



# Into the Light

*All things are possible with God*

January—February 2013

## A Time for Mourning

By Bob Van Domelen

*“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” (Matthew 2.18)*

Last evening I received a call from a friend who told he had been crying for three hours over the tragedy that took the lives of 20 children and 8 adults in Newtown, CT. My emotional state at the moment was pretty far removed from his because I had been watching a program on TV with my wife. After hanging up, this difference caused me to feel a little guilty.

This morning I watch a news report online where a photo of each of the victims accompanied a brief statement about them. The first photo, a 6-year old girl, showed a bright, smiling face. A moment after that image was displayed, I thought of my own 6-year granddaughter and tears came.

The words of her father described a loving child, a gift from God. He added that anger was not an option if he was to take care of his family and get through what was happening. I don't know if I could have said what he did.

When my friend called, he had added “And I thought of you.” He knows of my background, of the time I spent in prison, and of this ministry. He even financially supports it but he called because he was mourning those children and believed I would understand.

As the news was breaking on Friday, I actually heard my inner self say “At least I didn't do *that!*” – a statement of minimizing guilt if ever I heard one but one that surfaced nonetheless. But I did realize something significant.

Twenty-five years ago, though I knew what I did was seriously wrong, my view of those behaviors was from inside the protective self-absorbed shell I had been living in. After all, I would remind myself back then, I didn't force myself on anyone. That shell no longer exists to the extent it once did; those I had abused were children who didn't deserve the direction their lives took because of me.

I do not believe that God allowed this tragedy or the things I did years ago to happen merely to test the faith of survivors. As my pastor shared, God cried along with us over what happened. I do believe, however, that God received all those who died at Sandy Hook Elementary into His eternal presence because they were His children.

One thing is certain, not one of those whose life was taken woke that morning with the thought that “Today is the day I will die.” The same could be said for a child of any age whose day included an unwanted or unplanned act of sexual molestation. I don't want to think of this, but how

different was I from the shooter in Newtown, CT. We both made at least some plan to bring about what we did. We both put ourselves in a position of control over the lives of others. We both lived in worlds that saw everything as meeting or not meeting *our* needs—with little or no regard for the needs of others.

### Is there a difference?

Maybe my minimizing comment “At least I didn't do *that!*” bears at least some truth. A victim who has been killed has no opportunity to rejoin family or loved ones, no future goals to be reached *because they are no more*.

My victims have the potential for healing and fulfilled lives though I have no way of knowing the extent of their success in doing so. I sincerely pray that those who love them continue to support them in this process.

Unlike the young man in Newtown, I did not take my own life. Because he did, he is unable to explain anything to anyone. He cannot balance his deeds with at least some form of penance or society-demanded retribution. There is no justice for survivors.

### Mourning – A Time of Healing

Most letters I receive from individuals with sex-related offenses share an expression of sadness for choices made; most who write are able to recognize how their actions changed the lives of their victims; and most recognize a need to mourn the loss of a victim's innocence as well as the wake of pain inflicted on family and friends of a victim.

Though some might disagree, I know from experience that offenders will also need to mourn the losses they experienced as a result of their choices. Very few leave prison and return to family, to former jobs, or even to the church they attended. Those things *do* matter and if they are no more, they must be mourned—not from a “Poor me” position of self-centeredness but from a “This all happened because of *my* choices” position of acceptance and the responsibility taken for those actions.

Treatment programs are, of necessity, focused on victim empathy and the recognition of the damage abuse causes. There is little room or time for personal mourning such as I have described but that doesn't mean it can not or should not happen.

Healing is not a matter of forgetting because I believe that would be impossible for the survivors of those who were killed. I think it is also impossible for someone who has molested to forget what happened. There is no “Just put it behind you” if change is to be achieved.

It is my responsibility to pray for all whose lives I affected by my choices. God can and will do what I cannot,

but healing for me *and* for my victims demands my willingness to petition God, to call out from the center of my being.

I also think that those of us who have abused are in a unique position to pray for others who have abused. I have asked people during workshops if they are able to pray for someone who has done something atrocious. Many honestly say that they cannot. Then I ask "If you don't pray for them, who will?"

I asked my wife the same question about the young man responsible for so much destruction of lives. She responded by reminding me that some Christian would do that. Her comment reminded me of a man who regularly visited serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, a man who shared God's word with him and eventually baptized him. I would like to believe that God's servant was making possible a time for mourning, an opportunity to pray for those he had killed.

There is nothing about crimes against the innocent that can be made to look less heinous than those crimes are. As difficult as it is to say, I need to remember that I did heinous acts and took innocence I had no right to take. But I also believe that I have the opportunity to continue putting my life on a God-centered path. There will be times of mourning, but there must also be times of rejoicing. I pray that God helps all of us recognize the appropriate time for both. □



### HELP NEEDED

I have been blessed to have a workshop proposal, "Churches and Sex Offenders," accepted for the *Serving Together Summit* in 2013. My hope is to encourage discussion on the issue of those with sex-related offenses finding church support during incarceration and in re-entry. Given the ever changing attitude church communities have, I am asking for any churches with established policies or currently dealing with this to contact me (address on page 4) with information.

Some faith communities have active jail/prison ministries and reach out to all those incarcerated regardless of the nature of crimes committed. Sex offenders, however, are often excluded and even denied the level of support others receive. My workshop focus is on seeking ways to minister, to encourage, and to be a part of the healing process for both victims and offenders. Questions include:

- Does your church allow membership for someone with sex-related offenses?
- If yes, is there a written policy or guidelines special to them?
- If no, can someone with sex-related offenses still attend a Bible study or some other small group at the church for support?

Help make this workshop meaningful and successful.

