



# Into the Light

January – February 2006

Matthew 19.26

## I am *not* anxious!

By Bob Van Domelen

*<sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4.6)*

*“Dear Registrant. This is to inform you that as of December 1, your complete address will be listed on the state’s online sex offender registry. As a sex offender, you are to continue to comply fully by providing all information requested of you by this office. Failure to do so will result in a Class H felony and may result in a prison sentence of up to four years.”*

I did not copy the letter I got word for word in this example, but what you have read is pretty much the focus of the letter. The state was telling me that anyone wanting to know where I lived could find my name *and* address on the internet. Up to this point, my name has been online for some time now and those wishing to know if I was following the rules could do so by either using a name search or a zip code search.

### **Do not be anxious about anything**

Some of you have been writing to me with fears that all of this information on the internet could make it impossible for you in your effort to re-enter society. In every letter, the emotion I sense ranges from deep concern to basic panic mode.

My usual response is an attempt to calm those writers; to tell them that not everyone sits at a computer console looking up names and addresses; and to remind them of God’s presence and His loving protection. Of the three, I count the last one as the most important, but I can understand why those I write might not see any of what I share as being realistic.

Okay, maybe I should be just a little more honest with you. The idea that someone is making a list that might include my name and address *does* bother me. I have a wife, a family, a home, and a job. The thought that someone would have so much hate for me that any of those things would be considered fair game for being attacked is not a thought I take lightly.

So am I lying when I respond to the letters I get? Am I answering as I do from a comfort zone of not having had to face what others have faced in more restrictive communities? I don’t think I am lying nor is my life a complete comfort zone, yet I will agree that my faith in God is tested at times. Yet God has not let me down so far, and I don’t feel that will happen.

Had Paul put a period after “Do not be anxious about anything” you and I might easily have wondered about his sanity. But Paul added a comma, and having done so, gave us a significant verse to ponder. He wrote,

### **But in everything, by prayer and petition**

I know, you must have noticed that Paul still wanted to make sure there were no exceptions because he wrote, “but in *everything*.”

Most of us spend a lot of time in prayer asking God to make our lives better. Some of you might ask Him to move a foul-mouthed cell mate out and replace that person with a Spirit-filled Christian. Others, having a parole board hearing coming up, might ask God to touch the hearts of the board sufficiently to bring about a parole. And what about the situations sex offenders might face upon release? Lots of prayers being offered there.

What strikes me about most of my prayers is that they *are* born of anxiety or fear. I remind myself that each day should be filled with conversations with God; filled with a desire to hear the whisper of His love; and filled with an earnest desire to serve Him in all I do. Some days I do okay, other days not. Anxiety. Fear. They are like trump cards in bridge or a draw to an inside straight in poker.

Paul also seems to make a distinction between prayer and petition and this makes sense to me. My spiritual advisor likens prayer as being in the presence of God, of sharing and listening. When I think of my advisor, I think of a man who takes to heart the admonition found in Psalm 46.10: *Be still and know that I am God!*

Petition is by definition an act of asking for something, so I think most if not all of us do a lot and I mean a *lot* of petitioning. Studying the verse, I don’t think that Paul favors prayer over petition, just that he says that they are different.

### **With thanksgiving, present your requests to God**

There are two key elements connected with prayer and petition—attitudes, if you will, as to the manner in which we pray.

First of all, we are to pray with thanksgiving. On occasion I have thought this meant that whatever I pray for I will get, so I should thank God in advance for giving me what I want. But this idea falls short. For example, if an inmate prays for a release from the parole board and doesn’t get it, what is the point of thanking God ahead of time?

I recently wrote “Prison taught me to praise God not because of the wonderful life I had in prison or because a favor I asked of God was granted. Prison taught me to praise God because God is God and there is none beside Him.” As confusing as it might seem to my mortal, very human mind, if I believe in God and in God’s love for me, then *all* prayer should start with thanksgiving.

Second, the New International Version offers us, “present your requests to God.” There is an attitude of relationship in that phrase, for in order to do so, we must approach God. This cannot be done by those who don’t know Him, and people without a relationship with the Lord are like thirsty dogs, willing to follow anyone who gives them something to drink, willing to call that one master.

Continued on p.2

### So what has changed?

Just about every month I read of some new restriction placed on sex offenders in states around the country. Anxiety.

