



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

September-October 2008

Surviving or Thriving: God's Plan for Prison

By Andy

My first day in prison was hard. When the guy who did my initial processing took me to the unit officer's station, the guard asked me in guttural tone, "Whadoyawannaknow?"

Feeling overwhelmed and lost, I asked him for a map of the compound. "You want a *what?*" Okay, not a good start, but while I waited for my bed assignment, I recalled my appearance before the judge the day I was sentenced. I had given whatever sentence that would be over to the Lord and put myself in the hands of the real Judge rather than that imposing woman in black robes.

Even though my first day in prison was unnerving and difficult, I felt His peace. I had trusted God to be there with and for me and to help me make the most of the time I had been given.

In my first weeks I saw selfishness, rudeness, disrespect, and impatience. I saw gambling, complaining, participating in the black market, sleeping or watching TV all day, and those who just sat and stared.

"Lord, you could have picked a nicer place for my lessons."

"You picked it."

"Okay, Lord, you have my attention." Having said that, I knew God was beginning to deal with me in several areas of my life.

Healing My Attractions

Because I desperately wanted freedom from my addiction to child pornography, the Lord showed me the importance of controlling my thought life. There are children here in prison; I brought them with me in my mind. If I could drill a hole in the side of my skull and let these images drain out, I would do it in an instant.

But since I can't, with God's help I refuse to think about them. It is a sin to allow these images into my conscious mind in order to extract pleasure from them. And since I have been diligent about this, these images have lessened greatly in intensity and duration. I often go for weeks without having to deal with anything inappropriate.

I am learning obedience to the verse "Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (2 Cor.10.5) I am also learning to focus my thoughts on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable (Phil.4.8).

Once I began to have my thought life under control, I was able to stop masturbating because masturbation is the ultimate in selfishness and is pure, unbridled lust. God's word to all of us on masturbation is to quit as in completely, totally, 100%. Paul tells us in Romans 13.14, "Do not think about how to gratify the desires of a sinful nature."

But don't put yourself under condemnation. If you relapse, repent and move on. These things, as we all know, are not easy. In fact, this kind of discipline is hard. I was greatly helped by putting God's word in my heart, by memorizing Scripture.

The verses I have used so far in this article are a good starting place. A technique that works for me is to write verses on a small piece of paper. Then I slip that paper into my ID holder and review the verse when I have dead time, like when I am waiting in the chow line. Quoting Scripture when temptation comes is a great way to defuse lust, and I challenge you to try it.

Overcoming Seclusion

Prison can be a lonely place if you let it be so. You have to work on building relationships but the effort will be worth it. Sex offenders tend to lead isolated and secretive lives and often aren't emotionally there for loved ones. We are loners.

In prison, I quickly developed a core group of Christian friends—those who truly cared about me and who were willing to hold me accountable. Several of us even went through a Christian addiction recovery program together.

Because of the program, I began to understand the hurts I had received as a child and how they affected me in my relationship with my wife. Because of the program, I am learning how to constructively express myself and my feelings. The process also brought something else to my life.

In dealing with myself and others, God gave me a heart of compassion for new and needy inmates. "I tell you the truth," Jesus said, "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matt.25.40) This compassionate spirit is so "not me" from before prison that I marvel at His transforming work in my life.

Spiritual Growth and Discipline

The Lord led me to rediscovering Him through prayer and reading and through meditating on Scripture. His word now comes alive as I apply it to my life.

I know that I am still a work in progress but I feel much better prepared to face the challenges on the outside because of the choices I am learning to make on the inside.

I can't wait to rediscover my wife again. She's a pearl without price and I am truly blessed that she is still here for me. None of us desires prison, but here we sit. We have a choice to make—live for ourselves or live for Him. We can idle away our days or make good use of the opportunities

we have. The path God desires for us brings healing and growth. Live for Him! □

Dealing with prison is hard for someone just entering confinement. Andy is currently incarcerated and has offered, I think, some very useful information.

God has forgiven me, But I can't forgive myself

By Bob Van Domelen

The question of self-forgiveness is both simple and complicated because we are, by nature, both simple and complicated. Our hearts want to set aside our sins and to believe in the forgiveness we know we have from the Lord. But sin is proof of imperfection—the more grievous the sin, the greater the imperfection.

I have written on many occasions that we learn forgiveness in the manner in which we have experienced it as children. Caught for some infraction, a child will say “I’m sorry” and will receive some kind of affirmation from the one hearing the words. If both the infraction and the apology are repeated a number of times, the response might eventually sound like this: “No, you’re not sorry, because if you were *really* sorry, you wouldn’t have done it again.” It doesn’t take long before apology is in conflict due to the tendency of all of us to repeat behaviors we think are appropriate solutions to our needs. And this kind of conflict increases when applied to our relationship with God.

God, unlike our parents when we were kids, does not keep track of the number of times we sin. His forgiveness is as fresh and powerful after the most recent sin as it was after our first. Somehow, we come to believe that as long as we see imperfection within ourselves, we are unworthy of being in God’s presence—much less in His circle of close friends. Personally, I think this attitude saddens God because He knows it keeps us from receiving the full measure of grace He wants to share with us each and every day.

Brother Lawrence, a 17th century monk, wrote in *The Practice of the Presence of God* that when he sinned, he got on his knees and asked forgiveness. He then got up believing that whatever God wanted to do to him as a consequence for that sin was God’s decision and not his. Brother Lawrence shared that in the end, he had to rely on God’s mercy and not on his own ability to find some level of perfection.

