



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

May—June 2011

It's All How You See It

By Bob Van Domelen

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.³ For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isaiah 43.1-3)

Sometimes the letters that come to me are very difficult to read and even harder to answer. They are filled with words of fear or anger, situations almost impossible to imagine, yet always with a clear voice calling out "Please help!" There are also letters filled with plans for a future that others might call mere dreaming, a desire to serve in some type of ministry, or a belief in reconciliation with family, friends, and community.

While I hope my responses never sound like a form letter, in the literally thousands of letters I have answered there is usually a similarity. I am not anyone's solution nor do I have a magic wand to wave. As clearly as I can, I point to the only source of all that is needed, God.

The world in which we live is filled with a little of everything—both good and bad—and as much as we would like, none of us will awake tomorrow morning this side of heaven to a perfect world. Only God is perfect. And this is where some of the conflict comes from.

Those who write the pain-filled letters ask God to remove that pain. Those who are filled with positive images ignore the world as it really is. They believe that everyone is anxiously awaiting their return and the message of how God changed their lives. The message is powerful; the audience may or may not listen. It is the same reality that Jesus faced while on earth as man.

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine

In the March-April edition of *Into the Light*, the main article was titled "I Have Called You Friends." The focus was on the need to be released from the label sex offender as the manner in which we describe ourselves. Doing so is not an act of denial so much as it is an opportunity to rebuild our lives around the identity of wholeness.

For me, this verse confirms my motivation. Most of my life was spent in fear of having others know my darker side—not just the offenses I committed but the desires that crowded out the good that I should have been experiencing. I won't suggest that I am free of all fear but I *will* state that fear does not drive my life in the manner in once did.

I can say this because I have fully accepted the reality that I have been redeemed in God's eyes. All of society doesn't see me in that same light, but I cannot control that.

Being summoned by name is not like standing in a crowd and then hearing someone call out "Hey, you!" God is so much more personal than that. When I hear "Hey, Bob" in my spiritual heart, there is the warmth to the words that gets my attention.

In the early days of prison, it often felt like the system owned me and controlled everything about me. But their ownership meant they had the power to take away as much as they wanted or deny me the freedom of all choice other than to obey.

At some point, however, I heard and believed in my spiritual heart, "Hey, Bob. You are *mine!*" As I opened myself to those words, I came to understand that God did not take away. He gave me everything! His gifts sometimes took me time to recognize and to separate from what I *thought* He should be giving me, but I am much better at seeing these days.

When you pass through the waters,

I will be with you;

There is a powerful truth in these words, a truth that speaks to the desperate, fear-filled letters that I receive. Simply stated, there *will* be waters that we all will have to pass through. Being a child of God is not a golden pass that eliminates the waters, raging or not. Nor does God provide a team of engineers to build a crossing bridge.

Some might see "I will be with you" as a disappointing phrase, especially if God doesn't remove the water or build the bridges. But in the context of faith, however, "I will be with you" is an incredible promise.

***and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.***

Whether we are able to pass through or not doesn't alter the reality of God's presence. Yet, I won't deny that some situations we face could alter life in ways we would never have chosen. You might not be released from prison when you believe you should. You might not have a place to live, a job to enable you to support your basic needs, or even a community willing to accept you. None of these situations would be on our wish list but they do not have the power to alter the truth—"I will be with you."

When you walk through the fire,

you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.

How is this verse possible? I have wondered if Isaiah was saying "When you face the fire of opposition, you won't be harmed. That opposition cannot consume or alter your

faith.” Maybe. But in Daniel 3, there really is a fire, set to burn up the three young men who dared to defy the command that they obey false gods.

Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar “I believe that the God we serve *can* deliver us, but even if God chooses not to do so, we will never serve your gods or worship the image of gold.” His statement of faith defines his relationship with God. Nothing, Daniel points out, not even death could change that.

Some of you might be saying, “I don’t think I have that kind of faith,” and I confess that it seems a bit overwhelming to me, too. It’s nice to share “I would do anything for God” with members of a Bible study because it is a noble, faith-filled statement. How about “Even if I don’t get out of prison, even if I have to struggle to find a job or a place to live, or even I don’t ever feel accepted by anyone, I will do anything for you, Lord.” I’m not sure how one’s faith grows to that extent, but I think Daniel would approve.

***For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior***

To those without faith, none of what Isaiah wrote and certainly none of what I have shared makes any sense. It is only by faith that this declaration can be completely and open-heartedly received. If we believe that God spoke this to Isaiah, if we believe God spoke through the prophets, and if we believe that Jesus came so that we might live for all eternity, then our course of action is clear. It isn’t easy, but it *is* clear.

We continue to live each day in the presence of God. We surrender whatever in us stands in the way of God’s love flowing through our lives. We stand as witnesses of change—not with pride or haughty attitude, but with deep humility, for it is in that attitude that others can see the truth of God’s love. It is not about us but about God. □

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.

I’m not an addict but I could be again. I finally settled on the “recovering addict” moniker used by so many. I don’t think recovering SO sounds right. Former SO? Person who committed a sex offense? Probably most would prefer we say “monster.”

I have been in constant prayer about how to achieve a balance of emotional, psychological and spiritual soundness and have only come to one conclusion. God reveals answers at the pace that God wishes to do so.

For the record department in heaven, when you use that label in *Into the Light* I am no longer one who sees it as sex offender but as former sex offender and as an opportunity to make that enlightening distinction myself when God provides the opportunity.

