



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

March-April 2008

The Plans I Have for You

By Bob Van Domelen

¹⁰ This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile." (Jeremiah 29:10-14)

I did not enter prison confident of many things because the world as I thought I knew and understood it disappeared with my arrest in 1985. But what I knew for sure in that difficult time was that God had found a crack in the walls of secrecy I had constructed. Though I didn't know how He would do it, I believed that He was calling me out of my dark places.

God had given me a wife who believed in the sanctity of our marriage vows—though I had repeatedly brushed them aside to make room for doing what I wanted to do. Against public opinion, she offered her support, but only if I were truly serious about facing the future believing I had to change. It was an offer that boggled my mind but it was an offer I accepted.

God had also given us children whose lives were affected in ways no children should have to endure, yet I believe God protected them, encouraged them, and made them strong. They did not become perfect but they knew what it meant to make choices and I believe they understood that choices have consequences.

As for the rest of my extended family, my neighbors, my students and co-workers, and my church family, the idea of restoration and reconciliation seemed to me to be well beyond the realm of possibility—at least in the beginning.

The day I was granted a parole, I felt an incredible flowing of grace knowing that I would be going home. I wept in front of the board, in front of my friends at the halfway house when I told them of my parole, and especially when I called my wife to share the news with her.

I get many letters from men and women still in prison who believe that they somehow were by-passed by God because of their offenses. God *might* have had plans for them, they reason, but they lost those opportunities because of their actions.

I don't think it's possible to even be able to recognize the plans God has for us unless we are in relationship with the Lord. Early on, my calling on God and praying consisted mostly of asking "Me" requests. With time, though, I called on God because I wanted to feel in His presence. I wanted to know God and I believed God wanted me to spend time with Him. He opened His Word to me and showed me His people Israel. He showed me the prophets. I read the petitions and praise in David's psalms as well as the preparation for the coming of Messiah in Isaiah.

With each day and each effort at relationship, God became more real, the cross Jesus bore for my sins became central to everything, and the presence of the Holy Spirit was more obvious in my day to day living.

I need to make something clear. Today, my life is not without its problems or temptations, nor have I reached some level where I can coast until God calls me home. I wish I could say that my first reaction in all difficulties is always to turn to the Lord, but it isn't.

Fortunately, God understands me and knows my tendency to think I can control all things. But I am also confident that I am His. However, each day IS better than the day before because I believe it is God's plan for things to be that way.

When I was released on parole (December 12, 1988) and started my ten years of probation, I had no idea of the direction God had for me. Even back then, it was difficult to start over. Job applications always asked "Have you ever been convicted of a felony? If yes, please describe the nature of your conviction." It would have been impossible to even have hope had I not trusted God to have me where I was meant to be.

I learned that trusting God did not mean sitting on my butt waiting for the phone to ring. It meant praying about situations and being willing to be vulnerable enough to hear rejection if that was meant to be. It meant letting go of what I thought success should look like and instead nurturing success in the simple tasks that needed to be done each day. By doing the simple things, the level of trust others had in me increased because what they saw was consistency—not for their benefit but in obedience to God.

Over time I learned that faith was not makeup worn to impress others. Faith, I also learned, resided in the innermost parts of my being, nourished each day by God's love and evident most clearly when I surrendered to that love.

A significant part of my life now is the ministry that God chooses to do through my life.

In 1988 I looked forward to being a member of a support group called Broken Yoke Ministries in Madison. In that setting, I found a freedom to talk about same-gender attractions without shame, to believe that I could learn to choose to reject those behaviors, and to believe that a new man was emerging, one clearly known in my mother's womb by the Father of all Creation.

In 1990 I was encouraged to begin a branch of Broken Yoke Ministries closer to where I lived, and in 1991 became the director of the ministry when my predecessor left the area for a new position.

