad that I ~~could~~^{could} be there for him in those difficult times (the little rat (:.

And even others have benefited from me having money. I try to buy a good amount of coffee, because there's a lot of coffee drinkers in prison, many young. Consider; many inmates here are between 20-29. And many don't have financial support. I do what I can by buying coffee, and sharing it in small pill bottles (about 3-4 spoonfuls worth)...

crap! This mechanical pencil sucks!! I'm changing to a pen!!

Ok, where was I (he said, using a PEN)...oh, coffee. I buy coffee mainly to share. I do drink it a little, but because this prison is too cowardly to sell SUGAR, I can't sweeten it unless I use artificial sweeteners. They do sell it here, but I don't like the taste of it. Still I buy coffee because people need it.

And I like to buy food (ramen, chips, cookies) so if I don't want to go to the chowhall, I don't have to. The cafeteria is a very negative place when you listen to the guys in there. No, it's not violent, but it's spiritually violent when you have to listen to the negative comments throughout your meal. I like to eat in as pleasant a setting as I can. I can't make guys talk positive, but I don't have to be there

either, if I've got food. I'm making a quality decision to stay in the dorm, and have a Ramen noodles, than have a chicken dinner in the cafeteria with negative people. It takes money to be able to make that kinda decision.

There is no question that the things I've bought have made my time far, far easier to endure. When I don't have money, or can't get it, my life gets frustrated. And this is very evident in my journals. I clearly speak from the abundance of my heart in many of these journals when I express my frustration in not getting money for months on end...

And may I be spiritual here, for a moment? As a Christian, my support ought to come from God. There's a scripture that goes, "And my God will supply all your need according to the riches in glory by Christ Jesus". True, I have money sent from my family and friends, but it is by the grace of God that I receive it. I am learning much more now, after a couple of years, that if my trust is in God, the money will ALWAYS be there.

And it needs to. I want to help others here. I prayed many times, "what point is it for me to have money to buy stuff, if I can't SHARE it?" I actually enjoy sharing with certain people. Not everyone- some inmates here are ungrateful pigs, never helping anybody, but always wanting stuff. I can't help those guys- or do I want to.

But others give me a joy to help. One guy comes ^{by}~~by~~ and asks if I have anything sweet to eat. He does get some

money, but has to spend it on phone calls to talk to his little son. So he doesn't have money for food or snacks. I actually take delight in giving him a snack or two. I might imagine God feels the same way; He delights in blessing people.

So why can't I do the same thing? Besides, I need shoes anyway; the prison only gives out boots. Can't exercise outside in boots. I need stamps; LOTS of stamps, so I can mail my writings. I need ibuprophen, for headaches and back issues (from the mattress). I need hygiene, so I can take care of myself...

And before you answer that the prison gives us hygiene... be careful. The hygiene we get, once a month, is 3 blocks of state (or fed) soap, a cheap toothbrush, 5 orange Bic razors and a long tube of clear (and cheap) toothpaste. If you ask, they'll give you a very small stick of clear and cheap deodorant; the entire lot you couldn't sell for \$1 on the streets.

So, to get QUALITY items, you gotta buy them. I MUST have lotion; I hate dry hands. Most dates I've been on, women complimented me on my soft hands. They sell Cocoa Butter Lotion (about \$5) and Suave Lotion (about \$2.50). For those who buy hygiene, you can buy Noxema, a Cocoa stick, Colgate toothpaste, Dial or Speed Stick Deoderant, and many other items...

But it all costs money.

Even to drink costs money. You need to buy your own cup, a 22oz plastic clear mug for about \$3. And to eat noodles, you need a bowl and spork... or, you could STEAL one out of the chowhall...

(Funny, but true story here: When I first got here, my first canteen run was like late December of 2012, and I was new to the federal prison. I went to get the things I needed, including a bowl and spork. When I went to get my items, I was over by less than a dollar. The Canteen Officer said, "You went over, so I'll let you decide which one item to put back. You can put this bag of chips back (about \$1.40) or this spork (about 40 cents)." Then he said to me, "Personally, I'd take the chips, and just take a spork out of the chow hall, but you didn't hear that from me."

Do you know, that what ALMOST blurted out of my mouth was "but that would be STEALING"...

Can you imagine that, an inmate... worried about stealing a 40 cent spork out of the cafeteria, when half the compound already has that in their own lockers?)

Anyway, I believe inmates need money. Can they abuse it, yes. No different than anybody out there. There is a lot of discipline that comes with having money. Our country is amongst the worst in the world at it, even though we have the

most of it. But in its abundance we enjoy things; things that make life a little better.

No different here in prison. If I can buy things every week, not only do I feel better, I'm also in a position to help others. I don't expect Oprah Winfrey to come across my blogs, and bless me with 5 or 6 figures. But if I had that kinda money, while in prison, I'd tithe, send money home to family and friends, as well as pen pals that blessed me with letters. But I'd also ensure that inmates here that don't have will get the things they need. I believe when you do these kinds of things for people, it truly shows the love that God has for each of us.

Considering that for most, money is where your heart is, it makes since that acts of kindness based off money truly show the love of God.

Anyway, here's hoping one of my pen pals hits the lottery!! Hope this helps you understand a little more about the prison life. Until next time...

Hope this inspires you to think of inmates as people too,

JM