



# Into the Light

*All things are possible with God*

March—April 2016

## What of Mercy?

*By Bob Van Domelen*

<sup>21</sup> *keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*" (Jude 1.21)

There are few days that pass without my saying "Lord, have mercy on me" following close on the heels of something I did or said that should not have been done or said. And perhaps like for many of you, I felt the words "Lord, have mercy on me" were the same as saying "Lord, forgive me my sins." But there is a difference.

I believe that when I ask God's forgiveness, that forgiveness is given because Christ died so that my sins might be atoned or made right in the eyes of God. For my part, I recognize that something in me needs to change so as to avoid falling into that sin.

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51.10) is what David prayed. Pure is often understood as free of impurity (sins of the flesh) but it also means a condition of being closer to God's will. In other words, "Help me to do what you want, Lord, so that what I choose to do or say brings you honor and glory."

One of the blessings God gives us is the ability to come day after day confessing the same sins, sins we struggle to overcome, knowing that God never steps away. He never turns from us or declares us beyond redemption. Instead, He says <sup>28</sup> *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* <sup>29</sup> *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* <sup>30</sup> *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" (Matthew 11:28-30) So that's what I try to do.

Many who write ask why, if they are forgiven, life around them doesn't improve, families are not restored, communities reject them, and even churches keep them at arm's length. My response is usually "Hang in there and continue to do what brings change to the way you live. Eventually the witness of that change in a consistent life will bring restoration." In other words, just wait. It will get better. And it does though not always in ways we had imagined.

As some of you who write fairly often already know, I recently decided to test the water, so to speak, with regard to the declaration by Pope Francis that this would be a Year of Mercy. The bishop in our area had written "God promises to everyone who seeks mercy and forgiveness an ocean, a tsunami of mercy and grace during this year, especially in proportion to all who are asking for that grace." So I wrote with the intent of asking permission to serve as a lector, a

lay distributor, or even a member of the choir should any of those ministries be of interest, though not necessarily to actually declaring a desire to serve in those ministries.

His response was both encouraging and disappointing in that he encouraged me in the ministry I currently do through Broken Yoke but discouraging because he had written "I am unable to give you permission."

It was not an answer formed out of any fear that I might victimize someone so much as a desire to avoid any victim of molestation having to deal with what might appear to be the church setting aside what I had done as though it had not happened. On any scale with victims on one side and offenders on the other, it is normal that public opinion and feeling would support the victims and condemn the offenders. By the way, a normal reaction is not always the right or best reaction.

Maybe some of you reading this will say my church missed an opportunity to show restoration or at the least some level of reconciliation and you might be right. At the same time, I have witnessed varying degrees of trauma experienced by victims of child abuse who attended a workshop I gave at a conference. Some have told me that despite years since their abuse, seeing me standing as a teacher was more difficult than they had thought it would be. Some said they had to leave the room.

Since receiving the bishop's letter, the word mercy has appeared repeatedly in daily scripture, in sermons I hear, and even in daily conversation. Initially I felt some anger because if there was mercy, why did I get that reply to my letter? Where was the mercy in that? What of mercy?

Some resources suggest that mercy is a favorable treatment or attitude given to one who is deserving of punishment or rejection. In other words, mercy is going above and beyond expectation when a negative response is merited or expected. One source suggested that life in prison rather than a death penalty might define mercy.

The change I have experienced over the past 31 years is noticeable even to me, so it would be easy for me to ask "When will enough time have passed before I am not seen as an offender just biding his time to reoffend? When will the people in my church be able to hear of my past without revulsion or a desire to reject me?" I don't know if I will ever experience those things differently in my lifetime.

As much as I would like things to be different, I am beginning to understand how hard such things are for those who have been victims or the families and friends of victims. Quite frankly, mercy is a step beyond what most of us truly offer. We don't really live in a world open to more than

tolerance of those in reentry. People say “They deserve what they get and they don’t deserve any extras. Save the extras for the rest of us who have never been convicted and incarcerated.”

A Rwandan priest writing of the death of 800,000 in 1994 in that country, a genocide that included the death of his mother, wrote “I forgave the murderer of my mother. What I can say about forgiveness is that without mercy, forgiveness isn’t right. If we forgive, we have to be merciful. If you are not merciful to the one who made wrong to you, it means that your forgiveness is not complete.”

Not only did this man forgive the mayor responsible for ordering his mother’s death, he supported the mayor’s children after the man was sentenced to prison.

I don’t know if I could extend mercy to that degree nor do I think I should ever allow words like “I forgive you” to fall lightly. Yes, I am called to forgive and I pray that I can do that without hesitation, but I believe I am still very lacking in the offer of mercy. So in my shortcoming, I ask God to do what I often fail to do - offer *complete* mercy.

None of us can make others be more than they are but we can, through our witness of consistency, open the door of possibilities for them. They, however, must be the ones to choose to walk through that door.

Prison and reentry have put all of us who have completed prison to the test and though support is wonderful, it comes in small doses. We are the ones who get to do the real work and once in a while, there is mental applause from those walking alongside, a sound that gives us strength.

That’s why the opening verse is so meaningful to me. It says “*keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life,*” for that is the ultimate mercy.

I will tell you that it is hard to attend church services knowing I am restricted in what I can and cannot do, but my faith is not dependent on the approval of others, even the church hierarchy. My faith is, as Paul wrote to the Hebrews, “confidence in what we(I) hope for and assurance about what we(I) do not see.”

