



Into the Light

January-February 2007

Matthew 19.26

Restored

By Bob Van Domelen

¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to say to him [Naaman], "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." ¹¹ But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. (2 Kings 5.10-11)

Perhaps one of the most often heard statements about sex offenders is, "They can't change." To prove the point, a percentage is usually stated such as "75% of sex offenders released from prison will reoffend." That number, by the way, keeps getting higher and I never see a reference to a specific study justifying its use.

From where I stand, however, the issue of lowering the rate of recidivism or reoffending comes down to two things. First, there has to be a desire by others to restore an offender, and secondly, the offender has to be willing to go through the process of restoration.

In a recent sermon, my pastor shared a piece of history that had me knowing without a doubt that it would definitely be the basis for an article in this newsletter.

On May 21, 1972, a man attacked one of the most important sculptures in the world, the *Pieta* by Michelangelo, with a hammer. The damage caused by the 15 blows was extensive.

Over the years, literally several hundred offenders have shared their lives in letters sent to this ministry. Their beginnings could have been compared to the perfection of the *Pieta*; each life, however, attacked in some way with the bluntness and damaging power of that hammer.

Occasionally, it is a single crisis in life that literally replaces the light in a soul with darkness, but I am inclined to think that more often it is a series of blows that allows individuals to believe that the terrible choices they make are good choices. In the eyes of an observing public, however, the behaviors eventually become an individual's identity because "It's just the way he/she is."

In the case of the *Pieta*, a panel of experts was called in and the damaged statue was compared to photos of its original. Then in a painstaking fashion over a period of 10 months, the broken parts of the statue were reconstructed. When completed, observers could not find the flaws.

To protect against further damage, the decision was also made to enclose the work of art in a bullet-proof casing. According to officials, the casing is a sign of the times we live in.



Go wash yourself

In a more perfect world, someone who struggles with age-inappropriate attractions would be able to find help. Trained specialists would gather, do preliminary studies, and then recommend a course of action. Underlying their sense of commitment would be the recognition of that individual's value as someone priceless and worthy of restoration.

But we live in a very imperfect world, a world in which we refrain from sharing our failings with others—especially failings that do not fit the norm of acceptance. Bill W, for example, found stiff resistance to the notion of publicly acknowledging alcoholism much less having meetings where others with the same problem could meet for support and encouragement. But he persevered and a movement was born.

I've known both men and women who have age-inappropriate attractions, have never acted on them, yet felt disclosing those attractions to anyone, including a therapist, would be the end of their career and a justified exclusion from society.

"Go, wash yourself" is not unlike being told "Go, see a therapist." Sounds pretty simple, but strugglers of age-inappropriate attractions are really no different than the

leprous Naaman was in his day. They might hesitate for a different reason, but whatever the reason, the step to healing is not taken.

Naaman does eventually listen to the words of wisdom from his servant and puts aside his pride and preconceived ideas as to how healing should take place. After seven times surfacing from the water, his skin was made clean and he returned to thank Elisha.

Conventional therapy is a long way from understanding age-inappropriate attraction, but there are more theories in place today

than 20 years ago. Sadly, I think a lot of people really don't want solutions to be found. It is much easier to hate and confine than treat and support.

I know I have written this in the past, but it bears repeating: victims and offenders alike need to find wholeness, and society does neither any favors by locking the individual in a victim or offender state of mind. Victims can and do heal. So do offenders. Healing is not forgetting; it is moving through the pain of what happened and finding ways of preventing a repeat of that behavior.

If all a victim hears is "You are a victim. You are forever damaged!" then that child will live an entire life as a damaged victim. And in a way, a society that refuses to address the label itself for either victim or offender destines

itself to little change for either, for we often become what others tell us we are.

Then and Now

It is said that one small piece of the *Pieta* was left out for a period of time and then inserted later as a signed of a completed restoration.

For the sex offender given the opportunity to make change, that one piece might be something like the sex offender registry—a permanent reminder by the state of an offender's actions. But the registry itself has absolutely no power in protecting children and is, I think, a false blanket of security.

