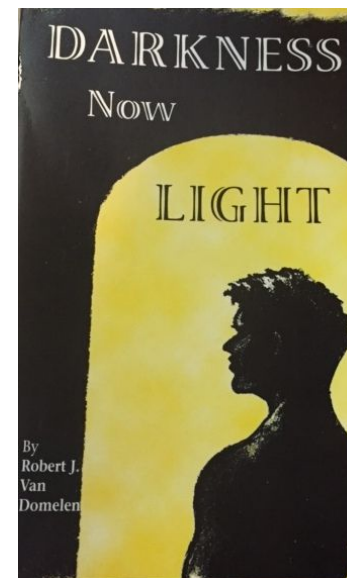


Darkness Now Light

By

Bob Van Domelen



(Original booklet cover in 1995)

Darkness Now Light

Introduction

Hardly a day goes by without a newspaper somewhere in this country reporting another case of child molestation. Some might say this problem has always been with us, or that unlike those of days past, today's victims are breaking through the walls of forced silence.

Whatever the dynamics of disclosure might be, society and the church must address major questions related to these crimes against our children. Among the questions: How is healing for the victim to be achieved? What role does the family play in therapy? How could God have allowed such a thing to happen?

In addition, when such a crime occurs, there is always an offender who must be dealt with. Beyond hate, few know what they should feel toward a person who would sexually abuse and leave a path of emotional, physical, and often spiritual pain in his or her path.

Many books have been written with a healing focus for the victim of sexual abuse, and rightly so. More and more victims are sharing the pain of their experiences with those just beginning that same healing walk.

On the other hand, what little has been written for the offender tends to be from a psychiatrist's or psychologist's clinical perspective. Because I sexually molested a number of teenage boys, my own walk toward healing has included a search for hopeful materials. What I have encountered instead is a void. As a result, this booklet is written primarily to help fill that void.

When I speak, my testimony often includes information about the time I spent in prison. The sharing generally results in two things happening.

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Other Booklets by Bob Van Domelen

**The Church, the Sex Offender, and Reconciliation
Prison and Homosexuality
When Darkness Isn't Dark Enough: A Discussion**

Into the Light, a bi-monthly newsletter for those with sex-related offenses is available free of charge. I will only add a name to the mailing list after receiving a *personal* request to be on the list. The subject matter can be and sometimes is a problem in correctional institutions, so those who receive the newsletter do so with that understanding.

First, there is usually a woman who has been abused standing in front of me after my talk expressing the need to confront or forgive me—not as her abuser but as one who *represents* her abuser. She also needs to hear me ask for *her* forgiveness. This healing, I have found, allows a victim not only to confront an abuser but also to see the potential for change in that person.

Second, I find people in the audience who know an abuser and are seeking help. They don't have the luxury of emotional detachment, yet they abhor the sin. They want to know what they should do. Sometimes they want to know if anything can really be done, or whether change is a possibility worthy of hope.

If what I have already experienced as a result of sharing with others in an indication, I believe this small booklet will speak to your heart in ways that are new. There are no simple answers for those who suffer, either victims or offenders, but we can learn to reach out to each other as Christ's representatives to those who hurt in this way.

I realize that this work might well be read from two different perspectives—by those who desire healing for someone who has been an offender and those who have themselves been offenders. Each chapter, therefore, will incorporate an attempt to speak directly to both sides—a difficult task, but a necessary one.

NOTE: Throughout this booklet, I refer to 'offenders.' In the years since this booklet was first published I have come to believe that God does not call us by our sins; He calls us by name. 'Offender' gives the impression of one currently offending rather than one who once offended. These days I usually refer to someone like myself as one with sex-related charges.

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Chapter 1

"Once Upon a Time"

The various Wisconsin prison cells I occupied for almost three years were similar: a simple bunk or bunkbed, a small table or desk, and a barred window that opened no more than a few inches if it opened at all. Other inmates in cells to my left and right had committed murder, rape, armed robbery, and other crimes. My charges included first- and second-degree sexual assault involving teen and preteen boys.

As a young child I loved to be held, especially by my father. One evening when I was about six years old, I climbed on my father's lap to kiss him goodnight.

My mother's voice interrupted me. "Don't you think you are getting a little old for that?" she asked. I hesitated, then climbed down and offered "Good night, Daddy." I never again held or kissed my father.

A few years later, older boys initiated sexual activity with me. I was scared at first but I came to enjoy those times of physical pleasure and what I believed was intimacy. In the years that followed, I found other boys my age or a little younger for that same kind of contact. Fear of discovery limited the number of such encounters to once or twice a month. But when they happened, for a brief moment at least my need for love and touch were answered.

When I was 16, my dad died of complications due diabetes. I tried to cry but tears came with difficulty, as though something in me had shut down.

My occasional encounters with girls while in high school involved kissing and some rather clumsy hand explorations. Things were more serious in college as I lost my heterosexual virginity in an effort to prove to myself that I was normal. While I was uneasy relating to the opposite sex, I had no problem finding physical pleasure with women. But

Given the trauma victims endure, such a hate would be understandable but it will, I think, do little for them in terms of healing.

The opening verses from Ezekiel are a ray of hope for those of us who have molested. He wrote, *And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right- if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die.*

In my story, Mike is just such a man. He turned from his sin and did all that was expected of him and more. His prison sentence behind him, he went out of his way to seek reconciliation and restoration; he stood with the others who were willing to stand, admitting by this action the truth posted on the bulletin board. He could have sought a church in another town, a church without such a bulletin board. But he didn't.

Alice didn't have to say yes to God's prompting. The hate she bore her offender and all offenders could have been preserved and others would not have thought any the less of her for that. Yet when no others showed a willingness to approach Mike for prayer, she knew that she must.

Ezekiel wrote, *None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him* and this is hard to understand. Surely every time Alice looks at Mike, she will be reminded of the abuse that happened to her. She will be reminded that her offender molested others as well. And she certainly might wonder if Mike will molest again.

