



Into the Light

All things are possible with God
January—February 2016

City of God

By Bob Van Domelen

³ *though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.* ⁴ *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.* ⁵ *God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.* (Psalm 46:3-5)

It isn't unusual to hear someone say "God told me" or "God spoke to my heart." I certainly don't doubt them but I also suspect a bit of jealousy creeps into my thinking. "Why doesn't God talk to *me* that way?" or "Why isn't my heart more open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit?" But even as I say these things to myself, I can feel the question "How do you know that God isn't talking to you or speaking to your heart?"

Earlier this week I began thinking and praying about this article. What verse would serve to anchor the thoughts together? And how can I write in such a way as to serve the very goal of this newsletter -- to offer hope and encouragement to those who get little or no hope and encouragement?

In the middle of a recent early morning service at our church, an idea started forming though it was like looking into muddy water. By the time I got home, I tried to express the idea to my wife, but I wasn't as successful as I would have liked to have been. Powering up my laptop, the title for the article, *City of God*, just popped into my head, so I entered it in the spot above.

I like listening to Spirit-filled music as I write and I know the songs of Dan Schutte and others so well that I really don't have to pay attention to them. Phrases float in and out of my conscious thinking as spaces of time are provided. I opened my audio player to select an album and there, at the top of the screen was the title *City of God*. Okay, Lord, what next?

Here's where things will start coming onto the page without my knowing for sure the direction they take, but I am going to trust the feelings and also trust God to make them clear.

waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging

My bible commentary says that this phrase describes times of stress and struggle for those who seek God. It also suggests the words might describe our enemies although I feel that the circumstances we are all in can be just as accurately described as an enemy as any person, especially if that enemy draws our sight from God or gives birth to despair.

There are few weeks that go by without a letter from someone struggling to find housing in communities with residency restrictions. Likewise, few fail to mention not only a concern but also a fear of what awaits them on the outside.

Though housing and employment are available to those whose names are etched in state sex offender registries, there is no city or safe haven awaiting them. Some in reentry violate probation because they have nothing on the outside. Sadly, others reoffend--an action that only confirms society's belief that "those who molest will *never* change!"

But there is one city that exists without physical boundaries. It is a city defined by relationships, especially a relationship with God. You might think that every letter I get and answer is one without hope, but that would not be true.

I get letters from those who have put their trust in God, believe in the forgiveness and atonement offered through Christ's death on the cross, and look for the presence of the Holy Spirit each and every day. Those letters are like an invisible cord connecting us. The hope and encouragement offered is like an address outside the front door, an address that helps us identify one another.

A love of God and a trust in His plan serve as the foundation for our relationships. These relationships are as unique as anything imaginable just as we are all created uniquely in God's image and likeness and this city of God exists and grows because it is God's design that it does so.

whose streams make glad

I doubt we could survive if our daily goal were to change the hearts of those who would rather see us forever in confinement. Don't misunderstand. There *are* people willing to see what God is doing in our lives. Many *are* willing to be supportive to the degree that they are able. But from my perspective of doing this ministry for almost 24 years now, I believe that the majority (a) don't understand or believe the changes taking place in us or (b) they don't really care or want to know.

All that is simply to say don't look to others for your affirmation. Look for it in God and then mirror God's image of you in your daily walk.

So what about the 'streams that make glad'? They are God's grace, mercy, love, and joy given by the Holy Spirit to all those who believe. Whatever we face, whatever rejection might be placed in our path, God's love is never changing, His city is always alive and His love flows constantly through all who dwell in it.

God is within her, she will not fall

God is within us because we are the city of God. Though we may never meet, we are connected by His love. Moreover, when we leave this world, we are heirs to His heavenly kingdom. So it makes sense, then, for us to remember the connection that joins us each and every day. We can and must pray for one another with hearts that understand our sin in ways others might not be able to understand. Names are not necessary. God makes the connection real whenever we lift each other up in His holy name.

Our relationship with God is not based on some level of perfection we have to maintain in order for God to love us. What we are called to do is to seek God in *all* things and to remember that God understands temptation. If we had to be free of temptation, could any of us come to the Lord's throne wearing some sign that says "I made it. I completely stopped sinning!"?

More realistic than wearing that kind of signage would be to come before the Lord's throne just as the tax collector did, saying "Lord, forgive me, a sinner." (Luke 18.13) And we are!

God will help her at break of day

It is rare, I think, for any of us to wake in the morning feeling as though the rest of the day will be one failure after another. Lamentations 3:22-24 reminds of God's loving presence at the break of day. It says

²² *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.*²³ *They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*²⁴ *I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."*

We cannot do anything on our own. The challenges we face daily are indeed formidable but God IS there with us through them all.

Some of you might already know the refrain to "City of God" but it seems very appropriate to share it with you here.

"Let us build the city of God.
May our tears be turned into dancing!
For the Lord, our light and our love,
has turned the night into day!"

We live together in this faith-filled community wherever we might actually be. I find strength in knowing that someone is praying for me at any given moment and believe I am called to pray for each of you. We live, after all, in the city of God. □

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 reading "Ask-Seek-Knock" (*Into the Light* – 2015), I run into a question that has crossed my mind. "Why didn't you [God] stop me?" Actually, He has answered me quite a few times but I just did not like His answer, so I kept throwing the question into the heavens in hope of a better answer.

