

## **In The Moment**

My buttocks are planted firmly upon this top bunk. My legs are dangling off the side of it. My feet are circling counter and clockwise and my gaze is affixed to my tightly grasped tablet while I exude my truest thoughts and feelings onto it in characters that form every expression.

What have they become in this moment?

Well, they've become a mixture of many things. The most dominant thought that I consistently have is, who cares?

Why is that thought so dominant, when I once carried myself as if I didn't care about the welfare of anyone other than myself? Could it be that my own growth has revealed how valuable it is to care or could it be that I only care because I want people to care for me?

I have to be honest, I do want people to care for me, who doesn't want people to care for them? But that is not my reason for caring. I care because through love, dignity, grace, mercy, and forgiveness it is essential. And if humanity has even the slightest chance at thriving, caring has to be a part of that foundational process.

So, whether I know you or not, I care, because I understand how valuable it is.

The meaning of the word 'care' can vary depending on who you ask. But can it really? To care is to simply or simply not show a concern for the welfare of others. The key words are 'concern' and 'welfare'.

When someone is concerned, whatever they're concerned with becomes a matter of interest. And whether it's an animal or a human that person is concerned about, the welfare of that animal or human becomes the focal point.

The acts of caring people are carried out in various ways. So, if there is ever a question about who cares or who doesn't, don't listen to what they say, pay attention to what they do. But if someone's actions fall short of what we consider to be caring, does that mean they don't care at all? I guess the answer to that question lies in what it means to care. Is caring continual or continuous? Because there's a difference in the two.

Both words mean continuing indefinitely, but 'continuous' means continuing without interruptions, whereas 'continual' implies a repetition with intervals. So my guess is that caring is more of a continual thing, because caring is in whatever moment it falls and whenever that moment is relieved caring takes place again, which becomes a repetition with intervals.

At times, are people too busy to care or is it that they feel powerless in this world so they'd rather remain silent and action-less?

There are many people in this world who standby doing nothing, because they feel that their efforts will result in no progress. So, if they're standing by remaining silent and doing nothing, does it mean they don't care? Again, what does it mean to care? Is caring a thing where actions are required? Of course it is, because if you see someone fall, caring alone isn't going to pick them up.

Honestly, I genuinely care more now than I ever did in the past. Needless to say, I grew within this prison environment. It has forced me to reflect on what it is to be a human and how I must perform in order to make a difference in others' lives moving forward. I will not make any attempts at convincing other people that I cared in the past, because had I, this would not even be a topic.

When I see children dying and parents crying it does something to me. If those tragic events don't spark a care within the people who witness them, then they don't have blood running through their bodies, and therefore, they are not human.

I realized that caring is very important, because when you care for someone that someone's perspective forms, which creates the thoughts, those thoughts produce the actions, and the possible results of those actions are, they'll care for others in similar ways. Without caring, a culture of carelessness is created, and we all know the harsh reality of a careless culture, just look around, it's everywhere we turn. If we all take on responsible roles in whatever environment we find ourselves, the mentality of people would drastically change. If we don't, I can guarantee you that someone else will be writing these exact words a thousand years from now in a different way.

Moving onto another thought, incentive, which is a worthy topic I've visited with many people throughout the years and more so during this pandemic.

Incentive would mean that incarcerated people would be afforded an opportunity to be released earlier than their minimum eligibility dates through good behavior. But I'm not referring to just being well behaved and ultimately granted an earlier release. I'm referring to rehabilitated beings showing an exemplification of their transformation through measurable achievements in order for that to be possible.

Perhaps, through various forms of mentoring, life and social developmental skills, violence prevention sessions operated by handpicked incarcerated men and women, and a class on understanding the consequences that actions produce, like the depth of the trauma that is created after crime is committed. Because many people who commit crimes are unaware of the long term effects their actions have.

A great question is, why should any incarcerated being be awarded the benefits that are often associated with good behavior, when in society they had every opportunity to do so, but didn't?

