



Into the Light

All things are possible with God
November—December 2019

Restored - Revisited

By Bob Van Domelen

[The following was first used for the January 2007 edition of this newsletter. I reprint it here with some added comments because the issues and the solutions remain the same.]

¹⁰ *Elisha sent a messenger to say to him [Naaman], "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."* ¹¹ *But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. (2 Kings 5.10-11)*

Perhaps one of the most often heard statements about sex offenders is, "They can't change." To prove the point, a percentage is usually stated such as "75% of sex offenders released from prison will reoffend." That number, by the way, keeps getting higher and I never see a reference to a specific study justifying its use.

I believe, however, the issue of lowering the rate of recidivism or reoffending comes down to two things. First, there has to be a desire by others to restore an offender, and secondly, the offender has to be willing to go through the process of restoration.

In a recent sermon, my pastor shared a piece of history that had me knowing without a doubt that it would definitely be the basis for an article in this newsletter.

On May 21, 1972, a man attacked one of the most important sculptures in the world, the *Pieta* by Michelangelo, with a hammer. The damage caused by the 15 blows was extensive.

Over the years, literally several hundred offenders have shared their lives in letters sent to this ministry. Their beginnings could have been compared to the perfection of the *Pieta*; each life, however, attacked in some way with the bluntness and damaging power of that hammer.

Occasionally, it is a single crisis in life that literally replaces the light in a soul with darkness, but I am inclined to think that more often it is a series of blows that allows individuals to believe that the terrible choices they make are good choices. In the eyes of an observing public, however, the behaviors eventually become an individual's identity because "It's just the way he/she is."

In the case of the *Pieta*, a panel of experts was called in and the damaged statue was compared to photos of its original. Then in a painstaking fashion over a period of 10 months, the broken parts of the statue were reconstructed. When completed, observers could not find the flaws.



To protect against further damage, the decision was also made to enclose the work of art in a bullet-proof casing. According to officials, the casing is a sign of the times we live in.

Go wash yourself

In a more perfect world, someone who struggles with age-inappropriate attractions would be able to find help. Trained specialists would gather, do preliminary studies, and then recommend a course of action. Underlying their sense of commitment would be the recognition of that individual's value as someone priceless and worthy of restoration.

But we live in a very imperfect world, a world in which we refrain from sharing our failings with others—especially failings that do not fit the norm of acceptance. Bill W, for example, found stiff resistance to the notion of publicly acknowledging alcoholism much less having meetings where others with the same problem could meet for support and encouragement. But he persevered and the movement called AA was born.

I've known both men and women who have age-inappropriate attractions, have never acted on them, yet felt disclosing those attractions to anyone, including a therapist, would be the end of their career and a justified exclusion from society.

"Go, wash yourself" is not unlike being told "Go, see a therapist." Sounds pretty simple, but strugglers of age-inappropriate attractions are really no different than the leprous Naaman was in his day. They might hesitate for a different reason, but whatever the reason, the step to healing is not taken.

Naaman does eventually listen to the words of wisdom from his servant and puts aside his pride and preconceived ideas as to how healing should take place. After seven times surfacing from the water, his skin was made clean and he returned to thank Elisha. (*Read the whole story 2 Kings:5*)

Conventional therapy is a long way from understanding age-inappropriate attraction, but there are more theories in place today than 20 years ago. Sadly, I think a lot of people really don't want solutions to be found. It is much easier to hate and confine than treat and support.

I know I have written this in the past, but it bears repeating: victims and offenders alike need to find wholeness. Society does neither any favors by locking the individual in a victim or offender state of mind. Victims can and do heal. So do offenders. Healing is not forgetting; it is moving through the pain of what happened and finding ways of preventing a repeat of that behavior.

If all a victim hears is “You are a victim. You are forever damaged!” then that child will live an entire life as a self-identified damaged victim. And in a way, a society that refuses to address the label for either victim or offender destines itself to little change for either, for we often become what others tell us we are.

Then and Now

It is said that one small piece of the *Pieta* was left out for a period of time and then inserted later as a signed of a completed restoration.

For the former sex offender given the opportunity to make change, that one piece might be something like the sex offender registry—a permanent reminder by the state of an offender’s past actions. But the registry itself has absolutely no power in protecting children and is, I think, a false blanket of security.

When all is said and done, though, it is my belief that nothing lasting comes without the active presence of God in the process; nothing lasting comes until our neighbors are willing to assist in the process of restoration; and nothing lasting comes until we all believe it is possible.

The *Pieta* is a wonderful piece of art and recognized as one of the truly magnificent sculptures of all time. But Jesus didn’t die for the *Pieta*. He died for us. And that makes us infinitely more important and more precious in God’s eyes.

