



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

May—June 2020

Never Alone - Revisited

By Bob Van Domelen

[The following article was first shared July 2004 and given our current global situation with COVID-19, it felt right to bring it back and add, as I usually do, a few comments based on feelings I have today.]

⁴⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' ⁶ So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13.5-6)

In the last edition of this newsletter, I included 21 responses to the question, "If someone knowing you before you were arrested asked, how would you say you have changed since your arrest?" I have since received a number of letters commenting on the responses—some favorable, a few questioning, still others offering yet another answer, but all accepting the fact that the answers were an honest attempt to share.

Most of the readers of *Into the Light* are in confinement for offenses against children. They look to a day when they might be allowed to leave but I know that they also fear what it will be like for them "back on the streets." They wonder about jobs and housing, and they wonder what kind of connection they will have with people willing to support their new start in life. Some, however, wonder if there will be a human connection period.

Ask anyone who has been released from prison what it is like to finally be home, and the first words might be, "It's great!" Probe a little deeper and you could hear about work being hard to find. You might even hear someone admit that he feels a little lonely and maybe even more stressed than he thought he would be.

Your reaction might be to remind him that work is hard to find for anyone these days. You might even say, "If you're lonely, are you in a church family? Aren't there friends you can contact?" And you would be right. Jobs *are* hard for *anyone* to find these days, and yes, there *are* people in churches willing to reach out a little to help support ex-felons.

Having said these things to him, you still would not really know the man's circumstances. You would not know how much he has already tried to find that job *or* to find a decent place to live *or* to find someone willing to talk to him. If he is a sex offender, all of these negative issues might be much worse and your answers will not seem like answers at all to him.

I was tempted when I first started writing this article to just hit the delete key and erase everything because I

thought, "What good is it to talk about "outside" issues to so many who are still "inside?" After pausing a bit, the answer came to me. I need to write about this because freedom is a state of mind and not just a physical thing.

When an inmate finds the presence of God in a dark prison cell shared with a foul-smelling cellmate, he will say, "My body might be in prison but my soul is free!" This newly found freedom often shows itself in an active participation in chapel activities; in a cellblock Bible study with a few others; or in a way of living that is unlike anything felt before. For such a man, there is daily life and there is life in the Lord.

Canteen is nice but if funds are not available, he can do without the candy or some other snack food. The candy would be a nice change from the prison food, but his life doesn't hinge on having it. The wealth of the world might seem a distant concern to him because, as he so freely shares, he has found God.

There is a little flaw in this ideal situation because if the man in prison needs clothes, they are provided—not the latest fashion or fit but wearable. If he is hungry, there are three meals a day—not the best food around but filling. Conversation might mean looking for someone willing to get along, but such people can be found—even in prison.

I am *not* suggesting that the man who has found an intimate relationship with God in prison should "get real" because, like Mary, I think he *has* chosen the better part. Martha served the Lord but served when she could also have sat at the feet of Jesus with her sister. What I *am* suggesting is that the relationship with God will make it possible for that man to deal with the hardship of not having money for extras in prison or finding a job or a place to stay when he is released. That relationship will give him peace when he feels alone or rejected because of his crimes in or out of prison.

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have

The man who says that he will never be anxious for anything is a man not in touch with life. We *do* have legitimate needs, some very critical. We *do* desire to find fulfillment in our lives at every level, and there is nothing wrong with that. But it is also true that the world will disappoint us and we will disappoint ourselves because of decisions that are made.

When we feel failure or rejection, run out of money, or maybe even feel that God has stopped loving us, it is all too easy to make gods of things in our lives. We can become like the rich young man who turned away from Jesus, saddened because he had great wealth and Jesus was suggesting he give it away. Moreover, if we are not careful,

we can find ourselves saying, "If only I had this or that thing, I would be happy. I would be okay." And the peace found one day in a small prison cell would be just a memory.

Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you

Some days you might find it very tempting to ask, "But Lord, if you are with me and in my corner, how come nothing seems to be working out right?" This applies to issues of money, housing, and companionship. But for the sex offender, it might apply even more to struggling against thoughts/fantasies that should not be there. It also might apply to the special kind of hate people have for a sex offender. You shout out, "If those people say they are Christian, why aren't they able to forgive?"

Having been home from prison for 16 years now, I sometimes tend to think that most people *have* forgiven me. But I forget about those who still struggle with what I have done, with my betrayal of trust, even after 20 years.

I know that I have changed, and I know that I will do everything in my power never to offend again. Yet if I place my trust in people to keep that from happening, I will fall short and eventually I might do the unpardonable.

I *do* believe that God takes care of every need I have, but I have learned that I only recognize that after I set aside *my* ideas of how I think God should answer my prayers. When I consider the almost complete lack of personal property I had while in prison, I know that I have wealth beyond my needs now.

To be honest with you, I think I had hoped for more acceptance from my church community than I have experienced. But I also think that maybe I look at acceptance as "What are they willing to let me do?" as opposed to how have they changed in their reaction to seeing me in church.

