



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

November—December 2010

Season of Change

By Bob Van Domelen

[Reprint from September, 1998]

Everything on earth has its own time and its own season.
(Eccl.3.1)

The upper reaches of a maple tree just outside my window already shows autumnal coloring despite many remaining signs of summer. There are others in the area like it, I'm sure, but at the moment it stands apart.

I cannot look at the tree without being reminded of the many things I said I would do this summer, things that remain undone. Last spring my "to do" list for the summer was filled with reasonable expectations. The garage would be cleaned; the upstairs bathroom finally painted (after more than two years of seeing the gallon of paint sitting in a corner); a book outline would be written—all still waiting attention.

Making a "to do" list is a good thing even if not everything gets done. I wonder sometimes how many of us make such lists about things within ourselves needing attention. And I wonder, too, how many seasons come and go with our list still intact, still in the planning stages.

"Everyone uses profanity in prison. As soon as I am released, I'll clean up my act."

"Chapel services are nothing like church at home, so I don't go. When I get home, I'll start attending again."

"SOTP here is a joke. When I get out, I can get some professional help from a Christian counselor."

God makes everything happen at the right time. Yet none of us can ever fully understand all he has done, and he puts questions in our minds about the past and the future. (Eccl.3.11)

The tree mentioned earlier is changing, but it doesn't really have a choice in the matter. It's simply changing. You and I have a choice. We can say yes or no.

God doesn't expect us to surrender willingly because He knows that change comes at a cost. We must give up something or some behavior we have seen as "good" or at least temporarily better than alternatives. God knows the child in us will often throw a tantrum when it does not get its way. But God also knows our hearts because He created them in His image and likeness.

The tree does not resist its chemical changes, nor does it decide to grow just so high or wide and then stop. The process of change is much more difficult for us.

"If God really wants me to surrender to His love, why doesn't He get me out of this prison? It's so hard in here."

Surrender to God in prison or out of prison is sometimes defined as saying no to self and yes to God. I propose to you that surrender is saying yes to self and yes to God. Not yes to selfish instincts that put others beneath our feet or

yes to material goals in life, but yes to the self God intended at the moment of our conception. God *does* make everything happen at the right time.

We may change from a good thing to a better thing, but most often change is moving from something less than good to something which *is* good. If that concept is correct, why do we put off doing whatever it takes to bring us to that better place? Why wait until next week to start a process of healing that can begin now?

"I said yes to God and nothing seems to change. I don't *feel* happier than I did before. In fact, life was much easier before I said yes." *Yet none of us can ever fully understand all he has done. . .*

A headache brought on by tension will disappear after taking aspirin or being separated from the source of tension. We actually *feel* a difference within a short period of time. It should be remembered, however, that a headache is not seen as a good thing while the absence of a headache is.

Saying yes to God will create a tension between what we have trained ourselves to accept as good and what we have yet to learn as being a better choice.

For the molester, reading Matthew 18.5-7 is difficult if not frightening. Some might even say, "Why should I try to change. The millstone is around my neck and I haven't the power to break free."

There was a time when I felt that way, a time when I agreed with those who preferred to see me dead. But loving Christ-centered people kept pointing to the cross, kept reminding me that Jesus bore the weight of my sin so that I could be free to love Him for all eternity.

You might know Christians who in their anger refuse the power of the cross for the molester, but the cross is for *ALL* of us.

This *is* the moment for us to say yes to change. This *is* the moment we set aside the negative expectations and lack of hope, the fear of feeling less than in control, for God is in control, and His plan is perfect.

Therefore, surrender each day. Listen with your heart for His voice, His leading. Talk to God and share what you feel—He will understand. Rise above the circumstances in which you live that others would describe as too restrictive for change by remembering that God is not bound by overcrowded cells or unfavorable conditions.