So I don't think it comes down to the idea of remembering versus forgetting as we generally understand those words. I can easily remember, for example, the first time I was molested and that was fifty-two years ago. What I believe remembering means is that the memory itself of what someone has done should not be used to hold that person in the same condition or in that same point of time in history.

Remembering should not be used to deny any sinner the forgiveness won by Christ's death on the cross. Remembering also means encouraging God's healing in the lives of others (and ourselves as well) so as to move beyond those past actions and into choices that bring God honor and glory.

The story as I have shared it is far from over. This was meant to be but one moment of sharing that will either continue in its healing potential or die based on fear of what might happen. If the relationship continues, the journey Alice and Mike make will not always be easy but when centered on God it will always be blessed.

The story also echoes a deep desire I have for the church, because the church is sorely tempted to look like the secular world. And when it looks like the secular world, the church is lessened and will eventually cease to draw a flock in search of a shepherd. We all, sinners and saints alike, are children of God, and few of us have no need of restoration.

the most meaningful relationships to me occurred with same-sex peers.

As a college freshman, I had been propositioned by an older man in a public restroom and soon began to frequent such places. For a while I clung to the idea that such behavior was merely experimentation—things guys sometimes did. But as people around me discussed homosexuality, I realized they were describing the kinds of activities that I was pursuing.

After I graduated from college, something happened that brought tremendous despair. One Sunday afternoon, I stood in the shower room of a local school after a swim in the pool. There was one other person in that shower room, a young man who seemed to watch every move I made. If I touched my leg, he touched his. When I smiled, so did he. I suggested he might like to come to my apartment where we would be less likely to be interrupted, and he agreed.

Later, after having sex, I asked him, "Why did you let me do this to you?" I'll never forget his answer: "Today is my fifteenth birthday. I wanted to find out what it was like to love a man."

I panicked. *I'm a teacher and I just assaulted this kid!* I thought. *Please, God, don't let me get caught and it will never happen again.* But nit did happen again.

Most of my students called me "Dad" and shared their hurts and hopes with me. Some of the young men were outwardly mature, but hidden behind the façade was a vulnerable child looking for love and tenderness. A factor which often made them susceptible was the absence of their own fathers—whether physically or emotionally. Before the end of any school year, I would be sexually involved with at least one male student.

I met my wife during my first weeks as a teacher. A year after graduating from college, I married with the hope that a heterosexual relationship might correct my own distorted life. My heart thought it understood love, but it was a confused and undeveloped boy, not a man, who had entered the marriage.

Many nights I lay awake and prayed that God would release me from the darkness of my life. Tears often flowed at the thought of losing my wife and family, but my prayer always ended, "Please, don't let me get caught."

IN April 1985, a student from 14 years before returned to town for the sole purpose of confronting me. When he asked how many other young men I had sexually abused, I told him "none" and said that ours had been a special relationship. He sensed correctly that I was not telling the truth and went to the police.

Within days I was interrogated and then arrested, I cannot remember what the police asked during the four hours of questioning, but when I was left alone, I heard a voice inside, "This is the answer to your prayers."

"No, it isn't," I shot back. "I wanted freedom without getting caught."

"But this *is* the answer to your prayers" was all I heard in response.

The next morning I was free on bail and brought home by my wife. The media reported the details of my arrest. I was so ashamed I thought of committing suicide, but taking my life seemed too much of a contradiction to the words I had heard. How could suicide be the answers to my prayers?

Just over a year passed from the day of my arrest to the day of my sentencing. In that time, God's healing love became evident as individuals and then a prayer community taught me how to seek His presence. At first I sought *their* God, *their* experiences. Eventually I learned to pursue my own personal relationship with God. I desperately needed to believe that Bob Van Domelen was worth saving and that my past sins did not necessarily dictate my future.

The hardest part of my final court appearance was having to listen to the court clerk, a complete stranger, read the detailed charges against me. A whole year had passed, a year free from pornography and behavior shrouded in dark secrecy. I wanted to scream, "*I am not the same person you are reading about!*"

treatment program helped provide understanding in some areas; the many chapel activities he attended took care of the rest. Mike's wife had divorced him and took the family across country. His room above the garage of an old house at the edge of town was all he could find but it served his purposes. Most important to Mike had been to find a church family, so when a friend told him about Crescentville's small and unusual church, that was where he headed.

It was somewhat of a surprise for Mike to see the bulletin board on the front lawn of the church. It was even more of a surprise to see his name listed, the only name in a column labeled 'Child molestation.'

Entering the church, he saw heads turn his way and then just as quickly turn back, huddled conversations taking place on either side of the main aisle. Feeling color come to his cheeks, he slid into an available spot at the end of a pew.

Just before the end of the service, a small group of individuals whose names were on the board stood and asked for prayer partners. Mike stood among them, head bowed, his weight shifting from foot to foot. One by one, others left their pews, approached a standing individual, and went into prayer with that person. Before long, Mike was alone, wondering why he ever thought this church would be able to help him. He thought of sitting down. He thought of leaving. Before he could do either, he became aware of someone standing next to him.

She was at least 80 years old, a face filled with wrinkles formed in both good and bad times. She looked up at him and said, "My name is Alice. When I was a little girl, a neighbor molested me. I wanted him to rot in hell. I wanted to kill him. He took my happiness and I wanted to hate him for as long as I lived.

"When he was arrested, I learned that I was not his only victim. In the investigation that followed, I also learned he had killed a little girl in another state who threatened to tell on him. The judge sentenced him to life without parole. Her parents wanted him executed." She paused for a moment before softly adding, "And so did I."

"I'm an old woman now and I have decided the time for my sadness cannot end unless I will it to end. When I saw your name and your sin on the bulletin board today, I knew God was telling me to stop hating. And here you are. And here I am standing next to you. Who would have thought that such a thing would even be possible?"

