



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

January-February 2009

I Resolve

By Bob Van Domelen

Note: This article was written for the January 1999 edition of this newsletter, yet it felt so fresh I decided to rerun it. It was written only weeks after I completed serving my time on parole. I hope that you will be blessed.

How many times have you wondered if you'd ever get your life on the right track? How many New Year's resolutions have you made and then discarded as too difficult or not really what you wanted? If you're anything like me, the answer probably is "More times than I can count!"

The start of a new year has traditionally been a time for making promises to oneself or to others, promises that might have sounded more than possible in the thought process but which grew to become mountains once the resolutions were actually made. In a way, though, resolutions *are* about beginnings.

On Wednesday, December 9, I sat in my parole agent's office and signed papers of discharge. I had thought about this event for years and wondered what I would feel like as I walked out the door for the last time. Somehow it seemed to me that life would start fresh again by the simple act of someone saying "Good luck" as the interview finished. But that wasn't the case at all.

When I walked out of that building and got into my car, life was just as I left it a short 30 minutes before, and that did get me started thinking about a lot of things—resolutions included. This wasn't about starting over or even about long term promises. It was about living as correctly as I could each and every moment, knowing that I would have good days and not-so-good days. It was about reminding myself that I was not the one in charge—God was and is—but that I could choose His way or my own.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jer.29.11) The key to the verse comes in understanding that the plans for my life are to be found *in the Lord*. God knows my heart and He also knows the gifts, talents, and interests I have. He should—they were all given to me by Him.

But I am impatient. The vision I see for myself is one which is completely free of the dark secrets of the past and of the webs of destruction I once helped to spin. This part is good. It's what we all hope to do. But I also want to be farther down the road in my spiritual development, more equipped to handle the stress of daily living than I am. Another good thing. The problem is a matter of timing.

God reminds me in Matthew 6:25 *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more*

important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

Those are hard words for someone like myself, a man who has been taught that self-preservation often means being something of a "Unless I'm in control" person. So when God tells me to have patience and to wait upon His will, I find myself sometimes saying with more force than I should "No, I can't wait." But wait I must if what is to happen in my life is to have any lasting value.

Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. (Jer.29.12) Impatient people call upon the Lord quite often but it's usually a selfish, one-way conversation. But do you sense something more in that verse? Do you see the "come and pray to me" part? God calls us to step away from where we are in order to enter into His presence. Jesus did it. *After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. (Mk 6:46)*

Some of you are saying that Jesus wasn't locked up and that Jesus was, after all, talking to His Father. I think people on the "outside" sometimes use the same kind of thinking. But the truth is that a cell or wherever you are can be a holy place if you allow it to become so. And just remember, the Lord added, "and I will *listen* to you."

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity (Jer.29.13-14).

One of the problems with resolutions is that so often they are made with a mind set that says "I can do this. . .I can do this on my own." If I have learned one thing about myself, it would be to recognize how untrue such a statement of resolve actually is. Without God I can do nothing.

I can remember times of real frustration in the first days of seeking. Every time I looked at someone I considered to be a holy person I felt even more distance between God and me. My sins were just too heinous and the damage too devastating to merit a God who would listen to one like me.

But God blessed me with a hunger for His presence. He showed me over and over how His son, Jesus, had died for all of those terrible things I did. He introduced me to the active presence of the Holy Spirit in my everyday living. I'd like to say I don't know why He did these things, but that wouldn't be true. My Father in heaven reminded me that I had asked and He was but answering.

Little by little, day by day, I am being brought back from captivity. Not from the jail cells I occupied but from the prison that was within me. There are days when I struggle to see evidence of the changes I long for, days when I feel I am not the man I am meant to be. But the outstretched

hand of Lord is always there, and the voice within me says, "Take my hand and hold on for eternity." And in a moment of resolve, we touch.

Ten Years Later

I can't begin to tell you all that has happened in the past ten years since this article was written. For sure I couldn't share everything God has done in my life in the past 20 years since I was released on December 12, 1988. I can tell you that I feel a little foolish for worrying about "tomorrow" when 7305 tomorrows (give or take) have passed.

