



# Into the Light

*All things are possible with God*

May—June 2010

## Yes, It's Difficult

*By Bob Van Domelen*

<sup>1</sup> Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. <sup>2</sup> From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I." (Psalm 61.1-2)

Dear Bob,

I have been down for 14 years now and there doesn't seem to be an end to this place. The program I was scheduled to take was cancelled because of budget cuts so now I don't know what I am going to do. The emotional hole I'm in is getting deeper every day. It all seems so hopeless. If God is there, I don't know why he isn't doing anything for me. If He is doing something, I just can't tell.

Thanks for listening.

### **Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer**

Sometimes I am tempted to respond to letters like this one with a simple "Hang in there. God loves you." The words seem shallow even though I believe that they are sincere. It's just that someone dealing with 14 years of struggle deserves a little more.

Non-sex offenders know that at the end of their time in prison, they will have a chance to start over. Employment will be hard to find for anyone who honestly answers "Have you ever been convicted of a felony?" on the job application form, but for most of them, there are no restrictions as to where they can work.

In many parts of the country, returning sex offenders (RSOs) are not only restricted in terms of where they work, but also where they live, where they go to church, or where they find recreation. Most people do not have to include these needs in their daily prayers, but sex offenders do. These and so much more.

They pray, just as I prayed and still do, for reconnection with family and friends who have been unable to see past the crimes we have committed. They pray for a chance to be different, to lay aside the dark thoughts and behaviors of the past. They pray for their victims knowing that nothing can undo the harm they caused. They pray for inner peace. Some pray for a way to help prevent others from doing what they did. "Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer."

### **From the ends of the earth I call to you**

Prison is a consequence for actions that society considers beyond the norm of acceptable behavior. It is one place where society defines people by the crimes they have committed and that definition (for society at least) doesn't and may not ever change.

When I read some of the letters I get from sex offenders, it is almost as if they have invited me into the deepest, most private part of their being. Prevented from the luxury of being open about what they have done, some

go to bed each evening thanking God that it was not a day of being beaten up or sexually assaulted. Some go to bed each evening wondering when if ever someone will share some encouragement with them about their future. Some go to bed in the afterglow of a great Bible study led by some outside ministry but wondering if the church they left behind will ever welcome them again. And most wonder if they will ever find restoration with family or friends who have just disappeared.

These are prayers that come from the ends of the earth, from a place so distant that faith and faith alone makes it possible for them to face the next day.

### **My heart grows faint**

I share sentences from some of the letters I get in the column *Bits & Pieces*, words despairing of hope and even faith. Sometimes there is a definite sense of anger that is impossible to miss and some write in the weeks that follow offering to share something with the people needing that connection.

It seemed logical to me to encourage those so discouraged to seek a connection in some chapel activity, a place where the wounded gather for encouragement. Sadly, however, what is often found is judgmental thinking and even alienation. They are told that they do not appear remorseful of their sins, that the denomination of their childhood is false, and that they are not saved.

Obviously, what I have described is not the case in all prisons but it is in many. Shoved out of the doors of potential healing and faith connection, they return to their cells wondering why they would want a God whose followers were such as these.

Yet, a voice deep inside says "Keep calling out. Keep asking God to be with you!" They have hearts that have grown faint but desperate as well. And in the depth of that desperation, I believe the sound of their calling is the same as God's people made before Moses led them out of Egypt.

### **Lead me to the rock that is higher than I**

My guess is that someone reading this will be thinking, "He's writing about me. He understands." I am not sure I fully understand because one person can never fully appreciate another's true needs, but I believe that God does and that's what is important.

During the time I was in county jail awaiting transfer to prison, I found that I was praying without ceasing—but I didn't know it at the time. Everything was so beyond my ability to control that instead of trying to get that control I gave it to God. Trust me, I didn't know how God would do what He was going to do, but I did believe He would do something. Considering how all my previous attempts to control life had failed, my life had to be better with God in

control than with me at the helm. People told me that pretty often but I used to think “What do they know? They have never done what I have done.”