In that moment, Mike felt his knees go weak; a wave of some deep emotion passing through him as she gently invited him to sit beside her. "Why don't we start with a prayer?"

Offenders in prison will read this story and call it a dream, a fantasy that will never happen. Readers not in prison might agree with the idea of reconciliation for sex offenders but would disagree with the idea of a victim serving an offender in the manner Alice did. What victims are encouraged to have is a healthy hate for those who molested them.

I'd like to close by including an article I wrote for *Into the Light* (November, 2004) that is worth considering. I hope that you will be blessed by it.

The Bulletin Board

¹⁴ *And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right-¹⁵ if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die.¹⁶ None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live." (Ezekiel 33.14-16)*

Crescentville is a town small enough for folks to know one another yet large enough that it supports a few successful businesses. There is a small main street with the usual assortment of stores, a pleasant park near the center of the town, and a church that faces the park in that town square.

There is a large bulletin board on the front lawn of the church. The board does not appear to be of human design and, much to the occasional dismay of those who attend the church, the information posted appears fresh each Monday morning. This is no ordinary board containing simple announcements of church activities. It is a board that lists various sins by category. Member anxiety stems from the fact that nearly everyone at some point or another has seen his or her name on that board under some specific sin category.

There is only one way that people can have their names removed from the board. They must find someone in the church willing to support and pray for them. Obviously, this means that a named individual basically confesses to another person that the board tells the truth and that he or she needs help to break the bonds of that particular sin.

Out of shame, some try to ignore the board, but only a handful have lasted more than a few weeks in that kind of denial. Sooner or later, friends in the church approach them and ask why they are unwilling to receive help. The few too stubborn to resist this final confrontation quietly leave the church.

This is a story. If Crescentville exists, I doubt it has a church bulletin board of the kind described above, yet I rather wish that such a board *did* exist. In this ideal place, people in the church have learned how to admit that they sin, their friends all sin, and if they want help walking away from a particular sin, there is always someone willing to help them.

I want to return to the story for a bit, however, and ask you to allow me a little leeway in its continuation. I want to place a sex offender (Mike) in this small town—a man who spent time in prison for his crimes and is now trying to start over. Mike used his time in prison trying to understand why he did the things he did. A mandated sex offender

The judge asked me if I wanted to add anything on my own behalf. I gave a sincere apology to all those I had harmed. Then the judge sentenced me to five years in prison and ten years subsequent probation. "I hope that your sentence will be a warning to others," he added. "Society needs protection from people like you."

Word spreads quickly among men in confinement and handmade signs began appearing on my bed frame announcing that I was a "baby raper." Lewd and suggestive remarks were included along with comments that I was not fit to live. I'd flush these efforts down the toilet. The other men merely laughed and started over making new signs. During my time in the county jail, I rarely slept for more than 15 or 20 minutes at a time.

At first only my wife was allowed to visit me but she managed to get the judge's permission for family visits that occurred in another part of the building where there was no glass to separate us. I arrived in that room with shackles on my hands and feet, only capable of small steps, between two guards. Of all my prison memories, the afternoon of that first visit with my family is the most painful for me to recall.

Eventually I was transferred to one of Wisconsin's prisons where I spent hours each day reading the Bible. No matter where I was sent within the state's prison system, I attended as many Bible studies as I was allowed.

One Tuesday morning in 1988 I found myself focusing on Nehemiah 2:17. That same evening at a Prison Fellowship Bible study the guest speaker was Bill Windel, director of a local ministry for those with unwanted same-sex attractions called Broken Yoke Ministries.

Bill gave his testimony and talked about his ministry. "Our Tuesday evening group is called the Nehemiah Fellowship," he said, "mostly because we the truth behind the verse in chapter 2, verse 17." I was amazed—that was the exact verse I'd been meditating on!

After the meeting, I talked to Bill and he gave me permission to call him collect whenever I felt the need. He always responded to my calls with hope, encouragement,

and prayers. He was the first man I had ever met who dealt with same-sex attractions and spoke of that—all the while speaking of Jesus in a way that I knew came from deep within.

Once out of prison, I drove the 60 miles from Milwaukee to Madison every week to attend his group meetings. In September 1990, I began a Broken Yoke support group in the Milwaukee area. Bill's witness of love gave me the courage to believe that sharing my own testimony could make a difference for others.

My healing process is grounded in the knowledge that God loves me. I surrender my life to Him on a daily basis. As I've grown spiritually, I have become more aware of my choices, rather than simply succumbing to compulsive, addictive behavior.

I look at young men far differently than I did years ago. I no longer feed on their vulnerability or see in them some aspect of completion needed within myself. Writing in a private journal shows me how my thinking and behavior are changing.

Some things, like pornography, no longer have any attraction for me though there are occasional moments of fleeting fantasy. But I am vulnerable in other areas. I avoid adult bookstores. I say a quick prayer before entering public restrooms. I cannot linger in locker rooms where young men might be changing.

These temptations offer only empty promises of fulfillment. I have freedom now that I don't want to lose, a freedom built both on the memories of what God has done for me as well as His promises for what lies ahead.

I have seen therapists who offer an objective ear to help me sort out what I am feeling. I had parole agents not afraid to ask direct questions and demanding answers. I also have friends with whom I am accountable. Most important, a part of each day is set aside for being in God's holy Word.

I was once invited to speak at a church and in that talk meant to be about unwanted same-sex attractions I felt God encouraging me to confess my past sins against young men.

minister to offenders might be tempted to give up, to seek those whose healing comes more quickly. I pray that you stand with the offender as guide and friend.

This is not a "How-to" book. It contains some observations and lessons I have learned on my personal journey so far. The thought that this might be a lifelong commitment does not depress me as it once did because each step is taken with Jesus at my side. I cannot erase the events of the past but the lessons learned from them can flow out to others even if the vessel from which they are poured is less than perfect.

