



Into the Light

All things are possible with God
May—June 2017

I Am With You

By Bob Van Domelen

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41.10)

This morning I received a letter from an inmate who asked a very simple question. “When can one hope to say that he has owned his charges and that he has paid for his sins?”

The question came at the close of a description of the number of times he has been beaten (15) – the most recent of which sent him on a flight for life to a hospital 70 miles away. At the time of his discharge, doctors told him that he would have to adapt to the headaches and nerve damage for the rest of his life.

Despite these medical issues, the balance of his letter talked about his concerns following release – residency restrictions, employment, church attendance, and public response to his presence. These are questions I get in most letters that come my way and I have no simple directory of answers. Most times I write “Trust God to meet your needs.”

Do not fear

It’s easy for someone not in prison to tell someone who is that he should not fear, that he should trust in God for protection. But the reality is that we all fear something or someone. We on the outside just have more places in which to hide than those in prisons or jails. You might remember, by the way, that “on the first day of the week, the disciples were together *with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders* (John 20.19).”

So it would seem that fear is a pretty normal response when we are faced with the unknown or with uncomfortable situations. But God told Isaiah *not* to fear because He would be with him. Perhaps, then, we can accept the fact that while we may have real fears, fear cannot scare God away. Remember, too, that when Jesus entered that room where the disciples huddled in fear, the first thing He said was “*Peace be with you!*” Jesus knew.

Do not be dismayed

Another truth that gets reinforced by the letters I receive is the simple reality that there are two prisons – one for those with sex-related offenses and the other for everyone else. That means that there are often two sets of rules, especially with regard to what someone can or cannot do even while in prison.

The potential for a positive parole board hearing is rather slim to none; parole plans submitted to the board require housing and employment that is almost impossible to secure from within prison walls given residency restriction

laws in most communities; and church support and/or attendance is sometimes held just out of reach for this population of inmates. The weight of so much negativity can bring on the deepest of depressions, a heart dismayed by so much rejection.

God not only tells His people Israel “I am your God” but also promises to strengthen and help them. How is it any different for those with sex charges? He IS our God and He DOES strengthen and help us! For those in prison who have been targeted with hate by others or for those trying to find successful reentry, how does God do this?

One thing that seems clear to me is that God’s way is not always ours; His solutions are not always ours. I would guess that for the man who wrote me of frequent beatings, the absence of those beatings might be proof of God’s love. And I would guess that a smooth reentry that included housing and employment might also be proof of God’s love. But that’s a little like praying to God to fix a leaky and unsafe roof and not hearing God’s possible suggestion that we move. Our prayer can easily ignore God’s response.

Where are you God?

When we reach out in prayer with our needs, it is not unusual to seek support from chaplains, ministries, and churches. After all, they claim to be servants of God in their lives and actions. If any or all of those fail us, we might be tempted to think that we are not worthy of their support. Given enough rejection from these faith-centered groups, I know that some begin to question whether or not God even cares. After all, He could meet every one of our needs, so why doesn’t He do it?

Scripture is full of examples of people who walked in the Lord while struggling with darkness and hatred that came up against them. I cannot think that there was a smile on anyone’s face while being beaten, stoned, or left for dead, but despite all they endured, they believed God was still with them. How do we find the strength that they had?

- Spend time with the Lord, time free of distractions
- Gain strength from the example of others
- Recognize that God’s solutions start with us and in the manner in which we hear God’s voice
- Pray for those who are a challenge to our lives, forgiving them and asking God to bless them
- Pray for all those we have harmed that they might experience the peace of God’s presence
- Rely on God and not on others
- Believe in the Serenity Prayer (see p.3)
- Give thanks to God for *everything*

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand

I have heard some say, "God's answer is always yes, no, or I have something better." "Yes" feels like God is in agreement with what we ask and gives it to us. "No" feels like God disagrees with our request but is not willing to give us the reason why. "I have something better" leaves us suspended and unsure of what God plans to do but we believe that whatever it is, it *will* be the best solution to our prayers.

Words are easy to write but often difficult to live when they point to things only defined by faith in what we believe but cannot see. Looking back over the past 32 years, I can only look with amazement at all that God has done in my life; I live with anticipation for what God has planned for the years to come; and I honestly ask God's blessings and presence on all of you who read this. I cannot tell you what your future will look like, but I can assure you that God is with you! He is with ALL of us! □

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.

Despite confronting my sinful nature, this is probably the most memorable time of my incarceration. Not only am I learning the battle for love and holiness, I am also being a positive, godly influence in the lives of others. I am amazed at God's confidence in me after my having failed so miserably.

I have held many things in my hands and have lost them all but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess. – Martin Luther

[Regarding one man's ongoing search for reentry support] I won't give up looking but I maintain that reentry groups are not forthcoming with help or even replies to letters I send them. Even a "will not help" response is better than no reply.

One of the greatest lessons I've had to learn throughout this time in prison is how to live as a branch within the Vine – what it means and looks like to abide in Christ, to live a surrendered life of faith in Christ, seeing Him as my life, and drawing from Him as a branch does from the Vine.

It would certainly be easier if we could turn off temptation and any desire we decide is not good for us.