When all is said and done, though, it is my belief that nothing lasting comes without the active presence of God in the process; nothing lasting comes until our neighbors are willing to assist in the process of restoration; and nothing lasting comes until we all believe it is possible.

The *Pieta* is a wonderful piece of art and recognized as one of the truly magnificent sculptures of all time. But Jesus didn't die for the *Pieta*. He died for us. And that makes us infinity more important and more precious in God's eyes. □

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 who minister to victims, that they continue to help them reclaim their lives by helping victims move from being survivors to being overcomers.
- For those being considered for civil commitment, that they not despair or give up on themselves.
- For those in treatment, that they set for themselves an image of wholeness and not of brokenness.
- For those feeling a sense defeat so often found in prisons, that they believe in the victory of the cross.
- For support ministries dealing with sex offenders, that they grow in number to reach the thousands who are not being ministered to in their situations.
- For churches, that they see their role as Christ's body to victims and offenders alike.
- 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.

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!

My Story—My Thoughts

By "A"

It was February 4, 2004 and I was running a meeting out of the town. As an environmental project manager, I ran many such meetings and this one was typical. The vibration of my cell phone interrupted my thoughts. My wife's hysterical voice was at the other end. "Hey, talk to these agents going through your computer," she screamed. My entire world fell apart right there in that meeting room. Those pictures were my deepest, darkest secret, and one I had fully intended to take to the grave with me. But God had other plans.

I'm writing this from federal prison nearly halfway through a 63 month sentence for downloading those images. God has shown me much and brought me a long way since that day in February, and I would like to share some of it with you. Although my perspective is as an inmate, what I have to say is for everyone dealing with inappropriate attractions, whether you are just struggling with thoughts, you are currently in prison, or you have already done time.

So just how do we deal with these weaknesses? What is healing anyway? Can we pray the inappropriate attraction away, or can we only expect to manage it? Healing isn't easy. I have prayed many times for God to take this garbage out of my life, and he seems to be answering my prayers one step at a time. Obviously, we need to begin with a relationship with the Lord. You must be a child of his and committed to seeing this through, with his grace, if you truly want to have victory over your problem. Then I am privileged to share with you what the Lord has done in my life.

Repent

I'm not talking about the "I am sorry I got caught" kind of repentance but the on your face before God kind. As soon as I arrived back at my motel room, I began to cry out to God. I was totally fed up with my life and desperately wanted to regain control. I hadn't cracked a Bible in a while but found a Gideon Bible and opened at midway, finding Psalm 51. I saw the heartfelt cry of David when he repented of his sexual sin, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

That verse became the cry of my heart. I would fall asleep with those words on my lips and awaken with them in my mind. I know God has forgiven me; it says so in 1John 1.9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness." Forgiveness, however, doesn't negate the consequences of sin. It didn't for David and it didn't for me.

Accept responsibility

My wife gave the phone to one of the agents who asked me if the pictures were mine. I could have asked him "What pictures?" Or I could have said they were my wife's. Or I could have said I wanted to talk to my attorney. Instead, I found myself saying, "Yes, they're mine." From the very beginning I took ownership of my offense, and you must too. Your abusive father didn't make you download those pictures, that cute little girl didn't seduce you, nor is God responsible for your choices. I made my own decisions. Me. No one else.

(continued on page 3)

Understand you have victims

This is tough if your problem is child pornography. At first I thought, "I didn't take those pictures. I don't know any of these kids, besides they aren't really real. They're just images." The Lord showed me that each picture, despite the smiles, represented a real, hurting child. In one of the most remarkable prayer times I have ever had, God made these children real, bringing image after image to my mind as I wept and prayed for each.

Consider a Christian 12 step program

These groups help relationships while you learn to understand yourself. Three of us here took ourselves through such a program and in the "making amends" step, I wrote a letter to my deceased father. I thought it would be a piece of cake and I did fine until I said, "Dad, I forgive you." I cried and cried as God peeled off layers of hurt.