I really want the church to find a way of reconciling those with sex-related offenses to the faith community, but this will have to be in God's time and not mine. Right at this moment, such a dream of healing for victims, offenders, and churches seems like it might not happen in my lifetime, if ever. Yet I believe that God has not turned His back on me even though it feels a little like the church has.

So we say with confidence,

'The Lord is my helper;

I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'

The above statement should be shouted, not spoken or merely written! It is the foundation for all of us in prison or out of prison. Like some of you, I have done shameful things in my life, but I still run the race that Paul encourages us all to run (1Corinthians 9.24).

Sometimes things should be a certain way but they aren't regardless of how much we want them to be. Sometimes our expectations soar until reality and people attach heavy chains and bring us back to earth. Sometimes we will feel completely alone, maybe hated in the place where we are, but there is always someone who loves us. This is the same someone who promised never to forsake us; the one who said He will never leave us.

There might be a time when you have no job, no comfortable dwelling place, and no friends or church to support you. Some of you have such long sentences, freedom from prison is not likely to happen. But regardless of where we are, we can always have God in our hearts. And with God in our hearts, we are *never* alone.

Some Thoughts. . .

By Bob

Social distancing. No more than ten people in a given area; no closer than six feet when in conversation with others. No trips to the library, no drive-through at the local coffee shop. No sporting events of any type and no church services. All this sounds a little like defining some prison environments but COVID-19 has redefined how we *all* live and it is not easy. As a matter of fact, it's hard. But then, you already know that feeling.

My wife and I stay indoors for the most part – reading, knitting, watching online church services each day, and on occasion chat with our daughter and her family while they maintain that six-foot distance rule. Through all of this we both feel separated from most of our family and friends except for phone calls and text messages.

There really is not much I would change about the main article because what I wrote sixteen years ago would be much the same as I'd write today. But the virus has added a new dimension, a new form of isolation – the fear of possible death from something for which there is no cure as of yet.

Small businesses considered non-essential have shut their doors and workers are either losing their jobs or are being furloughed (no pay until the doors open again). Searching for housing is risky for both landlord and potential renter; shelters are cautious in deciding who is admitted.

A new form of isolation. Not like the darkness and secrecy I lived in 35 years ago but an isolation we all need to surrender to the Lord. COVID-19 leaves disaster in its wake. Child molestation does the same. Though we cannot demand either simply disappear from the world in which we live, we can and must make life-saving choices. Let us pray for this world. Let us pray for one another. □

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.

If we stick to the simple grace of God – what He did for us and what He continues to do – we will win the fight.

Too many, I'm afraid, are locked up while being locked up. Many easily become institutionalized and really don't have much of a chance to successfully transition when [release] does happen. You can't allow a place like this to define you as a person.

I do my best to catch myself when I complain. I try to turn the complaint into a compliment. Sounds a little silly, but even in this situation I am still very fortunate and blessed.

I believe that my freedom is a spiritual freedom that is given to me by God himself through His Holy Spirit by confession and prayer. When I am able to resist temptation, God will get all the glory.



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 feel overwhelmed by feelings of rejection, that they recognize God will never leave them.
- For those near reentry, that their reentry will be a walk of faith and trust.
- For those experiencing lockdown because of the virus, that they find peace in their isolation.
- For those in need of support, that they will recognize God's grace, mercy, and love will make that possible.
- For churches, that they seek God in their response to those wanting fellowship with their faith communities.
- For the families, that they come to see that family is always family – never easy under difficult times.
- For all of us, that we remember the importance of a kind word, a touch, or a connection.
- For Bob's health, that the ministry God has for him will continue to be an encouragement and hope for others.
- 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.

Your Support Matters

Please consider financially supporting this ministry. *Into the Light*, a newsletter unlike any other, is made possible solely by your donations. Send contributions to

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

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

For those of you able, consider your Amazon purchases using Smile.Amazon and selecting Broken Yoke Ministries as your designation.

Special Needs

Thank you for all who helped out these past two months. I know that the majority of you reading this newsletter are incarcerated, so your support is a true blessing. Would you

please pray that funds continue to be available for the following:

- Events for Bob to share
- Annual hosting fee for Broken Yoke's website
- General office supplies
- Monthly telephone fees
- Membership fees (CMCA, NARSOL, etc)

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

Summit Date Change

Due to the coronavirus, the Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association Summit 2020 date has been changed to August 14-15 in Wheaton, IL. My workshop will be offered Saturday, August 15 – God willing. Pray!

In recent weeks I have received a number of letters with the following included, so it seemed a good idea to share it with you.

C O V I D 1:9
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⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

All things are possible with God!

**YOU WILL BE BLESSED
THE MOMENT YOU
REALIZE
YOU ALREADY ARE.**

Bryant H McGill

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A Little Humor. . .

A guy spots a sign outside a house that reads "Talking Dog for Sale." Intrigued, he walks in. "So what have you done with your life?" he asks the dog.

"I've led a very full life," says the dog. "I lived in the Alps rescuing avalanche victims. Then I served my country in Iraq. And now I spend my days reading to the residents of a retirement home."

The guy is flabbergasted. He asks the dog's owner, "Why on earth would you want to get rid of an incredible dog like that?"

The owner says, "Because he's a liar! He never did any of that!"