I hear on the news about communities adopting legislation that restricts a sex offender from living within 2000-2500 feet of a child care, a school, or any place where children normally congregate. Because of this legislation, a few communities are completely off limits, and in some of them, offenders who have been living quietly and doing what they need to do are being asked to leave. More anxiety.

Some internet sites offer maps of cities within their state that have stickpins indicating that an offender lives at that location. Click on the stickpin and the offender's name, address, and photograph come up. Even more anxiety.

I believe firmly in change and the ability we all have with the grace of God to set appropriate boundaries and establish effective accountability. If you've read this newsletter before, you will be nodding your head in agreement that I have.

You will also know that I have never suggested that it is my responsibility to change the hearts of others toward me. I am able to change only myself, and on difficult days I wonder just how effective I have been. But I believe in the kind of man I have been called by God to be, not in the man some say is a little more than a sex offender waiting for an opportunity to molest. Again, you've read this before.

### The answer

I often include the entire Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr in letters to inmates who are having a difficult time with a host of issues or one particular issue. It goes like this:

**God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.**

**Living one day at a time;**

**Enjoying one moment at a time;**

**Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;**

**Taking, as He did, this sinful world  
as it is, not as I would have it;**

**Trusting that He will make all things right  
if I surrender to His Will;**

**That I may be reasonably happy in this life  
and supremely happy with Him**

**Forever in the next.**

**Amen.**

Seeking God in all things is the answer whether by prayer or petition but certainly with thanksgiving.

Situations might continue to get worse instead of better but none of us can control that. In the end, we are charged with bringing our lives into God's will through surrender and obedience.

Anxiety? Sure, we will all have days that are filled with anxiety, but we can allow it to destroy any hope of peace or we can acknowledge it, turn it over to the Lord, and believe the words of Romans 8.28: *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

So hang in there as this new year of 2006 begins and be open to what the Lord wants to do in your life. I give thanks to God for the blessing of sharing with you; I pray that all goes well for you wherever you are; and I ask God to fill your life with His healing love and presence. Just remember,

***All things are possible with God!***



### 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 at the beginning of incarceration, that they trust in God to be their protector; that He will bring order to their lives where now there only seems to be chaos and fear.
- For those in the mid-range of their incarceration, that they might look back and see God's love through the most difficult of situations; that they might serve as encouragement to those beginning their time in prison.
- For those nearing the end of their incarceration, that they ask God to free them from all forms of anxiety as they look to starting their lives over.
- For our communities, that they come to learn that the safety of their children lies in their ability to teach them appropriate from inappropriate love by modeling a healthy love in their own lives.
- For our legislators, that they work to enact the kind of legislation that will help rehabilitate offenders, not penalize them further.
- For groups like The Support Group, that the support and love they show their loved ones in confinement is rewarded by positive changes in both their loved ones and treatment procedures.
- For prison ministries across the country, that they know how blessed they are for the service they offer and the example of Christ's love they set.
- For the concept of the Thursday Group, that sooner rather than later a support system will exist where offenders can be prayed with, encouraged, and strengthened.
- For Bob, that he continues to listen for the voice of the Lord in all things; that his life be filled with healthy balance and accountability; and that he has the time needed to do everything.
- For Broken Yoke Ministries, that its financial needs will always be met.
- (As always) For those who are still abusing, that they will come to understand the devastation they bring on their victims and that they seek help for themselves—whatever the cost.

**Broken Yoke Ministries is a not for profit 501 (c)(3) corporation and operates *solely* on the contributions of people such as you. All donations to this ministry are tax deductible and will be recognized. If you cannot support us financially, pray for us. *Unused stamps* are also very welcomed and a good way for those in confinement to be in partnership with this ministry. If you are in a position to make a financial contribution so that more might receive this newsletter, please consider doing that. The bottom line is that I ask you to pray about becoming a partner serving with this ministry.**

## Bits & Pieces

From an inmate letter: "I know that I'm not supposed to worry, but I find myself doing it every day. I worry about where I'll be able to live. I worry about finding a good job when I get out. I also worry about having to register as a sex offender for the rest of my life and the stigma that is attached to that. I would really appreciate any thoughts or device you can give me."

