

Freedom In Prison

*"Man can live about forty days without food,
about three days without water,
about eight minutes without air,
but only for one second without hope."
Anonymous*

Through The Valley Of Kwai

Ernest Gordon has written a book entitled *Through the Valley of the Kwai* in which he describes spending a large part of World War II as a prisoner in Thailand on the banks of the river Kwai. He worked on a railway which the Japanese were building. Over 12,000 allied prisoners died of starvation building the railway. Gordon says their worst enemy was not the Japanese but themselves. The law of the jungle took over among them. They stole from each other, and informed on each other to win favors from the Japanese. Morale was at rock bottom. Two men whose [faith](#) kept them going decided to try to do something. [They organized Bible reading and discussion groups.](#) They met at night and at first the numbers were small but after not too long the numbers grew to the hundreds. When reading the Bible they noticed that Jesus faced the same problems as they did; he often had no place to lay his head, no food, no friends in high places. He too had known weariness from too much toil; the suffering, rejection and disappointments that are part of life. Everything about Jesus began to make sense. The prisoners underwent a change of heart and stopped destroying one another as they had been doing. [Reading the Bible and using it for prayer and discussion transformed a prison camp.](#)

Hebrews 10:25

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching

The Mucker

In Ernest Gordon's true account of life in a World War II Japanese prison camp, there is a story about a man who through giving it all away literally transformed a whole camp of soldiers. The man's name was Angus McGillivray. Angus was a Scottish prisoner in one of the camps filled with Americans, Australians, and Britons who had helped build the infamous Bridge over the River Kwai. [The camp had become an ugly situation. A dog-eat-dog mentality had set in. Allies would literally steal from each other and cheat each other; men would sleep on their packs and yet have them stolen from under their heads. Survival was everything.](#) The law

of the jungle prevailed until the news of Angus McGillivray's death spread throughout the camp. Rumors spread in the wake of his death. No one could believe big Angus had succumbed. He was strong, one of those whom they had expected to be the last to die. Actually, it wasn't the fact of his death that shocked the men, but the reason he died. Finally they pieced together the true story.

The Argylls (Scottish soldiers) took their buddy system very seriously. Their buddy was called their "mucker," and these Argylls believed that it was literally up to each of them to make sure their "mucker" survived. Angus's mucker, though, was dying, and everyone had given up on him, everyone, of course, but Angus. He had made up his mind that his friend would not die. Someone had stolen his mucker's blanket. So Angus gave him his own, telling his mucker that he had "just come across an extra one."

Likewise, every mealtime, Angus would get his rations and take them to his friend, stand over him and force him to eat them, again stating that he was able to get "extra food." Angus was going to do anything and everything to see that his buddy got what he needed to recover.

But as Angus's mucker began to recover, Angus collapsed, slumped over, and died. The doctors discovered that he had died of starvation complicated by exhaustion. He had been giving of his own food and shelter. He had given everything he had—even his very life. The ramifications of his acts of love and unselfishness had a startling impact on the compound.

John 15:12,13

12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Self Sacrifice, Heroism, Love

Stories of a different kind began to circulate around the camp, stories of self-sacrifice, heroism, faith, and love. [A man had taken the blame, when the whole unit was threatened with death, for a supposedly-missing shovel and had been beaten to death. The shovel was then found. Another man had been caught trading with the local people (Thais) for medicines for a dying comrade and was sentenced to death by the Japanese. He submitted to it, reading from a little Bible and then cheering up the chaplain right before his execution.]

It was dawning on us all – officers and "other ranks" [lower ranks] alike – that the law of the jungle is not the law for men. We had seen for ourselves how quickly it could strip us of our humanity and reduce us to levels lower than beasts.

Death was still with us – no doubt about that. But we were being slowly freed from its destructive grip. We were seeing for ourselves the sharp contrasts between the forces that make for life and those that make for death. **Selfishness, hatred, jealousy, and greed were all anti-life. Love, self-sacrifice, mercy, and creative faith, on the other hand, were the essence of life, turning mere existence into living in its truest sense. These were the gifts of God to men.**

John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Philippians 4:13

13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Exerpts From 'Through The Valley Of Quay

True, he [Jesus] had been strung up on a cross and tormented with the hell of pain; but he had not broken. The weight of law and of prejudice had borne down on him but failed to crush him. He had remained free and alive, as the resurrection affirmed. What he was, what he did, what he said, all made sense for us. We understood that the love expressed so supremely in [Jesus was God's love – the same love we were experiencing for ourselves – the love that is passionate kindness, other-centered rather than self-centered, greater than all the laws of men](#). It was the love that inspired St. Paul, once he had felt its power, to write: "Love suffereth long and is kind."

I Corinthians 13:4

4 Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

I Corinthians 13:13

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity.

The doctrines we worked out were meaningful to us. We approached God through Jesus the carpenter of Nazareth, the incarnate word. Such an approach seemed logical, for that was the way he had come to us. He had taken flesh, walked in the midst of men, and declared himself by his actions to be full of grace and truth. We arrived at our understanding of God's way not one by one, but together. [In the fellowship of freedom and love we found truth, and with truth a wonderful sense of unity, of harmony, of peace](#)

John 8:32

32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Romans 5:1-5

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Through Jesus, Gods greatest gift of love to man these prisoners were made free in prison. They obtained a freedom that no man could steal no matter how high the fence or how strong the chains. Through their tribulations they displayed a love for each other, a love they saw in Jesus for them when he went to they cross to die for our sins. They had a love for each that no amount of cruelty or hatred could destroy just as nothing would stop Jesus from going to the cross, because he first loved us.