In 1992, God opened the door for me to share at a national conference not only that I had been in prison, but also *why* I had been in prison. The following year I had an opportunity to team-teach a workshop on ministry to sex offenders. The doors continued to open. God brought the story of love and healing in my life to Christian radio and TV as well as to both Christian and secular printed media.

In 1997, God had me see the need for a newsletter for sex offenders and those who minister to them. *Into the Light* began with a subscription list of 47 individuals. Today this newsletter reaches over 415 prisons and close to 2400 individuals. What also began as an occasional response to a letter from an offender has grown to a correspondence ministry with an average of 30-45 letters a week.

The real miracle has been the growing love and relationship I now have with my wife, the healing that has taken place with my children and many of my extended family, and my newest and happiest role as grandpa to two beautiful granddaughters.

All these things are of God's design and His plan. It is a mistake to think that the only thing God wants is for every sex offender to begin a ministry. It is a mistake to believe that unless what happens in our lives is some gigantic event it is neither of God nor in His plans.

The best of His planning, I think, comes in the intimate moments we have with God, talking and sharing but also spending an equal amount of time listening. And as I have shared many times, God knows each of us by name; He never calls us by our sin.

¹¹ *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* Despite how you might feel some days, believe and trust in God, for you *will* be renewed. □



Our Prayer Corner

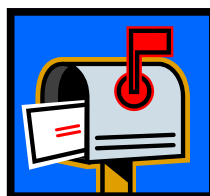
Prayer is an incredible gift we can give one another, for there is no better thing than to lift our lives, hopes, and dreams to the altar of the Lord.

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 just entering prison, that they will come to know that God IS with them, loves them, and has a plan for their lives.

- For those nearing the end of their sentence, that they take special care to live one day at a time, giving over to God circumstances and situations regarding their pending release that they cannot control.
- For those who minister to offenders, that they feel the power of God's love and joy for them in all they do.
- 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 hear of someone's age-inappropriate attractions, that their hearts be filled with compassion and a desire to bring hope and encouragement, not disdain or alienation.
- For those in group treatment, that they feel God's presence and protection, sharing what must be shared and doing what must be done.
- For family and friends of offenders, that their love and support continues to be the strong foundation of connection every offender needs.
- For those who have been abandoned by family and friends, that God will meet their needs and fill their lives with individuals willing to reach out in friendship.
- For Bob and Cathie as they prepare to move, that the trust and faith they have had in God will anchor the days ahead.
- 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.

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!



Did you know . . .

that the US Postal Service has recently announced an increase in the cost of first class mail?

According to a recent article in the New York Times, the cost of a first-class stamp will increase to 42 cents on May 12, 2008. When first class stamp rates increase, the cost of bulk mail also increases. We currently pay 16 cents for each newsletter that is mailed out at bulk rate with the total for the January edition costing approximately \$370 in postal fees. When you consider supporting the ministry, please keep this latest increased expense in mind. God bless you!

All things are possible with God!

Bits & Pieces

From a letter: "I got out three months ago and God is blessing my socks off! I was supposed to stay with my mom and help her out in her age, but I was asked to leave the trailer park when a neighbor found out that I was a VSP living right next door. God showed me a house even bigger than the one I had before I was arrested. I was allowed to move in for free for cleaning the place up. I put in over 100 applications looking for a job. I finally got one that pays \$8 an hour—the same as I was getting when I was arrested. It took me almost two months to be ok'd to go to church. That was the hardest thing for me. I now can go to church and I am excited about that!"

From a letter: "I don't think some want to change so much as to blame someone else for their being in prison."

From a letter: "A lot of people like to focus on what the Bible says to 'put off' (especially when those issues are in someone else's life) but seem to be oblivious to what the Bible says to 'put on.' There needs to be both or, like the dog, we will return to our own vomit."

