Journey Out of Hopelessness

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Saturday

My almost 25 years of total incarceration has taught me that if I was able to rise from the throes of hopelessness, lack of meaning, lack of purpose; then you can do the same.

The main reason I believe I had developed hopelessness was because I did not take time, effort, commitment to know who I was. By failing to have this knowledge, I grew tired of existing (waking; eating; sleeping; stressed by fears and anxieties due to fear of others; stressed by the foul language, relentless noise of TV, music which numbed the senses and provide temporary distraction from the real issues of life: How do I deal with the anger, frustration, doubt, insecurity, fear, anxiety, lack of empathy, denial, resentment, jealosy). Not knowing who I was had relegated me to be living without really understanding the meaning behind my life. In reality I had been living a meaningless life all along. It's just that when my busyness grew weary, I suddenly found myself without the desire to carry on. Simply put I was living from purpose to purpose (daily activities). This purpose (performance) driven life without a significant meaning finally took its toll. Now that I have found my purpose to write and share my lessons learned, this is meaningful and I reap the reward of joy in getting responses to my work. This is a Biblical teaching located in James 3:14-26. These scriptures demonstrate that faith (that which gives meaning) without works (worthwhile purpose) is

dead (no longer active or functioning). This means that meaning without purpose is dead. Conversely, by my works (purpose) I show you my faith (meaning). You see, I have decided to take action and nurture a skill God endowed me with. Yes, you can do the same. You can develop the writing skills through which you can take action (works) to know yourself through journaling so that you can share your own discoveries with others. Come on my fellow prisoners or American Prison Writing Archive (APWA) reader... I want to encourage you; you are very valuable because your experience can help others overcome pain. This is why I share my experience of overcoming hopelessness. With insight about myself, I have taken steps to know myself; this is a purpose full of meaning.

Another reason I had found myself in the trap of hopelessness was my dependence on family which had dwindled. When I no longer received packages or regular mail, I questioned my purpose for carrying on. You see, I now know that this experience was a test of my faith to see if I would really love Jesus more than my family. Though I had failed the test, I have found renewed strength. I recalled the admonition in Matthew 10:37-

> "He that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

I had failed the test of my faith because I had taken my mind off of the awesome meaning of the above scripture. By focusing on my family as the source of my strength and not having a sound relationship with Jesus through prayer and the word, I was weakenned spiritually and lost the meaning and my purpose (work in the word of God) lost its effectiveness. I have taken corrective action; I have now incorporated prayer; memorization of, recitation of, and meditation on God's word. This quadruple combination has brought me out of despair. I highly recommend it; know that it is challenging, but well worth your efforts. True peace, joy come from a devotion to someone greater than yourself -- Jesus. If you doubt this I challenge you to try the quadruple combination for a month... Memorize Phillipians 4:4-9 and Isaiah 26:3; meditate on these and put them into action. You will be amazed by the results of being mindful of these words of God, which will motivate you to a greater devotion. It may seem tedious, even boring; however, when you continue steadfast you will reap the rewards. Joyous practice!!!

A third reason I had developed hopelessness was due to a psychiatric label and treatment which induced fear that I would loose my mind without the drugs. I can attest that in every single instance ~~that~~ the environment and lack of nurture combined to derail me from my sanity. Though I take drugs, I depend on Jesus who had been waiting for me to depend on Him. I have suffered at the hands of a

system whose end is profit and punishment. The reality is that the system is dispensing drugs versus providing real therapy because it is easier to drug the sufferer's symptoms rather than address the core issues. It's a stale mate; the patient doesn't really understand himself to ask the right questions and the therapist cannot address the core issues (reasons for crimes, emotional, mental distress) because the patient fears retribution. It took me 48 years of my life to realize that to overcome fear I had to start speaking the truth of my life experience, even at the cost of possible prosecution. I say this because I believe that the fifth amendment, though a right, its also a trap because one who refuses to speak by invoking the fifth, has something to hide. And secrets are a sure way to entangle the mind because by hiding something the monster of fear of revealing begins to exact its toll. This happenned to me when I had been committing crimes and hiding it until fear, anxiety, stress, depression over my guilt showed their ugly face. This was how hopelessness had appeared into my life just before my imprisonment and this hopelessness reappeared years later. I now choose hope in Revelation 21:4. Wow! What wonderful hope; tremendous antidote to hopelessness.

Finally, I close by exhorting you to be courageous in face of hopelessness. No matter how slight or deep hopelessness can strike anyone, but you need not give up when it strikes. If you have lost desire to continue with life, know that it is a view that many have

experienced. I thought about my youngest daughter and I wondered ... What would she do if she got news that I had killed myself. So, I spoke to staff, was sent to Atascadero State Hospital for treatment, and there received the book "Battlefield of the Mind" by Joyce Meyer. and it changed my thinking. The choice is simple: toxic thinking or healthful thinking. I choose healthful thinking whether I face life in prison (which I have), loss of a loved one, loss of a relationship, loss of a friend, loss of a job. I have decided to NEVER GIVE UP because God is on my side. I have also realized there is another choice ... Sacred versus non-sacred. Again, a crossroad. -- Religion or Secular. I embrace Religion because it gives hope; hope of eternity with Immanuel (Jesus -- God with us). The secular persuasion would have ~~met~~ meant the spell of evolution which leads to hopelessness because of the inevibility of the notion of futility of life.

I had developed hopelessness because I had not taken the time, effort, commitment to know myself; I had not put Jesus as a priority; I had suffered due to mental affliction; but I developed courage to face my hopelessness. May you be likewise ~~sim~~ inspired and awakened to your awesome value as a human being so that you can journey out of hopelessness.

Douglas L. Griffith, JR.