*Those who hope in the Lord will
renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.*

Isaiah 40.31 NIV

Chapter 8

Many Miles Before I Sleep

Books, even short ones, are supposed to have endings that read like endings – good or bad, happy or sad, the final who-done-it. This one doesn't end with finality because there are simply too many variables, too many questions still unresolved. Life is like that.

There was a time when I thought that I would put everything that had happened in a drawer somewhere. Therapy completed. Perhaps even a certificate saying “all is well.” The state would return all the rights I had forfeited as a convicted felon, and I would once again walk down the streets where I live without feelings of shame. It was depressing to think otherwise because a little voice wanted me to believe that struggle was the same as failure.

I am slowly learning that I am a person of worth, even lovable. Acceptance of those thoughts doesn't always come easily but change is occurring. I'm not perfect, but no one is. What I am is a person who once molested teen boys, spent time in prison, and one who daily lifts up his victims that their lives might find blessing and happiness.

The dynamics of sexual molestation are far beyond the scope of what I hoped to address in this work. One of my parole officers told me that I was in a minority as far as offenders were concerned. Most, he said, will offend again. I asked him why it had to be that way. He remained silent.

I don't have answers for everyone although I have learned some that work for me. Some struggles just have to know they can be successful in order to continue their struggle. I can't lead someone to their healing but I can share with them the God who is healing me. That's what I told my parole officer – “Just allow others to know that there is hope.”

The journey toward healing for an offender is a long one and it is different for each individual. Those of you who

Afterward a woman approached me and opened her arms in what was clearly an invitation for a hug, I stepped forward and was mere inches from making contact when she said, “I'm Sue, Oscar's mother.” With a shock, I realized that I had been sexually involved with her son.

The hug was accepted with a plea for forgiveness. She told me that Oscar was a minister in a large city. “Up until a few months ago, I hated you,” she said. “One day I was sharing some of my hurts with my pastor's wife and she mentioned Broken Yoke and your name.” Later when she told her son about me, he responded, “I have been praying for that man ever since he was my teacher.” I write Oscar and asked his forgiveness. There was no answer.

[Almost 20 years later, I received an email from Oscar asking if I would call him. I had no idea what he wanted to say but he deserved the opportunity to say it.

We spoke for the better part of an hour. I listened as he shared the impact of my behavior and I tried to answer his questions. We prayed. I am not back in his life but at the same time every now and then he comes to mind and I pray some more.]

Today I share where I have been because the majority of people—even many Christians—say there is no hope for one like me. I know they are wrong but I do understand some of why they feel as they do. As Christ occupies more and more of this man named Bob, I am being changed into the man God created me to be. My prison doors have opened, and now I am walking free!

Chapter 2

So Now You Know

There is an emptiness—almost a vacuum that literally screams in silent panic. Nothing else matters. Others are not important unless they are willing to perpetuate the denial necessary to keep the secret in place.

An anger rises to the surface in search of someone to blame. Someone talked. They didn't follow the rules. "It was supposed to be 'our' secret, now everyone knows. I wish that I had never seen you before!"

Offenders race through these and many other emotions when they are found out. I certainly felt that way, although a deep depression settled so quickly within my heart that emotions demanding action disappeared. I wanted to fall asleep for a long, long time, and wake up with the knowledge that everything was as it was supposed to be, that the secret was still safe.

It is rare that an offender exposes his temptations to anyone else voluntarily. Those who feel desires but refuse to act on them live from day to day wondering *when* and not *if* they will act out.

Canice Connors, CEO of St Luke Institute in Suitland, Maryland, once said, "If recovery is not a possibility, how can we encourage offenders to come forward for treatment."

Disclosure is very difficult, however, for three reasons. First, offenders fear the legal action that is connected with their openness; second, victims literally have to break through the wall of imposed silence; and third, parents, relatives, and friends often enter a state of shock that hinders the logical thinking or response efforts needed.

Some well-intentioned individuals will hear the confession of an offender and feel that, as long as the behavior stops, there is no need to tell anyone else. Tears and promises of

conversation that merely becomes new fantasy for other members. Groups are a collection of broken people seeking change, often in areas considered unchangeable. Only God can bring about that type of healing but He does teach us ways in which He works through us in our brokenness.

By themselves, medical and psychological treatment can effect positive outcomes, but I believe those outcomes are greatly enhanced when therapists see God as the overseer of that treatment. Some secular therapists consider God an unnecessary crutch, even a hindrance, to an offender's therapy. Some refuse to allow even the mention of God's name in a session. In my view, these therapists foster the concept that an offender has the ability to control and out-of-control life.

I firmly believe that the correct approach for an offender is one that includes a statement to a potential therapist of (1) the goal being sought, (2) the offender's reliance on God, and (3) the offender's belief that change is possible. If the therapist is unable to agree with these points, a simple "Thank you for your time" should follow and the search for a new therapist should begin. If such a therapist cannot be found, it might be necessary to determine goals that can be reached together in the framework of mutual understanding with a therapist willing to do so.

mother shared that the man worked in the children's library in her town.

The man believed that his attitudes were okay because of his self-proclaimed status of pederast; there was nothing he could do to change what he was. He saw his relationships and his job as acceptable choices because, as he had told me, "The drug takes away my desire to have sex with boys." The drug might prevent sexual molestation in the physical sense, but it does nothing to prevent emotional rape.

Behavior therapy, such as I experienced while in prison, is generally a simple focus on overcoming present negative behaviors by shifting sexual focus to age-appropriate homosexual or heterosexual partners. The method most prominently used to achieve this goal seems to be pornography. I cannot understand how an otherwise responsible medical community would choose something proven to be as addictive and destructive as pornography for healing purposes. Porn represents a distorted image of reality. It depends on continuing victimization of those portrayed and potentially creates a downward spiral of depravity.

If it is to be effective and long-lasting, behavior therapy must reshape an offender's self-image and pornography cannot help the individual's long-range goal of change. It merely serves to establish new secrets and unhealthy life choices. Behavior therapy that seeks to build a new and positive self-image through behavior choices has a much better chance of meeting with success.