I enjoyed the Nov-Dec 2010 edition of *Into the Light*. The article “There Is Life After Prison” by Bob B made an impression on me and I appreciated what he wrote. I liked the honesty and realness of it. He didn’t “pretty it up” and

give false hope or minimize the struggles of release and yet he didn’t come across as beaten.

Thank you for your latest newsletter. As I read it I did notice the matching grant. I have literally next to nothing but I do know about cheerful giving and seed sowing. I would like nothing better than to give what I can to help further the Kingdom of God through your critically needed ministry; for the many years of your encouragement to me. Your work and ministry is nothing less than the Lord’s extension of grace, encouragement and challenge to the “pariahs of society” as the world views us. Jesus wasn’t afraid to touch the leper.

I have not committed a sexual offense in over 20 years, but beyond that today I *hate* such behavior and fight against it. Why should I accept such a label (SO)? A label such as Megan’s Law registrant or even *former* sex offender would be true though. It is also part of my relapse prevention to not accept or allow myself to receive such labels or any toxic words from people.

1996 was my release date from the slammer and God has slammed me with grace and prosperity ever since. Wow!

I do have to hear and accept “sex offender” as designed by society. But in my heart my identity is based on who I am in Christ—or at the very least that I should accept that truth of my identity in Christ.

I know “sex offender” is a tag that will follow me the rest of my life and though it be distasteful, it is the way people will see me. But it is not the way God sees me and His is the only opinion that should matter to us.

I wonder where I am at in my spiritual growth. Am I still in the caterpillar stage? Am I serving? Learning? Growing? Sharing?

I know the choices are mine and I just need to keep choosing good over evil. Sounds simple when I see it on paper.

I know that God wants for me to be in health and to prosper, but I feel sick. How do I get better?

If we desire to be forgiven, the only answer is our trusting in God and releasing others in forgiveness. By holding onto our shame, we are actually blocking the pathway of God’s blessing in our lives and denying others the chance to experience us as we are meant to be experienced. When we choose to live life as whole members of the Body, we become blessings to others and open the door to blessings for even those we have hurt the most—our victims and their families.

When I awaken each and every morning, God is still with me and extending His innumerable thoughts toward me. As David must have felt, this kind of knowledge is out of my control but I know it is too wonderful for me!

I've been waiting for some time to locate my own abuser— just so I can tell him that I have forgiven him. I refuse to hang onto negative feelings anymore.

Forgiveness isn't a statement that says "What you did to me was okay" but more an act of will that says "I'm not going to let what happened keep me in bondage another second. I choose freedom!"

Much as I would like to simply ignore the results of my pending hearing and put it in God's hands, my spirit is still troubled. I do trust God yet I dread more time in prison if that should be the decision. Hey, even Christ wasn't too thrilled about what was coming up next. Can't pretend it away.

It's unfortunate that the majority of the men I talk to about release share only negative plans. It's no wonder some many return to prison.

The story about re-entry by Bob B was really great. I'm sure many will take encouragement from it. Look how many times Peter fell and failed Jesus but in the end he became a strong witness.

God has us right where He wants us. If He wants us somewhere else, He will send us there!

God's people are being destroyed because the truth of sin and how to live godly lives is no longer being preached from the pulpit. Pray that God would move in our services and that the true Gospel will be once again preached.

Sometimes I get this feeling that my faith and spiritual encouragement must sound so naïve to those who are suffering in ways I can't even fathom. I try to remember all of the things I have read, especially about those grieving, just to be there even when I can't solve their problems for them.

In my opinion, declaring that I am the "righteousness in Christ Jesus" or that I am "more than a conqueror" in secular recovery settings causes the other members of the group to think that I am in denial. However, in reality, I am fully aware of my past and what I am capable of doing. Those in secular groups may not be able to understand this freedom, so I use terminology that they *will* understand but that speaks the truth.

Labels and Tags

By Jim Van Horn

By your words and actions you set a trend
That transmits approval that it's okay to upend.
Rather than being positive and trying to mend
By your words and actions you destroy and rend.
But if you want to restore, this I recommend:
Treat everyone you meet as in need of a friend.

Labels and tags to confuse and confound
Names that demean and throw lives to the ground

But when we realize that we are all in need
Then we will find ways for each to succeed.
For it is through the helping hand we extend
That one who was once a stranger becomes a friend.

With words we encourage and with words we destroy
It all depends upon the tactics we employ.
But Jesus shows us a much better way
Through words that restore and healing convey.
It's within the kingdom that we ascend
For the Master desires to call each of us friend.

Don't let labels and tags mutilate and bend
For to do so you are sure to offend
But lift up another and a helping hand lend
And to a righteous character we must defend.
For here is the message we must send:
With Jesus we have a trusted, true friend.

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 the issues of rejection, that healing and acceptance will be theirs.
- For all who fear the future, that they can see God waiting there for them.
- For families struggling with issues of betrayal, that they come to believe that God is the source of all restoration.
- For those struggling with re-entry, that they believe that God will meet their needs.
- For all support systems that bring hope and encouragement to those who need both, 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.

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A Little Humor . . .

A few hundred years ago a cleric, a lawyer and an engineer were about to be guillotined. The cleric put his head on the block, they pulled the rope but nothing happened. The cleric stood up and declared that he'd been saved by divine intervention, so they let him go.

The lawyer put his head on the block and again the rope didn't release the blade. The lawyer claimed he couldn't be executed twice for the same crime so, like the cleric, he was set free.

The executioners grabbed the engineer and shoved his head onto the guillotine block. The man looked up at the release mechanism and said, "Wait a minute, I see your problem!"

