



Into the Light

May-June 2007

Matthew 19.26

Who will you believe?

By Bob Van Domelen

⁵ *The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. And ¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. Jonah 3.5,10*

Some days I look through the paper, watch the news on TV, or listen to some conversation on talk radio, and the world seems too large, too unforgiving, especially when the topic is sex offenders. If I didn't know better, I would be tempted to say they are talking about me.

I'm sure that many people would eagerly respond, "They are talking about you!" but I made some conscious choices years ago as to whom I was going to believe about such things. While my list is not in any particular order, let me share a few of those choices with you.

- I will always need to watch my boundaries, accept accountability, and recognize the potential I have to harm children.
- I will not be afraid to acknowledge my past when situations demand that I do so.
- I will not live as one ready to reoffend at the first opportunity but as one who willingly puts on a new identity.
- I will remember that God calls me by name, not by my past.
- I will live to the best of my ability as a child of God and not as a man in darkness.
- I will ask for the grace to change whatever in me needs changing because such change brings me to a new level of healing, not because I need others to think differently of me.
- I will pray daily for those I have molested, asking God to bless them with lives where their dreams are realized.
- I will love those whose lives impact my own without demanding their love in return.
- I will pray for and not against those who would prefer to keep me in the center of my past.
- I will believe as I do because I am loved by God, saved by the death of Christ on the cross, and strengthened each day by the power of the Holy Spirit.

These are my beliefs and they certainly do not look like anything I read in the paper or see on TV. My beliefs bring me hope, healing, and a wholeness that the world might never offer.

Testimonies are wonderful because we all recognize a piece of ourselves in the lives of others. They are wonderful

because they remind us that sin (even serious sin) is something we all do. And testimonies remind us that the light of hope will penetrate any darkness if we are willing to look for it. I pray you will be blessed by these.

My Judgment Day

By T

I stood in the courtroom with the judge in front of me, with the prosecutor to my left, and my defense attorney to my right. I've never been so scared in my life as then because I knew that I was guilty.

First it was the prosecutor's turn to speak. He laid it on thick and hard, sparing no detail! I had so many charges, surely he would not go through all of them. Oh, but he did--every single one. With each charge read against me, the prosecutor made it a point to describe in detail what each charge involved and what the penalty each charge carried. So not only did the prosecutor read each charge one by one, he also gave details of the things I had done to earn those charges. When he was done, he demanded that I pay the highest price that I could possibly pay. "Justice demands it," he said.

The damage was done. All I could do was stand there in my shame because I truly was guilty of everything that the prosecutor charged me with. There was nothing that could possibly lessen the severity of the charges brought against me. I was ready to fall on my knees to beg the judge for mercy and to ask for just a bit of leniency when he sentenced me. However, my attorney still had to go through the motions to speak on my behalf.

But in a move that shocked everyone in the courtroom, my attorney stood there in silence and simply stretched out his hands. It was then that I noticed for the first time his nail-pierced hands. Satan hung his head because he realized he was defeated without one word being uttered. And God, with a smile on his face, looked at me and said, "Not guilty. Love demands it."

"Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me." The Lord replied, "My son, my precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

(A portion of "Footprints" by Mary Stevenson)

A Testimony

By Gil

I'm a 53-year old sex offender whose crime was aggravated sexual assault on an 8-year old boy. This past January 14 marked ten years since my release from prison.

My first correspondence with Broken Yoke Ministries was the month after my release and I have been receiving both *Wellspring* and *Into the Light* since that time. The March issue of ITL asked for stories from released sex offenders who are doing well. How about a sex offender who is blessed? I'd say that's better than well.

Since my release from prison, I have experienced many painful things—homelessness, false accusations, rejection, fear, resentment, and more. However, all of these things have made me stronger.

When I first got out of prison, I thought I'd change the world and let them know change can happen. I became active and involved with everything. I sat on church committees and boards, gave my testimony in public settings as well as at churches in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Missouri.

I began to write letters of encouragement to sex offenders and continue that practice even today. My only purpose is to uplift and give glory to God. I write to let other sex offenders know that it will be okay *no matter what happens*. God has a plan. Some of those I have written are now out of prison and they encourage me.

Satan told me many lies and I've learned that he never stops lying. However, I don't have to listen to his lies because God said, "I have a plan for you." I decided to believe in God's plan.

Looking back over these past ten years, I can see how God has been with me. I see the good choices I have made and the bad ones, too. Through all my choices I knew God was always there. Why? Because He loves me!

Whether we are sex offenders or not, we are going to experience trial in our lives. Choices will always be set before us.

If you spend a lot of time in your cell watching TV, I suggest you stop listening to the world and start listening to God. Pick up your Bible and build on that relationship because you will need God when you get out just as you need Him now.

I now have a job, a home, and still have my family, all because God's plan for me is good. Is my life without pain today? Not at all. But I am not traumatized by the future anymore because, and I say it again, I know God loves me. To show you what I mean, let me tell you what happened shortly after I was released.

One of my jobs while living at a halfway house for sex offenders was cutting the grass. This upset me terribly because I had to be outside. People would drive by and yell nasty things. The house would be egged and other unpleasant things would happen.

I asked God to help me do my task. One day it hit me to borrow another guy's Walkman. So all summer when I had to cut grass, I'd put in a Christian music tape and crank it up so that in a way I could go outside and be "invisible" as I worked.

One day while I was cutting grass I walked to the side yard where I was struck by the most putrid smell. Someone

apparently thought it would be funny to pick up a dead animal carcass and deposit it in our yard. The smell in the heat of the day was nauseating and the carcass was maggot ridden.

As I looked at it, I thought "This is what people think of me." My heart sank and I said "God, help me!"