When you hurt, breathe in God's healing presence. When you are lonely, believe that you are never alone. When you question whether or not the struggle is worth it, remember the darkness of your life and turn toward the light of God's love. It IS your season of change. Praise the Lord! □

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 think you already know I'm a prisoner and I have been a sinner most of my life. I'll probably die in prison and when that time comes, the Lord knows I've made my peace with Him.

Your *Bits & Pieces* were excellent! I saw myself in so many. One who said, "I really believe I've forgiven until I see or hear them and then I'm ready to start breathing fire again" is something I understand. He might sound like a victim but maybe like me just re-experiencing some childhood trauma.

I'm praying for you. I'm not sure what your need is but God knows and He alone has the answer. Keep pressing on. Keep seeking Him. He alone is our sufficiency.

At this time I need a lot of prayer. I'm really struggling to keep my head up and stay in a joyful mood. God's Word says to rejoice in all things, but I'm troubled about my future after I am released.

I need to trust God in the same way that I trust Him about civil commitment. If He feels I need more time, I will be committed. If not, I will be released. I know that once I give Him total control it takes a lot of pressure off me.

The system seems to want to minimize what was done to an abuser as a child. How is it that the abuser was less valuable as a child than the child he abused? Where were they when the victim/abuser was being abused as a child?

Do evil things and pay the price for the evil done, but as there is a God above and Jesus in my heart, I will not give up hope for anyone who does evil things because God did not give up on me.

Being new to incarceration, I was scared. But to have sex offense charges was terrifying to me. I find comfort in your newsletters. They keep me on track to living in newness of life for Jesus Christ!

I hope that my not writing for a length of time wasn't the cause for me to be taken off your mailing list. *[If someone doesn't receive the newsletter, it is probably because there was no response when I updated the mailing list a little over a year ago.]*

I remind myself that I should not try to make sense out of senseless people. But I can pray for them to receive everything I would desire for myself as if I am an angel sending little blessings their way. And I must always look at my own actions. Am I a reflection of Jesus Christ?

I really need prayers for a person in my family who has terminal cancer and was given two months to live. Please pray for God to heal her, to give to us the miracle she

needs, to give her strength and His grace while she faces this fate.

I must tell you that I have seen your newsletter for some years and never read it. I thought it was the same old stuff and that wasn't what I needed. It was a blessing when I was told that I needed to read it by a brother and sex offender like myself.

I truly believe that when we fail to deal with *all* of our erroneous thinking, we set ourselves up for failure again--even in the areas we may feel we have conquered. We must stay away from anything that will allow us to think things that are improper.

You had one guy in *Bits & Pieces* who walked on eggshells. The more he embraces God, the less fear he will have (I John 4:18). It's easy to say don't be afraid, but when his love of God is perfected, he won't have to be afraid.

I believe that if I walk around all day saying "I will not masturbate today," I'll probably wind up doing just that. But if I focus on Christ and remain in his presence, I might not even think about masturbation. But if I do think about it, I can overcome it with the strength of that very presence.

It is amazing how judgmental or self-righteous I was when I was living a double life of sexual idolatry and sin! Sadly I still find this tendency to creep back into my life especially when I feel insecure or out of control. The Lord is working to change this, and I am now guessing it would take a lifetime! We need to learn, I believe, to sometimes laugh at ourselves and not take ourselves so seriously. It is a counterbalance to sincere and necessary repentance brought on by self-examination. The cure for worry and fear is found in gratitude and faith.

The Word of God has the power to change our lives if we believe Him and continue to do what He says. I know God uses Scripture to transform us from the inside out. His word has the quality of the sword that cuts through our hearts and judges our thoughts and intentions, delivering light to the darkness hiding in our souls. This tells us not only who God is but also who we are.

I was once a very stupid person who didn't care about anything in the world. God wasn't even a thought to me then. It scares me now to think what would've happened if I had gotten killed before coming to know God. God has been on my side all these years in prison, waiting on me. He has plans for me.

It is sometimes hard for me to think of God being good to someone I would personally reject. But it is even harder for me to think of God being good to me in spite of all the horrible things I have done and, in some cases, am still doing. So I guess I just need to take Him at His word and believe that He is truly gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in love. And I need to strive to be the same way with others.