The options for me were to give up or give in and based on the things God already had shown me in others, that made sense to me. Somehow I knew that if I gave up I was already saying no to the potential for good things to happen. With 25 years having passed since my arrest, I can testify that despite some issues that must be faced on a daily basis, I am so happy that I trusted and had faith despite my occasional results.

There is a wonderful sentence in one of the *Bits & Pieces* offerings – a reminder that we cannot think of God as a man, a man who responds the way we expect Him to respond. God *does* view us differently and that’s the key.

To surrender to God is to give up the right to having things turn out just as we want them to turn out. During the past 25 years, God *indeed* is new to me every morning. Even today as I write this I could share stories of His presence in my life and in my wife’s life that neither of us expected though the blessings were/are nonetheless real.

God meets our needs though not with luxury. Residency restrictions do not limit God. GPS tracking does not prevent His presence in our lives. SOT is not a room where God may not enter. And in the solitude of a single heart, He longs to have conversations if we are but willing to speak with Him and to listen.

Yes, daily life *is* a struggle, yet surrendering to God is not a step away from those struggles and it certainly isn’t an easy way to live. In all the years I have been writing to sex offenders, I can honestly say that I have been honored and blessed to be corresponding with saints.

Do what you need to do each day to be a bit more connected with God than you were the day before. Where you are may not be where you want to be but it is a far better place than where you have been. And, of course, never forget that God is wherever you are, loving you beyond your ability to comprehend. God is like that.

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## ***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.*

I’ve always known men who act religious for appearance but now I’m seeing many men who I believe genuinely had faith lose it over time after their release from prison. They weren’t consciously trying to fool people inside but they may have been fooling themselves by not being well grounded in their faith or by over-estimating their own strength.

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Sometimes it’s a challenge to be okay with where people are at in their own lives. I don’t want to hurt anyone again, so for me it has been very helpful to own up to my feelings and my bad decisions. I guess I worry that other people might go out and hurt others again if they can’t own up to their shortcomings. However, I recognize that I can’t be accountable for them. God is in control and that is what needs to be and should be.

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Just like alcoholism or any other addiction cannot be cured by just putting down the bottle or stopping the behavior, sex

offender therapy must, **MUST** go back to and resolve, heal, or correct all the bad messages that have encouraged the sex offender to believe that past behaviors were wanted or even needed.

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Your March-April 2010 issue of *Into the Light* – WOW! I struggle with anger every single day. I even went so far as to purchase a book titled “Anger Kills” by Redford and Virginia Williams. Telling others about this book will help many who are suffering from anger issues.

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I really enjoyed the March-April newsletter on anger. I think it is something that we as sex offenders deal with but feel bad over having. One of my biggest battles with anger comes from my relationship with my former church. I’ve had zero response since I was incarcerated. I haven’t reached out to them in anger. I always strive to be humble and to recognize that it was my own actions that caused this situation.

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I have experienced 23 months of freedom [from sexual behaviors] and now I am beginning to dimly understand how much it matters to live a life of holiness and purity. Yes, I slip and slide occasionally in my mind and in my words, but I am learning the difference between being a ‘child’ of God and a ‘man’ of God. The line is quite thin and we all will forever be God’s children, but the road to manhood can only be walked through the valley of the shadow of death. The completeness and wholeness we all seek is found in our sincere search for God in Christ.

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Please pray with me that I will not get to a certain point in my journey, screw up, and have to start all over again. This has been the way things have gone so many times before and I am hoping to get past that point—not go back.

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I liked the lead article in the most recent ITL [“Anger?”]. I must admit that some days I feel like anger is the only emotion worth having. I feel so betrayed or mistreated by others and I really get tired of being told that I have to accept the attitude of others so to move on.

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As part of the process I’m in I’ve been journaling again—a 10<sup>th</sup> step practice that helps me greatly. The journal started as a “Rage Journal” so that I could see the patterns of my anger, then the patterns where I surrendered my peace. Now it’s another activity confirming my willingness to change old patterns.

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Sex offender recidivism rates did not drop because offenders one day chose to stop a certain behavior. They have dropped because of offenders being in a persistent and grinding struggle with their past. That means dealing with all those years of distorted actions and thoughts.

