



# Into the Light

*All things are possible with God*

November—December 2010

## What Are *Your* Plans?

By Bob Van Domelen

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. (Jeremiah 29.11-14)

Two dates stand out in my memory: December 12, 1988 and December 12, 1998. It isn't hard to remember that day in 1988 when I walked out of a Milwaukee halfway house just a short two weeks after being granted a parole. As many times as I imagined what going home would be like, there was nothing to match the reality of actually going home.

The future, as far as I could see, was pretty much an empty slate in terms of things like employment. Sitting at the table with my family for meals, watching them do the things that they did every day (but were new to me), and knowing I had a lot to prove made those first days both wonderful and strange and a bit daunting.

Ten years later, I shook the hand of my parole agent following my last visit. Standing outside the probation and parole offices, I found myself wondering "What now?" I was not required to attend any more regular visits with a parole agent but other than that freedom, the rest of my life was the same as it was when I got up that morning.

By 1998, however, I had completed courses in accounting, graduated, and found work—at first two part-time jobs and eventually a full time job five years later. I had also not only become involved as a member of one of this ministry's support groups, I had become the ministry director.

By 1994 I was speaking at conferences, teaching workshops, and writing a lot. The point I want to make is not that I filled my life with all sorts of activity (though it seemed that way some days) but that I had given God permission to allow *His* plans for me to become reality. And they did.

***I know the plans I have for you***

***... plans to prosper you and not to harm you***

The verses from Jeremiah are a powerful daily reminder that God is in control. When a person doesn't have a lot in terms of possessions or money, it isn't hard to believe God is in the business of providing both. God does that but not necessarily in the way of worldly response.

To a sex offender in re-entry, life looks pretty bleak. No job, nothing that resembles home the way home used to be, and in most cases little support from family or friends. Every now and then, however, I get a letter from someone in temporary housing who shares that he has the possibility of

a job interview that might work. What makes those letters special is the part where they share "And God is taking care of me. I'll be okay." That person is rich because he or she knows what it is to rely on the Lord, to trust completely that things will be well. There are many in the world with large houses, sizeable incomes, and luxuries of all sorts who will never experience that kind of prosperity.

***... plans to give you hope and a future***

I'm not alone in saying that life is far better today than it was while living in the center of emotional, sexual turmoil. "If only I could turn back the clock" is something I hear a lot but that isn't going to happen. The abuse committed cannot be undone. The wounds for many are very deep and could take a life time to heal. But there *is* hope for victims and offenders alike. There *is* a future available—for victims a restoration of what was lost and for offenders the permission to move beyond what looked like an inescapable past.

***... and I will listen to you***

God knows my needs and knows what is best for me but I know that my relationship with God could be a lot better than it is. I don't talk to God often enough and unless I am in something of a mini-crisis situation, I tend to listen even less. I don't have God on some storage room shelf for when I need Him, but neither do I consciously include Him in *all* things. If I believe God is all things to me, why would I not want to do so?

God wants all of us to call on Him, to come into His presence, and to pray/converse with Him. Can any of us say that we give God what He deserves? But God emphasizes a simple truth—if we do those things, He *will* listen.

***When you seek me with all your heart***

***... I will be found by you***

"When you seek me with all your heart" is the difficult part, isn't it. It's those three words—all your heart—that separate my efforts from the manner in which God would have me search.

If ever there were people in need of an intimate sense of God's presence, it would be sex offenders. "Modern day lepers" they call us and in the eyes of many, we are. "Not to be trusted" is the feeling others have about us, and what have we done to earn their trust or regain it, for that matter?

I believe that to start with a focus on how others will accept us or reject us is starting from the wrong direction. We already have God. We have redemption won by the death of Jesus on the cross. And if we have learned anything, we know that we are truly in control of very little in life. Seeking God with all our hearts will, I firmly believe,

give us a heart to live as we should, eyes to see Him in all things and situations, and a soul alive with grace. Jesus said "Come, follow me" to those who sought to be His disciples. He also told them that they would need to leave all else behind.

