



# Into the Light

*All things are possible with God*  
November—December 2013

## If

By Bob Van Domelen

<sup>11</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying: *If we died with him, we will also live with him;* <sup>12</sup> *if we endure, we will also reign with him.* (2 Timothy 2.11-12)

Recently a small, dedicated group of people decided it was time to do something about those who walk daily in the shadow of childhood sexual abuse. They announced their intention to area churches with an open invitation for those who might be interested that a special monthly prayer service they called “Hope for Healing” would be started in one of the local churches.

Before attending, I spoke with the leader of the core team and shared that I was both victim and offender to make sure my presence would not be a distraction. Because the service was designed to be monthly, it stood as unusual—an open door, an open invitation to be in a safe place with others on the same journey.

It’s difficult to say how or even if the hour we spent in prayer, reflection, and worship brought on significant change for anyone, but I know I was affected. Had I tried sharing out loud, a few might have been able to hear my heart, but most could not. For them, dealing with the pain of their own abuse meant listening to one who had been an offender was unlikely.

My heart wanted everyone there to see sexual abuse as damaging and soul-destroying for victim and offender alike. My heart wanted an open door that applied equally but this whole “Hope for Healing” idea was a foot testing the water of possibility. Prayerfully it will grow in acceptance. Prayerfully I might be able to be a part of that development. But for now I will sit among those attending without forcing issues.

Treatment programs for those with sex-related offenses in prison generally refuse any focus on childhood abuse suffered. Perhaps they feel such acknowledgment might diminish attention on the harm we brought to our victims. Perhaps they are locked into a treatment format that is to be applied in the same manner to each without variation. Yet despite whatever good intentions lie behind their efforts, that treatment will fall short of its potential.

Over the years I have recognized it has been *my* responsibility to do whatever was needed in the whole process of change. That doesn’t mean I went off in the direction of my choosing but rather that others could not meet some of the specific needs I had. I had to be willing, therefore, to remember what God impressed on my heart back in 1985. He simply said, “Rely on me alone.”

This reliance was not meant, as I have shared in other writings, to be a rejection of others. Instead, it was meant as a reminder that God can and does use others for His purposes in healing us all. Our responsibility, then, is to look for His presence.

### **IF we die with Him**

Sin has a way of making cowards of us. Confronted with the reality of what we have done, our first decision is usually to run or to deny. Boxed in a corner, we take a tentative step forward and say “Yes, I did that, *but*. . .” with an explanation that we hope somehow makes us look a little better or at least not quite so sinful looking.

Finally, trusting and hoping, we set aside our protests of innocence, our “It really wasn’t all *my* fault” comments, and place who we are and what we have done in God’s hands. This kind of surrender *is* to die with Him and once that happens, an attitude of repentance comes to life.

But God knows all of this before we even open our mouths -- let alone our hearts. Yet God encourages us to take the next and very important step. “Therefore confess your sins to each other and *pray for each* other so that you may be healed.” Treatment facilitators are not likely to pray for us as we confess. It is more likely that they will make a note of the confession and feel that they have done their job.

We, on the other hand, understand that the call to pray for one another opens the door to healing, so we pray for others and hope they pray for us. This kind of spiritual bonding is critical to the whole process of change and makes possible the next stage.

### **We will also live with Him**

As much as a part of me didn’t want my darkness to be seen by others, the hope and encouragement some offered was like having a huge weight lifted from my back. My secrets had controlled me for far too many years and quite frankly, I felt sickened by them.

Dying to self actually allowed me to feel God’s mercy. Dying to self allowed me to finally understand what Jesus had done for me. He atoned for my sins and was, I think, lovingly waiting for me to truly recognize and appreciate His sacrifice. And when I did, I felt an incredible gratitude for which words are not possible. Most of all, I finally felt able to live with Him, serve Him, and grow in Him.

I do need to share with you that one of the more difficult parts of this walk in faith is trusting in God’s vision for what is to be or what should happen. My petition prayers often sound like “Dear God, I need you to do something about” and then expect His answer to match my idea of what that

answer should be. Did I mention “And God, could you make that happen now?”