Immediately I became aware of the praise music in my ears and I remembered a dead patch of ground where I had unsuccessfully tried earlier to make grass grow. I got a shovel and buried that stinking carcass in the spot and added grass seed.

It did not take long for a beautiful, lush green grass to fill in that bare spot. Looking at that patch of grass, I realized that what was intended for evil, God allowed to be used for good. I saw that God could make something so bare and empty become lush and full.

That nasty old carcass was me and I knew God could also take me and change me (Rom.8.28). I can't truly express what happened to me over time, but I knew it was a God thing.

Today I know forgiveness—not just for me but for you and those who persecute us as well. I know that I am a work in progress and that what I did to earn prison is not who I am.

I'm no longer set on changing the world. I'm set on changing myself, fine-tuning with God's help this person called Me. Hopefully others will see the new and improved me, but it is more important, I think, that I see and am grateful.

Our life is God's gift to us. Every breath we take is a gift. Am I doing well? Yes, for I am blessed and today no longer feel the need to be invisible. □



All things are possible with God! *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 feeling abandoned, that they will be blessed with the faith that God will *never* abandon them.
- For those fearful for their safety, that they experience peace of heart and the presence of God's love.
- For those who worried about the world outside, that they will remember God's word and trust that their needs will be met.
- For chaplains who minister to sex offenders, that their compassion be as limitless as the words of hope and encouragement that they offer.
- For churches, that they remember the lamb that was lost but now is found.
- For support systems, that they be willing to see the potential for healing and then offer it.

- For Bob, that he continues to listen for the voice of the Lord in all things; that his life be filled with healthy balance and accountability; and that he has the time needed to do everything.
- (As always) For those who are still abusing, that they will come to understand the devastation they bring on their victims and that they seek help for themselves—whatever the cost.

Victory in Jesus

By Chris

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” (1 John 5:4 KJV)

Prison life can be very discouraging, even under the best of circumstances. For those of us convicted of sex-related offenses, the difficulties are often multiplied. There’s nothing easy about doing time as a sex offender.

Nonetheless, the promises of God assured us of a victory even in the face of all hardship. Paul wrote that tribulation, distress, persecution, and famine could not separate us from the love of Christ. “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” (Romans 8:37) Whatever challenges arise to vex us in our daily walk in Christ, we can claim the victory by standing on God’s sure word.

Even more, we are called by faith to rest secure in the knowledge that we are divinely protected, and that no harm will come to us when we trust in our loving Father’s care. “In God will I praise his word: in the Lord will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.” (Psalm 56:10-11) And “because thou hast made the Lord even the most high, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.” (Psalm 91:9-10)

Walking in this blessed truth of God’s perfect and unerrant word does not come automatically simply because we believe on his Son. It requires of us an active and involved faith rooted deeply in daily Scripture study and prayer. When we draw near to God by our sanctified living, he will draw near to us. “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” (1 Peter 3:12-13)

Therefore we must be about our Father’s business; as we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. For this cause the apostle prayed without ceasing on behalf of his beloved brethren at Colosse: “to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding: that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God: strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power.” (Colossians 1:9b-11a)

This is the victory that is promised to us in Christ Jesus, when we believe on him and trust in him with all our heart. May this victory be yours today! □

A Testimony

By Andrew V

I am writing in response to the person who wrote you that they would like to hear from former sex offenders who have been out of prison and was curious how they are doing. I have been out now for two years. The saying “a bad day outside the prison is still better than a good day in prison” is quite true! There have been some rough times as far as finding employment and housing, but eventually, everything fell into place.

Furthermore, every day I wake up in my own apartment, with no cellmate, and the freedom to go to the refrigerator and eat anything I want at any time, is just a blessing beyond compare. Every day spent here and not in prison is a joy. Better still, I have been blessed with a new church community that has accepted me in spite of my actions in the past. I think what works to my credit is my honesty. It has paid off.

When you get out and find a church community you would like to be a part of, the best advice I can offer is have a talk with the pastor about your past. And for two reasons. First, if someone finds out you are on the registry, they might worry what your motives are for being at the church if you’re not honest up front. Second, how can your pastor help you with your problems if he does not know what they are? If after you tell him of your past, you don’t sense that you will fit into the church, find a new one. You don’t want to be at a church where you do not feel accepted.

I offer you hope. I want to tell you that there is life after prison, and it is good. It will not always be easy. There are disadvantages like employment discrimination, especially in the higher wage jobs. And as for housing, I was blessed with finding a landlord who rented to me anyway, even when I told him I was on parole and for what. I did this because he wanted to run a credit check, and I knew I would not pass, so I just took a gamble and was honest with him and it paid off!

My decision to have a relationship with God plays a large part in providing me with happiness and peace amongst a sea of illogical laws, parole restrictions, and a generally misinformed public. I have not experienced any personal attacks on myself, verbal or physical, or on my property due to being on the registry. Nor have I known anyone who has.

Whatever we do expands in life. If you are interested in leading an offense-free lifestyle, you will be rewarded for that. To stay offense-free both you and I must remain vigilant of our offense cycles and interventions. If we stay vigilant and also do not desire to reoffend, there is an excellent chance that we will not reoffend.

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!

Note: *Bits & Pieces* will return in the July edition of this newsletter.

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Dated Material

A Little Humor

Two men were walking home after a Halloween party and decided to take a shortcut through the cemetery just for laughs. Right in the middle of the cemetery, they were startled by a tap-tap-tapping noise coming from the misty shadows. Trembling with fear, they found an old man with a hammer and chisel, chipping away at one of the headstones.

"Holy cow, Mister," one of them said after catching his breath. "You scared us half to death -- we thought you were a ghost! What are you doing working here so late at night?"
"Those fools!" the old man grumbled. "They misspelled my name!"