I am asking God to do His work with me by reaching deep inside of me and pulling out all of the garbage that I have stored up through the years, all the resentments toward all those who hurt me in my past. I need to let the past stay in the past except when reflecting will help another brother or sister. My past does not define just who I am today, so to let it go is to let God do His work within me. Then and only then can I be purified through Him.

I often have to remind myself that God created man for His use and not the other way around. When I think this way it becomes clear as to what areas my desires should be in to please Him and not myself.

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**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.

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 remember to give thanks to the Lord for all that He has done for us – for His love, mercy, forgiveness, and protection.
- For those who need to know they have value, that they find quiet times to rest in God's presence. He will confirm who they are in Him.
- For those afraid to surrender, that they find the strength and courage to let go of darkness and embrace the light of freedom.
- For those in reentry and managing to make each day better than the day before, that their witness of faith and trust touches the lives of many.
- For all with loved ones on the outside who are seriously ill, dealing with the issues of age, or in the final stages of their journey here on earth, that they will feel the prayers incarcerated loved ones offer.
- For chaplains and chapel staff, that they be blessed and appreciated by all for efforts that DO make a difference.
- In thanksgiving for the blessings received by those who attended "Balancing Protection and Ministry" taught by Bob Van Domelen and Maggie Witherow at the Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association Summit in Philadelphia.
- For victims, that they might regain power over their lives and walk in freedom.
- For treatment personnel, that they might always seek to offer hope and change by looking at the needs of individuals as well as for all in group treatment.

- 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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All things are possible with God!

A Look Inside

Chuck S

Lust indulged starves the soul, but fools hate to turn from evil. (Proverbs 13.19 NAB)

When I was deep into my lustful thinking, I couldn't see the meaning in this passage. Maybe some can relate to the time when our sins blinded us. Cravings freely given into feed themselves while depriving the soul of the spiritual nourishment it needs. As our lust increases, our soul slowly dies.

Because the definition of sin is separation from God, our soul is denied the full power of the Holy Spirit in us. It's a vicious cycle. As lust is rewarded, it promotes the desire for more; and as the soul is deprived, it becomes weaker and unable to counter that cycle. This is why "fools hate to turn from evil." (v 19)

Whether a substance abuse addiction or a sexual deviation, we do it because it feels good. And because it feels good we want more. The more we do, the less we remember what good felt like without it.

Things that are not physical are even harder because our brains have a 'pleasure center' where dopamine, a chemical hormone, stimulates when we experience pleasurable feelings. It doesn't distinguish between right or wrong, good or evil. If it feels good, the brain is stimulated and wants more. That's how bad habits form.

When we do a thing enough times, our brains learn through that repetition. But have an intensely emotional experience and the learning is instantaneous and deeply set.

I used to have a relaxed, semi-cautious attitude about wearing my seatbelts before the law required they be worn. I'd put them on if I was on the highway but didn't really care while in town. One day and before I had gotten one block from my office, I was T-boned at 40 mph, spinning my car in circles, totaling it. I was thrown toward the passenger side window which my back shattered. At the same time, my head broke the window shield. I was blessed to be alive and it didn't go unnoticed. No one ever had to tell me to put my seatbelt on because the emotions of that moment instantly imprinted that on my mind.

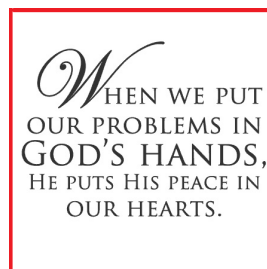
Think how much more emotional and pleasurable a sexual climax is. But what thought or desire are we

imprinting on our mind? Is it reinforcing a deviant or sinful act, or is it promoting a healthy sexual drive given by God with a purpose in marriage? We complicate the issue with the thought or image that we use to make us feel like what we are doing or thinking is okay, but does that make it so?

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom and understanding to enlighten your mind. Feed your soul with the gifts He provides including wisdom, discernment and self control (Galatians 6.12) to counter the works of the flesh such as immorality and impurity. The good news is that the Spirit is not fooled by our 'stinking thinking' because that comes from the flesh. Spirit and flesh work against each other and gratefully Jesus conquered the wages of sin (death) already, so we know which one will win when we choose right. All we have to do is use the weapons we have through Jesus as revealed in His word. "Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil – that you may be able to resist evil every day, and having done everything, to hold your ground (Ephesians 6:17-18) By doing so, your soul will be refreshed and invigorated and the Holy Spirit will empower you to lasting change.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I thank you for showing me Your way in Your word. I thank you for enlightening me and showing me how to live righteously. You know my struggles and you know my weaknesses. Send your Spirit to guide me one day at a time. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen



The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.

Amen.

--Reinhold Niebuhr

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A Little Humor . . .

Paddy and Murphy are havin' a pint in the pub, when they see scuba divers going into the water on the TV.

Paddy says, "Murphy, why is it them deep sea divers always sit on the side of the boat with them air tanks on their backs, and fall backwards out of the boat?"

Murphy thinks for a minute then says, "That's easy. It's 'cause if they fell forwards, they'd still be in the darn boat!"