I wish I could say that everything works out the way I'd like things to work out, but that doesn't happen. It doesn't happen for anyone—sex offender or not.

I'd like to be able to tell you that I have managed to trust God in all things, but I still have days when I confess to the human trait of doubting. There are no pedestals just waiting for me to climb, only day to day living while trying to see God in each step. And even there, yes, even there I find myself falling woefully short. But God knows me, knows my weaknesses, and knows my desire to be His.

In some ways I wish my update on the past ten years could be more reassuring but it is, if anything, realistic. That's the message I have for you as you start 2009.

We are all called because we have been chosen since the beginning of time to be God's children. I know that some of you reading this from behind prison bars might feel somewhat divorced from God because of your crimes, but please be assured that God's hand is still outstretched and waiting for you to take hold.

But the outstretched hand of Lord is always there, and the voice within me says, "Take my hand and hold on for eternity." And in a moment of resolve, we touch.

Do you see how easily these words from the original article still fit? That's because they are meant to fit. If you resolve to do anything in this New Year, resolve to seek God with all your heart—for you *will* find Him. □

Bits & Pieces

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

Back to the issue of strength and weakness. It comes back to "Am I safe for society?" I would say that I am, not because I am free from temptation but because I know that I'm not, and may never be. Plus, I set up boundaries and an accountability structure to protect me from the old man. One of the most important steps I've ever taken was a change from the attitude that used to say, "I'm a loner and don't need anybody" but now says, "I cannot live this life alone because I need people. I need friends."

I had to smile about this one. Today I was looking out the window and I saw a rabbit sitting, relaxing. He looked so big and looked like he would make a good meal. I couldn't kill a rabbit. They look so cute and innocent. Have you ever had rabbit for dinner before?

Let's take for instance my sin struggle with lustful fantasy and masturbation, a persistent bad habit or addiction. I've

read some wonderful books on finding victory in such troubles. I approach the problem with enthusiasm but before long doubt creeps in and I wonder if I even want to find victory. "What a wretched man I am" to paraphrase the apostle Paul. He goes on to ask "Who can save me from this body of death?" This is a question that I ask all too often. Paul thanks Jesus as being the savior and I agree, but whereas I can see the spiritual salvation, it is the physical deliverance that eludes me.

I do know that by faith in Christ my attitude on a consistent basis is not determined by my circumstances, or by what judges, prosecutors, the government, wardens, deputy wardens, correctional officers, or other inmates say or do. I have no control over those things. I only have control over how I choose to respond and view myself and I want to respond and view myself through Christ. Prison is a daily challenge to my attitude.

Some inmates I encounter who claim total victory seem to use it as a personal defense mechanism to avoid having to face and admit to what they have done and as a way of using God to avoid taking full responsibility or being accountable to anyone. They claim victory but their victory doesn't seem to bring internal change in their heart, spirit, thought processes, or choices based on what they consistently show externally.

Everything God has done in me so far to bring the healing and change that has taken place to this point has happened because the Lord has required me to invest myself in it, worked at it, trust him for it, and diligently seek it. He opens the doors but I have to walk through them. Sometimes the process and my progress may seem slow, but it's there and God is faithful.

I continue to read, write, study and learn. This is the fabric of my incarcerated life. As you know, the dull monotony of prison life is a real challenge--if we don't remain physically, emotionally and spiritually active, there's a great danger of falling into complacency and compromise. By God's grace, we have a vibrant Christian community here, and I am blessed with several dear brothers with whom to stand against the wiles of the enemy.

Too many of us want to make deals with God. But that's not how God works. And many of us were incarcerated think that if we do as God has asked, he'll get us out of this mess.

Satan continues to tempt me in thoughts, dreams, and also in actions. The actions have ceased but the other two still come up. I immediately tried to talk to God or I pick up the Bible and start reading. What I feed, I know will grow. Satan tries to bind me, but thankfully I am free through Jesus Christ.