### **IF we endure (with Him)**

This is, I think, where the rubber hits the road as my dad used to say when I was a boy, because enduring implies that not everything is as we might want it to be. For those in prison, some days might seem as though God has taken a vacation. Many think their prayers go unanswered, parts of treatment seem un-Godly, and the environment in which their life goes on bears no resemblance to family life with the Huxtables, the Cleavers, or the Waltons. The most difficult letters I get include “I just don’t know if God exists anymore.”

Many of those letters are filled with frustrations, fears, and anxiety—not that I am supposed to do something about those situations, but that I allow them to vent, to relieve some of the pressure building up. When I write back, I don’t accuse them of a lack of faith. Instead, I try to share “Look to God for your peace” adding “and trust that it will come about in God’s timing and in God’s way.” Endure. Hang in there. Trust.

### **We will also reign with Him**

We all live on this side of eternity regardless of our circumstances. We do our best although we sometimes fall pretty short of what we believe is our best. What sustains us is knowing heaven awaits all who trust and believe. There will come a time, then, when we all cross over into eternity “which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time” (Titus 1.1) In short, regardless of what we have done or how many times we have failed, God loves us so much that He calls us to spend eternity with Him.

### **IF . . .**

Two letters yet a word filled with an infinite number of questions as well as possibilities. One source claimed the word “if” appears 1784 times in the NIV Bible but points out that every time it is used, “something important follows” so pay attention.

The “Hope for Healing” prayer service might one day prove to be an openly welcoming environment for those who have abused, but my decision to attend should not be based on that. My presence is an invitation to see God’s healing in my life as well as the lives of others attending – if I am willing to look for that.

Life in prison might never be free of stress, fear, and despair, but God *is* present in all of those situations -- if those in confinement are willing to trust in that truth.

Our past sins do not have the power to define us even though society prefers that option. Healing, freedom, and an identity in the Lord are possible – if we are willing to give God access.

<sup>33</sup> *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* <sup>34</sup> *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.* (Matthew 6.33-34) □

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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.*

I am learning that God is not mad at me. I am not a bad person. He loves me because I am His child and I don’t have to perform or do anything to gain His acceptance. It is simply my responsibility to love Him back. I almost hate to use the word responsibility because that has connotations of something I *have* to do. No, I love God because I love Him and *want* to love Him.

I came for a choir practice but a praise service broke out. The spirit of worship was so intense that the practice requirements felt like distractions.

With my parole restrictions pretty much keeping me confined to the house, I’ve kept busy writing to men I knew in prison. There is much confusion about what to expect upon release and I attempt to fill them in.

I am reminded of the fact that being convicted of a sex crime and feeling a lot of rejection, I sometimes do things for a moment of acceptance that does not always reflect Christ.

Some people cannot see the forest because the trees get in the way. Isolation is very bad medication for a sex offender. Does the system not see that in removing him from his family they set back one of the basic psychological needs of man—the need to belong.

I believe that sex offenders in particular are desperate for acceptance both from society and God. Many of us feel that the more good works we do the more likely we can somehow merit that acceptance. Perhaps it is a sub-conscious motivator for many, but I’ve realized in the past few years just how much this idea drives me. [The writer does *not* refer to earning salvation but of earning a feeling of acceptance. Ed]

Hope never abandons us; we abandon hope.

Early this morning, I was reminded how weak I am in matters of the flesh and I am glad God limits my exposure to situations where I could fall. I don’t think my resolve to not sin is anywhere near what it should be. Then again, that’s entirely where the battle is. Lord, help me to love others and not hurt them with what is false and harmful.

I did pray that God remove my cell mate from my life. When that wasn’t working—the whole “My grace is sufficient for you” thing—I began asking that God remove the evil from the room. Maybe that was the correct prayer because most of it is gone. At least it’s not directed at me and there is now more respect being shown.

I’m out! Praise God because it really looked like I would never be freed!

