



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

January—February 2012

Those Who Hope

By Bob Van Domelen

³¹ *but those who hope in the Lord, will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40.31)*

I recently received a letter that stopped me in my tracks because of a single sentence. “Tell me if you have settled for too little of what God can do, or am I living hoping for a lie.” Basically, my response was “I have not settled for too little nor have I failed to ask God for everything. I simply trust God to provide me what I need each and every day. So far I cannot say I have been disappointed.”

His question is not really unique. Any person who has come face to face with personal weakness, acknowledged change was needed, and honestly took steps to bring about that change at some point prays, “God, take this all away.” But not many conclude that prayer with “but if you won’t do it, then I will stop believing because healing and change are all just a lie. I am what I am.”

Can God bring about complete change in someone’s life? Yes. Does everyone who asks for change eventually see a complete absence of their attractions and the associated sins? There are some who do but to answer the question directly, no, not everyone experiences complete change. Am I showing a lack of faith by answering as I just have? I don’t believe that I am.

If healing is defined by the absence of any or all temptation, then I might as well throw in the towel right now. As much as I love the Lord, there are still temptations and even failures. I am not referring only to age-inappropriate attraction; I am referring to *all* of the things I do that fall short of God’s plan for my life. Before some of you suggest I am straying from the point, let me explain.

Even as a teenager, I knew that there was no such thing as this one big issue I called my major sin. *My* one big issue was fed by a lot of other much easier to ignore smaller issues. I often didn’t know how to deal with everyday situations, the kind everyone has, without resorting to feelings of self-centeredness, anger, frustration, loneliness, etc. As a result, my feeling sorry for me opened the door to behaviors I considered rewards or justifications, and those eventually became behaviors of choice and some even addictive behaviors.

In a sense then, the prayer “Lord, take away this sin that so destroys me” is pointed at the “big” sin but fails to recognize all of the contributing conditions that over time made the big sin possible in the first place.

The letters I get from those experiencing the most success in their daily walk while in prison are from those who are paying attention to the smaller, often forgotten or

overlooked issues. They recognize loneliness and look for healthy responses to that loneliness. Pornography, masturbation, and sexual encounters in the bathroom late at night don’t heal loneliness. Those choices only mask their loneliness with physical distraction.

They recognize legitimate anger, relationship conflicts, and depression for what they are and not as an excuse to believe that God has abandoned them. Sometimes “Lord, help me to tolerate my cell mate” is answered by a change in cell mates. Even better, sometimes that prayer is answered by a change in the person causing the conflict, so the response “Thank you, Lord” feels appropriate. But in the end, the changes we seek often start with changes in us, not in the other person.

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength

Prayer is communication with God, words of praise, and words of petition. Communication is conversation with God, not unlike sitting with a friend sharing something of common interest. It’s both talking and listening but when the words are finished, the end of the conversation is okay because conversation is mostly about being with one another and sharing.

We best understand praise of God as a sincere expression of thanksgiving—recognizing God’s love, mercy, and faithfulness in our lives. The best times of worship for me are those when I forget me and have complete focus on God. I wish that state of mind happened all the time, but it doesn’t. I get in the way of myself at times.

Petition is at the heart of this article and indeed at the heart of the letter to which I responded. But asking God for something isn’t like asking something of a friend. When we ask a friend, we sit back and wait for the friend to do what we ask.

When we ask something of God, we can’t sit back because God is a nudging God. It’s not that God cannot make the miracle that meets our petition. I think God knows what we *really* need, however, and that we need to do it for ourselves. God nudges us, reminds us of something we should do that we had not thought of doing, and then encourages us to see that His nudge IS the answer.

Strength comes from exercise—either muscle or mind—and repetition of anything healthy will renew us and restore us. Choosing to walk away whenever conversations become inappropriate is not always easy, but the more we do it the better we become at seeking the best, not the worst.

Choosing to change the channel or, better still, to avoid TV programs that present images reminding us of our past

behaviors will bring us to eventually reject any image that holds us to darkness rather than light. But it takes time and it takes repetition for these choices to become first choices.

