



Into the Light

All things are possible with God
September—October 2014

A Gentle Whisper . . . Can You Hear It?

By Bob Van Domelen

¹¹ *The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave."* (1 Kings 19:11-13)

What struck me about this story is that Elijah, prophet of the Lord, was in hiding and fearing that Jezebel would, in fact, be able to make good on her promise to see him dead before the day was out.

We don't often think of those chosen by God to have normal anxieties like the rest of us. Just, I suppose, like most people have no real idea what prison life is like. And if prison issues come to light for them, the common reaction is usually "They are only getting what they deserve."

The day after my arrest, I felt great despair. Just as God's word said it would, a light had been shown on my darkness and the exposure felt like more than I could handle. My choices had destroyed the trust of my wife, my children, relatives and friends, and my church family.

Yet in one particularly difficult moment I felt God speak to my heart. "Rely on me alone." Simple words but in that moment just words. After all, I had begged God to cleanse me and bring me to wholeness. In my mind His response of "You're under arrest" hardly felt cleansing or healing. But despite my narrow thinking, I came to see over time that God is persistent. He had said "Rely on me alone." Well?

Finally transferred from the county jail to the State's receiving institution, I was sitting alone in a segregation holding cell because the regular unit was full. I looked out the narrow slit of window and with it opened a crack I could smell the freshness of newly cut grass—a remarkable thing after so long in artificially controlled environments. In that moment I heard "Rely on me alone" once more. This time I also heard "and now it begins."

What that meant was clear to me. Everything in my life's descending spiral had bottomed, had stopped. In that moment I knew I was starting the journey out of my self-designed pit and into the light of the life I had been begging God to restore.

No, restoration was not a release from confinement, the return of my job, or the return of the trust and respect of those I had betrayed. Restoration was and is the gradual process of setting aside the old self, the old choices, and putting on the new man Scripture claimed I would be. Some of these changes would be slow in coming and, in fact, some are still coming. "Rely on me alone." A gentle whisper. And I heard it.

In most prisons, sometimes the only time peace and quiet exists is in the early hours of the morning when most are still asleep. During the day, inmates deal with loud voices, constant profanity, and the business of living in an environment for which they had no preparation. This is difficult for everyone, harder for those in prison on sexual assault charges and worse still for those with child sex offenses.

A whisper has little chance of survival in most prison environments and more often than not is drowned out by real noise as well as internal noise where *FEAR, ANXIETY, DESPAIR, LONELINESS, CONFUSION*, and shouts of *I'M SORRY!* swirl and mix without rhyme or reason but are still deeply felt.

But for those willing to trust and listen for it, the gentle whisper of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness eventually comes through—if only for a moment or two when they are needed the most.

He pulled his cloak over his face

At a recent Bible study at our county jail, one man shared that the moment he committed his crime, he had willingly surrendered his life into the hands of those who now had authority over him. Someone had told him that and after thinking about it, he decided that it was true. It was obvious that the other men attending the study grasped what he said because heads were nodding in agreement. They had given over authority to strangers.

Tradition suggests that Elijah was afraid to look upon the glory of God and therefore covered his face. Bible scholars also suggest that he did so as a token of shame for having been cowardly in fleeing from Jezebel, especially knowing that what he had done was by God's command. In this moment, however, he covered his face because he recognized that God, Yahweh, I Am Who Am was passing by. A gentle whisper. But it was God and Elijah knew it.

As I have shared in any number of articles I have written for this newsletter over the years, our life IS about surrender. It IS about believing and trusting that in whatever

is happening, however maddening or fearful, God IS present.

There was a time when I thought that meant God would stop something from happening; He would get me an early release; or He would make others stop taunting or threatening me. But it didn't work that way. Things still happened; I didn't get a release the first time I saw the parole board; and I still had to put up with the taunts and threats. So what had God actually done?

In those gentle whispers that came every now and then, I was reminded of God's love. In those gentle whispers I came to seek a deeper relationship with Jesus and a growing awareness of the Holy Spirit influencing my life. And I knew it was enough.

Are the whispers constant? Maybe they are, especially if the nudges I feel when making choices are, in fact, gentle whispers. But I am no more or less human than anyone else and there are days when I just don't hear them. But I suspect that's because I am not listening for them.

Life will continue with or without our permission. Others will do what they want without concern for you or me—just as we will do things without concern for others. So on a larger scale it might seem like nothing is happening, nothing is changing. But the whispers tell me the opposite. The whispers tell me I am doing okay and my journey is headed in the right direction. Despite days when I get frustrated for one reason or another, I *will* be okay. So will you. The gentle whispers? Can you hear them? □

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.

God has blessed me so much since I gave my life to Him. I just want to do His will. Two things I have changed in my life that I also contribute to my life changes are being available by putting myself out there and being vulnerable in ways I never dreamed I could.

The quality of one's life is based on the quality of one's spirit. It is not based upon the quality of the circumstances of life. It is the quality of one's spirit that counts.

If you don't do it here, you won't do it there—tell others about Jesus, stopping the sin, doing the right thing. And if you don't stop it here, you won't stop it there—disobey rules, cause problems, continue to sin.

It seems the further we separate ourselves from God, the worse things get for everyone in our community. The ripple effect is overwhelming and I constantly pray for guidance.

I am now at peace and walking in the Father's rest. I am no longer trying to perform for His acceptance and love. Christ in me—a despised one—the hope of glory. It really is no longer I who live but Jesus is living and serving in and through me. Thank you, Lord!

I've not had any contact with any of my family in over six years. I think I understand their feelings and all I can do is pray that someday they will forgive me. I've made my peace with them on my part.

