



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

November—December 2009

As for Me

By Bob Van Domelen

¹⁴ "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:14-16)

Over the past year I have been involved within a network of prison aftercare ministries. The experience has been healing in many ways but most notably in the fact that when I walk in the door, I am greeted just as any other member. Some of you might wonder why this is such a big deal, so let me explain.

I have been out of prison for 21 years yet I am reminded almost daily of the stigma of my crimes, whether in reports of abuse in the press and other news outlets or in TV programs focusing on hated child molesters. The network brass knows that they really cannot go too far in expressing loathing because the public is in agreement.

When I enter any gathering of people, therefore, I tend to be one of two people. Most see me as a caring individual because I *am* a caring person. What I share of myself is what I believe is appropriate for the moment and more often than not, there is no need to mention my past.

The second identity is that of that same caring individual but one who also has a background of time in prison for child molestation. The aftercare network needed to know this about me because the knowledge gave purpose to my presence at the meetings, so I told them.

To be honest, though, when I came home from prison in 1988, I was also someone wanting a very low profile. I still felt like ducking down in the car's passenger seat, still was uncomfortable around groups of people, and still uncertain of how I should respond to lots of situations.

Prison is never an easy experience but it is not meant to be. It is supposed to be a daily reminder of the harm done to someone who did not deserve it. For those willing to surrender, God becomes more real than ever. The love of Jesus and the power of the cross open the door to hope. The understanding of the forgiveness won by Jesus grows deeper each day, fanned by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Fear the Lord, serve Him

A lot of people roll their eyes when they hear about men and women in prison "finding God." They call it jailhouse religion in a way that underlines their belief that such faith is a self-serving display meant to present a change, maybe

even hasten a parole. And to some degree, there are those whose faith is little more than a good job of acting.

Sex offenders understand that there is little hope for parole. Even if paroled, they fear how they will be looked upon once released. Many who write to me have life sentences and for them God is not defined as the one who will make prison go away. He is the one who will make prison livable.

This particular group of inmates has also shown me how they have come to understand "fear the Lord" as also translated "be in great awe of the Lord." Those who have chosen to do so serve the Lord, listen for His heart in all things, and determine to do everything they can to eliminate sinful choices. Their lives become lives of witness—not of the spoken variety but of the far more meaningful variety observed by others who see their actions.

Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped

In some ways, prison is a huge time out. Parents give their children a time out when they misbehave, a time to reflect on that fact that they did wrong. Sometimes that works, sometimes it doesn't. Adults who do a wrong that falls short of breaking civil codes might remember the time outs they got as children, but as adults they understand it is up to them to make right the wrong they have done. Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't.

I remember men who loudly protested the unfairness of being sentenced to prison. After all, they hadn't hurt anyone enough to deserve confinement. They rage against security for restricting their movement and for failing to treat them with the respect they feel should be theirs. I know that security personnel can abuse their position of authority but this is not about them. It's about us and about how the balance of our lives will be lived.

Our gods were (and might still be) everyday things: feeling in control, being able to exercise power, having authority over at least someone else, and being treated with respect. Our gods were (and still might be) addictions to alcohol, drugs, pornography, or anything that satisfied us in a given moment. These gods were worshiped by our forefathers but when confronted with these gods in our own lives, we struggled feebly or not at all.

Joshua basically told the people they had a choice to make. His words were not spoken in arrogance or from the posture of being on some pedestal but as one who recognized human weakness and disobedience in all its forms. Notice that he *did* give them a choice. He *did* point out that some might not want to change a thing. I don't



know about you, but this sounds pretty much like the way it is even today.

Despite what anyone says, despite what society might say about us, *we have a choice!* Making the choice does nothing to force others to recognize that choice, though.

But as for me

Joshua made his choice. He and his family would serve the Lord. They would put aside the gods of their forefathers and would serve the one true God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac.

¹⁶ *Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods!"*

Okay, that was what they said. Was that response faithfully followed by all who made it? I don't know but I do understand something of our human frailty. I do understand how despite best intentions, we are all capable of falling into our personal pits of depravity. The man sober for ten years might drink again; the porn addict might be drawn into that web of false intimacy. What then, is the point of saying anything? In a word, witness.

Those who hear me speak at the many meetings I attend have a chance to look closely at my life. Do I live the goal of No More Victims? Are my actions in agreement with my words—written or spoken? I can't fully answer that. I can only start each day with a desire to serve the Lord *and* to receive all the grace and blessing God wants to bestow on me and my family.

I would rather not have to speak about sex offenders, about that part of my own life, but it seems God wants me to do that. I would rather not have to worry about local legislation written to protect others, but I will observe these laws and work within the framework of society to see them changed some day. Maybe I won't see that happen, but serving the Lord doesn't depend on God bringing about changes in these laws.

Serving the Lord is pretty straightforward. It is knowing that His desire for me is to love Him with all my being. I won't be perfect—none of us is—but my imperfections are His to forgive. And He does. □

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.

Some days it is hard not to live in fear. But God has taught me that indeed "perfect love casts out fear." The problem is that I am still far from perfect. Now there are no more secrets and I can live free in Christ.

The guy was harassing me because of my charges. Instead of fighting or doing something crazy, I sought the Lord for an answer. Mainly I sought peace. I prayed, fasted, had many others praying, etc. I never received any answer nor did I feel peace. My trust and faith in God has been fractured ever since and has not recovered. Don't know if it will.

Please keep my name on your mailing list for "Into the Light." I have been greatly helped and blessed by your publication. (Thanks to the many who responded as this letter writer did.)

Get a life that is worth staying out for.