Finally, group counseling can be a valuable asset in the offender's treatment program, especially if the group is a Christian 12-step program such as SA (Sexaholics Anonymous). Such groups generally have accountability within their organizational system. Members are encouraged to admit their temptations and show a willingness to seek the support of others in the group.

In my experience, a good group leader knows what is appropriate sharing and will not allow a continuation of

seeking help are tools used by the offender to influence this conclusion.

Even if an offender is true to his or her word, failure to disclose this information, in my opinion, grossly neglects the needs of the one abused. Secrecy for the offender is providing more concern for the sinner than the one sinned against. Ideally, a balance for the needs of *both* should be the objective, but if this is not possible, the victim's needs far outweigh those of the offender.

Christian counselors might be tempted to bring victim and offender together with the idea of reconciliation. The victim is at a definite disadvantage in such a situation because he or she hears phrases like "As Christians, we are supposed to forgive." Or "Bob is sorry for what he did to you. You need to forgive him so that everything can return to normal."

Child molesters operate from a position of power over their victims regardless of the perceived internal motivation. In other words, I might not have consciously used my position as an adult in order to get what I wanted, but the victim isn't going to see my intentions. The victim sees an adult, a person who is supposed to be respected. There can never be a minimizing of the adult-child relationship.

Reconciliation or confrontation must be at the child's discretion, not the adult's. While there were many times when I wanted to speak to those I had offended, such an approach might well have done more harm than good. As an offender, I have learned that God will create the proper time for both my victims and me. It has already happened a number of times, so I know that God is faithful.

When a case of sexual assault comes to light, those who know the victim need to remember that the victim cannot be blamed for what happened. Unfortunately, children hear "Why didn't you fight him off?" or "Why didn't you tell us sooner? If you had, it would not have gotten this serious." In short, the victim will feel guilt where none should be implied.

The victim needs to know that home is a safe place. If the offender lives in the same house, arrangements must be made to take the offender out of that setting. The victim

should not be placed with relatives or friends and the offender allowed to stay. That sends a terrible message to the child that were it not for him or her, none of this would ever have happened.

Contact should be made with a local agency recommended by a trusted person to obtain counseling for the whole family, if necessary. In recent years, well qualified and caring organizations have come into existence able to reach out and begin the healing process. From my personal experience, I believe it is important to look for a Christian counseling service. A child's faith in God's protection has been severely damaged and this wound can create more long-term damage than anything else.

With attention correctly placed on the victim, the offender is often in jail or some segregated place. If legal action has taken place, the first-time offender will make bail and will be awaiting further action. This is a critical period of time.

My phone has rung on two occasions where the voice at the other end informed me that a man recently discovered to be an offender had taken his life. In Chapter One, I wrote that I had considered suicide myself, but the thought contradicted what I felt the Lord had told me. Because I chose not to follow that course does not mean that I don't understand how someone else might feel that way.

Issues an offender deals with include: personal disgrace, loss of job, family, and friends, incarceration and possible physical harm while in confinement, the knowledge that the sin is beyond the understanding of most people, and the feeling that God has stopped wanting the sinner to return. Any one of them might induce an individual to commit suicide. All of them taken together represent an almost unbeatable burden.

I firmly believe that some type of special support system is needed to reach out to the offender from the time of arrest until all possible legal sanctions have been concluded. Suicide is motivated by the absence of any hope, the belief that the burden is too great, and the perceived or real absence of caring people. A victim and his or her family

When the subject of treatment is discussed, Harvey refers to four clinical approaches currently used. I mention them only briefly here but suggest that the reader consider investigating his writing in more detail.

Psychotherapy focuses on a treatment employing introspection as its main tool. I agree with Harvey that understanding one's past is not sufficient to guarantee a permanent change. It is, I think, a little like peeling away a scab in order to examine the initial wound and thus determine how the wound came to be. Indeed, the focus is on the wound and not on the healing. If therapy keeps introspection at the center of each visit, the offender will not hear the words of hope that are so desperately needed.

A mixture of understanding the past and present must be matched with an ability to *live* in the present without second-guessing every action or word. To do the latter is to make living in the present impossible.

There are surgical procedures that can be employed. Emphasis is placed on the elimination of testosterone, the hormone said to relate to sexual desire, through castration. This choice, however, is drastic and unnecessary. A drug known as Depo-Provera has been shown to be effective in lowering testosterone levels, thereby lowering the libido. There are side effects to this drug (weight gain and possible hypertension), but the side effects would be outweighed by effective cessation of inappropriate behavior.

I believe a word of caution is needed, however, related to the use of Depo-Provera. While it lowers the desire for sexual activity, it may not eliminate the emotional attachments still in place in the offender. Not long ago, I met a man using this medication who saw the drug as a guarantee that he would not sexually molest another teenage boy.

Some weeks after our meeting, I learned from a friend that this man showed an unhealthy interest in her two teenage sons. It has gotten so bad that the sons would find excuses to avoid even talking with him. Additionally, the

Chapter 7

What to Do Next

It is not the purpose of this small work to offer all that is currently known about transforming the offender. I am neither a licensed therapist nor a research specialist able to sift through all that has been written on the subject.

I hope that I have been obvious in my expression of an offender's need for emotional support. Without that support, the isolation that led to inappropriate and illegal behavior in the first place will still be there and will almost guarantee a future of further offenses.

Spiritual support is essential for the offender. I do not mean by this the forced attentions of well-meaning Christians whose offerings do little more than reduce the offender to the status of child. Spiritual support is many things but always must center on the witness of God's love and mercy.

Spiritual support involves a faith community in providing an environment within which an offender can learn to worship and communicate with God. It calls for an attitude that encourages appropriate treatment for the offender on an ongoing basis, yet at the same time recognizes change in the individual and affirms that change.

