



# Into the Light

*All things are possible with God*

March-April 2009

## May All Be Healed

By Bob Van Domelen

<sup>26</sup>At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."<sup>27</sup>The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain." (Hebrews 12:26-27 NIT)

Every now and then I get a letter from an offender who has heard about this ministry and is looking for help. He (and sometimes a she) shares his story beginning with his childhood up to his present environment, confesses to his sin, and desperately offers to do whatever is necessary to make amends to those he has abused.

He recognizes that his status as a sex offender in some prisons places his life in danger, yet he asks to be on the mailing list for this newsletter. He is willing to be exposed as a baby-raper, a tree jumper, or any other hate-filled description other inmates might throw in his direction just to do the right thing.

His letter focuses on his victim(s) and all those affected by his actions, all the lives he has turned upside down merely to satisfy some perverse desire. Though many in his community might not believe it, he is horrified at what he has done and what he has become. But even if not directly stated, there is another element of his story that demands attention. It is his own healing—the resolution of what happened to him as a child—that hangs in the balance.

It is, I think, a reasonable concern held by prison therapists that some offenders will see what they did no more than a direct result of what happened to them. This attitude is not so much denial as a shifting of attention, but the consequences are significant.

Unless checked, the offender who fails to acknowledge the seriousness of what he has done literally abuses his victim(s) again because they just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Unless checked, this individual becomes a molestation waiting to happen once released.

In the matter of molestation, the victim must come first—his or her needs must be met and assurances that blame cannot be theirs must be made. As far as I am concerned, this is not negotiable although I confess that at the time of my own arrest, my victims were important but it was *my* life and *my* family that took that position. By God's grace, however, that changed.

A survey I offered years ago showed that over 80% of those in prison for molestation had been molested or abused themselves as children. Significantly, these individuals shared that what they did to their victims mirrored what was done to them.

Certainly not all offenders were molested and to some treatment specialists it is immaterial whether or not they were. The focus of most sex offender treatment programs is simple: appropriate victim empathy and a sufficient understanding of personal deviant behavior to make future molestation improbable.

There is, however, a question that is present in almost all of the letters that come: "What about fixing what happened to me?" Some even share the following: "If I even mention my own childhood abuse, the other guys in the group will do a negative write-up on me. I will be told I am in denial." The potential for termination from the group is enough to keep such thoughts silent.

### **removing of what can be shaken**

Situations like sex offender treatment are not easily found in Scripture but I believe that if God so desires, He will shake our world so that all that is not of Him will be loosened. What remains is the person each of us is created to be *in His image and likeness*. What remains is complete faith and trust.

Given the secular nature of sex offender treatment programs and given the guidelines that dictate what can or cannot be said in group, offenders who have themselves been molested or abused must see the program as belonging to the state.

Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." (Mark 12:17) In a simple sense, anyone in prison is a ward of the state prison, so as much as I would like to argue that treatment programs should contain modules to deal with an offender's childhood abuse, I am inclined to think that in most programs it will not happen.

But I do believe that belonging to God means being called to receive healing, to make changes, and to deepen that relationship God offers. The men and women who seem to achieve this are those who have complied with the treatment program but did not ignore the spiritual program that was theirs.

To look at the feelings of those they molested is to look at themselves as children. To recognize the pain, betrayal of trust, and despair in their victims, is to look through a window to their own souls.

For most of my life, I have feared the anger that lies just below the surface of my consciousness. It is a beast that when provoked can result in slamming my foot on the accelerator of my car when cut off by someone, the look of complete disdain when someone says something I take too personally, or perhaps the worst, the silence I bury myself in when I cannot express what is in my state of anger.

Is it so far-fetched to see that this anger comes from times of helplessness as a victim? Is it a reaction that

screams out words or actions that could not be found when I was being taken advantage of? Or is my anger the unresolved chaos during a time when others told me something was good that certainly was not—a lie I taught my victims to believe?

This is just one example of the after-effects of molestation, one of possibly many that I don't even recognize.

The purpose in treatment is not so much resolution as recognition. Seeing familiar situations that previously foretold abuse, offenders learn alternative choices. They are not taught to believe the situations will disappear—just how to handle them. And how is that not a good thing for *all* of us in any situation?

Likewise, healing for me and you is not to understand or have dealt with everything that has ever happened to us or by us. Healing is to know that we are not forever locked into a behavioral response based on what we have done. We have a choice.

So when we think of our victims and what we did to them, we need to get better at seeing what happened to us. The solution is not to strike out at those who abused us; the solution is to not allow our abusers to have any more control over our lives.

We are responsible for what we did to our victims and what we did cannot be placed on the shoulders of those who abused us. There can be no "If that had not happened" statements when faced with our deeds.

What we can do is turn what is learned in treatment around so that it faces the lives of any of us who have been victims. What we can do is ask God for the gift of appropriate love—for others as well as for ourselves. What we can do is surrender each and every day to whatever healing grace comes our way—in treatment, in the chapel, or in our cells/homes. What we can do is pray sincerely that all may be healed.

*"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."* (John 15.16)

## ***Bits & Pieces***

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

If one doesn't want to reoffend, behavioral techniques can help. Similarly, cognitive therapy can help someone restructure his or her thinking. Both techniques used together are even better. I believe that true healing and transformation can only come through the work of God in our life. God himself empowers us to convert and live holy lives. I suppose some secular psychological procedures could help, particularly as an immediate precaution once released, as well as for nonbelievers, but we need to be remade, not simply patched over.

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Every day I stand at turning points. My thoughts and actions sometimes propel me toward growth or turn me down the road to old habits. Sometimes turning points are beginning, as when I decided to start praising instead of condemning someone -- even family members. Sometimes turning points are when I begin to ask for help instead of going it

alone. At other times, turning points are endings, such as when I clearly see the need to stop worrying, festering resentments or crippling self-seeking. My shortcomings tempt me daily, so I also have opportunities daily to become aware of them.

