



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

March—April 2011

I Have Called You Friends

By Bob Van Domelen

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. (John 15:14-16)

I recently received an email from a man with whom I had corresponded while he was in prison. My first inclination was to shrug it off. Not that his point was incorrect or misdirected but because I agreed with what he shared. This is what he wrote:

*"You have a great platform to effect positive change on this seemingly subtle but really quite powerful way of how we define ourselves. We are **NOT** sex offenders. That implies we are still interested in offending and indeed that we are still offending. I refuse to be dishonest, and to call myself or you or anyone I know a sex offender is being dishonest. It is also disrespectful. But more importantly it sets us up for a dismal road of failure, implying that we are defined and held down by a label. But we are so much above that. We are spirits who have made a choice that has harmed many people (including ourselves) but who have had the insight to see that and then the desire to improve the issues that plagued us. To call a person like that a sex offender is demeaning to say the least.*

"It is getting harder and harder for me to read your newsletters because of your choice to use that phrase. I hope you start replacing that phrase with the much healthier phrase "person who has committed a sex offense" because your newsletter has great value and I wish to keep reading it."

My email response was a simple "Noted." After clicking the "Send" button, I hoped that he did not feel I was brushing him off. I just didn't know what to say beyond that.

He is right. Saying sex offender does imply someone who is still sexually abusing someone or plans to do so. When I speak in public, I usually make the point that I am not a sex offender but I admit that at one time I was. And as I have shared in this column many times, I add "God does not call me sex offender. He calls me Bob."

The label sex offender begins at the time of arrest, is used in all court proceedings, establishes a firm hold on the lowest rung of prison society, and follows an individual at a state and national level as part of a registry system, as well

as determines the availability of housing, employment, and even church membership in most communities. The label is applied, mistakenly so, as a means of protecting children from possible abuse, yet studies clearly show that recidivism is considerably lower than is often publicized. Personally, I think the label's most effective purpose is to stimulate a fear that encourages a self-righteous rejection of individuals who have committed sex-related crimes.

My friend is right. I don't do anyone favors by using the label when I really do not need to do so. It is, however, a battle I may never win on the outside, yet I should be doing all I can to encourage those most affected—you and me.

I have called you friends

Some of the most incredible and amazingly healthy relationships I have are with individuals who know my background, know that I am on the state registry, yet greet me warmly whenever we see one another. I don't have to start every conversation by asking for forgiveness and they don't ask it of me.

These are people who know a lot about me but they don't know everything. God does. And knowing that I am still loved by God who calls me a friend is both a blessing and a healing. God knows all about our sins, our time in court and prison, and the issues we face on a day to day basis whether in or out of prison. Knowing that, God still calls us friends. That is a label worth wearing.

I chose you and appointed you

If we actually believe that God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to die for our sins, then we must accept the fact that God calls us to step out of our past darkness. The name of this newsletter was the vision God gave me in 1997 when the first newsletter was produced and mailed to 47 people.

One of the truly negative connections the label sex offender encourages is the belief that though we might be saved, we are called to sit on the sidelines, to be silent followers of Christ except when sharing with others forced to wear the same label. But Jesus said "I chose you and appointed you." Appointed me? To what?

Why, "to bear fruit—fruit that will last." My friend said it to me in his opening comment. "You have a great platform to effect positive change." And when I consider his words in terms of what I actually do, I think it translates to something very simple. I share with you, encourage you, pray for you, and consider you friends just as you are willing to do that for me. In other words, we talk more about what we are called to *be* than what we have *done*. Sadly, if we don't do so for one another, I fear the silence will be overwhelming.

There is, however, a reality that we must face. That reality is that the odds are definitely against us if we are hoping to see a shift any time soon in how others see us, judge us, or call us. We know from personal experience the road to change is hard work filled with frustration. Society is not going to alter how they feel just because we are being accountable and maintaining appropriate boundaries. In their thinking, we are the ones who have done wrong—not them.

So we, therefore, need to start the shift away from the label among ourselves. Using a “person who has committed a sex offense” or “one who is on the state registry” is a good start but we will not be 100% consistent. We are, after all, part of the same society taught that labeling is appropriate, whether we are talking about an alcoholic, a drug addict, an overeater, or any other behavior that stands in the path of healthy and moral living.

When I use portions of letters for the *Bits & Pieces* column, I don't plan on editing out sex offender should it appear. I am simply asking you to make the translation to a phrase that is more positive. Support for one another does not mean we need to create a new level of judgment but to recognize how we might serve one another.

“I have called you friends” might fill you with God's grace and presence, but for many it might be a phrase almost impossible to accept. You and I have been appointed. We have been called to enter the lives of others with a witness by our actions of God's love and healing. The words will come with time. For now, if the label is to diminish or disappear, it has to start within us.

Finally, I do apologize to those of you I may have offended. It was never my intent to do so. Pray for me. Pray for the platform that God has provided, that it consistently points in the right direction. And pray for one another because, as I have shared before, if you aren't praying for those around you, who is? □

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 families overwhelmed at the abuse of a loved one or dealing with a loved one who has abused, that God's call that all might be drawn unto Him will be reality.
- For all who struggle daily with labels, that they come to see their identity in the God who created them.
- For communities torn by the conflict of child molestation, that they be open to the healing and life-changing process needed by both victim and the one who offended.
- For those struggling with re-entry, that their faith and trust in God will carry through.
- For support systems like The Support Group, that they remain faithful to the journey they are on.
- 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.



Please Note!

