



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

May-June 2009

A Little About Change

By Bob Van Domelen

¹¹*But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. (1 Timothy 6.11)*

Spending time in the county jail, I learned what it meant to pray without ceasing, to have fear a constant companion, and to feel despair seeking a foothold in my thinking. As a sex offender, I had won the distinction of being the lowest life form in the minds of those looking for a way to push any and all focus off their own crimes.

There was one man, however, who was not like most of the others. He was quiet and very much to himself most of the time although he always seemed to get excited when the conversation turned to motorcycles. One day he sat down next to me and said, "Hang on. You're going to get through this."

For the next few minutes, he described the housing units at an institution where he thought I would be assigned. He told me of all the possibilities available to me in prison that I would never see in the county jail. It was enough. To this day, I see him as someone God sent to me, a man who encouraged and offered hope. And by the way, I was sent to the institution he described.

At the state's admissions facility I was assigned to a cell in the hole because the normal intake area was filled. The man in the cell next to mine yelled obscenities every time a guard passed and for a brief moment I felt I was back in the county jail.

Looking around at my temporary home, I saw a narrow window that could be opened about an inch or two. Outside, an inmate was cutting the grass and that simple yet familiar smell was gently pushed at my face by a spring breeze. In that very moment I felt God blessing me and telling my heart "You are finally on your way."

I am not going to suggest that I waltzed my way through prison time without fear, anxiety, or the realization that what I faced was really a consequence of my own actions. I will tell you, however, that every day gave me reason to thank God for the healing and change being brought into my life.

Flee from all this

Most introductory letters to this ministry are from individuals who recognize the harm they have done by molesting a child. Many echo feelings I can remember to this very day, feelings of intense conflict—on one side a deep shame supported by promises to stop and on the other a cyclical drive to repeat the behaviors.

Shortly after my arrest, a psychologist told me that the absence of any sexual drive at that point in my life came because my mind actually shut it down. He also told me that this was not a permanent response. As much as I wanted to

believe I could control myself, separation from the objects of my attraction was really not unlike removing alcohol from an alcoholic's home. Prison was for me something of a detox center where resolve was supported by the lack of access. Some who write to me feel a sense of freedom after a time and claim that they have been healed.

I know that feeling but I also know that dealing with the issues that allowed the molestation to happen in the first place achieve the highest levels of success once this freedom is felt. So in a way, confinement for me was an opportunity to flee the behaviors that had brought me to prison.

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness

Some would argue sex offender treatment does not need to include these qualities—certainly most programs go to great lengths in restricting any and all reference to God or spirituality. Professionals in the medical field have long maintained that the degree of personal motivation will define the level of success and it would be difficult to argue that concept.

In the past I have referenced the biblical story of the man who had been freed of an evil spirit but did nothing to fill the void with positive things (Matthew 12.43-45). When the spirit returned, he found the house swept clean and put in order, but the implication is that it was basically unoccupied. The evil spirit returned and brought seven others with him.

I think in my case, I could have done a great job on my own of emptying the house (establishing appropriate boundaries), sweeping it (addressing my thinking patterns), and putting it in order (giving at least the outward appearance that all was well). But if I am to be completely honest with myself, I might have done those things more for the benefit of others. In the past, "I can handle it" was the phrase I used to keep the demons at bay but in reality it rarely if ever worked.

At some point I finally acknowledged what those in 12 step programs acknowledge—that I was powerless over a dark side of myself that I could not control. More importantly, I came to understand that my spiritual life and my higher power had always been on my terms and not on God's terms.

Surrendering my life completely to God would have been a pointless gesture had I not also determined to experience God in a more personal and life changing way. It was not enough to call on God or to wait for God to change my life without any effort on my part. I had to be an active participant in the process and I had to work at it. If being an active participant sounds like something heard in a

treatment program, that's okay because the kind of changes I sought in my life demanded that kind of commitment and effort.

I know that some claim that being in Christ means becoming a new man (and it does). They continue the scripture (2 Cor. 5.17) by reminding me that the "old" man is dead and not in need of any treatment. Actually, some even maintain that it is morally wrong to even think about past behaviors.

I *am* a new man and my desire to live as the old man no longer exists, but I also believe healing and change come by acknowledging the *potential* to reoffend. Any person who ignores this potential for sin diminishes, I think, a complete reliance on God in the face of all temptation.