From a letter: "The letter from Natalie (January 2008 edition) was timely. Her comments show how much hope really exists on both sides of this issue. I've often wondered what I would say to my victim should I meet her face-to-face. I think we've all played those tapes or verbalized it in various groups. I think the best words are 'I'm sorry for hurting you.' Nothing else seems appropriate. Anything else would seem like a rationale or an excuse. I will add Natalie to my prayer list. Thanks."

From a person currently facing trial for civil commitment: "Commitment is like a life sentence in [this state]. It's indefinite. Even facing all this I still have faith that whatever happens I will just remind myself that it's all part of God's personal plan for me. It's His will that controls my life.

"In the past, I was very self-centered, arrogant, and sarcastic. I was someone who lacked empathy. I was abused as a child, grew up, and hurt others. They say hurt people hurt people.

"I like to think that I have grown and have begun to live healthy."

A GAME

Take the month of birth (Jan = 1, Feb = 2, etc)

Multiply that number times 4

Add 13

Multiply your answer by 25

Subtract 200 from that answer

Add the day of month of your birthday

Multiply that number times 2

Subtract 40

Multiply your answer times 50

Add the last two digits of the year you were born

Finally, subtract 10,500

The result should be familiar to you!

NEW NAME MINISTRIES

Changing the World, ONE life at a time!

Fort Worth, TX

[From an article posted on this ministry's website]

How time flies! June 24th was the two-year anniversary of our state-approved reentry aftercare for sex offenders - truly a modern miracle! Our ministry aftercare home in Fort Worth, Texas has taught us more during these last two years than we would've imagined or hoped for. When we set out to create a reentry model for former sex offenders for our nation to embrace, we understood we would need to be the tortoise and not the hare. So now, after two years, we are completing a refining process that will bring the total package together for others to duplicate by year's end.

BE THE TORTOISE NOT THE HARE.

Our process of development has shown us a number of key elements. It's important to start slow and earn the trust of those in the community in authority over your ministry and those you are serving. This, of course, takes time, cooperation, consistency and willingness to be accountable.

Another key piece of the process is forgiveness. Before you open your doors to the lack of grace in the world and issues of those you're going to be serving, you better be taking a stance of forgiveness. You can be sure that attacks are going to come from within and without your ministry. You'll keep a much better perspective if you've already forgiven those who will offend you.

One significant atmosphere to maintain is one of grace. The road of recovery, renewal, rebuilding and restoration is all about a process, not a program. Programs tend to create people doing (going through the motions) rather than people being (embracing internally). Broken people are dysfunctional from the inside out, so changing behavior does little to address the issues of the heart.

Essentially, treatment is all about discovering and confessing your sins.

This is why we believe that treatment for sex offenders combined with learning the Word of God is essential for effective renewal. The Word of God can encourage and strengthen a person to face his demons while treatment can help identify issues and assist in accountability. Essentially, treatment is all about discovering and confessing your sins. This is something God would have us do! Additionally, God would have us pray for each other to be healed from the consequences of our sin (James 5:15).

Please keep us in your prayers as we dive into this season of refining our organization and our ministry to the men. These are exciting days for a pioneering ministry that desires to bring hope to a nation lacking in grace.

Note: I had the honor to meet the individuals leading this ministry at the 2007 COPE conference and felt incredibly blessed. I don't share the address because they are limited in size; but I share the article as an example of what should be happening all over the country.

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Dated Material

A Little Humor



A farm boy accidentally overturned his wagonload of corn. The farmer who lived nearby heard the noise and yelled over to the boy, "Hey Willis, forget your troubles! Come in and visit with us. I'll help you get the wagon up later." "That's mighty nice of you," Willis answered, "but I don't think Pa would like me to." "Aw come on boy," the farmer insisted. "Well okay," the boy finally agreed, and added, "but Pa won't like it." After a hearty dinner, Willis thanked his host. "I feel a lot better now, but I know Pa is going to be real upset." "Don't be foolish!" the neighbor said with a smile. "By the way, where is he?" With eyes lowered, the boy replied, "Under the wagon!"