Spiritual support also means finding someone of spiritual maturity willing to help the offender continue his or her walk. This should not be seen as a co-dependent relationship but one which recognizes the value of each individual standing together or separately which acknowledging the need for mutual accountability.

In John F Harvey's book, *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care*, there is a chapter titled "Reflections on Pedophilia" (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1987, pp. 215-227) It is, I feel, a chapter written with clarity and readability and, for those reasons, it stands out over other studies on the subject.

might feel a sense of justice being done with the suicide of an offender, but such an event eventually will be a burden carried by the victim.

Chapter 3

Is There Hope in Prison?

Because some offenders never face confinement, this chapter might seem unnecessary. But others are arrested and immediately incarcerated. I was free on bail for a little more than a year from the time of arrest to the time of sentencing. The topic of prison is important because more and more individuals are being confronted with the reality of legal sanctions as a result of their offenses.

In addition, this chapter is important for those involved in the offender's healing process because a number of issues are involved in that process needing clarification.

Prison is primarily a warehousing operation. Our institutions are operating at well beyond their capacity in most states. Most are short on staff and long on needs, even those which are efficiently run. Therapists have caseloads that preclude any in-depth, personalized treatment for individuals. While they can be beneficial, sex offender treatment programs focus mainly on group situations, and many individuals fall through the cracks in such settings. Too often the end result is eventual release without major issues being addressed.

It is really impossible to prepare oneself for a prison experience, but for anyone facing such an ordeal I would strongly recommend two things.

First, believe with all your heart that the Lord is present *wherever* you might be, regardless of the reality of your surroundings or the *feeling* that God is not there.

Second, surrender *all* outside concerns to *His* will and protection. There is an incredible guilt many inmates feel because things are happening at home and there is nothing that they can do. It was only when I confessed to God that I could do nothing and followed that by turning my loved ones

Only the Evil One would encourage behavior so harmful and even dangerous. Only the Prince of Darkness would want an offender to return to a life of hiding and forced secrecy.

There are practical considerations which are part of the healing process. One cannot simply say "God has healed me and that's all I have to do." The first step, and the most important one, has been dealt with in preceding paragraphs: a need to experience and accept the love of God and the image He has of us. Once I felt the reality of God in my life, I knew that He created and gifted people meant to help me. I realized that I very much needed psychological, spiritual, and emotional support.

why don't things change for me? I still feel like I am in the same place."

There are far too many people who would minimize that last comment with "You can change things if you want to – you just don't want to." The reality is that an offender does not find a great deal of *support*, and things *are* difficult. I do believe, however, that it is possible to walk a little more freely if one is able to change focus.

Offenders with low self-images need to see themselves as God sees them and loves them. It might take some time before this 'head knowledge' becomes 'heart knowledge,' but it is the path that must be walked.

I remember the day I came to the realization that some people would always hate me, and nothing I might do or say would change that. What made the day memorable was that it didn't matter whether everyone loved me or not. Knowing that Jesus died out of love for me and that He is always with me, I might be disappointed by rejection but need not make the love of another (human being) my primary goal.

It is important to remember that most offenders don't relate well with their peers, so rejection from another adult might feed the need for a substitute love – that of a child. This distorted logic can and must be avoided.

Healing, as I understand and believe it to be, is the process and individual goes through experiencing a personal and loving relationship with the Lord that defines and directs changes in self-image and behavior choices.

Healing and change, complete or otherwise, do not result in shutting out the memory of past offenses. As much as I would like to forget the many occasions of abusing, I cannot. The memories, however, are not carried in front of my face obscuring my vision of God. Rather, the memories are meant to be a reminder of the *effects* of those sins, not only on my victims and those who love them, but also on me, my family, and my friends.

I need to add that when the memory of sexual molestation focuses on the physical and/or mental pleasure felt, it is not God who encourages the memory. It is Satan.

over to Him that I began to find peace. The beauty of this surrender was seeing that God *did* take care of things and also richly blessed me and my family. These words of the Serenity Prayer used by 12-step programs apply in this area of an inmate's life:

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

In short, the inmate must ask "If I cannot change it [any situation], can I give the matter over to God and let Him deal with it?"

An offender must look at prison as more than simply punishment. It is a time to focus on those areas of his or her life that need correcting. In most cases, prison separates the sin and the sinner. For the one with age-inappropriate attractions, this will mean the absence of children and therefore a time of possible freedom from temptation. Unfortunately, some believe that separation alone will result in total healing. Without treatment, release from prison and a return to the stress of everyday life will bring an offender face to face with the same temptations and behaviors that led to prison in the first place.

When a released offender falls and is returned to prison, the message sent to society is that there is no hope for change. Some would maintain that if prison is not enough to deter someone, then this condition cannot be corrected. I believe that prisons, in general, are not able to provide the therapy necessary to make change possible. One avenue that most of our public institutions do not travel is the road that leads to God.

To illustrate the point, I had the benefit of therapy in 1983 as a result of an agreement reached with parents of a teen I had molested. I saw the therapist for a little more than a year on a regular basis but never felt things were getting any better. Therapist thought my difficulties stemmed from not accepting my homosexual orientation, and advised me that

other problems would disappear once I came to this acceptance. Eventually I stopped seeing him and was pronounced 'safe' as far as contact with young men was concerned.

During that entire time of therapy, I never connected with God as being the source of my healing. I was still trying to have things my own way—I could control my life without help, thank you.

The question asked two years later after my arrest in 1985 was "Why didn't therapy in 1983 work?" That was usually followed by "and what makes you think that you will do any better in future therapy?" I believe the answer is God, but it is understandable that my behavior encouraged skepticism on the part of those who had to deal with me.

As I strove for an intimate relationship with Jesus and Jesus became the focus of my daily life, I found that therapy was different than before. I heard others speak and knew when those words connected with something inside me. The treatment I received in prison sex offender treatment programs taught me much about myself—not because the therapist's observations were so insightful but because I began to see the areas of my life the Lord wanted to heal.