Recent bulk mail rules require that every 90 days “Return Service Requested” be displayed as part of our mailing format. When a newsletter comes back as undeliverable, the ministry is charged \$1.09 for the services rendered in trying to find an address. Because most inmates do not fill out change of address forms when transferred or released, the newsletter comes back and the fee must be paid. I have been told that other than the required 90-day posting, the newsletter can be mailed without any designation. The problem is simple: if you are transferred or released, I would not know because the newsletter would be thrown out. In these times of tight budgeting, Broken Yoke needs to be responsible in how it uses donations. Paying \$1.09 (plus the original 16 cents) is not good stewardship, so please help us by providing accurate address information. Thank you.

Matching Grant Announced

These are, without a doubt, difficult economic times. Household budgets are stretched, pared, and difficult decisions are made every day. Companies continue to lay off workers in an effort to sustain enough profit to keep them in business, but those efforts are often not enough.

Church donations diminish; donations to worthy nonprofit service organizations are cut; and ministries whose existence is tied to the donations of others wonder how much longer they can continue to serve and provide the services they do.

Our co-director Jill Rennick's salary is determined by the donations she receives from people who want to support her efforts, so her financial stability is rooted in faith that God will provide.

Like all ministries, Broken Yoke does have basic expenses and for the past 22 years has never operated in the red. Our primary expenses (aside from Jill's efforts to raise salary support) are driven by communication—getting

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the word out. This is done through *Wellspring, Into the Light*, correspondence ministry, and internet as well as telephone contacts.

In early January, the ministry was contacted and asked if it would be interested in a matching grant. The donor, who wishes to remain completely anonymous, will match every dollar the ministry receives up to \$5000 in the timeframe of February to July.

We see this as an incredible opportunity to give some stability for at least the immediate future. We ask that you prayerfully consider making a donation, a gift that will double in size. All contributions to the ministry are tax exempt and recognized with a letter of appreciation.

Donations can be mailed to:

**Broken Yoke Ministries
PO Box 5824
De Pere, WI 54115-5824**

If you prefer, donations can also be made using the donation link on our website.

www.brokenyoke.org/donations

If you choose this method, however, please understand that a percentage of all online donations is taken by PayPal for its services.

Thank you in advance for consideration in this opportunity. We are blessed by 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.

While I have no idea of jobs, finances, living, relationships, etc., or how to exactly set everything up once I am released, at least I can acquire the character, the temperament, and so forth required to move forward and make progress on the outside.

The Lord has really been blessing me with the practice of instantly praying for someone who has been in my face, that they be born again on that very spot and at that very moment. A visual image of the joy in heaven and the hopeful instant change in that person sure wipes out any anger or hurt I might feel due to that stress.

I still have a really hard time speaking up about how I feel and what I need, even when I'm dealing with people that I know won't go off on me if I tell them something they probably won't like.

I do have some good news--I graduate from anger management class in two weeks! I feel that the class has helped me because I've been catching myself when one of my triggers is set off. I don't seem to let as much bother me either and that's a good thing.

The fact that we get so discouraged when we sin is a sign that we are close to God. It's when we stop worrying about our sin that we are in real danger.

Though I do so well spiritually for periods of times, there are days when some of the most god-awful thoughts creep into my mind and I get so frustrated with myself. Then I am

reminded of what Paul wrote, "For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate."

As I read Scripture and meditate upon His word, I am awestruck by our Father's great love for each of us, even when we mess up. And just maybe, if we would admit it, God's love becomes clearer *when* we mess up. If we will only listen with our spirit, we will hear His Spirit beckon us to draw near and receive His grace.

If one has real faith in God, I suspect that we should believe in His power to see, hear, feel, know, understand and maybe effect what we do. At any rate, I have always welcomed God's input, but I'm not sure I've always asked for it properly.

As I reflect over the many blessings Christ gifted me with, I remember the prayers, letters, cards, phone calls and visits with family and friends. And I have no doubt that even those who choose not to communicate with me may still be praying for me and keeping me in their thoughts, as I do.

Here in Arizona, when mandatory minimums were put in place and sentencing discretion was removed from judges, it shifted the justice system from dealing with individuals to treating us all as a class of criminal and a category of crime. The law says "If you commit this crime, then you get this sentence." It's based solely on what you've done, not what the chances are for rehabilitation, not on who you become or what you accomplish while incarcerated, not on whether you get help or treatment, not on what happened to you as a child, or any other mitigating factor.

We as men have failed as we have not been as truthful with one another as we should have been. We put on our mask to hide our weaknesses from each other and make ourselves unapproachable both to those in the body and outside of it. After a time our pride even leads us to believe we are doing the right things. We need to learn to be there for each other.

Something we struggle with but refused to share with others remains a problem not dealt with.

Thank you for the excellent articles. Even though I was recently set off for three years, I am able to maintain my sobriety by helping others who struggle with the same issues. I use your newsletters as talking points with these men, so please keep them coming.

Now faith is confidence in what we
hope for and assurance about
what we do not see. (Hebrews 11.1)

Think about it – Live it!

Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.
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A Little Humor . . .



A prince had a curse put on him when he was a little boy. He could only speak two words every year. But, if he didn't speak for a whole year, he would then be able to speak four words the next year, six the next and so on. One day he met a princess named Josie and he wanted to say "My Princess" but knew he had to wait. The next year he saw her again and wanted to say "My princess, I love you". The third year he saw her he wanted to say "My princess I love you, will you marry me?" But, the young prince knew he would have to wait at least two more years in order to say all that.

So, on the fifth year, excited to finally present his question, he visited the princess. He approached her respectfully and asked, "Josie, my princess, I love you. Will you marry me?"

The princess looked at him with questioning eyes and said, "Pardon?"