



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

March—April 2015

What's the Point?

By Bob Van Domelen

"If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it (the Ark) and his dwelling place. ²⁶ But if he says, 'I have no pleasure in you,' behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him."
(2 Samuel 15.25-26)

I started this edition of *Into the Light* by entering comments for the *Bits & Pieces* column, and as I did so, a theme surfaced. That theme was good people trying to do what was expected of them, facing difficult issues, but meeting with little or no support.

In recent years, I have heard stories of inmates successfully completing their programs only to be told that they should not expect parole unless, as a recent writer shared, "there is no chance that I could reoffend." A successful relapse prevention plan recognizes the red flags previously ignored and counters those flags with appropriate boundaries and healthy choices.

Others not only were denied release from prison but also found themselves in civil commitment institutions where, they were told, they would receive appropriate treatment prior to their eventual release. This is a carrot, I think, that dangles without much hope of success. Is it any wonder that they look at their situations and ask "What's the point?"

If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord

When I looked in the Word for something that spoke to this issue, I found the words David spoke as he prepared to flee his son Absalom, a son who had declared himself king.

This same David had slain Goliath, won numerous victories over the enemies of the Hebrews, and had gained power such as most could only dream of having. He was not a flawless man, however, but one who sinned against God; a man who today could easily have been given a life sentence in prison for murder.

Whatever level of pride had driven David before was, at this point in his life, set aside. It was a humble David who said "If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord."

Not everyone who is arrested and sentenced to prison goes willingly. Certainly not every inmate enters a cell saying "If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord." But there are many who find relief knowing that they have a chance to be restored, to make amends, and to "Go and sin no more."

He will bring me back

For David and for all of us, this is one of those "if-then" situations. If we do this, then that will happen. In David's situation, leaving the ark behind and being willing to go into exile was to put aside any thought he might have had that

he was in control. "If I go into exile and if I make sure that the ark remains safe, then God will grant me favor and bring me back. Then God will return me to His dwelling place."

For those of us with sex-related offenses, the exile of prison comes on the heels of public condemnation and, in many cases, the destruction of family and extended family. Separation is further extended within the prison population where violence and outward displays of hatred are not uncommon.

The inmate who recognizes the gravity of his or her actions says "If I surrender myself to this experience, seek forgiveness for my actions, and submit to programs meant to help me grow and change, then God will honor that effort. God will not only see me through this experience, but He will have me leave prison better able to make healthy choices. Through Him, I will be restored."

From childhood on, we are raised with if-then conditions. That's not always a bad thing. Expectations keep us motivated, encourage growth, and help us measure the choices we make. But they are a very human way of thinking, especially with respect to how God sees us.

But if he says, "I have no pleasure in you"

After reading these words, I almost immediately thought of a very human experience—a boss who no longer feels an employee is doing the job and should therefore be fired. Once fired, however, there is very little need for the employer to ever think of that employee again.

This is where human and divine thinking are in conflict because God *always* calls us, *always* loves us, and because of Jesus' death on the cross *always* forgives us. In Matthew 28.20 we read "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." I take great comfort in believing that always means exactly that—always.

Let him do to me what seems good to him

Over the years I have come to believe that faith is to be in relationship with God. I don't seek proof that God exists. I believe God exists and that belief both strengthens and challenges me. It is not an act of cowardice that allows me to surrender to His will. I believe that all of us who hear God's call know that doing so means that each day will be filled with situations where man's thinking might be more appealing than God's thinking.

Some months ago, I wrote of Brother Lawrence (*The Practice of the Presence of God*) in this newsletter and of his approach to repentance. In a nutshell, Brother Lawrence said that when he sinned, he fell to his knees asking for forgiveness. Then he rose believing that whatever God wanted to do in response was God's decision, not his.

David said the same thing. "Let him do to me what seems good to him." What trust! What faith! What an incredible statement of belief that proclaims "Whatever God decides is the best for me!"

Another conflict

When confronted with the things actually happening in our lives, do we really surrender as David did? Is "What's the point?" a question of despair and of giving up? Once more it is critical to separate human thinking from divine thinking.

If all things are as they should be, then reconciliation and restoration are possible. Successful completion of a treatment program *should* send a signal that "This person should be given the chance to start over, to make right what was so grievously in error." Churches *should* seek to find ways to participate in the process—ways that protect where protection is needed, reconcile where and when possible, and encourage personal growth begun in confinement in testimony to God's healing presence.

If all things are as they should be, communities may not welcome someone in reentry with sex-related offenses but neither will they stand in the way. They will recognize that housing, employment, and support systems are a part of healing and critical to creating healthy and safe environments. *If all things are as they should be*.

Somehow, it is too easy to put God into the middle of the frustration we face. If God doesn't answer prayer for an early parole, restore family ties, or help correct this difficult situation, maybe God is just toying with us. Maybe we are to take any and all abuse because followers of Christ are supposed "to turn the other cheek."