One might ask, "Why can't you give the therapist full credit for designing a program that brought you to the understandings of yourself that you say are there now?" My answer is that, without God, the therapist's direction was no different than that taken by the therapist I saw in 1983. I was created in the image and likeness of God. Few secular therapists would even explore the need for me to reconnect with the source of my creation or to believe that God wanted me to be healed. Most would maintain that God is not necessary for personal day-to-day living. However, if God is not part of the healing process, then I am left with many of the same flawed devices I used in the past for controlling my behavior.

With Jesus as guide, I went to all therapy sessions believing I would find more healing. Self-disclosure and hearing the stories of other offenders can be very painful, but

Chapter 6

Can the Offender Ever Be Healed?

Some will ask, "Is there ever healing for the offender?" There is an answer to that question but it is not as simple as a yes or no. I have often found that the answer depends on the person being asked. Most individuals struggling with sexual fantasies involving children want to be free of those fantasies. Therefore, the answer for them, their families, and those who minister to them will be a resounding "yes."

If the question is directed to the victim, the family and friends of the victim, or the legal system, the answer clearly becomes "no." Even therapists dealing with molesters often have a very negative outlook toward their patients. Offenders are rarely caught after having molested only one child; the list of victims can be quite long. Considering the compulsive nature of this offense and the fact that many released from prison offend again, a "no" response is logical.

A basic issue, it would seem, is to define healing. In the medical world, healing is most often determined by the absence of a pre-existing condition. In short, the condition disappears much as a headache or minor abrasion does, leaving little or no trace of ever having been there.

I have met men and women who claim a total lack of desire to repeat behavior patterns that once were compulsive or addictive. The skeptic in me sometimes seeks a flaw in their statement of freedom. Maybe that's because I am jealous of that freedom and want the same for myself. Not having it, at least not to the same degree I perceive them to have, I find it easy to project the remains of my own brokenness on them.

But in my quiet times of reflection, I know that Jesus *does* set us free. Our freedom *is* found when our daily focus is on Jesus and not on the problems we face. An offender might be tempted to rebuke this position with the question, "Then

failure, a lost soul. I have heard some who minister say that everything will be “just the way it should be” once these hear the *right* words.

A woman working in prison ministry once told me, “The ones I appreciate working with the most are alcoholics and child molesters. They really want to turn their lives around, so I know that it is only a matter of time before Jesus becomes real in their lives.” Perhaps a simple parallel might help to illustrate the point I am trying to make.

Jesus chose twelve to be His disciples. They were not ‘finished products’ when He first called them out, but they *grew* to know and understand the message He brought. It took time.

The child molester, like *any* sinner, will hear and believe the message of the love of Jesus with time. I tell men and women to seek *their* personal relationship with the Lord, not to mimic mine. I can be an example for them but if they seek what I have in the same way I have it, they will be cheating themselves. God created each of us unique yet in His image and likeness. It stands to reason that our personal relationship will also bear that uniqueness.

With time, an offender will not only seek true forgiveness for his or her offenses but will also receive forgiveness. It is only when the molester can see the child within as God sees that child that the chains can be finally broken. Without this freedom, without this vision, a molester sees only one thing – a molester. And if this is the only vision he or she sees, then there is little hope of ever changing that vision or the behaviors that flow from it.

both are necessary if the locked doors to those dark, hidden areas are ever to be opened/ I met some who believed that their sins had been forgiven; they were now new creations in the Lord; and, because Jesus had dealt with their sin of child molestation, they believed that to focus on it in therapy was a lack of faith in the power of the cross. That attitude might be theirs, but it cannot be mine.

Those who desire to help someone in prison should consider corresponding with an inmate. If possible, visits are wonderful. Just about all who are in prison think of the day when they will be released. Visits and mail are tangible evidence that there are people on the ‘outside’ who will welcome them back into society and at the same time will encourage them in their healing process. Check with the institution for visiting requirements or mailing restrictions, and be prepared to feel a little like an inmate yourself as you go through the process.

Above all, continue to hold up the visit of healing and hope to an offender. There are few things more demoralizing than being told “You can’t change” or “You’ll always be a child molester.” Suicide can seem to be a reasonable alternative when one is told there is no hope. I spend time each day trying to see myself as God sees me. It is this vision that encourages me to reach beyond the scope of the world’s knowledge. What a blessing it was for me to have had friends believing in this vision while I was in prison!

Chapter 4

Is the Body Still One?

The Christian community must face its own reaction to what the sex offender has done. This response will include a tremendous amount of anger, strong feelings of betrayal, and an initial desire to simply expel the person.

Before my arrest, I had been deeply involved in my church—a community of 2,300 families. Over time I had chaired the finance committee, served as president of the parish council, and directed the folk liturgical group responsible for music at a special family service held each week. Without question, I was one of the more visible people in my church community.

I was arrested on Wednesday of Holy Week in 1985, spent that evening in a suicide prevention cell in our county jail, and was encouraged not to attend any of the remaining Holy Week services held in my church. I really didn't know what people were saying or thinking. Years later a friend told me my arrest literally divided that community right down the middle.

Sexual molestation will polarize any community in its attitude toward the offender. People will either rally around the individual in loving support or shun him or her entirely. Many of those supporting the offender will do so from a position of denial—the charges must be false.

After my arrest, I received many cards expressing support, but there were also some that encouraged me to commit suicide. Our family learned to answer the phone with “Who’s calling, please?” rather than the usual “Hello.” We never knew whether the person on the other end would be calling as a friend or using the phone’s anonymity to profanely condemn me and my family for what I had done. There were also a few calls from men who had read about me in the paper. They suggested I might be interested in having sex with an ‘adult’ male.

take control and blot out our hopeful expectation that things can be better.

As a small child, I did things I knew were wrong. It seemed logical, at first, to admit my failings when asked if I were guilty. I’d say “I’m sorry” and then hear “Well, just don’t do that anymore because it’s bad.” As time passed and the same offense recurred, the gentle reprimand eventually turned to “You aren’t sorry. If you were really sorry, you wouldn’t do that!”