In this respect, "Please heal me, Lord, and take away those things I wish were gone forever" is being answered one step at a time, one day at a time, and with a reliance on God for the continuing strength to grow. Healing does not happen in an instant, but it does happen.

Soar on wings like eagles; Run and not grow weary; Walk and not be faint

Why is it that we think the word "hope" is a poor word, one lacking in faith or in belief of God? Why is it we see God in human terms, ignoring us or denying us, simply because there is no obvious response to our prayers? Doesn't "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" mean just what it says?

I do believe that God meets all of our needs, heals our broken souls, loves us beyond imagination, and calls us to be with Him for all eternity. I believe it but I am not always sure *how* everything will come to pass. And in some ways, I don't think that's such a bad thing.

I want my heart and spirit to soar, though some days I feel leaden and not able to get off the ground. I want to run and not grow weary, but with age come body changes that make running more difficult. And though I want to walk and not grow faint, more than anything I want my walk to be with the Lord. I want to go where He leads.

Yes, there are days when you might believe yourself to have taken steps backward or not taken steps at all. Your temptations might encourage the thought that you have no chance of change. You might look around and feel completely abandoned by family, friends, and even God. But for those who hope and are willing to continue the journey, there is always healing. There is always change. □

Bits & Pieces

The following are segments from letters I have received since the last edition of "Into the Light." I hope that you will be blessed by them, discuss with others, and pray for situations where prayer is needed.

Change just for the sake of change can be bad because, as the old AA saying goes, "Where you go, there you are."

Pastors are God's representatives and should be held to those standards. First and foremost, that was the calling they felt led to follow, to help make a difference in the lives of others, so why ostracize? When you have the greatest opportunity lying before your feet, praying is one thing, but speaking out in truth to hardened hearts is another!

I don't think there has been a time in church history where a sex offender would be welcomed. It would certainly be a challenge for them to attend a church today. In a practical vein, how would pastors know who is a sex offender? Do they have a background check of all members or visitors? Why would any sex offender want to go to church like that anyway?

It is not enough to hold one's tongue when there is ill feeling behind words spoken. Words meant to hurt often come from

a heart that has been hurt and it turns out to be a battle of pain more than a battle of words.

Until we are face-to-face with God himself, we must be honest, transparent, and willing to seek help from our support group. This highlights the need for all of us who are recovering or recovered sex offenders to remain in community with those we can trust. Others in the group may be able to see the signals of your slipping far quicker than you may yourself. This will only work, however, if you are willing to be honest and transparent in your thoughts and feelings, not just your actions.

I really don't care what the people here think or feel about me; I am here to fix myself to a degree in which I can live in society safely and not hurt another soul again. I'm not here to please another staff member. Because I guess in the end, it really won't matter to most of them anyway. They have their own lives and families to worry about.

The only refuge is in God's grace. The situation I currently am in has shown me that when one is utterly in 0% control of the wrongs being infected by political agenda, it's only God that one can turn to.

All of my life since I can remember when things got tough, I quit. I had only one feeling--anger. I was angry with those who abused me and I was angry at myself. I could not relate to others emotions. I was confused by how they could cry and show joy. When I saw people crying on TV, I had no idea why they were crying. I felt cut off. But God has been changing this.

I have so much love to learn and can't even find the resources to start. There has to be someone that God has been able to bring through to the end of this journey of inner healing and deliverance that he can now use to lead others on to victory in this journey. I truly want to be that new creature God intended me to be.

I still struggle way too much with throwing a fit whenever my schedule gets disrupted, so God has been graciously providing lots of disruptions lately to help me grow out of that.

I don't expect people to be perfect. In fact I'm well aware that I'm probably the worst offender at this camp. I can't let myself slide back down to the foulmouthed, sexual, deceitful person I was just to get along. I can't reject the work Christ is done in my life. And I know I can't correct those around me, but sometimes I at least try to put things in a different light for them.