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*From an inmate letter: (In describing a current situation) "Just this morning at our meeting, someone mentioned that a soap dish and towel was left in one of the bathrooms. At the institution I was at before, the soap dish and towel would be gone for good! What a big change this place is!"*

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From a grandmother's letter: "It seems to me there is so little concern for the offender and no one that I know seems to care (about them). I see no Christians who seem to care—no churches involved in Ministry to them. I am an old lady and am in no position to do more than pray and try to minister to my own grandson."

[Would that more people would be willing to pray for and encourage sex offenders into God's kingdom. Ed]

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*A personal thought: I received a letter about two months ago that was written by an inmate dealing with his father. His letter was filled with pain, anger, and tremendous regrets that his father was not able to be the man he should've been to his son. If you have someone in your life that needs forgiving but that is not possible for some reason, write a letter to that person. You can mail it to me or you can destroy it, but the act of writing it can be very healing. (Bob)*

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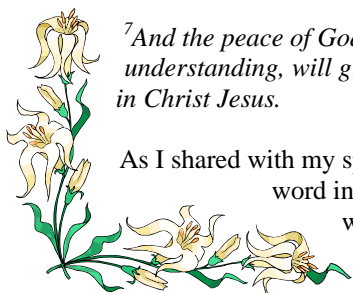
From an inmate's letter: "Inmates are real hard to be around. There are, however, those who are decent sorts. I have to remember that. On this unit, there is a lot of immaturity. I have to be the bigger man. I know that I always think that people see my crime and not me. I try to remember what I did. It is good for me to remember that I changed someone's life forever."

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*From an inmate's letter: "I guess I need help in order to allow myself to open up enough to let Jesus into my heart for real. I need to be able to be honest with something besides my fantasies. And I need to learn to forgive myself."*

## A Postscript

If you read the article on pages one and two centering on Philippians 4.6, maybe it encouraged you to get out your Bible and read a little more of this chapter. Because my focus when writing the article was directed at verse 6, I was a bit taken back when I read the next verse a few days after completing the article. It reads:



*<sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

As I shared with my spiritual advisor recently, God's word in Holy Scripture is power, healing, wisdom, and love. Once you taste of all that, your life will be forever changed.

## Regeneration Books



Recently, an email came across my desk announcing the news that Regeneration Books had a flood in the basement area of the building where all of their stock was being stored. A complete loss valued at over \$30,000!

I emailed a response to Lani, who serves as the manager of this incredible Christian ministry, offering prayers and lots of encouragement.

This is the organization that produces the booklets I have written. I don't think they make *any* money on materials I have written because they willingly send out free copies to inmates who request them. When I get a letter from someone in prison asking what resources are available to help them, I always point to Regeneration Books and list two of the titles they might consider.

If you had written for material in the past month or so, please have patience because it will take some time to get back into full operation. If you have a dollar or two that you could send them, the address is:

**Regeneration Books  
PO BOX 9830  
Baltimore, MD 21284**

I don't know of a more dedicated group of people serving the Lord in this manner anywhere in the country. If you cannot donate, please keep them in prayer!

## 2006 Just some thoughts

- Resolutions are easy to make and easier to break. Be realistic but believe in what you resolve in the New Year.
- It only takes a moment to look back at all you've been through for you to realize that you've been through it.
- God doesn't just want you to make good choices; God wants YOU!
- The Serenity Prayer is called the Serenity Prayer for a good reason.
- The best thing you can give someone is your attention.
- Change takes a lot of effort, but others will be more than happy you did.
- Your life is only as depressing as you allow it to be and only as joy-filled as you allow room in your heart for that to happen.
- I've never met a person not worth praying for—and that includes me.
- If you say yes to the Lord, He will find a way to use your heart to serve others.
- The direction you walk might be influenced by others, but only you can actually take the first step—and that's *your* choice, not anyone else's.

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*All things are possible with God*

**Dated Material**

### ***A Little Humor . . .***

A young man from the city went to visit his farmer uncle. For the first few days, the uncle showed him the usual things - chickens, cows, crops, etc. After three days, however, it was obvious that the nephew was getting bored, and the uncle was running out of things to amuse him with.



Finally, the uncle had an idea. "There's no one around for miles, why don't you grab a gun, take the dogs, and go shooting?" This seemed to cheer the nephew up, and off he went, dogs in trail.

That afternoon, the nephew returned. "How did you enjoy that?" asked the uncle.

"It was great!" exclaimed the nephew. "Got any more dogs?"