I truly want to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness because the more I seek God the more God's love is reflected in my life. This reflection is a consequence of my relationship with God, the kind of consequence I pray that we all seek. May it be so for you. □

Bits & Pieces

The following are all from letters I have received in recent months. As always, I hope something you read will bring you encouragement and hope.

The *Bits & Pieces* column in the March-April edition of *Into the Light* really blessed me as I saw a few words of wisdom that helped me out. Thanks.

Upon release I will be given \$100 and a bus ticket to anywhere in the state I want to go. That is not going to be much help if I do not have a place to go for housing until I can get a job.

We had an emergency meeting of our small support group tonight. One of the brothers fell into masturbation after allowing images from the yard to get to him. We prayed for each other and in particular that at the moment of greatest temptation we would remember that the battle is won not by our own strength but through the cross of Christ.

How do I change myself so that this chain of sexual immorality is broken? My life is not what I want it to be and I don't want to hurt anyone that way ever again.

At night I have started to listen to Christian music instead of pop/rock music. I try to meditate at night instead of thinking of things from my past. I keep my hands on top of the covers and I notice that it helps me.

My son wrote me a letter and told me that he thinks I am the best dad ever. I like that but I feel so small because if I was a good dad, I would not be here.

I've tried prayer, I've tried honesty, I've tried empathy, I've tried everything but no one came to help.

If you had known me a few years ago, you would not have liked me. No way did I ever think of anyone but myself and my desires. Like most self-centered people, I would tell others what they wanted to hear but it was always to get

what I wanted in the end. I've hurt so many people only God can change their hearts.

Today is my anniversary. I have been here 12 years and feel a little better about myself. That's today anyway.

I was reading a book titled "The Unseen Essential" and came on a section dealing with having an intimate relationship with Christ. As I was reading it, I could sense a real warm feeling come over me and, not ashamed to say, I just started crying. I can't explain it. I just felt such peace and love come over me. I know we don't go by feelings but by faith, yet I think the Lord gives special graces on certain occasions just to reassure us of his love. It was pretty awesome!

God does not punish. We simply experience consequences of turning our backs on him and his loving guidance. I thank God for that reaching hand called prison. We have to remember to seek progress, not perfection. Solid change in one's behavior happens gradually.

The most effective secular methods of treatment resemble the ways God uses to redirect our hearts. I understand the attitude that doesn't work as well--that only the Bible can be used to deal with our problems. "God has delivered me" is what I hear people say. For some, the statement means that they feel there is no work for them to do. Religion can be window dressing for a still darkened soul. We can fool ourselves with piety, but Christ wants us to take our sexuality to the cross and that is painful and often tiring work.

In order to work, we need one hand holding a trowel fixing the holes in our wall (anger to love, worry to peace, vengeance to forgiveness, sorrow to joy, etc.), with the other hand holding a sword to attack and defend against the adversary.

(A man released) In all the emotional upheaval I go through, God is giving me much grace. In the same way God kept me while I was dealing with the dark and difficult side of the beginning consequences of my actions, God is giving me grace as I deal with this chapter of reconciliation and restoration. It kind of makes me wonder what it's going to be like when I see Jesus for the first time.

The only way we can get through the consequences we are experiencing is by realizing that God does love us and wants us to abide in that love right now. God is watching over us even when we feel like not a soul in this world cares.

The point of my letter is to ask that you let offenders know that acknowledgment of their pain is important for healing, but that it's just not a part of the prison therapy goal.

I can't wait for heaven so my mind can be washed as clean as my heart is. Like Paul, I'll never give up and I will continue to run the race until I receive my crown and then I, too, can lay it at the Master's feet.

Into the Light is like having a relative to write to--someone you grew up with who knows your history, who does not need a whole lot of explanation to know what you are telling them about.

During this incarceration, both of my parents have passed away and are with Jesus! Since their deaths, my siblings have stopped all correspondence. I'm praying for restoration of our family. Please pray with me. God has done so much in my heart since I've been in this pit.

What I did to my victims disgusts and arouses me at the same time. So do I love me for being disgusted or do I hate me for being aroused?

One thing I have learned in our Anger Resolution Seminar is the fact that our words can bless or curse someone and that we should always bless and not curse our enemies and those who spitefully use us.

