



Into the Light

All things are possible with God
May—June 2019

But If a Wicked Man Turns

- Revisited -

By Bob Van Domelen

Originally written in 2002, I hope the article and my current closing thoughts both bless and encourage.

If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will die for it; because of the sin he has committed he will die. But if a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life. Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die. (Ezekiel 18.26-28)

The Story

Jack (a fictional name) spent the first months of his prison sentence in despair. He felt hated by everyone and feared for his physical safety. His family had abandoned him, his pastor made no attempt to return his letters, and no one he contacted wanted to be on his visiting list. In short, he felt incredibly alone.

Jack knew what had happened to bring him to this state of affairs. He had sexually molested a child. In his mind he had not meant to cause harm to anyone, least of all a child, yet the question he heard most often from others was “How could you have done such a thing?” And that was sometimes followed by “I hope you rot in hell for what you did!”

This last comment was sometimes reinforced by the reaction of others to his presence at chapel activities and services. Men who called themselves Christian were as vocal in their not-so-veiled threats as those who claimed no God in their lives and never attended chapel. It didn’t take long for Jack to feel God had abandoned him. In the eventual quiet after lights out he started to think that his spending an eternity in hell was, if he believed those who stood against him, a distinct possibility.

The Reality

There are more than a few men like Jack in prisons around the country—men who wake each day with little or no hope for their physical or spiritual futures. There are also men such as myself who have found that the God we serve is a faithful and loving God, a God who desires all who are in need of healing to experience His healing touch. I can write these feelings now, but I would admit that early on they were not so easy for me to believe. In fact, in the beginning it was only by faith that I did.

In 1985 I didn’t feel quite so confident of my ability to make the changes I knew had to take place. I really wanted to change but my success rate over the years before my arrest was pretty dismal. During the time after my arrest a

prison sentence loomed like “the other shoe waiting to drop.” My family was trying to make it from one day to the next and I knew that none of this would be happening had I not done what I had done.

Support came from my family, a handful of friends, and a few relatives offering words of encouragement. Most people, however, distanced themselves from me. Some were even pretty obvious in their attempt to avoid being in the same place as I. Who could blame them?

A significant blessing for me at the time was to be allowed to attend prayer services with a local charismatic prayer group. In the year I spent on bail waiting for the court process to be completed, friends drove me to weekly meetings where I heard of God’s love and the healing and forgiving message of the cross. In that gathering I also saw those messages in the flesh they took among the others who attended. They hated my sin, but somehow they loved me. Up to then “Hate the sin, love the sinner” was just a worn cliché I heard Christians use. With this prayer group they took on life-changing meaning.

The Message

One day while doing the daily Bible readings I read a verse that leaped off the page with its truth. ²⁷*But if a wicked man turns from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life.* What an incredible lifeline for someone like me!

It sure sounded like a pretty simple directive at the time. All I had to do, I told myself, was turn from the wickedness I had committed and things would be okay. I did eventually recognize, however, that turning from the wickedness I had done would end up being a lifetime process.

The message was clear, though. I wasn’t damned to hell for eternity because of what I had done. The man who had been an active molester did not have to remain a molester—there did not have to be more victims. What a life saving message!

The Method

In verse 28, Ezekiel adds “*Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die.*” It’s logical that a person must consider the effect or consequences of his behavior, decide what is bad and what is good, and then make a conscious decision to avoid what is evil in favor of what is good. For anyone who has molested a child, these are critical decisions. The chain of repetitive behavior patterns that made abuse possible must be broken.

It could be argued that the act of ‘considering’ is an act that involves some silent and private mental process. I

would also suggest that inside our heads we believe our thoughts to be perfectly logical and insightful until, that is, we open our mouths and share those thoughts with others. It is the act of speaking that allows us to hear our private decisions and/or feelings just as *others* might hear them. Some thoughts are indeed good and worth retaining. Others are not quite so good.

Not Alone

For a time following my release from prison, I had been attending a monthly prison support group meeting as an outside volunteer. I remember one group member pointing out that just being able to be with others who had also molested gave him hope and encouragement. "We don't condemn one another," he said. "We look for ways to help one another."

I felt honored to be with these men, to be able to share with them and they with me. Of course, when the meeting was over, I was able to leave and return home. They returned to their units. In my mind, however, they walked out of the prison doors with me.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls down and has no one to help him up. Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4.9-10,12)

These verses were included in a letter I received from an inmate and they can, I think, be a fitting connection to the opening verses for this article taken from Ezekiel. That prison support group I attended was a good example of that put into practice.

Within that simple prison support system, I don't think any of us hung onto another group member in a 'fix me' manner, nor did we see each other as having all the answers. We did know that all of us had failed and had prison numbers to prove our failures, but we also had our victories.

We were learning to surrender to God so that He could guide us in rebuilding our lives. Most of us also surrendered to a system of institutional treatment not because it was necessarily the best treatment available but because it afforded us an open door to ourselves - if only we remained willing to walk through that door.

The Future

I think it's healthy to have someone who knows me well. In my case, I now share with some people who know of my past without having to have every detail from my past repeatedly explained. When I finish sharing, I listen for the words they offer me from their hearts. Best of all, we pray.

