



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

November—December 2011

Be Patient

By Bob Van Domelen

¹ *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.* ² *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.* (Ephesians 4.1-2)

There is something to living in a climate where seasonal changes are easily identified. Winter is cold and snowy, brittle sometimes; spring is a time of rebirth as what seemed dead comes to life; summer is a time for recreation, a season where gardens sing with color and variety; and autumn is a time of gradually dying but in a way that causes us to stop and take in its transitional colors.

No season just happens. There is no “here today/gone tomorrow,” no specific date that clearly separates one season from another other than dates fixed as markers on the calendar telling us to get ready.

This might seem a strange way to start sharing some thoughts on patience but it makes sense to me. I am sure that there are others like me who want things done yesterday, so if you are nodding your head to that comment, welcome. If not, you probably have a lot of patience already. Nonetheless, read on.

As a prisoner for the Lord

During my time in prison, I often read phrases like this and failed to identify with them. I came to the conclusion that my being in prison for my crimes was a far different choice. I had been sentenced to confinement for sex-related offenses and not, I’m afraid, as an endorsement of my spiritual witness. But I learned that the invitation to *become* a prisoner for the Lord was being offered every day.

Spirituality is not merely walking around with a Bible. It isn’t even reading the Bible every day and attending study groups. Spirituality is a commitment to get to know the Lord, to love Him, and to surrender all that stands in the way of that relationship. The hardest part is the surrender because it means that my way is not always the best way. Just so you know, I still like to think my way is the best way. Thankfully I am getting over that.

Worthy of the calling you have received

The one thing I know for certain is that God did not call me to molest anyone and I cannot imagine anyone believing that they have been so called. *So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.* (Galatians 4.7) That’s my calling. That’s your calling. We are children of God and therefore heirs to the kingdom of heaven.

But I also know that there is nothing I can do to make myself worthy of such a calling. There were days after my arrest when I sincerely believed that I had lost all right to be

considered an heir to the kingdom. God doesn’t celebrate sin—especially heinous sin. But God sent Jesus to die for my sin—your sins—and because of that atonement, God celebrates me *and* you. He reminds us of our calling, encourages us in our struggles, and never ever stops loving us.

Be completely humble and gentle

For a man such as me, pride has always been an issue in my life. Actually, I think pride is more of a defensive mechanism than anything else. I thought that as long as I set myself above others, I was out of reach from anything they might say or do. Being in a place of self-elevation, however, also made it very difficult for me to be blessed by others. That is, until I fell so far I thought all light had disappeared, all hope disappeared.

Then I looked up and saw hope. Despite all the hurt I had caused others, Jesus opened my eyes to those whose love went deeper than I had ever offered them. Like seasons, though, no change happened over night. Some are still happening 26 years later and I pray will continue to happen for as long as God permits me the time.

Humble and gentle are not easy words. Actually, they can be confusing, especially in the face of prison life or life on the streets facing a host of rules that seem not only pointless but contrary to the whole business of restoration.

I will tell you that it takes strength to be humble and sometimes more so to be gentle. These are not wimpy words or words uttered by a human doormat. How do I know that?

²⁸ *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ³⁰ *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11.28-30) Jesus declared himself gentle and humble of heart all the while encouraging us to take on the yoke of His love. His life was an example of that yoke, an example we frequently set aside in favor of our own choices.

Be patient, bearing with one another in love

Finally we’ve arrived at the big word, patient. Were you getting impatient that it took so long for me to get there? Maybe, maybe not. I do have some observations I’d like to share with you, however, but I doubt I can list them in any order of priority.

Over the years I have been corresponding, I have received many letters from individuals who have either completed a treatment program or had spent several years working on issues that needed attention. The further they felt themselves moving away from their addictive behaviors,

the more they believed that people on the outside should be able to recognize and accept those changes. Having a focused and God-centered pattern of daily living, it angered them that there might even be the possibility of being rejected.

Some readily condemn any church unwilling to grant them full access. Others demand an immediate repeal of all laws restricting either their choice of home or job. Still others feel that any who do not forgive them are damned for all eternity for their failure to forgive.

There are times when I want to yell at someone about the unfairness of it all. And then I remember what I did. There are times when I want to hide and forget about this kind of ministry. And then I remember what God has done for me and what He continues to do for me. *Take my yoke* He said. So I said okay. There are times when I want politicians to stop with all the legislation that only feeds on irrational fear. And then I remember patience. It is not unlike the seasons that move one into the other with change so gradual that it is frequently not observed at all.

Every now and then I get a letter from someone who says that I misquoted some scriptural reference or worse, that I failed to point out God's word to someone needing to be helped. I write back that I do the best I can and add that I am far from perfect. God's word is not a club to be wielded at those with a differing opinion. God's word brings each of us closer to Him in our daily walk if we allow that to happen.

So, be patient and bear with one another in love. That means the cell mate who snores, is messy, or stinks. That means treatment that does not have God as its central point of reference. God is *always* the central point but do those of you in treatment actually look for Him there?

Be patient with those who love you and those who do not love you. Change starts with us—not them. We are the ones who drove a wedge into our relationships. And if others refuse to love you, love them anyway. Take the high road, not the road of anger and discord. We've been there before. We *can* make better choices now. Just be patient.

Bits & Pieces

The following are segments from letters I have received since the last edition of "Into the Light." I hope that you will be blessed by them, discuss with others, and pray for situations where prayer is needed.