For so long I've tried to conform to be accepted by certain people or cliques. You know what I found out? It's just not worth it. I found out that the majority of the time the people or cliques I seek to gain approval from aren't who I really want to be around anyway.

Three weeks into group, I told them of my faith. At the same time I told them, "It is through my faith that I understand that I am responsible for every action and decision I made. For I

had to understand this before I could come to the cross for his forgiveness."

I do admit after 13 years there are days I am optimistic and days I get very frustrated and depressed over my continued incarceration and just what the future may hold, along with the challenges--yet mostly unknown and not understood--I'll face once out.

God has indeed given each of us a new name, free from the shame of our sin soaked past. Free to embrace love; free to embrace his nail scarred hands; free to pour out our lives in service to the least of these.

I guess it is much easier for a church to reject a soul than it is to keep track of it, but then again, that church will have to answer to God for rejecting that soul.

As I write this letter, four other Christian brothers and I are fasting to take a stand against sexual immorality here.

In terms of getting out and succeeding, things looked very bleak right now, almost impossible, and yet all I know to do is have faith in him and his atonement. I pray every day that miracles will someday happen for me, too.

I fear some think of me as having a morally superior attitude because I don't do the things everyone else does. I don't condemn anyone but I'm still suspect that their eyes.

I can't think that the last 35 or so years I spent filling my head it with all sorts of depravity is going to go away in a couple of years. I know I need to be patient and let God do his work in me in his time.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
(Matthew 6:21)

Though my predominant feelings (of being home) are those of joy and gratitude, I don't want to leave the impression that there are no challenges. That is not the case at all. Each day has them. There is a joy that comes even with many of them, however. Challenges are a part of life and I am thankful for the current challenges life presents. Sadness, anger, frustration, and the rest all come with a perspective I never had before. It is the same with the joy, peace, and feelings of hope.

When I hear things about the Penn State story, I have felt that sinful passion which is in my flesh being aroused. I have so many different emotions in this story. And I can't get away from this story. Either I am watching sports or the news and this story is on both. On one hand I feel bad, being a big college football fan, but on the other hand, the story is too similar to mine and I am drawn to it. Negatively it brings up bad desires but positively it reminds me what impact my decisions have made on so many people. This story hits home in so many ways and gives me a wide range of emotions.

I have found that my greatest strides in recovery are when I'm not focused exclusively on my sexual issues. It seems

that when I focus on these things I empower them. When I focus on other areas of my life (family, education, ministry, etc.) the sexual issues fade and become irrelevant.

A Prayer

A.W.Tozer

"I am sure that there is in me nothing that could attract the love of one as holy and as just as you are. Yet you have declared your unchanging love for me in Christ Jesus. If nothing in me can win your love, nothing in the universe can prevent you from loving me. Your love is uncaused and undeserved. You are yourself the reason for the love wherewith I am loved. Help me to believe the intensity, the eternity of the love that has found me. That love will cast out fear; and my troubled heart will be at peace, trusting not in what I am but in what you have declared yourself to be. Amen"

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!

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 all who struggle with hopelessness and despair, that they *will* find themselves renewed and strengthened.
- For all who consider themselves beyond hope, that they know Jesus died so that we might have hope eternal.
- For those struggling because of the improper use of authority, that they are able to find time to pray for the healing and change needed in their situations.
- For those depressed by the start of yet another year in prison, that they can also see the light at the end of the tunnel growing larger.
- For all who serve as witness of God's love, that they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.
- 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.

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A Little Humor . . .

A city man decided to start a chicken farm so he bought a small place in the country and then purchased a hundred chickens. A month later, he was visiting the dealer and buying another hundred chickens. When the dealer looked at him questioningly, the man shared that all of the first lot he purchased had died.

Two months passed and he was back again buying yet another hundred chickens. "The second lot I bought died just like the first ones," he explained. "But I think I know where I'm going wrong," the man said with some confidence. "I think I'm planting them too deep."