2019

I am beginning to think that restoration is a two-sided definition. First, it means being restored within one’s own thinking as that applies to making healthy choices, maintaining appropriate boundaries (just as ALL people are called to do), and being in a daily relationship with God. This last part actually makes the other two possible. In other words, living in the peaceful understanding that we are loved and blessed by the God we serve.

Second, while there will always be some restoration with family and friends who are willing to allow that to happen, societal restoration might best be described as simply coexisting with those around us, knowing that we remain and always will remain lepers to those who prefer seeing us that way. For those willing to take a chance, being reacquainted with us might give them a window into the miracles God has done in our lives. And perhaps we will see the miracles worked in their lives, too.

If you change the letters in depression,
the word spells **I pressed on!**

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 did not know what depression was until I went to the hole the first time, and it seems I have not been able to shake it.

Bless God for all he has done for me – keeping me alive and in good health these past 20 years!

This year I wrote a two-page letter of apology to my victim. So far no response nor do I expect one – unless God works in her heart to open a line of communication. I think, like me, she has stuffed her feelings and this may not be the time to deal with it. I am praying for her.

I’m grateful that God has blessed me once more with a job. It was rough going five months without one but my needs were met.

It takes a strong person to go through what we go through. Without Jesus in one’s life, I believe it is much harder, in part because one does not know or understand the truth about his/her own value as a person. One does not understand that forgiveness is there, that we have much value, are loved, and have a future. One also needs faith because not every piece of that puzzle can be seen or physically realized at every moment of every day.

The wonderful thing about prayer is we leave a world of not being able to do something and enter God’s realm where everything is possible. Nothing is too great for his almighty power. Nothing is too small for his love.

I just got back from another apartment viewing with no estate agent showing up, so I am beginning to wonder about these folks.

How quickly I get carried away with the treasures, pleasures, and cares of the world, putting my Master on the back burner!

Look where you are today. Look where God has brought you out of. No matter how you’re feeling or what you are going through, never stop thanking or praising God for he is always worthy. We only have one day – tomorrow is not promised.

The article you wrote on loneliness really hit home. Being in a dark place where there is no hope as well as having the shame of what I have done eat away at me even though I know God forgives me. Wanting to hear from those I hurt and knowing they forgive me.

God has shown me that he is faithful. I see it every day. My children are the reason I keep my hand to the plow and even if I never see them again, even if they never know their dad, even if no one ever tells them who I am now compared to who I was, even if I have to serve out the remaining 119 years I have been sentenced to, I will continue the true fast my Lord has asked. I will continue to deny myself and what I think I deserve, picking up my cross, and obeying the order of my King, “Follow me.”

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Your Support Matters

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Broken Yoke Ministries
PO Box 5824
De Pere, WI, 54115-5824.

All donations are tax deductible and will be acknowledged. If you are unable to support this effort financially, please support it with your prayers.



Our Prayer Corner

Prayer is an incredible gift we can give one another, for there is no better thing than to lift our lives, hopes, and dreams to the altar of the Lord.

Let us pray . . .

- First and always foremost, for our victims, that each day for them is a new day, a day without fear, and a day of healing.
- For those who believe there is nothing but darkness in their future, that they see the light of hope God shines into their lives.
- For those who feel that restoration is an all or nothing option, that they surrender control of that idea as unreal
- For those who feel God has abandoned them, that they experience a renewed faith encouraged by those around them, those willing to share *their* faith.
- For those who are close to a time of reentry, that they trust God that their needs will be met and that the anxiety they feel will melt into the assurance of God's love.
- For those who struggle with illness, that their health improves and that they are strengthened.
- For those praying for family members and others that they love, that they believe their prayers reach the altar of the Most High who will look down with compassion.
- For family who have abandoned a loved one in prison, that they come to understand the power of family ties and the reality of brokenness.
- For Bob's health, that the ministry God has for him will continue to be an encouragement and hope for others.
- For this ministry so 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.

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

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

Sometimes we read this psalm and think "I know this one and have known it since I was young." Yet do we believe the words? Do we believe that the Lord is our shepherd or that we shall not want? Maybe we do when things are going well but does that hold true when life seems to be nothing more than one dark cloud after another. But if we think about each line and each image offered in this psalm, we cannot help but find hope.

For example, "He restores my soul" is an incredibly powerful statement. Whether we define the soul as the inner being of who we are and who we were created to be or as a part of us connected to God for all eternity, God restores what we believe we have destroyed by our choices. In other words, God does what we cannot do.



*The Lord is my
Shepherd*

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A Little Humor...

A boy with a monkey on his shoulder was walking down the road when he passed a policeman who said, "Now, now young lad, I think you had better take that monkey the zoo."

The next day, the boy was walking down the road with the monkey on his shoulder again, when he passed the same policeman. The policeman said, "Hey there, I thought I told you to take that money to the zoo!"

The boy answered, "I did! Today I'm taking him to the movies."