Perhaps I have raised more questions for you than answers, but I trust God to make clear what I struggled to define while at the same time offering you hope and encouragement. Be blessed. □

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## *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.*

A prayer: May we all work hard to see the wrongness of our crimes and the damage we’ve done. May we work hard with God and His servants’ help to clean up the mess we’ve made. With God all these things are possible.

*I found that my struggle with faith gave me a security in my faith that I would never have had otherwise. I know God. Even in my civil commitment which turned an 8-year sentence into 25 years of confinement has led me to a place where I am truly confident in who I am, what I want*

*from life, and my ability to live a happy, healthy, offense-free life.*

I am still engaged in multiple battlefronts in the spiritual arena, but as long as I remember who is supposed to do the fighting for me, it is not too bad.

*Never debate or argue with a fool. An innocent bystander might not be able to determine which is which.*

I believe that change will never last unless God is involved in it. It’s amazing what we see and experience in prison. It just doesn’t seem possible to get it across to those outside of here. There are those few who interact with us or who have been willing to go the extra mile to help make change. It can be frustrating but I always come back to “God knows and He is in control.” So I am content knowing that it’s in His time and when it’s time for me, He will see that it happens.

*It’s so confusing to read about cases like mine and worse that end up where the offender is given so much less time or even that the offense is negotiated down to a misdemeanor. But I know and have to remind myself daily that this is no shock to God. He knows what He is doing. His plan is eternal and mine, when dissected, is only for this lifetime. I trust Him over me.*

Is Jesus a rapist, a child molester, a sex offender? Then neither are we in this world. We are righteous because He is righteous. We are holy because He is holy. We are because He is.

*The opinion of some [group facilitators] is that all we do is sit around planning out sex crimes against children.*

I have to tell myself this daily: “As long as I retain the emotional reactions of my sins, whatever comes to mind, I can never forgive myself and move on.” I have learned to deposit my sins and understand them as evil. I do not have to be attracted to labels or any words that describe my sins. I cannot change the minds of others, but I can change mine.

*The seminars that are held here are almost always headed toward the drug abusers, alcoholics, and others. It seems like sex offenders are the quiet elephant in the room. It would be awesome if there were some things geared toward our particular issues but, outside of the sex offender treatment program mandated by the courts, there is nothing.*

I realize that the best way I can make restitution to my victim is to live my life in purity and right living – a spiritual life in God.

*I would like to think that a government agency such as the DOC would look at a facilitator’s success rate to determine the effectiveness of the facilitator/program. However, too often in my experience they blame the inmate for any failure because, after all, he is the inmate.*

When I turn to God and accept His love, He reminds me that I cannot understand love until I start to give love.

*I am not sure where I will go once I am released. I'm tired of doing time and would be happy living in the woods with a tarp – as long as I am not in prison. I just want to get out of prison and live for God and serve Him as He sees fit.*

## 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](http://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 we find peace knowing that God is at the center of all that we are, a peace that cannot be destroyed unless we allow that to happen.
- For those who feel the frustration of seeming not to move forward, that they are able to turn and see how far they have already come.
- For those who feel God cannot exist in the environment in which they live, that each day begins with accepting the grace God is offering.
- For those who try to please others, that success will be gained when they begin to accept the good that is already in them.
- For those who serve in jail or prison ministries, that they will look as Jesus looked at the soul and not the offense.
- For those who dealing with difficult cell mates, that they come to find prayer that seeks to bless that cell mate will eventually bear fruit.
- For churches, that they seek to be part of reconciliation and restoration, not mirrors of societal attitude.
- 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.

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**Thank you!**

In the January-February *Into the Light* I included a survey and a stamped envelope to make responding easier. Well, the stamped envelopes proved to be something of a problem in that they are considered contraband in many prisons. I truly wasn't sure because policies seem so varied.

Despite what I suspect to be a high number of surveys that never arrived, 192 surveys have come back completed! There are currently a little more than 400 on the mailing list, so a 49.6% return rate is excellent. I will work on some way to at least make sure to include some results in May-June edition.

I am going to be in need of your prayer support, though, as I work on developing the workshop "What the Hope We Offer Really Looks Like." Your prayers are always heard, my friends, and as I tell some of you, I count them as treasure.

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## A Prayer for Mercy

For all of us have become like one who is unclean,  
And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;  
And all of us wither like a leaf,  
And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

But now, O Lord, You are our Father,  
We are the clay, and You our potter;  
And all of us are the work of Your hand.  
(Isaiah 64: 6, 8)



**Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.**

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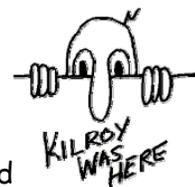
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### ***A Little Humor . . .***

A lawyer opened the door of his BMW, when suddenly a car came along and hit the door, ripping it off completely. When the police arrived at the scene, the lawyer was hopping up and down with rage, complaining bitterly about the damage to his precious BMW.



"Officer, look what they've done to my Beemer!" he shrieked.

"You lawyers are so materialistic, you make me sick!" retorted the officer, "You're so worried about your stupid BMW, that you didn't even notice that your left arm was ripped off!"

"Oh no...." replied the lawyer, looking down and noticing for the first time the bloody stump where his left arm had once been. "Where's my Rolex?"