The Lord impressed upon my heart that I was to hold a Resurrection Day Celebration here. That is where we cook a meal for men who are low on the financial and/or social scale. We provide it for them free of charge. We also provide them with fellowship while we eat that meal together, interspersing spirit-led gospel truths throughout our time together. On this occasion not only will we give them two very healthy-sized roast beef wraps, but we will also provide them with two ramen noodle soups (to cook at their leisure) as well as a bar of soap. That way they'll recall the love of Jesus for a longer period of time. Topping that off, I'll prepare some Christian literature for them to read and hopefully be encouraged by.

[This is not the first time this inmate organized this kind of event and I have always been impressed by the fact that it is those who are alienated and/or rejected who are invited. Another inmate who regularly writes shared with me that he was organizing a "Walking Ministry" where individuals wanting someone to pray with them or just to listen to them could sign up in the chaplain's office and be connected with a willing walking partner. From where I sit, this is powerful ministry being offered in two different ways.]

In the *Bits & Pieces* section of your January-February newsletter, a man wrote to say he used to wake in the middle of the night with impure dreams and thoughts. I too struggle with the same thing--sometimes just during my everyday life. I gave his idea a try and began praising God the moment anything impure even began to flicker in my mind and it has worked beautifully. What a tremendous boost of self-esteem and confidence that the changes I have wanted to correct for such a long time may finally be able to come to fruition.

All things are possible with God!

This newsletter is made possible by the donations of its readers and would cease to exist without that support. Please consider a tax-exempt donation to Broken Yoke Ministries, PO Box 5824, De Pere, WI 54115-5824. And if you cannot contribute, please pray!



Our Prayer Corner

Prayer is an incredible gift we can give one another, for there is no better thing than to lift our lives, hopes, and dreams to the altar of the Lord.

Let us pray . . .

- First and always foremost, for our victims, that each day for them is a new day, a day without fear, and a day of healing.
- For those in prison ministry, that they come to fully recognize what they do in Christ's name for those so desperately needing hope and encouragement.
- For the workshop Barbara Hansen and Bob co-presented ("The Voices of the Victim and Perpetrator: Is Reconciliation and Restoration Possible?"), that those who attended continue to see evidence of that life-changing message in their daily lives.
- For those who actively challenge local communities across the country regarding sex offender legislation, that their voices of reason will be heard and respected.
- For the Support Group (Wisconsin), that their ongoing efforts to promote effective resolution for those in civil commitment will find success.
- For those who feel a sense of hopelessness, that they live daily by the words "With God all things are possible."
- For all with age-inappropriate attractions but have not acted on those attractions, that they seek help so that the secret can be destroyed.
- For those who feel caught up in the despair prison often brings, that they come to know that their lives *do* make a difference--especially to their cellmate or to others on their unit.
- For the families and friends of victims, that they will continue in their love and support.
- For inmates experiencing the loss of a loved one, that they recognize that their love cannot be restricted by prison walls.
- For churches, that the word of God and the example of Jesus opens the door for more and not less ministry to those considered modern day lepers.
- For Bob and Cathie, that they continue to live each day with the same trust and faith in God that they've had from the start.
- For this ministry, that Broken Yoke Ministries continues to be blessed with the financial support needed to meet basic expenses like this newsletter.
- Finally, for those who are still abusing and are reading this newsletter because God made that possible, that they will do whatever it takes to stop the cycle of abuse and harm caused to their victims.

Shortly after my arrest, someone sent me an Easter card whose cover read

Be encouraged--this may be your Friday, but Sunday's coming!

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Dated Material

A Little Humor

A young minister was asked by a funeral director to hold a grave side service for a homeless man with no family or friends. The funeral was to be at a new cemetery way out in the country.

Not familiar with the area, he became lost. Eventually, however, he found the cemetery noticing that he was about an hour late. The back hoe was there and the crew was eating their lunch. The hearse, however, was nowhere to be seen.

Apologizing to the workers for so being late, he looked into the open grave and saw the vault lid already in place. Feeling it was the proper thing to do, he asked the workers, still eating their lunch, if he could pray.

Young and enthusiastic, he poured out his heart and soul with his preaching while the workers joined in with, "Praise the Lord," "Amen," and "Glory!" Their enthusiasm was so contagious that he preached and preached, from Genesis to The Revelation.

When the service was over, the preacher said a prayer and walked to his car. Opening the door, he heard one of the workers say, "I never saw anything like that before and I've been putting in septic systems for twenty years."