To accurately answer this question we have to dig much deeper than what we see on the surface, because many people spend far too much time talking about how terrible a particular pie tastes, when in fact, the ingredients that made that particular pie terrible to begin with is worthy of a lengthier discussion.

What many people tend to forget is, no one is inherently criminal.

When a child is born into the world, he or she is without a moral compass.

Like a computer, a child is created and over periods of time many things are programmed into his or her brain. Just like that computer, that child can be hacked and compromised, and when that child is compromised, he or she is just like the user of that hacked computer, he or she is no longer independently controlling their functions.

Education is a 24/7 process and there are three major environments that shape a child's existence.

The primary education begins within that child's household where certain principles and values are instilled in that child's mind, but these principles and values vary in Urban and Suburban community households.

Secondary education is on the outside of that child's home, whereas if enough time is spent in that environment with other children, those learned principles and values could possibly take a backseat to whatever that child's reality becomes. This is where many friendships are developed and that child may start taking on the principles and values of that environment.

If you disagree with me, put on some fresh clothing and pump gas for a few hours and see if the fabric doesn't become a product of that gas smell.

The third education takes place more than likely in a school setting with many other children from the community that child lives in. This is another place where friendships are developed.

What we all mustn't forget is that education is verbal and non verbal. No one has to utter a word to teach, all they'd have to do is act consistently and under the watchful eye of that child, he or she will probably mimic that behavior.

Although these environments play large roles in every child's existence, they play even larger ones in the lives of the children who grow up in poverty. There may be high levels

of frustration and anger amongst relatives within those households due to lacking the means to adequately provide for family as well as many other things.

It is quite easy for people to point out what opportunities others failed to seize when they are successful in their professions or when their smallest amount of effort guarantees them a pot of gold at the end.

But what happens when environments create those mental deficiencies that block particular groups of people from even recognizing those opportunities?

If someone lacked prowess to see an opportunity, did they really have one or is it only an interpretation in the eyes of the person who saw it as such?

For example, if someone was willing to hire someone as a plumber, but that someone had no prior experience, is it still an opportunity for that inexperienced person? Will that inexperienced person see it as an opportunity? What if the conditions of that person's environment is a hindrance to even realizing the benefits of acquiring such a skill?

I believe that people only know what opportunities are when they are intelligent enough to make use of them.

Although the question "why should any incarcerated being be awarded the benefits that are often associated with good behavior, when in society they had every opportunity to do so, but didn't?" is a great one, it is imperative that we address whether or not these individuals actually knew what opportunities were to even say that they had such.

Honestly, I feel like there is such an exactness to punishment without any incentive in many cases.

Let me be absolutely clear on this though, I'm not saying that incarcerated men and women should be entitled to anything. All I'm saying is that they should at least be considered for an earlier eligibility date if they could demonstrate their rehabilitation through measurable conduct.

When someone is sentenced to serve time is the sentence to punish or is it to rehabilitate that person?

Is punishment really necessary to rehabilitate someone? Is rehabilitation more important than punishment? Because punishment doesn't produce rehabilitation, although it can, it is not the most powerful method in making that possible. If it was, prisons would see a much lower recidivism rate.

If someone was sentenced to a 20-40 year sentence they'd be eligible for release after that minimum is served.

If prison's purpose is to punish then it has nothing to do with people returning to their communities rehabilitated.

For instance, if an average sized Turkey can be cooked in approximately 6-8 hours at 375°, what happens if that Turkey could be prepared much sooner through a different cooking process? Do we still leave it in the oven to bake for the additional time?

The point that I'm making is, what if that incarcerated person is rehabilitated long before that minimum comes?

What if a 10, 20, 30 year or even a life sentence isn't needed in order for that rehabilitative process to be completed?

Prison has to be more about rehabilitating than punishing, because there are many incarcerated people who've served their entire prison terms and weren't rehabilitated, so the punishment served no real purpose to the community and others in which those individuals directly harmed.

Could you imagine that Turkey just being in that oven for that 6-8hour period without any results? Of what use was the oven if the intent wasn't to prepare with it?