No sin goes unpunished but God is a merciful and loving God. His grace and the blood of Jesus cover a multitude of sins. I don’t have to keep getting down on myself. I just need to trust and believe God will see me through and have mercy on me.

When I am released, I will not allow myself to be in a situation where an accusation could be made, where I have no one to alibi me if anything should happen to someone. I pray that sort of situation will never arise but, being realistic, I must be prepared for such a scenario as should any sex offender.

Our spiritual growth is a key to our being able to recover. We need the love and fellowship of a good church family.

I pray every single night. I ask for God's forgiveness and love. I just keep asking God "Why am I in prison? Why did I commit such a terrible crime?" I understand that He does not control what we do, but I just feel like God has given up on me—just like everyone else. I hope you don't think I am being negative. I know I'm not the only one who has ever felt this way.

I will not lie. The biggest reason I struggle is that I love my addiction. I know it is wrong and an abomination to the Lord but I like it. Each time I lust and then masturbate it is like I slap God in the face. What my prayer now is that God would give me a godly sorrow so I can truly repent and stop.

While some in prison do change—most who care to—it is a shame that many do not change because they see no need to do so. They are against the "system" saying "They put me here, not me." Many will go back to the same atmosphere that got them busted or, for those who don't get out, the lifestyle they're living here is fine. They're getting what they want and are happy doing what they're doing no matter who they hurt.

Support is important. It sucks to be abandoned.

The Lord took me on a journey of learning how to forgive myself and keep myself forgiven. Given the fact that dealing with sin is a part of life until we go home to be with the Lord, I have to re-up the revelation that even as I receive forgiveness from the Lord, I have to again forgive myself to keep the enemy, the accuser of the brethren, disarmed.

I feel the best and safest thing a church can do with an offender is to welcome the person—become significantly involved with the individual's recovery and pray with that person often. Bring the person out into the light and show the love of God. The only offender lurking in the shadows is the one we hide in darkness.

God loves me because I am unworthy. He loves me because He loves me and not due to anything I have done. I finally figured out this answer from the depths of my soul. God is love. Therefore the only way to know Him is to love myself and then to love others as myself.

A flaw in my faith, I'm told, is that I don't hope for heaven—not in the sense of actively seeking and praying for it with ardent desire. I can't explain why. Intellectually and theologically I know it is the goal of my life or should be. Maybe I am too concerned with trying to make a difference here or worse, to make a name for myself other than the infamous one I've created. I'm still working this through.

There is one fear I cannot seem to kick—that I will be judged by society for something that happened more than 15 years ago.

## *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 our prayers of expectancy, that we trust God's response is the one we need.
- For those who reach out to help in a Christ-centered environment like the Hope for Healing service, that those involved will continue to be blessed.
- For those seeking support, that it can be theirs.
- For churches, that they find ways to open their doors to avenues of opportunity, not paths of rejection.
- For those in treatment, that they remember God cannot be barred from their hearts.
- For those who contemplate giving up, that there will be evidence of God's love in their lives.
- For family members, that the journey their loved one is on is, in many ways, theirs as well.
- For those in civil commitment, that each day becomes an opportunity to grow healthy and focused.
- For those in the SORTS program, that they find ways to share with each other with God at the center.
- 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.**

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### **Please Note**

Our computer encountered a virus and though most things are back to normal, the mailing list has flaws. If someone you know didn't receive the newsletter, please ask them to write me. My apologies for the inconvenience.

**Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.**  
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***A Little Humor . . .***

A guy walks into a bar and takes a seat. Before he can order a beer, the bowl of pretzels in front of him says "Hey, you're a handsome fellow." The man tries to ignore the bowl of pretzels, and orders a fine Pilsner beer. The bowl of pretzels then says "Ooooh, a pilsner, great choice. You're a smart man." Starting to freak out, the guy says to the bartender "Hey, what the heck! This bowl of pretzels keeps saying nice things to me!" Bartender says "Don't worry about it, the pretzels are complimentary."