My act of will does not increase my faith, just like an act of my will does not keep me from sinning. That seems to be the natural and human thing to do, at least for me, just try harder. Trying harder is just not going to do it. Jesus wouldn't have had to die if we could be better, do better, or trust more by trying harder. I guess that's one of the things all Christians must learn—how to let God change you, to let God increase your faith. After all, I didn't have any faith of my own to be saved. If God didn't give it to me, I would still be lost.

I really need you to help me pray for guidance and God's will for my life but most of all, my prayer life is struggling a little and I'm feeling stagnant. I need new breath, fresh water, something that will lift my spirits.

I went to take a shower. Another man came in and undressed in front of me. He made a comment. I told him firmly, "No, I am working my program." His mouth went quiet. I feel good about it.

It seems like every day we read about more restrictions for sex offenders. On the plus side, the extent to which some want to go to protect their communities even raises the eyebrows of those who supported basic restrictions. We can only hope that with time there will be a balance and uniformity in what everyone should consider legitimate legislation.

One thing I have learned about the process called healing of memories was that I needed to ask Jesus to be present at the moment of pain in my past. His healing at that moment seems to work forward through the years. The events remain the same, but it's as if the emotional effects of them begin to change. I believe it's like forgiving someone that once hurt us, even if the person is long gone. It's psychology, but I believe it's grace as well.

I have a hard time being with the other brothers and I feel I've let God down yet again. I know he will forgive all and will cleanse me each time I ask. I just don't understand how after two years seven months and one and a half days I could fall so easily. I never took credit for any temptation I overcame and always assured anyone who would listen that without God's help I couldn't last one day. Maybe I just wanted too much too soon.

To me having a cellie is like having a wife or living with a brother or even a sister. The gender is not the point. It's how human beings get along together. One cellie I had paced the floor. Before it would have bugged me. It would also have bugged me when he turned on his radio when I wanted to sleep. Now I simply tell myself that this is something this person needs to do and I can live with that.

I have had a revelation of sorts lately that my condescending overly critical demeanor is largely fueled by my wanting to be in control. If I perceive a person to be really stupid, incompetent, or immature, and I talked to him in a manner that belies that perception, then I am definitely

in control, or at least that's the feeling I get. Of course, the negative consequences of that kind of attitude cancel out any benefits of being in control, but my need for control often short-circuits reality.

I am a horrible person and I failed my children. I promised my son when he was young but I'd never leave him like my father left me. But here I am a liar and failure to my children, and worse yet, to my God who trusted me with them!

I am not a work of perfection; rather a work in progress toward perfection which I realize will not occur until I leave this earthly life. All will only happen through His grace, blessing, and plan for me.

Being in prison can become almost a drug of the mind if we don't keep our eyes focused on the Word and the plan that God has laid out for us in it. Sometimes I find myself even dreading release more than I dread being in this place! This has at times scared me, but I am learning that it is the natural tendency of man to fear the unknown.

the outcast

Joe

If you could see what I have seen, then you'd understand;
that the corruption of the real world is always in demand.

For here I am all alone from those I love so dear,
taking for that old life I knew without a single care.

I hope these years in prison will help me change my ways;
offering me peace and happiness and a chance for better days.

I do have faith deep inside and the faith I try to uphold;
after all these years I've served, the story still gets told.

I guess it's what's inside that matters
if anyone should care to look;

but it sure gets frustrating being judged by my cover
like some common book.

I've prayed and loved you Lord, yet send in every way.
It's amazing that you loved me given my sinful life each day.

Surely I have gone throughout my life doing as I will.

I wonder if I tried to serve you better, would you love me still?
I've always heard that the outcasts are closest to your heart.

If that's the case then keep me Lord, never to depart.

But if given another chance to serve you well
beyond these walls of stone,

I humbly ask that you walk with me so I will never walk alone.



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 whose lives feel out of control, that they hear God's call and answer yes.
- For those beginning SOT, that they understand that God is present in each and every session despite any and all restrictions in place.
- For those completely frustrated by the world around them, that they remember that they are of this world but not of this world. They belong to God and are heirs to the kingdom.
- For the Support Group (Wisconsin), that the material they collect and share will help bring people to a better understanding.
- For prison ministries world-wide, that they continue to be a lifeline of encouragement for those who feel completely cut off and lost.
- For those who speak out in an attempt to educate the public about sex offenders, that what they share will be received and carefully considered.
- For all with age-inappropriate attractions who have not acted on those attractions, that they are able to find the support and encouragement needed to deal with those attractions.
- For those struggling with memories of broken childhoods, that when they revisit those memories, they see the presence of Jesus and the potential for healing.
- For the families and friends of victims, that they will continue to show support in love or come to understand how important their support is.
- For inmates finding themselves isolated from others, that they are able to make small steps in connecting with others in a healthy manner.
- 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 those communities with residency restrictions, that they constantly question the effectiveness of the laws they support.
- 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.

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!

“Create
in me a
clean heart,
O God,
and put a
new and right
spirit
within me.”
Psalm 51:10

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A Little Humor . . .

A scientist finally succeeded in cloning himself, but all his clone would do was sit around and spew out cuss words. After a week of this, the scientist finally got fed up and pushed his clone out of the 10th-story office window.

A short time later there was a knock on his office door. The scientist opened the door to find a policeman who said, "I'm going to have to arrest you for making an obscene clone fall."



And a bonus . . .

A famous Viking explorer returned home from a voyage and found his name missing from the town register. His wife insisted on complaining to the local civic official who apologized profusely saying, "I must have taken Leif off my census."