There will be times when turning the other cheek *is* the right response, but there will also be times for standing up for what is right. Some of the most incredible Christians I have ever met are still in prison and still uncertain as to whether or not they will ever see freedom. But despite facing so much that is wrong, their lives speak of God's love. And when I look in a mirror, I wonder if my life is that kind of spiritual reflection. I pray that it is—for me *and* for you.

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.

Within the Christ-centered process of change, we learn to never let our guilt or shame keep us from the Lord. God seeks those who have made a mess of their lives and speaks to them through His word, His Spirit, and His people.

Rehabilitation or reclamation is not about jumping through hoops just to get through a temporary program. It's a commitment and a journey of protecting our future. We must cherish the eternal over the temporal and be satisfied with what the Lord has planned for us.

One day, the self-righteous of the world who see that it is their duty to keep us second or even third class in society and label us pariahs will see that, in truth, no one is above anyone under God. Those who feel it is their duty to hate offenders into a tomb will one day realize that out of the hurt they excruciatingly went through in their own lives, they have, in the long run, hurt and destroyed many others. "Hurt people hurt people" goes both ways.

Over the past few months, a peace has settled over me. There doesn't have to be a reason for it, in fact several aspects of my life have taken a turn for the worse. This peace is apparently unrelated to circumstances, especially the anxiety I normally have as I approach parole consideration. This must be a spiritual peace, a gift from God. I don't expect it to last for the rest of my life though that is possible. I'll just enjoy it while it lasts. Hopefully, it is a condition that is contagious.

Grace is entering into the life of God and the only thing that can hinder that is our refusal to let go of our addictions. Why do we cling to them? Fear of losing ourselves? Doubting that God will do what He says? Anxiety about having to face what the addiction is trying to cover. So we often define ourselves by our addictions and we think there is no power strong enough to overcome them. And should the addiction be removed, the darkness of anger, hate, worthlessness, and consuming fear of others would rise up out of hiding. These are all genuine concerns a person has to face. At some point, the addicted one has to simply trust that God has the power and the love to bring sanity.

I sometimes wonder what is the point of it all. Why bother with all the therapy programs and parole meetings if there is pretty much no chance a person will be released before his maximum time served. I really wonder if anything I have done in the past 16 years has been worth the while. From what I took from the agent's words, I will only be paroled if there is no chance I could reoffend—which is impossible to assure about anyone. As I said, what's the point of it all?

In preparing for a parole hearing I wrote to many ministries and Christian churches but no one wanted to help me. So the parole board said I will have to stay in prison for two more years. I could be released on parole, however, if I found a place to live. Please pray for me about this matter.

Even as I pray for my PO, I've seen a change in his attitude toward me and I've found an appreciation for him and those like him who are there to prevent relapse and, more importantly, to protect vulnerable children.

The funny thing about losing one's temper is that we have a very bad habit of finding it again.

As my release nears, I rest in the fact that it's all in God's hands—everything! Most importantly, the healing and happiness of all those I've hurt with my choices, whether directly or indirectly, whom I pray for daily is in His hands, as is my marriage, which only He can bring back to life. God is the only one who can do what He does. I am blessed!

In my 22 years of incarceration for a sexual offense, never have I read a publication (*Into the Light*) that gave a person such as me so much hope. I read your publication twice and am reading it again.

I have come to the conclusion that the same God has comforted those who need comfort and that the same love and forgiveness Jesus preached is meant for all, one and all, the victim and the victimizer, the same love is no less for one than the other.

The Potter

"I'll make you into something special," said the Potter to the clay, "but don't expect to be complete or finished in a day.

"For many changes must be taken to create the right desire, like refining gold and silver,

"Child, you must be tried by fire."

Around and around in life you're going - many things you're going to feel

By changes being made each day while on the potter's wheel.

So many days and nights in life you may not understand.

You're more than just a piece of clay when in the Potter's hand.

But when the vessel's finally finished and the Potter's work is done

with the clay that once was purchased by the Potter's only Son,

You will be a priceless treasure in the Master's hand each day

all because the Lord refused to throw this useless piece away.

from an inmate

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Support

If you have family and friends who stand by you, tell them about the website for this ministry:

www.brokenyoke.org

-- a site filled with links and downloads to use.

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 each day we look for God's presence in those we meet and pray that they see it in us.
- For those who say "What's the point?", that despite everything to the contrary, they know and believe in the strength of God's love for them.
- For those wondering if there is a future, that they know that it is already becoming reality in God's design.
- For those who struggle with anger, that they are able to forgive just as they seek forgiveness.
- For those who want to serve, that they seek God in all things and witness of what they find.
- For pastors, that they find a way to make real the presence of Christ in their faith communities.
- For those in treatment, that they listen for God in what they hear in group and that they take everything to the Lord in prayer.
- For chaplains, that they find the strength needed to serve as they are called to serve.
- 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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Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.

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A Little Humor . . .

Two snakes were slithering through a field. One snake turned to the other and asked, "Do you suppose we are poisonous snakes?"

"I don't know", replied the other. "Why?"

"Well", said the first, "I just bit my lip"

