



# Into the Light

*All things are possible with God*

July—August 2014

## We Are Reconciled

Restoration Might Take Some Time

By Bob Van Domelen

*<sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”*  
(2 Corinthians 5.19)

One of my favorite places to be is with those who do prison or jail ministry because I never feel as though they look at me with eyes fixed on my past, a past that included time in prison for sexual assault. They are my encouragers, my occasional accountability team, and my reminder of God's mercy and forgiveness. I can say the same for you who are reading this newsletter because sharing with you involves trusting God to encourage me in what I write.

When I correspond with individuals in prison for sex-related offenses, I try to see them as I want them to see me—in the process of Christ-centered change. I don't like to refer to someone as a sex offender any more than I would identify my son as “The Liar” or my neighbor as “The Prostitute.” We all sin, some more grievously than others, but God calls us by name, not by those failings. As I tell people, “God doesn't call me molester. He calls me Bob.”

Despite how easily those words come, I daily read letters from individuals who cannot find a way to see themselves as anything other than a sex offender. Many write to share that they know God has forgiven them but that they cannot forgive themselves. More write that re-entry seems almost impossible given the rejection they fear facing them when they actually are released.

While we do need the support of others, the healing change we seek for our lives must center on *us*, on how *we* identify ourselves and how *we* believe God identifies us. In that sense, how the public responds is not important, though I would be less than honest if I didn't acknowledge how nice it is to feel accepted.

The bondage to the past can never really be broken until we take into the core of our being that Jesus took those sins to the cross as atonement to the Heavenly Father. The verse above says “God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ.” It doesn't say “God took the death of His son on the cross under consideration and would get back to humanity as to whether or not we would be reconciled.” It said we are reconciled because of Christ.

### **Not counting people's sins against them**

Some believe that God forgets our sins (Psalm 103.12) because “as far as east is from west” implies forgetting. When God removes our transgressions from us, He chooses to love us without the filter of those past sins. He

sees us all as He created us and calls us to be in His love. In a way, believing that God *could* hold my sins over my head like some tool of control but that He *chooses* not to do so is more of a sign of love than forgetting my sins.

For my part, I am a new creation (2 Corinthians 5.17) because the choices I make and the identity I claim are in Christ. The old me, which I chose not to willingly reveal, lived in murky moral darkness. My eventual surrender felt in some ways like my slate had been wiped clean, like I was newly born into the world.

But I grew to realize that I still had to deal with temptation as well as with the consequences of my addictive behaviors. Having been blessed with the cleansing love of Christ, the option of re-offending was like an invitation to swim in a foul-smelling cesspool. Could I jump into that cesspool if I wanted? Sure. But knowing I could and choosing to do so are two different things.

### **Breaking the Bond**

*“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”* (James 5.16)

Keeping sin a secret empowers that sin—helps keep it alive. Whatever one might say about SOT, no one who is sincere about change will complete the program without breaking the shame that binds. And I believe this happens because the choice is not made to satisfy a group facilitator but to face the darkness within that needs to be eliminated.

In Chapter 7 of Luke's gospel, we read the story of the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus when he dined at the home of a Pharisee. She knew what she had done. She believed Jesus could set her free by forgiving her. And she was willing to humble herself for this to happen. Simon the Pharisee was not able to accept the woman's actions because of her sinful past, because he could not release her from that identity.

### **Steps to Restoration**

At the minimum, society wants to be assured that a person in re-entry completed treatment and found a way to break the addictive behavior cycles so many have. Most of society doesn't really think this way, but those who are willing to be supportive of you and me do. They want to know we did something significant to bring about change.

A person who tells a pastor “I didn't need treatment—God healed me!” is not, in my opinion, a candidate for long-term successful re-entry. I am not suggesting that re-offending is inevitable, just that there are triggers still present that make it a possibility.

## Dealing with Shame

One point I made at the recent Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association "Impact 2014" conference dealt with shame, specifically the shame we assign to temptation. We are afraid to tell anyone that we have temptations, especially temptations that fit our criminal pasts.

Perhaps we fear that the progress others think we have made will disappear as though it never existed. Perhaps they might think we are no different than we were when in the center of our addictive behaviors. Worse, they might just believe that we are manipulating them as we manipulated our victims. So we keep still rather than risk losing their support and acceptance.

I get the feeling that some SOT treatment facilitators consider temptation as proof that nothing has changed. "Unless we can eliminate those fantasies," they say, "we have not succeeded in protecting society." Or they might suggest that the person is not giving the program 100% effort.

Every person without exception deals with temptation. This particular temptation just carries greater consequences. When temptation does occur, however, it seems to me that being able to effectively say no IS a sign of change.

Maybe I am being a little unrealistic. After all, can we really trust others with knowing our weaknesses, our darker sides? Never mind that we don't act on the temptation because the temptation is enough by itself in their eyes and maybe in our own as well. I rather wish, by the way, that the verse in James also said "and don't forget to confess your temptations, for in confessing them, you take away their power."

### The Timetable

There is nothing anyone can say that will cause me to deny the reconciliation God has brought into my life. I am different, considerably so since my arrest in 1985.

But restoration—at least restoration in a way that you and I might imagine it—is still a work in progress. They say that the pendulum continues to swing to the right in how the world deals with this issue. We are feared, despised, and rejected more than we are loved, respected, and welcomed. Whenever I start to have a pity party, I am reminded of a friend who reminds me where I have been and what I have become in the past 29 years. He then closes with "Don't let anyone stop what God has been doing." And he's right. □

## Bits & Pieces

*The following are taken from letters I have received since the last issue of this newsletter. Some are meant to offer hope and encouragement while others call out for us to be in prayer.*

In all of this, while I do not know why God allowed this to happen to me, as I loathe what happened, the toxic environment that never ends, and my life and family ripped away—though I have frustrations and questions, yet I cling to Him.