We all need to be honest about ourselves because there will be alone times when important choices must be made. In those moments, change comes by knowing that we have 'considered' our past offenses and weaknesses and have taken steps to strengthen the quality of the future choices we know we must make.

²⁸*Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die!* (Emphasis mine) When I hold God's Word in my hands, I know without a doubt that He provides the message and the method for the healing change I seek for my life. I am not content merely to exist or to simply be. God calls me to live in Him, and that means an active participation. He is calling me. He is calling you. Say yes.

2019

I have been writing this newsletter for 22 years and occasionally look at earlier editions – partly to see if I still believe what I wrote and partly to see if I am still on track in my own life. What I learn by doing this is that some words might be changed for better words but truth remains truth.

What *has* changed is the world in which you and I live and that can sometimes influence our healing walk. We are tempted to zero in on the negatives - residency restrictions, housing and employment issues, and ever-changing negative legislation - instead of the goals we set for ourselves while still in prison.

That support group I mentioned attending no longer exists. When the original staff facilitator retired, the administration decided against continuation of the group citing security issues. Though the group disappeared, I still remember the strength I found just being with others and I resolved that I would not isolate from others. I would find ways to be connected in my family, my church, and my ministry.

It is important to me to be able to walk into a gathering of people and hear "Hi, Bob!" because that means I have connected with them and they with me. As my pastor says, "We are all part of the Body of Christ."

I mentioned negatives and the need to stay focused on my/our daily walk. Our goal is not to change how others think of us. Our goal is to change ourselves by being who we are meant to be – sons and daughters of God. Those who are looking for changes in us will see them because they *want* to see them. To others, it won't make any difference because they will only see what they want to see.

As I have shared many times, God does not call me by the sins I have committed. He calls me Bob. And he calls you by your first name, too!

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.

You've no idea what it means to know that "he will never leave nor forsake you." The peace and comfort that brings is beyond mere words. It's like so many want to claim Philippians 4:13 but do not realize they must first live and learn Philippians 4:11-12. Then you rest in Christ and trust in him; then you can do all things through Christ.

Psalm 51 says "Restore to me the joy of your salvation." I often feel that I lost my joy years ago. It is good to know that maybe I've just forgotten it and that it is still there somewhere.

For me, I still have hope, but there's a rapidly closing window it seems – not on salvation or repentance but on simply having a life and being with my family.

I've been spending a great deal of time on my knees in private prayer. It is so refreshing to be in his presence. Prayer is truly powerful – it changes not only circumstance but also changes us. Amen.

What we focus on in the midst of our personal storms – the storm or the Lord in the midst of the storm – will determine how we manage those storms in our lives.

Through this time God is showing me just how much love I have been given, but also that I need to show that love to others. Many times we don't realize just how much we lack in showing love to others. In my recovery I am seeing so much of what God wants me to change. What a wonderful experience it is to grow closer to our God!

We disciple (or witness) way more in our actions and behaviors than we do with words. I can be eloquent in speech yet if my actions are contradictory to that speech, then the speech does not matter. If at the end of the day we have failed, we are called to reflect on our actions and have contrition in our hearts, repenting of our failures.

James says "but let ask him in faith." (James 1:6) Have I lost faith in Jesus Christ and can't find him even in my prayers to him? Is the Holy Spirit gone? Maybe James is right when he says "He is unstable in all my ways" (verse 8) and I don't expect to receive anything from the Lord. O Lord, forgive me. By faith I reach out to you, Lord.

*All things are possible with
God!*



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 those who feel stuck in one place, that they will hear God calling them, God loving them.
- For those who live in the secrecy created by their choices, that they see isolation as a choice that keeps them locked into that darkness.
- For those who offended against you, that you believe they are in God's care.
- For those who see others in need of support, that they will trust in God as they step forward to help.
- For churches that reject those in reentry and believe that their heart is only in protecting the congregations, that they remember the very lepers Christ healed when no one else would.
- For the families and friends of victims, that they find a way to see the future of healing and not as a bondage to the abuse that happened.
- For family and friends of offenders, that they remember the importance of connection.

- For Bob's health, that the ministry God has for him will continue to be an encouragement and hope for others.
- 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.

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. For those of you able, consider your Amazon purchases using Smile.Amazon and selecting Broken Yoke Ministries as your designation.

To change from what we were to what we hope to be requires us to recognize the 'what' in us that needs to be changed

A Prayer

You are a miracle-working God.
Give me a vision for what freedom looks like for me.
Give me faith to believe You for my miracle.
Show me what makes me tired.
Show me what masters me and slows me down.
Help me to lose my taste for that which weakens me, and acquire a taste for that which strengthens me.
Heal me from the inside out!
Help me to make the necessary changes.
I want to participate with You in my healing process.
Awaken fresh life in me!
Amen.

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A Little Humor...

A man who clearly had had too much to drink was stumbling down the street with one foot on the curb and one foot in the gutter. A cop pulled up and said, "I've got to take you in pal. You're obviously drunk."

The wasted man asked, "Officer, are ya absolutely sure I'm drunk?"

"Yeah buddy, I'm sure," said the cop, "Let's go."

Breathing a sigh of relief, the man said, "Thank goodness. I thought I was crippled."