Avoid second looks

The brain's output is derived from input and the more we scrutinize the input, the better is the output. Whatever, whether real or a picture, can be transplanted by your mind into inappropriate mental imagery, whether pornographic or not, needs to be avoided. I can picture your response now, so before you fire off a letter to Bob, let me articulate what you're thinking: "You're in prison where there are no kids and I have to live in the real world. Am I supposed to walk like I have blinders on?"

Whatever it takes. Jesus, in emphasizing his hatred of sexual sin said in Matthew 5: 29, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away." And yes, there are children in prison. They are on TV, in magazines, in newspapers, and in the visiting room.

There is a technique I learned from the book *Every Man's Battle* by Steve Arterburn called "bouncing the eyes." When you see someone with the potential to cause inappropriate thoughts, your eyes go immediately somewhere else. If I am reading my paper and see a picture of kids in the pool, my eyes are somewhere else. I couldn't even tell you how. They just are.

Dealing with mental imagery

You might wonder if it is okay to think lustful thoughts as long as you don't act out. Thinking is acting out! Maybe not legally, but in God's eyes it is. The verse before the Scripture in Matthew I just quoted says, "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Now don't misunderstand me. It is not sin to have an inappropriate mental imagery in your mind because you have no control over what shows up there. It's what you do with it that counts.

When you allow yourself to think about what's there and begin to process those mental images, you move into dangerous territory. The last time I allowed a mental image to produce lustful thoughts was February 3, 2004 so I know it can be done. At first it was a struggle. There were so many images and they just kept coming. The toughest times were when I was bored, tired, or otherwise idle. But there were other times, like the middle of a church service, when images would jump into my mind. I would disengage from the activity and take authority over the images or ask the Lord to remove them.

I discovered that with time the images decreased in quantity and intensity. Every day I asked the Lord to keep my mind pure and clean, and the images have virtually quit coming. Romans 13:14 says to "Clothe yourself with the

Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." The mind is absolutely and unequivocally the key to victory, and we are to fill it with wholesome thoughts--those that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable (Philippians 4:8). We are to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). When your thought life becomes obedient to Christ, there is no temptation to masturbate, which is the ultimate in self-satisfaction and sexual selfishness.

Select a secular treatment program

In this context, treatment means management. I was in one of these before my incarceration and these programs are becoming popular for those convicted of sex offenses, either during or after incarceration. You will learn to identify your physical and emotional triggers that begin the cycle which ends with molestation or other inappropriate behavior. You will be taught ways to derail this cycle and how to write a relapse prevention plan.

We can never let our guard down. 1 Cor.10:12 says, "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall." Here in my prison, we are privileged to have a track and I run every day. "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily tangles, and run with perseverance the race marked out for us." (Heb.12:1) It isn't a speed race and we aren't trying to beat anyone. As best I can tell, there isn't even a finish. It is a race of endurance. He gives us the desire and ability and we do the running—one lap at a time.

Will I ever be able to look at children with purity? I honestly don't know, but I do know that my diligence pleases him. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Bits & Pieces

From a letter: If you are about to be released, "The Shepherd's Ministry" is a *small* aftercare ministry with limited live-in space for those released from prison in Oregon. Write them at PO Box 3336, LaPine, OR, 97739. Sex offenders will be considered.

From the US Bureau of Justice Statistics: "In 2005 state legislators passed over 150 sex offender-related laws, more than double the number the year before, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. And this trend shows no sign of slowing; indeed, the volume of sex offender legislation appears to be increasing nationwide."

From the Coalition for Prisoners' Rights Newsletter (Oct 2006): "The Internet registry is targeted primarily to preventing stranger abuse. This type of abuse, however, accounts for only 6.7% of offenses against children. Over 70% of sexual offenses against children are committed by a relative or close friend of the family."

From an inmate letter: "The one thing wrong with doing nothing is that you never know when you are finished."

I recently received a note from a woman whose husband died. He had been on the mailing list for this newsletter but she didn't read it herself until a copy arrived after his death. She sent a small donation and said she would be read them in the future as a reminder to pray for sex offenders.