Do I still struggle with impure thoughts? Do I let my mind wander sometimes into fantasyland? Yes, but the difference now is I know where to run when I fall. Before I ran away from God, now I run to Him.

I allow myself to get depressed and that can lead to my withdrawing into myself. I don't like it as I feel my spirit slip into that state, yet I can't seem to pull out of it. My cries for help from above seem to fall on deaf ears. So at this time I am just pressing forward in the faith that Christ will, in His time, show me the way out.

Recently I was struck with the verse line "The Lord is near." These words appear in many of the Psalms and again in the New Testament. Through meditation, I began to experience the verse rather than simply considering its theology. It was then that I found both comfort and strength. I felt how His love is expressed by nearness to me in my body, soul and spirit. It is the experience of being the child, the temple, the body. I believe "The Lord is near" and that He calls me to respond to the love in that nearness.

In the previous issue of Into the Light, I shared that "Faith is not some highway bypass for the purpose of avoiding downtown traffic congestion." A few wrote in and shared additional words I thought you might appreciate.

- Faith is not the bypass for avoiding congestion; it is the way *through* the congestion. Faith is the turn by turn guidance system given by God, managed by God, and delivered by God. So who holds the trademark for GPS? Could it be called God's Positioning System?

- Faith is for me the realization of God's love for me and for all of us. Within that love there is room for our hopes, dreams and desires.

- Faith takes us downtown and *makes* us learn to be good drivers.



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 afraid of the need to change, that God grants them the strength to make the first steps.
- For ministries, that they become willing participants in the miracles God has in mind for all who seek Him.
- For those walking in fear, that they be blessed with the kind of faith that knows God is *always* present, always loving.
- For churches, that they find ways to open and not close their doors to today's modern day leper.

- For those unable to say goodbye to a loved one who has died or is dying while they are in prison, that they will believe in God's grand reunion.
- For positive outreach, that groups like Matthew 25, the Support Group and PAN are able to find ways to help.
- For communities, that they seek intelligent rather than emotional answers to issues related to sex offender housing.
- 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.

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!



The Christian Association for Prisoner Aftercare (CAPA) National Prisoner Re-entry Conference

**October 7-10, 2010
Milwaukee, WI**

While at this gathering, I finally had a chance to meet a man I have known for many years, a man who I hold in high regard for his ongoing ministry. Richard Witherow (on right) and his wife Maggie are co-directors of Matthew 25 Ministries in Florida, a unique ministry in that they are able to provide housing for those in re-entry—including sex offenders. Initial costs to those interested amount to approximately \$750 with monthly rent of \$540 per person.

There are costs in re-entry that are impossible to ignore and ministries like Matthew 25 cannot absorb them without help. I truly wish that we all had unlimited funds but that's not likely to happen. God *will* meet your needs. Trust in Him.

Contact Information

- Matthew 25 Ministries, P.O. Box 5690, Lake Worth, FL 33466

Other ministries that can accept sex offenders in Florida include:

- Christlike Ministry 3011 Orient Rd. Tampa, FL 33619
- Florida Justice Alliance, Inc. P.O. Box 1426 Pinellas, FL 33780
- The Mission 208 S.E. 8th St. Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33316

Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.
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A Little Humor . . .

On a sunny Sunday afternoon, two young church members were going door to door to invite people to visit their services. When they knocked on one door, it was immediately clear the woman who answered was not happy to see them. She told them in no uncertain terms that she did not want to hear their message, and before they could say anything more, she slammed the door in their faces.

To her surprise, however, the door did not close; in fact, it bounced back open. She tried again, really putting her back into it, and slammed it again with the same result - the door bounced back open. Convinced these rude young people were sticking their foot in her door, she reared back to give it a slam that would teach them a lesson. Just then, one of them said quietly: "Ma'am, before you do that again, you really need to move your cat."