Your words of encouragement give me hope for when I am released—be it in 2041 or, God willing, sooner. I pray that I will still have a life that can be lived fully and to God's glory.

Things are moving along very well and as far as what God has for me in the future, I am not too sure. But I know with God it will be something wonderful and amazing, so I look forward to it.

When I got my Aggravated Life Sentence, everyone said to me, "Man, your life is over!" But you know what? My life kept going on. I kept waking up here every morning. So what was I to do? Keep on living in that death? I learned that was a lie. Yet in many ways that statement was true. For at that time, I literally died to the world just as Jesus calls each of us to do. Jesus said "It is the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies – *but if it dies!* – it produces an abundance of harvest." (John 12, 24ff) In that truth and in that sense, in my life sentence I received a death sentence which is the greatest and most powerful blessing for my life.

I can see the race toward Christ-likeness begins with a sense of honesty and dissatisfaction and we should expect to pursue sanctification with all our might, straining every spiritual muscle to win the prize.

I know that I am not perfect and that I still need to pay attention and even rethink things. I'm human and life is a journey.

It has taken the better part of five years to the point of recognizing that though situations and circumstances are real, real is not always truth. Truth always trumps real.

My wife once made the comment that the problem with our churches was the fact that the pastors had never tasted life outside of their closed worlds. The regression of our churches has done away with the progression of our lives. With Jesus out of the picture, I see churches closing their doors to sex offenders for fear of hurting their offering plates. Having lived it I can speak on it.

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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 learn to listen for that gentle whisper, those words of love from God.
- For those who are willing to reach out to others, that this choice is available to ALL of us.
- For those who feel the weight of condemnation, that they look for the blessing of forgiveness.
- For those who pray, that their prayers seek God's wisdom and not merely agreement with their own thoughts.
- For those in civil commitment, that they look each day for ways to grow in Christ.
- For family members, that love can be restored when based on a willingness to recognize it.
- For prison personnel, that they bear responsibility for those they are called to serve.
- For those being released, that they walk every step trusting in God's mercy and love.
- 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.

Some thoughts from 2003

Being Tempted

I sometimes struggle with the reality that most people would never consider molesting a child. So how is my temptation "common to man"? To be tempted in such a manner sets me apart from the majority of the world and places me in the company of those despised by that majority. But if I view the temptation in a broad and not specific sense, I start to see that there are many related side issues that impact what I might be considering *the* temptation. And those side issues are *very* common to all us humans.

Never Too Much to Handle

I don't know about you but sometimes temptations come on like lightening from the sky—one moment nothing, the next a flash of blinding light capable of incredible damage. I used to think that most temptations come out of nowhere to blindsides the best-laid plans against them. But they don't. Not really.

I have learned that though the serious threat to my moral balance might have seemed like unexpected lightening, there were always forewarnings. I have written that my temptation level or frequency was directly related to

how well I was taking care of myself. Whenever I am attentive to my well being, my relationship with God is ongoing and I can recognize Satan's snares.

One thing I want to share here is that most of the temptations I have aren't really new ones. Rather, they are like visiting a dirty bookstore. The covers might be different but the content is the same. So when I take a closer look at my temptations I can see that there is a "been there, seen that, done it" quality to them. And if I am honest with myself, are those temptations really more than I can handle? Or might the question be better phrased, "Are those temptations really things that I reject with all my heart or do I still have a hunger for sin?" If I still hunger for particular sins, then the temptations don't overcome me. They fit me.

A Way Out

Without any particular order intended, let me share what I think about the way out God provides.

- Temptation is a warning sign and God reminds me that I need to rely on Him completely.
- Separated from the objects of my addictions while in prison, I saw just how far down the road of darkness I had gone. I learned that my temptations were Satan's attempt to have me accept false intimacy and not the God-ordained intimacy I was meant to have. And please keep in mind that intimacy does not simply refer to sexual intimacy. It refers to honest relational intimacy with anyone as well as with God.
- Instead of becoming more isolated in my thoughts and behaviors, I was forced to share them with others just as they were forced to share themselves with me in required treatment programs. Being accountable to someone is a critical component to any relapse prevention plan. And if the power of *any* temptation is to be diffused, it must in some way be brought into the light where it can be seen for what it is. "Satan is a liar!" is stated in every letter a good friend of mine sends. He's right.
- I have learned that keeping a journal of private thoughts is yet another way of taking care of myself. It is amazing how clearly God helps me to see both the good and the bad in my life and if I am honest in that journal, I often know exactly what steps I need to take.
- Finally, I have learned that temptation reminds me that I am still in the battle, that Satan does not own me, and that God's grace is indeed sufficient if I am open to His direction.

I have also written that when I am tempted to do *anything* I know to be wrong, I sometimes wonder just how changed I am. After sharing with you this far, I come full circle myself and can see the lie that Satan would want me to accept as truth. He wants me to doubt that I have changed. But I *have* changed! And so have you! The changes are taking place deep within me and are being evidenced every day that I seek God, seek to do His will, and seek to serve Him in whatever manner He wills.

Maybe I have a better feeling about my own temptations just for having written this article. Maybe some of these ideas will be helpful to you. I certainly hope so.

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A Little Humor . . .

When the zoo's gorilla died, the zookeeper hired an actor to put on a costume and act like an ape until the zoo could get another one.

Once in the cage, the actor made faces, swung around, and drew a huge crowd. Then he crawled across a partition and atop the lion's cage, making the lion furious. Ignoring the lion, the actor stayed in character—until he lost his grip and fell into the lion's cage.

Terrified, the actor shouted, "Help! Help me!" But it was too late. The lion pounced and opened its massive jaws. Between terrifying roars the lion whispered, "Shut up! Do you want to get us both fired?!"