*I found Joe's letter encouraging. Thanks to Joe and to you for sharing it. The duck joke I've heard many times but I must agree, it is still funny.*

"Whatever it is that has its hooks in you, you will never be free from it until you find something you want more. It's not about getting rid of desire. It's about giving ourselves to bigger, better, and more powerful desires. Life is not about toning down and repressing your God-given life force. It's about channeling it, focusing it, and turning it loose on something beautiful, something pure, true, and good, something that connects you with God, with others, with the world." (Rob Bell, author)

*The way I treat creation reflects how I feel about the Creator, so when I sin against someone, I sin against God.*

When I feel or perceive that I have been rejected by someone, my frame of mind changes to one of self-pity and then to anger at the person I felt rejected me. Then I move into remorse for my thoughts against that person and, led by the Holy Spirit, talk to the person and ask forgiveness. I used to not be able to get to that last part and that led to a lot of problems for me.

*I heard that whenever you are going through some difficult times and God seems to be absent, remember the teacher is always quiet during the test.*

How the trials and temptations change upon release. The change of time—that time I used to have to read and study sometimes gets taken over by work and things of this world. I need to daily return to my first love.

*My question to myself: What is Christ to me? Why do I follow Jesus? Is it to receive all I can from Him or to do as He did? It is my hope that I have matured from where I was. But if I am honest, I am still learning and growing to become as my elder brother Jesus.*

I do not speak against other people. I do not speak against God. Give thanks. I give thanks. I thank God for everything that happens to me, everything I am, and everything I have.

*The shoes that bring you where you are today are the ones you put your feet into. Maybe it's time to grow into shoes that don't come back to prison. Maybe it's time to leave foot steps you would be proud to have followed.*

I make a commitment to journal every day. Sometimes it's a few lines. Sometimes a whole page or two. I make a point to write in my journal all of my thoughts, both positive and negative, and the emotions I felt during the day. I include at least one beautiful thing I saw each day and something for which I am grateful. I've learned a great deal about myself doing this.

*I have to remind myself daily of who I am in Christ and that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8.1).*

When mom died, I felt that since God did not meet my need by healing her, then I couldn't live for Him. I am so glad that I chose to keep on in my faith, but I think that it's in those times we can actually grow. I did.

# 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 each of us, that we come to believe in the identity we have in Christ Jesus.
- For those who reach out in ministry to those in jail or prison, that they find blessings in their efforts.
- For CMCA, that the organization continues to grow and open new doors for service.
- For those who feel completely alone, that they are only as alone as they allow themselves to be and that they trust God in opening doors to healing connections.
- For those approaching a release from prison, that what needs to be done, will be; that what cannot be done, will strengthen their trust in God.
- For those in civil commitment, that they find hope and determination in what they do—steps toward eventual freedom.
- For family members, that there is healing and restoration founded on the love of Christ.
- For prison personnel, that they recognize their potential as part of a positive time of rehabilitation.
- For those blessed by "Impact 2014," that they have been able to return home filled with ideas for positive impact.
- For those who attended my workshop "Sex Offenders in Our Churches," that the message was received and found to be useful.
- 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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**Be Reconciled**



## Why Not Joy?

- ❖ Christ has made himself known to you!
- ❖ He has forgiven all your repented sins!
- ❖ He has taken from you all condemnation!
- ❖ He has set you Free!
- ❖ He has come to restore your soul, return you to life!
- ❖ The Holy Spirit – is present within you! He will lead you now, guide you, teach you and correct you.
- ❖ You have a Father now! Unlike man, He will never forsake you!
- ❖ As you draw near Him, you will be overcome with goodness, wisdom, truth, mercy, love and peace.
- ❖ You have much to be grateful for: food, roof, clothing, and breathing. He provides for you!
- ❖ He has set you in The Way of, not only life abundant, but also Eternal life. Death even has lost its sting!
- ❖ You have no reason to fear, worry, doubt, or despair! The One True Triune God is now with you. He will carry you through your trials!
- ❖ You are God's child now! With Him as your Father, nothing is impossible!
- ❖ Hope has been set firm within you! Your life story will end well.

## Some Thoughts on CMCA

The Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association is relatively new but in the two years I have been blessed to teach workshops at CMCA conferences it is clear to me that these are good people. Our short time together provided a chance to meet others in ministry, find out what they are doing, as well as share what my ministry is about for those who were interested.

The many workshops offered, the resources displayed covering all things ministry, and the beautiful Wheaton College Campus all combined to make *Impact 2014* a success for the more than 400 in attendance.

One unexpected gift this year was the opportunity to meet Chaplain Gerald Silliman from Alaska. Though we had not met before the conference, he has been financially supporting Broken Yoke Ministries for years, helping to make *Into the Light* possible. I truly enjoyed our conversations and the encouragement he offered me.



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

A woman runs into a doctor's office and says "DOCTOR! DOCTOR! You have to help me! Everywhere I touch on my body it hurts!"

The doctor replied, "Show me."

So the woman poked her ankle and screamed of pain. Then she poked her knee and yelled OW. She poked her forehead and screamed again.

She was about to continue when the doctor said, "That's enough, let me think this over." He thought for about a minute and said "I think I know what your problem is. You broke your finger."