It didn’t take long for me to suspect that God felt the same way about me. I would confess my sins and sincerely promise not to repeat them. It would not be long before I would find myself saying the same words over again, and I would be reminded of the disparity between sorrow and not doing. Jesus said “Go and sin no more.” (John 8.11) My head understood the purpose of Jesus’ death on the cross, but my heart refused to accept it until one day as I was sitting in my prison cell, I looked at the picture of Jesus hanging on the cross wedged in the frame of a mirror and felt these words literally flooding my being. “I not only died for you, but I died as a homosexual child molester.”

I rejected the thought as quickly as it had entered my mind, because to think of Jesus as a homosexual child molester seemed an abomination. In my mind, Jesus was the white knight sacrificing his life in ransom for my soul. He certainly was not a homosexual child molester.

But the words returned again and again until finally I focused all my attention on that picture. Where only moments before I had seen a literal sea of humanity at the foot of the cross, I now saw only one standing there – and it was me. At the same moment, the words I had rejected were accepted and Jesus finally became my *personal* Savior.

Those who minister to an offender must gently encourage a reconnection with God, I say gently because there are some ministers who tend to figuratively back an offender up against a wall and admonish rather than encourage. If an offender rejects an admonition or is even a little bit slow in saying the ‘right’ words, he is deemed a

Chapter 5

Are You Still There, God?

Scripture says, “If anyone should cause one of these little ones to lose faith in me [to sin], it would be better for that person to have a large millstone tied around his neck and be drowned in the deep sea.” (Matthew 18.6 (TEV))

As a child, I did not think about this verse much because I didn’t understand it. But when I began to do the same things to others as an adult that were done to me in my childhood, these words leaped off the page and brought me to deep despair. Through manipulation, I had encouraged more than one young man to allow me to touch areas I had no right to touch. Understanding that many abusers were once abused themselves as children, it is not unreasonable to think that perhaps some of those I abused are abusing others themselves.

As an offender, I truly sought freedom from my behaviors. I hated myself for what was happening yet I felt powerless to stop it. IN the first chapter, I spoke of praying for a release both from homosexuality and from molesting my students, but I always ended that prayer with “But don’t let me get caught!”

Rather than finding freedom, I managed to create ‘dry’ times, spaces where I was not acting out any of the behaviors that had become so addictive. But the behaviors did not go away, and it was only a matter of time before I fell again.

Because of my repeated failures, I felt God was getting more and more distant. Instead of having a front row seat and seeing God clearly, I seemed to keep moving to sections that were farther away. God kept getting smaller and smaller.

Most offenders find it difficult to believe that God really loves them. With time, addictions and compulsive behaviors

If you find that a friend or acquaintance has been exposed as a sex offender, by all means call and ask what you might be able to do, but definitely identify yourself at the beginning of the conversation. You don’t have to be able to solve an offender’s problems, but you can offer prayers and whatever realistic support might be needed—especially for the family.

Such support might be something as simple as running errands that would otherwise force the individual into the public eye. In the first weeks after my arrest, I could not drive the car because to do so made it more difficult to shield my face from those I knew. This kind of behavior might sound strange, but others have shared with me that they had the same reaction to being ‘out in the open.’

The church community will also struggle with feelings about the offender’s spouse. The most common statement heard when people share the ‘latest’ about a child molestation is “She [the wife of an offender] must have known that her husband was abusing children. How could she not have seen what was right under her nose?” The spouse automatically becomes guilty of the same offenses by association and is equally shunned by many in the church.

I was a master manipulator. While my wife knew something was wrong, she never had any concrete evidence that would reveal my offenses. Faithful and true to her marriage vows, my wife might have prayed that whatever I withheld would be released, but I don’t believe that she was at all aware of the depth of my problem.

That is not to say that *all* wives are in the dark about such things. Some are deeply ashamed of their suspicions and pray that those thoughts would prove to be nothing more than manifestations of an over-active imagination. Additionally, a wife who knows and reveals could find herself without financial support and beset by a multitude of related problems. There are often children in the family—can she raise them alone? The answer is yes, but without the support of others the task is daunting.

Church communities have a responsibility both to witness to the truth of Christ's teaching and to live that teaching out by example. In effect, we are called to be a bonding agent in the name of Jesus. The reality of child molestation is that an offender has crossed the line into areas of sinful behavior generally defined as totally unacceptable. Lost, ironically, is the fact that all sin is deserving of death (Romans 6.23). Instead, when dealing with a child molester, most of Christian society tends to see the depravity as a sin far worse than other sins—a sin meriting special condemnation.

The Christian community does *not* have to sacrifice beliefs when dealing with difficult issues. As spiritual parent, the church teaches and explains how we are to live in accordance with God's word and by the example of Jesus. We are told that walking a Christian walk is never easy. By holding fast to these principles and at the same time offering love and encouragement, the Christian community is presenting not only a God who loves and forgives but also a God whose way is narrow. It is the only way. This is the God an offender needs.

A warm, fuzzy God concerned only about whether or not we feel good is of no use. Just as useless is a God unwilling or unable to bring change—often manifested in an attitude of "You are a sinner. Leave our midst." Unfortunately, the offender all too often is faced with a choice between these two extremes. Both the offender and the church deserve better.

If a church community is to survive such a shock, it must focus beyond merely getting through the difficult days. The church must take an aggressive stance which will force the offender to grow, rather than allowing itself to re-define right and wrong in order to fit a situation. In other words, the church must stand by its belief system, a system anchored in Christ and His teachings. It must neither set aside that system of belief nor use that belief as a club either to punish or to enforce self-righteousness.

The body might be bruised. It may be in terrible pain. I am convinced, however, that a faith community that

maintains its focus on God *can* minister to an offender in ways that will prove to all involved that the body is still one. And it can do this without ignoring the victims so grievously harmed by the offender.