An observation I have is that me and others I know who by and large are positive minded and able to keep our hope in Christ as believers are guys who have admitted our crimes and our role in them. We have taken responsibility for what we've done and we don't blame the victims, judges, prosecutors, or the system. We have accepted that we have put ourselves in this situation and we have chosen to break

the secrecy we lived under in favor of being open, honest, transparent, and we voluntarily made ourselves accountable from this point forward to God and a group of like-minded men. Far too many others, including believers here, have not done all that.

Being in prison is somewhat like being in the lion's den. There are many ill tempered people here. Most of them yell, throw trash everywhere, stalk, and are violent. The lion is supposed to be the most ferocious animal in the land. I am living a "Daniel in the lion's den" story. God protects me and I am able to sleep and move around freely. Praise God! I'm not trying to say I am better than most people, I am saying that God is in my life and I serve him. Some of the worst people in here I get along with. I do not hang out with them (I'm not yoked with them), but I do treat everyone with respect. God says to love your enemies. That is a hard thing to do but not impossible. If God says to do it, then it can't be impossible.

This week seemed to be filled with a lot of extremes. The weekend was filled with spiritual revelations and power, and the week was also filled with stumbling blocks and growing pains inside. The love of God helps us to overcome these slips and to find our center again in Christ. Looking for peace that passes understanding, I have found a place of contentment in the family of God. Although I am constantly driven to strive for better understanding and a closer relationship with Jesus, I know that as a child of God I have no need to fear my place in him.

In this seemingly most unlikely place called prison, a place where degradation and fear are ordinary, there is a unique opportunity to be lifted up, to be empowered, and to find peace. I never had time to get to know me until I was locked away alone with myself. Grace brought me to prison to be free from the bondage, a self-imposed prison I had myself locked away in all these years. I lived in bondage my whole marriage, keeping secrets from my wife. I've come to believe that the secrets that we keep locked away keep us shamefilled and stop us from appreciating and resting in our intrinsic innocence and goodness.

When the layers of pride, arrogance, and personal defenses are stripped away, I think a man is then able to really get the needed correction in his thought life and in his core values to rewire the mind, and to find true lasting freedom from dominating life habits and sins.

When I was incarcerated, I too read the Bible and continually tried to draw nearer to God during the day. Yet at night I would awake with fear. Lustful dreams of a homosexual nature would flood my mind. It would anger me because I always prayed for God's protection in my sleep and over my dreams. The thought hit me that maybe God didn't care for me or my prayers. However, I knew that was contrary to Scripture. One night I woke almost in a sweat. The fear, lust, and anger I had was there because I knew in my heart that I enjoyed those images in my dreams. In desperation I prayed and asked God, "What do you want from me?" Almost immediately I knew he wanted my praise. So I praised him and thanked him for allowing me to be wakened to praise him. The next night I woke basically with

the same nasty dream, so again I praised him again. This lasted about a week--waking and then praising. Then the waking stopped completely. I knew that it was Satan who had been attacking me at night because I was vulnerable. During the day I prayed but at night I just wanted sleep and escape. Once Satan found that I was going to praise God, he stopped waking me.

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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 who experience despair, that they will be touched each day by words of hope and demonstrations of encouragement.
- For those who feel God has stopped loving them, that God will fill them to bursting with His undeniable love
- For those are dealing with civil commitment issues, that they not lose heart. God's plan is still unfolding.
- 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 in a position to reach out to a sex offender, that they will remember "whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me."
- For the families and friends of victims, that they will continue in their love and support.
- 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.

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Dated Material

A Little Humor



One rainy evening, a man and his wife emerged from a restaurant only to find that he had locked the keys in the car. He insisted he could open the door with a wire coat hanger, so we went back to the restaurant to get one. Unfortunately, there were none to be found.

The man then ran to a department store a quarter-mile away and returned with a hanger. After a few attempts, he got the door open and they climbed in. Sitting there, soaked and cold, he stuck the hanger under his seat and with a grin said, "Now if this ever happens again, I'll have one handy."