



Into the Light

July-August 2007

Matthew 19.26

Not A Stranger

By Bob Van Domelen

⁹"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matthew 7.9-10 NIT)

I recently received a letter from a young man in prison for sexual assault whose sentence reflected a growing nationwide trend toward lengthy terms of confinement. My own sentence structure in the 1980s reflected what probably fit a list of sentence guidelines judges used at the time, but my emotions are often quite mixed when confronted with the sentences individuals receive in 2007.

Sentence issues aside, a single emotion ran through his letter that went far deeper. "My dad ruined my life."

After answering his letter, I found myself considering his words, his anger, and his desire to somehow put his own life back together. I also started thinking about victims and their relationship to their offenders. According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin for 2005, 73% of all sex offenders were known to their victims; 28% of that total was referred to as "Intimate" which I took to mean family.

Give him a stone, a snake

Numbers prove things but numbers do very little to tell us about people—victims, offenders, and those left in the wake of molestation.

Children thrive on love, learn by example, and grow to the extent they are able in the environments in which they live. At the core of their development, though, is the well of love from which they draw on a daily basis or the lack of love creating a desert that will eventually kill the potential that should have been theirs.

Adults create children and, if all things are equal, do their best to feed, clothe, educate, and above all love them. There are, I think, times when parents, relatives, and friends fall short in one of those categories. The reasons they do so are as many and as varied as the number of individuals closely connected to a child. But for the most part, the stones and snakes are only temporary setbacks and are corrected.

Molestation is not a tiny pebble or a harmless garter snake. Even if unrecognized as such by victims at the time of the abuse, left to hide in some corner of a child's mind a sexual violation will eventually take on monster proportions.

"How could you do that?" is a question that often erupts, boiled by rage and made furious by betrayal. "I don't know" is not an acceptable answer. Denial in the face of proof adds even deeper insult. Yet most offenders, myself included, stared without speaking or physically turned away from the question. How does someone who has fallen so

far away from being a healthy adult provide an answer that will make any kind of sense? One doesn't.

I reject the notion that child molesters are born child molesters and I certainly reject the notion that God would have had any part. If I am correct in what I just stated, then child molesters develop somehow. How? Were they victims themselves? Again, the variations are numerous and, I believe, valid to the extent that eventually molesting a child was more possible than not because of those circumstances.

That last sentence might sound like denial but I will suggest that it isn't. Regardless of circumstances there always lies the ability to make the right choice and reject everything less than the right choice. Denial, on the other hand, is minimizing harmful behavior using words like "I only . . ." or "She came on to me" or "I was drunk at the time and didn't know what I was doing."

An offender who grows up in an abusive home, is molested, or is shuffled from one foster care facility to the next has grown up in an environment that co-exists with circumstances no child should have to face. Such an environment creates the potential for molestation but does not demand it. And if the mail I have received over the years is any indication, my examples are just a few compared to the potential list I could make.

Though you are evil

At some point I defined my own prison time as a period of forced separation not only from those I loved but also from those places where I fed my hidden life. At some point, I found myself free enough from the compulsive nature of my addictions to see my victims *and* many of the reasons I did what I did.

If treatment ignores this kind of parallel recognition, it's my opinion that the hoped for results, an effective relapse prevention program, will fall short. Others have shared with me, however, that in many programs even a discussion of their own victimization is rejected as a form of denial. So if that is true, is there hope for change? My answer is yes.

None of us can go back and undo what was done—by us or to us. We can, however, find some balance by accepting complete responsibility for our sins, by accepting the consequences of confinement, and by doing what it takes to correct whatever in us needs correcting.

We find balance by placing our faith and trust in God. Some argue that they don't need God but I cannot. I have reached a point in my own journey where I can see not only the darkness of my crimes but also the light of God's gift of love in my life. God *does* provide me with the gift of His presence day after day after day. For my part, I have to be willing to look for that presence.

It has been twenty-two years since my arrest and I do not feel I am the same man who was arrested in 1985. There are still rough edges and there is *always* the potential for reoffending if I fail to remain vigilant, but I *am* changing. Most of all, I greet each day with hope and enthusiasm.

That Bureau of Justice Statistics report confirmed that 73% of all sex offenders deal daily with the reality that they molested someone they knew—someone who knew, trusted, and maybe even loved them. I am among that group and it never gets easier acknowledging that. It's not supposed to get easier.

I've learned that giving up is not a solution nor is moving to some remote spot void of people. The solution is not an easy one but it does work. On more than one occasion, I have printed the entire Serenity Prayer in this newsletter and I do so again.

The Serenity Prayer

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.

--Reinhold Niebuhr

Most of us were not strangers to our victims and in some ways you and I are not strangers, either. We can and must support one and encourage one another. And should we meet along the way, I pray that we will always remind one another to persevere. Our victims deserve nothing less. □

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 361, Waukesha, WI 53187-0361. And if you cannot contribute, please pray!



Broken Yoke Ministries is celebrating 20 years of ministry this year. *Into the Light* is celebrating 10 years. Begun in 1997 with a mailing list of 43, we now mail to 2119, enter 416 institutions, and continue to grow!

God is not only good—God is GREAT!



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 10 years of *Into the Light*, that God continues to bless this outreach of hope and encouragement.
- For those challenging legislation that does little or nothing to protect children while continuing to punish offenders, that courts will recognize and be able to separate appropriate legislation from punishing legislation.
- For sex offenders who were themselves victims of child molestation, that they find healing for their own wounds as they learn empathy for their victims.
- For churches considering ministry to sex offenders, that they be blessed and affirmed by reaching out as they do.
- For offenders who develop support groups in prisons where treatment is not available, that their efforts will serve those most hungering for this support.
- 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.
- (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.