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I believe the essence of any growth is a willingness to make a change for the better and then an unremitting willingness to shoulder whenever responsibility that entails.

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Every now and then I pause to take a really good look at my progress. More and more of my garden is weeded each time I look, but each time I look I also find new weeds sprouting where I thought I had made my final pass with the blade. As I head back to get the newly sprouted weed (it is easier when they are young), I take a moment to admire how large the growing flowers and vegetables are and my labors are rewarded. My faithfulness grows and bears fruit.

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I did have a visit and it was really a great one! We talked about growing up, being here, and getting out. I told my brother that a big percentage of sex offenders come back not because of a new crime but because of a violation either of our probation or parole. My brother responded, "What can I do to help you stay out?" Wow! I was thankful to hear that.

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I was abused as a child. For years I resented sexual offenders yet I became one. I don't understand why I would do something I hated when I was forced to endure it. My sexual abuse was a secret for 12 years.

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The *Bits & Pieces* section of the last newsletter was extraordinary! More than one spoke to me and made me realize that I'm not the only one with wicked dreams and fantasies. Not to give Satan any credit but 50 years of addiction is not easy to overcome. Those who live in my old world are the loneliest people on earth. Nothing is ever satisfying.

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(Regarding a small group of inmates) the group is going great. I've asked them to hold me accountable daily and see at least one of them every day, because having to face their questioning truly helps me battle the tempt nation to lust and masturbate. These brothers are a true Godsend. They have real concern for my growth and maturity.

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Luckily I am on a sex offender block and involved in the SA group. Today I am a much better person than I was three years ago, one year ago, or yesterday. With ongoing Blessings from God, I will continue to become a new and improved person.

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A young man I know has been ostracized because of his charges. I've tried to give him some mentoring but he's trapped in his own worries. The moral is that if we glorify our faults, we will quickly be defined by them. If we glorify Christ, we will be defined as Christians regardless of our faults.

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(Regarding comments about forgetting the past) If people were to speak of forgetting as meaning "forgetting to let what Christ has cleansed hold me back any longer," or

"forgetting to wallow in ongoing guilt and shame over what Christ has cleansed," that I could agree with forgetting the past. But if someone uses forgetting to mean repressing our feelings or refusing to repent by facing up to and acknowledging our wrongdoing, all we are really doing is failing to learn and setting ourselves up to fall again.

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My personal prayer time is much more profound than even six months ago. And even in a place as godless as this, I have seized every opportunity to "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [me] to give the reason for the hope that [I] have." (1 Peter 3:15). The opportunities are sometimes frequent and sometimes not, but they exist.

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Prior to my incarceration, I was saved, but I walked away from the Lord for several years. In prison I had come to my wits end. I often say I was so low I couldn't see the bottom. Suicide began to look like a good solution but that's something I vowed never to do. It's a permanent solution to a temporary problem. My only other option was to return to the one that had never left my side--Jesus Christ.

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The facilitators here are concerned that my lack of being discontented will lead to careless living on the outside. In effect, they feel that a person that is not angry or depressed in prison will not do all in his power not to return.

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I pray for your ministry and thank the Lord that he put me in a place where I am relatively safe and have Christian men to fellowship with.

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I know that God loves me so if I die I can be in the presence of that love all the time. I just want to be loved and I'm not getting it here on this earth. Please pray for me and tell me how to get through this. Sorry this letter is so messed up but I do not know what to do anymore.

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How do you look at yourself and see a good person? I want help so badly and I don't know how to get it.

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Satan would have us believe that there are times and circumstances where there is no way of escape. And when we surrender to that lie, we feel condemned all over again. But Romans 12.1-2 tells us the truth. If we fail to appropriate God's Word in our lives, we set ourselves up for idolatry. At all times we must focus upon God and his promises.

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I think that in regards to temptation, if I am doing the things I need to do and if I am conscious of when I am susceptible to temptation, that knowledge will help curtail some of the problem. For instance, when I drink things are worse; so I don't drink. If I'm depressed, things are worse; so I work on my perception of things and look at who I am in Christ. I need to avoid situations that could lead to a relapse--particularly at times of depression. I am working on the simple things in my life. I try to maintain a good diet, making wise eating choices in the chow hall. I don't buy junk food from the store. I try and get a good balanced amount of sleep, though sometimes that varies in one extreme or another (too much or too little) due to my job. The exercise thing I am really not too good at it but I play a lot of sports and I walk.

## *All things are possible with God!*

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 the Prisoner's Family Conference in El Paso, that all who attend will find encouragement.
- For the workshop Barbara Hansen and Bob will co-present ("The Voices of the Victim and Perpetrator: Is Reconciliation and Restoration Possible?"), that God will use this unique opportunity to plant seeds of hope and encouragement.
- For those who experience despair, that they will be touched each day by someone willing to reach out in support.
- For the Support Group (Wisconsin), that their ongoing efforts to promote effective resolution for those in civil commitment will find success.
- For those who feel God has stopped loving them, that God will fill them to bursting with His undeniable love
- 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*



A turtle was walking down an alley in New York when he was mugged by a gang of snails. A police detective came to investigate and asked the turtle if he could explain what happened.

The turtle looked at the detective with a confused look on his face and replied "I don't know, it all happened so fast."

OK. . .that was short so. . .

A doctor says to his patient, "I have bad news and worse news".

"Oh dear, what's the bad news?" asks the patient.

The doctor replies, "You only have 24 hours to live."

"That's terrible", said the patient. "How can the news possibly be worse?"

The doctor replies, "I've been trying to contact you since yesterday."