If the oven is no longer working, it would make perfect sense to either look into making repairs on it or for one that does, because there is much more one could do with space than to reserve it for an oven that doesn't work. Let's stop running from these realistic conversations.

If rehabilitation became the focus, would punishment still be as harsh or would it even be a discussion at all?

I strongly believe that if someone was deep enough in a hole and had to climb their way to the top they'd be a totally different person if they ever made it to that surface.

The staff whose duty it is to supervise the environment in which the incarcerated are subjected to, must appropriate responsible roles in rehabilitating these people, because if they are representing an entity such as the Department Of Corrections, they should at least make efforts in correcting.

What roles do staff and environment play in rehabilitation?

Staff are the gatekeepers to temperament, so they take on the responsibility of shaping the perspectives of the incarcerated through words and actions. Lets just say that they are the human thermostats in a prison environment and have active roles in influencing behavior for better or worse.

Incentive would make staff positions a lot easier, because it would result in somewhat of a push pull relationship.

The incarcerated would be motivated by the incentive to move in a positive direction and trained staff would take roles in aiding them on that path.

Another great question is, why should incarcerated people be given incentive to be better, when that's something they should actually be doing without it?

That's absolutely true, but think about the many people that feel like nothing about their circumstances is going to change, so their choice is to do nothing at all.

Through my time in prison, I've witnessed firsthand the mindsets of the many people who've been denied parole on their minimum release dates and on numerous occasions afterwards, some of these guys were reaching their maximum prison terms as well. It was like they slumped deeper and deeper into a culture of not caring.

There are levels to caring as we all know.

My obvious assumption is that, when someone gets that first parole denial they say to themselves they have to do more to better their chances in being granted parole the next time they are eligible for it.

If they are denied a second time frustration settles in, but it doesn't deter them from being engaged for the betterment of themselves.

If they are faced with a third denial, it could be pivotal, they could lose hope, give up, and let it play out however it does, because they may stop believing in what they thought would be a workable process as this particular person may be approaching their maximum term in prison.

How could someone convince another to keep working hard if it isn't paying off for that person?

If an incarcerated person's reality is that he or she will get released regardless of anything else on their upcoming maximum release date, what incentive would they have to do better than what they were doing in that moment?

If we want our communities to continue resembling our worst fears, let's not work on bettering people, let's keep them in prison without the proper methodology to treat them and we'll get our wishes when they reenter society.

The efforts should always be concerted in proving to not only the loved ones of the incarcerated, but especially to the many crime victims and to society in general, that there is an effective system in correcting the many incarcerated men and women who

appear to be incorrigible. Then maybe, the people in society will have more confidence in establishing relationships with these returning men and women.

We don't throw away humans, because the implied message is that humans can't be repaired. And we all know that even the people who others consider to be the worst of the worst have redeemable qualities somewhere within them.

Even the most totaled vehicle can be reconstructed.

Why not reconstruct that human and use that human to reconstruct other humans who've had similar damage?

That would make perfect sense, but then again, in this country it would have to make perfect cents in order for it to make perfect sense.

What are my true thoughts and how do I feel about my conditions in this moment?

For starters, I feel like the standard is begging to be treated like a human for the simplest of things like telephone calls, kiosk usage, or a shower.

I realize that when someone acts uncharacteristically of themselves, it is possible their conditions compelled them to.

At times when I walk into the cell that I'm assigned to, I feel an overwhelming anxiety. I inhale...Slowly...Slowly...I can feel my lungs continuously expanding. I exhale...Slowly...Slowly...Yea that's it.

I wonder to myself, how many more of these do I have left in this moment?

This box of a living quarter feels like it's shrinking daily and the air feels much denser than the air outside of it.

No matter how much I've transitioned into a better person than the one that landed me where I am or how hard I strive to obtain my freedom physically, I can't seem to grasp it as it gets no closer than time will allow it to.

When you're In The Moment, what do you think about? What are your feelings? Do you share them or do you keep them to yourself?

Remember that these are the realistic conversations that we should never run from. Always strive to be the best version of yourself and use that to make everyone else better versions of themselves as well. Let's strive to be better together.