I doubt that we will ever feel completely comfortable with our past sins or even those which still plague our lives. I have read that failure to forgive oneself is the height of arrogance because we somehow manage to delegate God’s forgiveness to some position of lower importance. I don’t believe we consciously think or tell God that we cannot surrender our lives until we have self-forgiveness, but it is not difficult to understand how that logic might exist.

People enter the true presence of God wearing the rags of their brokenness, their heads bowed, lips murmuring “Lord, forgive me a sinner.” Knowing their hearts, God robes them in the peace that surpasses all understanding, the joy of His infinite love. God, through the death of Jesus on the cross, also erases the eternal consequences of even

the most heinous of sins. He reminds us that He will never leave us or forsake us whether we struggle though daily life in a prison cell or an office cubicle.

Separation from God is *never* God’s design for we are *all* called into His presence. Even though it is hard to forgive self, we are offered the grace to do so each and every day. Don’t worry if the *feeling* of forgiveness escapes you or if daily temptation makes you feel that the eternal banquet is not for the likes of you. A place has been set for you and God takes great joy in your company! □

The issue of self-forgiveness plagues many as they begin their time in prison, so this brief article is included as something of a follow-up to what Andy shared.

ONE WORD

By Ken

What does one word, empathy, really mean to someone like me?

- To reach out and touch your broken heart?
- To keep your life from falling apart?
- To enter a space you’ve never allowed?
- To go in a way that is neither boisterous nor loud?
- To see what you see, to hear what you hear?
- To know what you love, to feel what you fear?
- To take a chance though you may balk?
- To listen, be silent, to hear you talk?
- To comfort, to love, wanting nothing in return?
- To see your life, watching it churn?
- To watch your struggles, enduring your pain?
- To do all this, expecting no gain?

How can I manage? How can I see?

How can I reach out, be more than just me?

How can I have courage to neither run nor flee?

It’s all in one word—EMPATHY

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!

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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 entering prison filled with fear, that they will feel the presence of God each and every day.
- For those who believe that they cannot be forgiven, that the power of Christ's death on the cross will take root in their hearts.
- For those who seek true empathy, that they learn to listen with their hearts to the hearts of others.
- For all with age-inappropriate attractions but have not acted on those attractions, that they refuse to accept that secrecy is the solution and the path to healing.
- For those who face the future with fear, that they trust God to meet their needs in *all* things.
- For the families and friends of victims, that they be strengthened in times when they feel overwhelmed by the circumstances and situations they face.
- For churches, that they begin to see the impact possible by living God's word when dealing with sex offenders.
- For organizations like PAN (Prison Aftercare Network), that they see the ministry they do as an important link to other ministries working with the imprisoned.
- For the success of the 11-state Salvation Army Regional Conference in Wausau, WI, Sept.22-24, where Bob will present a workshop.
- 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.

To contact this ministry, write me at:

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Please remember that most institutions do NOT forward bulk mail (like *Into the Light*), so if you are transferred or released, please let me know so I can make changes in the mailing list database.

Bits & Pieces

Some months ago, I received a nickel donation from an individual who wanted to share in the support of this ministry. A month or two later, there was another letter with two dimes included. Talk about feeling blessed!

From a letter: "I've heard that the definition of insanity is to continue doing the same thing over and over, expecting a different result."

From a letter: "During breakfast one morning, I kept feeling 'Help my unbelief' as I was mentally preparing for a presentation in the chapel. As I studied those words, I found that the word unbelief in Greek really means distrust. God was showing me that though one may be a believer in Christ, that person can distrust God in certain areas of life. When I asked God if I distrusted Him, His answer was a simple "Yes."

From a letter: "I recently found a simple, yet powerful phrase that says 'I am content in the Son of God and in His Father who let Him die on a cross for me.' It is better than counting to ten or breathing several deep breaths in rapid succession and slowly letting the air out after each breath. When all things are considered, I am content in Christ before, during, and after the fact."

A Christian Under Construction *By Jim*

I'm a Christian under construction
with the Master Builder working inside
And although at times I don't show it,
I know from Him I cannot hide.

He's tearing down all the walls
that for years I had built up
And day after day He's teaching me
all the skills I need to develop.

So if at first you cannot tell
how far I've come down this road,
Then come take a closer look
and you'll see the blessings He's bestowed.

I'm aware there's still many a time
when it's two steps forward and one step back
But I've come to know and understand
that it's the result of the faith I still lack

So as I release my all to Him
and let Him have complete control
I find the peace and happiness
that fills my heart and soul

Yes, I'm a Christian under construction
with many battles yet to be won
But oh what glory lies ahead
when the Master Builder gets done

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Dated Material

A Little Humor



One day a man strolled in to the paint section of a hardware store and walked up to the assistant. "I'd like a pint of canary colored paint," he says. "Sure" the clerk replies. "Mind if I ask what it's for?" "My parakeet," the man said. "See, I want to enter him in a canary contest. He sings so beautifully he is sure to win." "Well, you can't do that!" the assistant says. "The chemicals in the paint will surely kill the poor thing!" "No they won't," says the customer. "Listen, buddy, I'll bet you twenty bucks your parakeet dies if you try to paint him." "You're on" said the customer. Two days later the man walks back in the store and very sheepishly lays \$20 on the counter. "So the paint killed him?" asked the clerk. "Indirectly," the man said. "He seemed to handle the paint okay, but I think the sanding between coats did him in."