In some ways, sex offenders don't have much to leave behind in personal possessions or ambitions, but the directive can also be an encouragement to set aside the old life, the old thought patterns, and the old behavior choices. I think that's what is meant by "with all your heart."

***I will be found by you***

***. . . and will bring you back from captivity***

On occasion I can still remember specific times while sitting alone in my cell that I felt an incredible peace, and with that peace an incredible freedom. The bars, the guards, the institution were a consequence and not a life sentence. The consequences sex offenders face in society are growing increasingly intense. The response to a sex offender in a neighborhood is something I can understand but I know that some take their feelings to the extreme.

I can't control my neighbors and truthfully, had I never offended, I wonder how I would react to sex offenders. There are times when I am tempted to think that others should be my first responsibility. That is errant thinking. My first responsibility is to myself, to living as I was called to live, to loving as I was called to love. And 25 years after my arrest, I can tell you that the walk to true freedom begins with God and ends with God. You will need to surrender and you'll need to give up what you think should be yours. Whatever you surrender to God, He gives back in blessings a hundred-fold. □

*The following testimony is one individual's experience and advice for those approaching re-entry.*

### **There is Life After Prison**

By Bob B

It was two months to the day after the end of my probation that I was challenged publicly because of my background. My wife and I walked into a barbershop in my hometown and the proprietor said, "I can't serve you. Megan's Law." We turned around and walked out without saying a word. My wife was more upset about the incident than I was.

I figured that this was just the first of what would probably be many challenges to my current life because of my past. My wife sees the incident as her husband being denied service because of something he had already served time for and paid his debt to society for. As a sex offender, I have to ask whether or not that will ever be completely paid.

I understand that my situation will not be the same as what many of you behind bars experience. I had a supportive church that wrote to me and prayed for me while I was incarcerated. Upon release, I joined that church and the adult Bible study class there. I met my wife in that church and together we operate a small cleaning company.

There are some ways, however, that my and your situations may be alike. Faith is the key to success. If you haven't already, make a commitment now to pray, to join a Bible study, and to be in a supportive church for the rest of your life. Be bold in prayer. I once prayed, "Lord, I am your child and this situation is beyond my control. I have done all

that I can do. The rest is up to you. Your reputation is on the line. Amen." Three times God has answered this type of prayer for me; twice within minutes of my praying the prayer!

My home plan fell apart while I was on the bus returning from prison. Even with a supportive church, I had five different address changes within my first 53 days of release. But I never lost faith. It is better to be prepared for trouble finding a place in which to live even with the home plan.

Despite a Masters degree, I could not find more than a part-time job. I have had three part-time jobs since release and 43 rejections! I now work 15 hours every two weeks in our cleaning company and take care of the company supplies and books. I personally would advise starting your own business but in the end, suggest that you trust God for a job.

My wife and I have five adult children and eight grandchildren. We see one child and three grandchildren regularly. Two other children and four grandchildren we only talk to on the phone. Two children are estranged and two grandsons we never get to see. This is after 3+ years. Trust in God to heal your family relationships, but realize that the healing might not happen.

Practice Avoidance and Thought Switching. Make those a part of your everyday life. Get into a 12-step program like SA. Rely on the 12-step program because your court appointed sex offender treatment will end after probation and will fail you. Trust in God and do it for yourself that you will do whatever it takes to not reoffend. Urges will come. God will help you.

I almost want to say don't get out of prison if you can't control your anger. If you let it, just living life can get you mad. So learn to control your anger. Anger will get you sent back to prison quicker than any other emotion. Remember, you love Jesus. To love means you desire to please him just as you desire to please yourself and others. Anger has no part in love.

Save your money. Prison can be expensive but release will be far more expensive.

It seemed like forever to get out of prison. It seemed like forever to get off probation. Each day for me is new and will present both trials and testing. I will trust God for the results of each day. The day after my sentencing, a prison volunteer told me, "There is life after prison." He was right. I pray that each of you will trust God to give you life after prison.