## 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.

Since my arrest, my approach to any job or task I do has become to work in whatever I do with all my heart as working for the Lord rather than for men. (Colossians 3:23) I don't look at it as a "prison job," but as an opportunity for God to use me as a servant and a steward in his service by taking my work as a bathroom Porter and using it to benefit, bless, and extend a measure of common grace for believers and nonbelievers alike.

I know that when it comes to inmates, when they see you go to church carrying your Bible, they are looking to see if you are just another phony. They are not stupid. So I have to walk as Christ did matter how they treat me or how bad things get, not to react in the flesh, but in the spirit. If I am genuine, it will be evident in how I talk, how I spend my time, and how I treat others. I also need to follow the rules, not only because I am being watched but because *I am changed*.

The Lord is with me in prison and in my pain whether I am aware of it or not. Sometimes he reaches out in hot pursuit of me. At other times, he wants me to come after him. He flirts with his bride and romances her until they marry. Even we guys are collectively the bride of Christ and he's preparing us for our wedding day.

I have to constantly remember that I have surrendered my life to God and he is in charge, not me. After all, when I was in charge of my life I really screwed it up. I took all the credit for what God gave me and misused it. God has been so good to me and I praise his name every day. I also pray to him that my life will now be lived for his honor and glory and not my own.

There are times I feel absolutely alone spiritually. I feel like I am in a dark and dry place in my life. His grace was very prevalent during the early years of my incarceration but now he seems very distant and detached from me.

Before my release, I often went to God asking what his plan was for me at my release to cover the nature of my crime. I felt him respond that there was no plan for covering my crime but I was also led to the book of Joshua with the instructions to "Be strong and of good courage." At this time, although I have shared with my pastor and the deacons of my church about my incarceration, I do not feel threatened by the charge but I do feel threatened by the lawmakers because of their hunger to have their names in the newspapers as well as their power to make restrictions on the lives of those of us in reentry. The good neighborhoods all have schools for children so we are forced to live in neighborhoods that are not so good.

I do get dismayed when I read some letters in *Bits and Pieces* by prisoners who seem lost, without hope, or have given up. I would like to tell those who are hurting that if you

are lost, you can be found. If you are without hope, there is hope. And if you have given up, don't. There is an amazing God who wants so much to comfort you and who loves you so much that he sacrificed his son for you. Turn to him. Let him carry the burden you are feeling.

My emotions tend to change so often, I wonder how I can function at times. Last week I was feeling weak and vulnerable in my walk with God and this week I feel empowered and motivated. It's amazing how much of my mood depends on the decisions I make and the quantity of time I spend with God. One would think if stability were that easy, then why ever deviate from the program?

I am just as close to heaven being here in prison. I must look to Jesus.

"Rejoice in the hope. When we can't rejoice in circumstances, we can rejoice in the anticipation of what God is doing with them, in them, through them, despite them and because of them. On cloudy days the sun still shines as brightly as ever in the center of the solar system; and when we rejoice in hope, were saying "Despite current conditions, the Son is shining for me as brightly as ever with healing in his race." (Robert J Morgan)

In June of this year, I felt a strong prompting from the Spirit to leave a job that paid well in order to spend more time with our Father. My income here is all that I have to survive on, and I had no idea just how I would survive without that job. Finally, I pulled the trigger in August and just quit. I'd been there in my previous position for 10 years. During my time of deliberation, there had been times of doubt and uncertainty, but in submitting to him in trust and total dependence, I've been able to see him in everything. And, by the way, by noon of the same day I quit that position, God provided and I had another job that would at least pay for necessities.

I've learned that healing really only begins when we face the hurt in its full force and then grow through it with all the strength of our soul. For every reward of learning and growing, some degree of pain is always the price. Healing is not cure. Cure is clean, quick, and done— often under anesthesia. Healing needs work and time and energy. Orson F Whitney once said "No pain that we suffer is wasted. It ministers to our education and to the development of patience, faith, fortitude, and humility, all that we suffer, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our character, purifies our heart, expands our soul, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God. And it is through sorrow and suffering, trial and tribulation that we gain the education that we came here to acquire and which will draw us closer to our heavenly Father."

Be full— full of grace, humility, and forgiveness— caring so much that there is no room in you for wrongness, only love. Love for all and forgiveness— that's the prayer I try to live up to.

## *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 all struggling specifically with this time of the year, a time of absence and separation from loved ones, that they experience strength and joy.
- For all who lost loved ones in Newtown, CT, that we continue to keep all survivors in prayer during this ongoing time of loss.
- For those seeking church support—both inside and in re-entry—that God's people will see the need and step into the gap.
- For those who suffer brokenness of any type, that they open themselves to God's healing love.
- For churches and pastors, that they allow the message of Christ to serve as the foundation of their ministries, offering hope and healing for those deemed lost.
- For family members, that they see God's hand in reshaping the lives of their loved ones.
- For those in civil commitment, that they not surrender hope of freedom or of God's love for them.
- For all who serve in ministry to those in prison, that they are able to see God's presence in each and every person they 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.

**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.**

### ***Coming in March***

I will be reviewing "Unprecedented: How Sex Offender Laws Are Impacting Our Nation" by JB Haralson and JR Cordeiro.

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

As the passengers waited on the plane, the stewardess announced, "We're just waiting for the pilots." Looking out the window, they see two men, dressed as pilots and using guide dogs, walking toward the plane. There are murmurs among the passengers though some believe it's a joke. The men board the plane and go into the cockpit. Despite more concerned murmurs and uneasy chuckles from the passengers, the plane taxis normally and begins its takeoff. Realizing they were getting too close to the end of the runway, many passengers began screaming. To their relief, however, the plane lifted off and the passengers calmed down. In the cockpit, the pilot turned to his copilot and said, "You know, one day those people are going to scream too late and we're all going to die!"