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I recognize the hurts and trials in the quotes I read in *Bits & Pieces* as I too have gone through many of them at various points in my life. I pray that those who struggle remember that God is not a man. He doesn’t view us the way we often view ourselves.

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[Referring to “A Point of View – July ‘09] Looking in the mirror is step one. Seeing yourself honestly is step two. Knowing how to improve the image is the oft missing miracle that is part of step four. The hardest part, step five, is making that change and maintaining it in times of duress. From where I stand, this is normal life.

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When I forgave my dad for leaving before I was born and later forgave the 5<sup>th</sup> grade bullies by name, I was delivered from anger. Praise God! I try to tell some of the young guys here that anger and hate only hurts *them*. They will never actually get to see the person who is the object of their anger lose even one minute of sleep. Only the angry one does.

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I never realized how out of control my life was or the amount of people I hurt.

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Part of a North Carolina law banning sex offenders from churches with childcare facilities was struck down as unconstitutional December 17 by a local trial court. A Chatham County court found the existing law to be too broad to be enforced but upheld restrictions against offenders visiting schools and other childcare locations. The Chatham County District Attorney’s office will appeal. (*Christianity Today*, February 2010)

- For Prison Fellowship, that their April 6-7 *Out4Life* conference in Lansing, MI, bore the fruit of encouragement for all those in ministry to inmates.
- For all with age-inappropriate attractions who have not acted on those attractions, that they are able to find the support and encouragement needed to deal with those attractions.
- For groups like The Support Group, that their efforts to help loved ones deal with civil commitment are recognized as a responsible approach to a difficult situation.
- For those whose victims are family members, that each day is a reminder to pray for them and ask God to heal the wounds of betrayal.
- For communities, that they seek intelligent rather than emotional answers to issues related to housing.
- For churches, that the word of God and the example of Jesus opens the door for more and not less ministry to those considered modern day lepers.
- 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.

**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!**

### Selections from “Maybe”

#### Maybe --

- It is true that we don’t know what we have until we lose it, but it is also true that we don’t know what we have been missing until it arrives.
- The happiest of people don’t necessarily have the best of everything; they just make the most everything that comes their way.
- The best kind of friend is the kind you can sit on a porch and swing with, never say a word, and then walk away feeling like it was the best conversation you’ve ever had.
- You should do something nice for someone every day, even if it is simply to leave them alone.
- You should hope for enough happiness to make you sweet, enough trials to make you strong, enough sorrow to keep you human, and enough hope to make you happy.
- Giving someone all your love is never an assurance that they will love you back. Don’t expect love in return; just wait for it to grow in their heart; but if it doesn’t, be content that it grew in yours.

*Submitted by Jim. (Author Unknown)*



### *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 facing civil commitment hearings, that they never lose a sense of God’s presence in their lives and that the hearing will be fair.
- For those whose environment is difficult, that the peace that surpasses all understanding be theirs.
- For those churches fearful of even discussing the issue of child molestation or how to minister, that they become aware of resources able to help them be Christ to *all* of the wounded.
- For those in despair, that they be blessed by words of encouragement and hope.
- For those who struggle with anger, that they are able to find a healthy manner in which to deal with it.

***All things are possible with God!***

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### ***A Little Humor . . .***

Sven and Ole worked together and both were laid off, so they went to the unemployment office. When asked his occupation, Ole answered, "Dress Maker". "I make the dresses for the nice ladies." The clerk looked up Dress Maker. Finding it classified as unskilled labor, she gave him \$300 a week unemployment pay.

Sven was asked his occupation. "Diesel fitter" he replied. Since diesel fitter was a skilled job, the clerk gave Sven \$600 a week.

When Ole found out he was furious. He stormed back into the office to find out why his friend and co-worker was collecting double his pay.

The Clerk explained: "Dress Makers are unskilled and diesel fitters are skilled labor."

"What skill?" yelled Ole. "I make the dresses for the nice ladies, Sven holds them up, looks at 'em up and says: "Yah, diesel fitter."