**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!**

### **Help Wanted—Help Needed**

Last issue I shared information about Matthew 25 Ministries and the wonderful work that ministry does to assist sex offenders in re-entry. Dick recently shared with me that it costs \$62,100 a month in rent, but current income from residents only totals \$32,000. If you can donate, send a check to **Matthew 25 Ministries, PO Box 5690, Lake Worth, FL, 33466**. It would be a well-placed investment.

## **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.*

Part of my rehabilitation has included years of AA. Honesty, openness and willingness are the first three principles of a 12 step program. Those principles also apply to my spirit life. How honest, open and willing am I to let God into my life? Am I willing to accept God's unconditional forgiveness? Am I willing to accept that I will make mistakes and have to learn that regardless of how honest, open and willing I am today God will take me beyond my unrealized limitations? Can I trust God in these new circumstances?

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We like excuses! We say we can't do anything because Satan has us convinced we have to do great things or nothing!

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Until there is a change of heart in the churches toward sex offenders, there will be no change of heart in the communities.

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I hate what happens sometimes when victims are considered "damaged goods," especially when people avoid them and don't fellowship with them once they know of that past. It rankles me to no end to know I put others into that stigma. People need to know that people who been offended against can heal, too.

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How can I be obedient in one area, only to completely fall apart in another? I'm discouraged and feeling distant from the God I should be running to right now. Sometimes I feel like I'm just kidding myself that I could ever change or be changed.

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I believe that it is human nature to shift the focus away from oneself by pointing out the flaws of another so that one's own defects are minimized. But God knows. And the only one that we are fooling is ourselves when we do that. Yet, that is precisely what we continue to try to do. God must look upon our futile attempts to hide and/or disguise our own flaws and shake his head, saying "When will they ever realize what a waste of time that is?"

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Through all of this, I've learned that whether life is good or bad I must trust God. I don't know the future but I know who holds it. There is a Psalm that says God's word is a lamp unto our feet. It's not a searchlight. He often only reveals one step at a time!

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I am a rapist. That is what I did and I can't change that. This means that others have a legitimate right to be cautious and to exercise reasonable and useful controls to ensure safety. It does not mean that I am to be forever a monster to be feared and hated—a non-human deserving of no dignity or rights. If I don't stand up for this, who will?

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I am still praying a fair amount each morning and I have kept my New Year's resolution to not buy or eat any commissary foods. I'm also fasting all day on Tuesdays. I

find that these forms of self denial allow me to stay focused on just how badly I want sexual sobriety.

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I know that a lot of my brothers out there are being attacked in different ways, but the key to survival is letting go of this life and hiding in the shadow of the Most High. I hope this brings some peace and hope to those who need it..

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Suffering takes on a new dimension when we realize that God has already sifted it and allowed it out of his love for us. That doesn't make it any easier, especially when a loved one dies, but it is a balm; it gives meaning to pain..

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As Thanksgiving approaches, I'm reminded of how much there is to be thankful for—even and especially in here. I may not, however, yet be at that place where I can be thankful for the green turkey loaf..

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The struggles and temptations I had before are still with me. Only now there is someone with whom I can share them. My struggle is His struggle and His strength is mine. What is important is that I continue to turn to Him as a source of my strength as He changes me from the inside of. No Christian is gay or transsexual, nor is he a thief or a murderer, even if once he was all of these. We are God's possessions and his children..

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One of my favorite verses is found in Proverbs 16.7: "When your ways please the Lord, even your enemies are at peace with you." Feel free to share that with anyone worried about their safety.

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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 who are in fear, that God grants them the peace of His presence and the witness of others.
- For churches, that they find ways to open and not close their doors to today's modern day leper.
- For those struggling with re-entry, that their faith and trust in God will carry through..
- 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!***

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### *A Little Humor . . .*

Two guys are out in the woods hiking when all of a sudden, a bear starts chasing them. They climb a tree, but the bear starts climbing up the tree after them.

The first guy gets his sneakers out of his knapsack and starts putting them on.

The second guy says, "What are you doing? The first guy says, "I figure when the bear gets too close, we'll have to jump down and make a run for it." The second guy says, "Are you crazy? You can't outrun a bear"! The first guy says, "I don't have to outrun the bear. I only have to outrun you."