I think that having the peace that passes all understanding is more important than healing. When one's mind and heart are at ease in the Lord, the rest, for me anyway, seems to be at rest, too.

This life today is a million times better than it was before and I wouldn't trade what I have inside of me and my relationship with God for anything this material world has to offer. The freedom and peace I feel and have today is what gives me my hope that I live with today. Thanks to God and this treatment program for blessing me with all the wonderful people and situations from which to learn.

Nothing is perfect and going to church doesn't do much unless I am willing to apply the teachings, principles, and teachings of Jesus in my daily life. With change comes challenges.

My favorite counter to wanted or unwanted thoughts that *should* be unwanted is "Any thoughts that are not of You, I cast them into the fiery pits of hell." I may have to say that prayer again and again but as long as I keep saying it, I ain't doing it!

Life is good or bad with or without God. Yet we Christians think it's all God's doing. Him being with me is not enough. I've seen others live happy lives and overcome addiction apart from God, yet Christians struggle. What gives? It's also frustrating to me.

God's compassions are his greatest miracles. Without his compassion there would be no love and without his love there wouldn't have been the sacrifice Jesus made for us and the miracle of his resurrection and our salvation as a free gift. And you can add my own miracle of being content, even in prison.

I am happy to know that someone out there understands what I went through but won't judge me on that but what I am under my sinful nature.

I trust that I will be okay. God has put me through many trials in my life but then always spared me the worst in the end.

I've been praying for strength to focus on good images and to the best of my ability to delete the ones I don't want anymore. I know that some things I will never forget, but I do not dwell on the past and images associated with the past. With God's help anything is possible.

If we respond to problems just like the world does, then Christ is meaningless. We would be no different than the world. Of course, this is the hard part. Not to react like the natural man but like Jesus would. I can't criticize those who fail. At least I shouldn't because I can't do any better.

Faith is trust that my loving, heavenly father will take good care of me, you, and all others who call out to him. For he rewards those that diligently seek him!

I am well aware of the many miracles God has done in and through my life. There are still many demons with which I struggle every day, however. That God permits me to love is a miracle because I definitely was headed down the wrong road prior to my arrest.

I believe God wants me to speak to people but don't know how to start. I'm shy for the most part and I don't know what to say to them. I listen to people I talk to now and try to help them out the best I can.

I understand many times we can't see the forest for the trees. One of the hardest obstacles to overcome is self. For this reason, Christ came.

Every now and then I go over my past, make notes on incidents or activities that I feel contributed to my being here. I've been doing this because at some point I want to put a testimony together. Yet I know I need to be careful in

that God gets the glory and that I don't give sin too much precedence or dwell on it too much.

One cannot anticipate or expect societal changes to be the deciding factor on how to live for Christ. We have to say as Joshua did, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

It will take someone to come along side us and testify of what they know [of the changes we have experienced] before others will believe. In the meantime, we mustn't attempt to manipulate the circumstances.

I would just love to know why society had such an easy time ignoring child abuse when I was the one being abused!

I always thought that the real miracle lies in the fact that we want to change it all!

I get so discouraged and worn down trying to praise God and to pray when it seems everything that can go wrong does. It's hard to imagine it would be worse apart from God.

The SOP is about prevention and not cure. It is about correcting what is emotionally and mentally in attitude what is wrong. It is about finding out why and what has to be done so as not to do it again!

Recently I have had dreams that I have not had for a very long time. I guess it's a reminder of how quick my mind can turn on me if ever I become complacent in my walk with the Lord. For I know how easy it is for me to fall and stumble in those areas. The area I become complacent the most is my daily prayer, and I have noticed that it is then that I become the most susceptible to temptations.

Where I am, we're not allowed to share or give food items to another inmate. One day I was sitting next to a peer and he offered me a chip that was seasoned with a baby back ribs taste. I accepted the chip even though I know I should have said no. On the surface, it's funny that I gave in to the temptation of a single chip. While in group, I talked about giving in to temptation and the small stuff that could lead to bigger temptations. If you feel guilt at the small stuff, you might start to cover up the guilt with other unhealthy choices. I consider it a miracle that I was given insight into the possibilities of the consequences I choose to act on.

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 all who struggle with patience, that each day will find them a little better at dealing with anything that might make them impatient.
- For all who consider themselves beyond hope, that Jesus died so that we might have hope eternal.
- For families of both victims and offenders needing healing and a sense of normalcy in living, that God's miracles will be evident each day.
- For those struggling with re-entry, that they believe that God will meet their needs.
- For all who are dealing with issues related to civil commitment, that they will believe that they *do* have the power to define themselves as individuals in the process of change and healing.
- 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.



Every year at this time I find myself wondering how many of those incarcerated still give thanks to God - not just for Thanksgiving or special holidays, but for the smallest of blessings as well. Thank you, Lord!

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A Little Humor . . .

A firefighter is working outside the station when he notices a little girl in a little red wagon with small ladders on the sides, a garden hose coiled in the middle, and wearing a firefighter's helmet. The wagon is being pulled by her dog and her cat.

The firefighter takes a closer look. "That sure is a nice fire-truck," the fire fighter says with high regard. "Thanks," says the girl.

Then the firefighter notices the girl has tied the wagon to her dog's collar and to the cat's tail. "Little lady," the firefighter says, "I don't want to tell you how to run your rig, but if you were to tie that rope around the cat's collar, I think you could go faster."

The little girl replied thoughtfully, "You're probably right, but then I wouldn't have a siren!"