When I went through my Victim/Offender Mediation Program and met with my victim, one of the biggest lessons I learned was that the best way for me to make restitution to my victim is for me to live my life in purity and right living (righteousness) in a spiritual life in God. In that spiritual perspective, God truly does work His spiritual interior healing – for all.

One of my father's favorite expressions was "Life is great if you don't have to live it!" Life in here [prison] can be anything but great but through Christ I can thrive in it.

It is not what you say but how you act in normal every day situations that defines who you are. If we worry all the time about being 'found out,' then we'll never be able to live in a normal way.

In my devotions this morning I read where we need to take time to really listen to what the Lord is saying to us. We do find it easier to listen to our own thoughts and run with them, but we know where that can lead us at times, don't we. I am doing my best now to listen and be observant to what the Lord is saying and showing me.

I am not proud of what I did. Being here is a daily reminder of that, so there are days when I'm not happy with my past and of the image I see in the mirror. I do realize that that is my belief-issue-problem and I am the only one who can let that go and move on. I'm working on it.

Yes, it is comforting to feel loved by God and to have hopes of an eternal world of good for 'the future' but I cannot stop wanting the personal intervention now! Yes, most people believe God is intervening at all times in various ways, but I'm not ashamed to ask for more. He asks me for more.

God has given me a new heart, a heart that is after Him, a heart full of joy and peace. He has given me a hope, a hope that everything is going to be alright. He has everything in control. He has given me new sight so I can see as He sees. My body today is the temple of the Holy Spirit, not an empty room that the enemy has used for his playground most of my life. Today I am free. I am a new creature in Christ.

Who I have been is NOT who I will be!

A former pastor writes: This isn't the end of life or ministry for me. It's simply an opportunity to be restored for His glory and to do even mightier work than I was able to do before while trying to keep all my skeletons secure in the closet. To God be the glory!

Sometimes we get so wrapped up in 'us' that we forget there are others around us who so desperately need to have God's love portrayed to them

God has truly changed my life while I have been in prison and I know He has saved my life – physically and spiritually.

It's too bad that even in a sex offender unit there is a hierarchy of crimes.

Your Support Matters

Please consider financially supporting this ministry. *Into the Light*, a newsletter unlike any other, is made possible solely by your donations. Send contributions to

Broken Yoke Ministries
PO Box 5824
De Pere, WI, 54115-5824.

All donations are tax deductible and will be acknowledged. If you are unable to support this effort financially, please support it with your prayers.

**If you have family or friends, tell them about the website for Broken Yoke Ministries:
www.brokenyoke.org
Newsletters, links, information**

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 though we have not met, we are connected by faith in the City of God.
- For those who feel alone, that God's presence will awaken in them the joy of that relationship.
- For those who fear re-entry with all its uncertainty, that they remember that fear is a natural response to the unknown but is overcome by trusting God.
- For those who are still looking for something positive in themselves, that they come to see beyond their offenses and embrace the mercy and love of God.
- For those who serve in jail or prison ministries, that they remind those they serve of God's forgiveness and of the identity they are called to have by God's design.
- For those who struggle with holidays because they are a reminder of their separation from family and friends, that God's plan for restoring them is unfolding.
- For churches, that they lift up those in jails or prisons as extensions of the faith community.
- For those who were themselves victims, that somehow they allow God to heal that wounded inner child.
- 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



Your Help Is Needed

I have been blessed by an invitation to present a workshop at the Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association (CMCA) annual conference in Atlanta, GA, in May 2016. The title of the workshop is "What the Hope we offer really looks like."

As part of my preparation for the workshop, I am including a survey with this newsletter that I prayerfully ask you to consider filling out and returning in the stamped return envelope.

As you look at the series of basically yes or no questions, you might easily say "Well, isn't the end result pretty much already known?" and you'd be right – to a point. Sometimes, however, being able to say something like "87% of those responding" carries a lot more weight than merely saying "We all know that. . ."

There is a place for a comment at the bottom of the page but I hope you will feel free to comment as much as you'd like. Numbers or percentages can easily lack any sense of connection with real people.

Finally, there are two things I would also ask. First, please be praying for the preparation process and the presentation itself. The workshop is meant to encourage discussion on how to improve things. Second, there will be travel and lodging expenses that will need to be covered. If you or someone who supports you on the outside is able, please contribute toward meeting these costs. Of the two things, I count prayer far for important because God *will* meet the second.

A Prayer for the Cave Time

Guardian of my soul, thank you,
for guiding me in the dark places,
for reaching me through the people of my life,
for drawing near to love me when I feel unlovable,
for teaching me how to tend my wounds,
for guarding me with words of truth
and moments of empowerment,
for allowing my pain and struggle
so that I can come to greater wholeness.

Joyce Rupp *Dear Heart Come Home* (2001)

Hope
CHANGES EVERYTHING

Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.

PO Box 5824

De Pere, WI 54115-5824



All things are possible with God

A Little Humor . . .

"Sugar why don't you sit down by the table and we'll start supper," said Dorothy to her husband of 50 years. "Sure thing," he said settling himself down in his chair.

"Now darling, would you like the soup first or the salad?" his wife asked.

"Umm I guess I'll take the soup," he responded.

After a whole meal of one endearing term after another, their guest Bob couldn't contain his curiosity any longer so he snuck into the kitchen and whispered, "Dorothy, do you always talk to your husband like that?" "Bob, I'll be honest with you," Dorothy replied. "It's been five years now, I just can't remember his name, and I am just too embarrassed to ask him!"