Another opportunity to pray

Josh Lunsford (18), son of Mark Lunsford, was arrested for sexual contact with his girlfriend, aged 14. Josh's younger sister, Jessica, had been raped and murdered by an individual on the Ohio sex offender registry. Lunsford Sr. formed a foundation in his daughter's name and pushed for tougher legislation for *all* registered sex offenders. If convicted, his son will be required to register, will have to deal with restricted living zones, and will probably find difficulty in achieving some of his life ambitions.

Some might shout, "Let's see how you like the rules you created when they get applied to your son!" but I am praying that a second and even third look will be given to the current sex offender registration laws. As they exist now, there is no difference between someone who has sexual contact with an under-aged girlfriend and someone who rapes and murders a child—and there should be.

I do have a problem with the age spread in this particular case. I do have a problem with the argument that it was called consensual contact. But I have no problem with looking for a higher moral road. In some states, this offense would warrant a 25-year sentence and, from where I stand, that makes little sense.

Bits & Pieces

From a letter: "The battle rages on within me to keep the dirt from my mind as it mixes with my tears of regret to give me the name mud—mud that can only be wiped clean by the blood of the Lamb."

From a letter: "If I was going to molest again, keeping me 1000 feet from any school bus stop won't stop me. What will stop me is giving me someone to be accountable to, accept me back into the community, and help me be accountable for my time and action."

From a letter: "We sex offenders need to be examples through our behavior to show people that we are not merely preparing to pounce and to label some laws as unnecessary. After all, it was our actions which set these wheels in motion in the first place. It also needs to be our new actions and attitudes that will slow and change the direction of the wheel."

From a letter: "I love my job but I get very tired sometimes. Most guys there don't have my attitude that this job is the same as any job on the outside and should be treated as such."

From a letter: "When I sin, God does not let go of my hand and no matter how hard I try to let go of Him, He doesn't let go of me!"

From a letter: "I have been in [civil commitment] treatment since 2002. The treatment I have been receiving is very infrequent at best. Nevertheless, I have been able to complete over 16 different groups successfully and am at the highest level offered, yet I do not know if the court would sign my release."

Comment: There has been a significant increase in the number of individuals confined in civil commitment and held as such based on a need for more intensive treatment. If letters I receive from around the country is any indication, however, these situations exist more for confinement than for treatment. Something has to change!

From Anchorage Daily News (Feb. 13): "A study of nearly 2000 Alaska ex-cons challenges the widely held conviction that sex criminals are more likely to strike again than other lawbreakers when they get out of prison. The study says only 3 percent of sex offenders were convicted of another sex crime within three years of release from jail.

"Rep. Anna Fairclough (Eagle River Republican) was unfazed by the Alaska report, which the Judicial Council says is the first of its kind here. Sex offenders learn how not to get caught again, she said. 'Some of these people are very, very bright. They're just very, very bad.'"

From the San Diego Union-Tribune (May 7): "A Carlsbad church that's been the center of national attention since a registered sex offender asked to worship there has approved a policy that could pave the way for this to happen. The policy calls for screening people who work with children and institutes procedures for dealing with convicted sex offenders who want to participate in the congregation.

Another Story to Share

By Brian

I am writing to you in response to the challenge in the most recent edition of *Into the Light*. I should have been writing all along, but I get busy with daily chores and put it off. I couldn't, however, let your challenge go by as I consider myself a success story.

I got out in October 2003 and within a month I had a job. I realize that delivering papers may seem below some people's dignity, but I needed a job.

I lived with my Mom who had supported me during my ten year imprisonment and my first priority was to pay her back for every cent she sent me while I was locked up. Additionally, she got me a five hundred dollar car. I wasn't picky. I needed transportation.

My first advice to anyone soon to be released is don't say, "I deserve" anything. You take what you can get and work from there.

I also owed court costs including the airfare for my extradition. After six months I got all the money paid back to everyone. I then started saving up toward a good truck and so I could rent my own place. Almost exactly a year after my release I walked into my own rented townhouse.

I took a second job driving a truck and a third driving another truck. That's right, I work close to sixteen hours a day with a little less on weekends. I am now saving to buy my own house. The state helped me with CDL training so I could drive those trucks.

I want to comment on the lack of sex offender treatment in prison. I was locked up in Virginia and was on the waiting list [for a program] until my release. I kept getting moved to different prisons and had to start at the bottom of the list over and over.

Instead of waiting, I contacted several child abuse recovery programs on the outside and described my plight. They responded by sending me books and workbooks. They also sent me the names of others who could provide additional help. I am not going to give you any more information than that. If you want it bad enough, you will do the work.

I pray for all prisoners everywhere, those inside locked facilities and those outside locked in their own self-made prison. -B-

Note: I have known Brian for some time and have shared many letters with him. His faith is what motivates him each and every day and on more than one occasion he encouraged me more than I think I ever encouraged him. Some of you, however, were looking for God's name in each paragraph and felt frustrated because you couldn't see that. God is there for Brian—each and every day, each and every hour. As I have shared before, St. Francis wrote "Go and preach the good news, and if absolutely necessary, use words."



Some would argue our country is far from perfect, but it is our country and countless numbers have given their lives for it.

Happy 4th of July!

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Waukesha, WI 53187-0361

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Dated Material

A Little Humor

Two friends rented a boat and fished on the same lake every day. One day they caught 30 fish. The man in the front of the boat said to his friend, "Mark this spot so that we can come back here again tomorrow."

The next day, when they were driving to rent the boat, the man asked his friend, "Did you mark that spot?"

His friend replied, "Yeah, I put a big 'X' on the bottom of the boat."

The first one said, "You big dummy! What if we don't get that same boat?"

