



Into the Light

All things are possible with God
November—December 2014

Change is Not for Wimps

By Bob Van Domelen

⁸ *Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* ¹⁰ *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.* (James 4:8,10)

For the past year or so, I have been blessed to be part of a Prison Fellowship bible study team at our county jail. Because I got to lead the study for men from Alpha and Bravo pods last week, I knew that this week we were scheduled to meet with Charlie and Delta pods. We got to the program room and did our usual set up of workbooks and Bibles. No one came.

After ten minutes, our team leader pushed the intercom button and asked if C-D had been notified. There was a pause and then the announcement “You are supposed to be seeing Gulf pod this evening.” Within a minute, a staff member stopped by the room, spoke to us, and confirmed that four men were indeed waiting for us in Gulf pod.

When we got there, we saw seven men sitting in a straight line so we rearranged things to create a circle and began the lesson for the week.

I noticed that one of the men was particularly intelligent in his replies and in his knowledge of the Bible. Before closing prayer, he asked if he could say something. What followed was his admission that he was the pastor whose name had been all over local media in the past week or so for sexual assault. He spoke of his sins and the betrayal of those who trusted and loved him. All of us listened. All of us knew what it took for him to share.

Though we left the pod recognizing that there were no errors in where we were meant to be that evening, I did remind myself of the long road ahead for this man. Confession and the admission of guilt presented in a way that clearly showed sorrow is a critical step—but it is the first of many he will have to take in the years ahead.

**Come near to God and
He will come near to you**

That seems like such an easy step but for some it is the most difficult. Raised to believe that sin separates a person from the heart of God, many think “I have crossed a line that should never have been crossed and have caused these little ones to sin. I can’t imagine God wanting anything to do with me.” But the truth is that God desires all come to Him—especially those who have much need of forgiveness. And if you think about it, who among us would have been able to cast the first stone at the woman caught in adultery?

Because God is *always* with us, coming near to God is to consciously choose to set aside whatever barriers are in

us. And despite the encouragement of those around us, I think it does take courage to step beyond those barriers in order to better connect with God.

The greatest battles we face might be those existing within us. The body (the flesh) wants what it wants and can make a convincing argument that it knows best. Years ago, a whole culture was preaching “If it feels good, do it.” A generation of Nike followers preached “Just do it.” Maybe the saying would have been better had it said “If it feels good and is appropriate and morally correct, do it.” God’s word supports the modified version.

³ *It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality;* ⁴ *that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable,* ⁵ *not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God.* (1 Thess 4:3-5)

All I can say is that these words are not for wimps. Just think, though, of the changes we’d experience in our lives by following them.

**Wash your hands, you sinners,
Purify your hearts**

A commentary on the letter of James suggests that he was very aware of his audience. He called them “you adulterous people,” “you sinners,” and “enemy of God.” You and I know the things we have done, the harm we have brought others—especially the young—and our need of forgiveness that comes with saying “Yes, Lord, I am a sinner. Have mercy on me.”

Having said the words, we wash our hands by turning from the actions formed in our darkness; we purify our hearts by choosing to seek all that is worthy to be proclaimed. Have you ever noticed, by the way, that what we do in secret is the last thing we want made known to the world. That alone should say something about sin.

Strange as it may sound, we spend a lot of time and energy building a fondness for our sins, a hunger to serve the flesh. And in this light we are, as James suggested, “you double-minded” – we parade our Christian side to the world while wallowing in the muck and mire of sin in shadows.

I have written many times over the years that the formula “All you have to do is” sounds too simple—because it is. If “All you have to do is” set aside every addictive behavior you spent years developing, then prepare for battle because there will be many battles to be fought. And battles, my friends, are not for wimps. Battles are fought without knowing the outcome yet trusting God to give strength when the battle we fight is one of moral righteousness. Should we be surprised, though, when we

are wounded in the process? To overcome sin is to decide that what the body wants is not always what God wants. Saying no to the body is to discipline it in the ways it is meant to live and I think it is safe to say that the body is not always going to be happy about that.

¹¹ *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.*

Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

(Heb.12:11)

**Humble yourselves before the Lord,
and He will lift you up**

There was one truth that I learned with my arrest in 1985—I *could not continue to be as I was. I had to change!* That was not merely my focus but also the focus of those who continued to love and support me. None of us, however, knew what to do about someone like me. Thankfully, some knew enough to pray because the work ahead was and continues to be mine and not theirs to do.

The day after my arrest, I was talking with my pastor, listening to his words of encouragement. Left alone for a moment, I found myself on the floor with a deep sense of despair over all that was happening and all I had done to bring on this moment. In my mind's eye, however, I saw God's hand reaching out to me and mine stretching to reach His. "Rely on me alone."

Despite all I had done, I felt His presence and all I could do was wonder how God could love someone like me. But God didn't provide any clues about everything that would happen in the years ahead. He just kept reminding me that He was there.

Twenty-nine years later, I can say that there have been many, many moments and events that clearly bore the stamp of God's love. Some I recognized as they happened but most only as a reflection like "That could not have happened unless. . . " just as meeting the pastor in county jail could not have happened unless it was of God.

I do stand by the title of this article "Change is Not for Wimps." If we commit ourselves to the journey ahead, we don't get to decide every bend in the road we travel. That takes courage and a willingness to believe that our destination will be the right one. "*Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up.*"

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 won't be perfect because nobody is perfect! However, I don't have to purposely sin just because it feels good. Each night is a new challenge because the devil seems to have a new suit for the same old thing. However, I am onto him now. All I have to do is obey God and follow Christ wherever He leads me. All I know is that the devil will try to use what I have been doing to myself but in new ways—a new look on the same old clothing.

I just finished the September-October "Into the Light." If I was a boxer, I would be down for the count. What a one-two punch combo. The main article was so insightful but the

review of 2003 really hit home. I don't know which was more powerful—the section "Being Tempted" or the following section "Never Too Much to Handle." The dirty bookstore comparison is me up one side and down the other. I thought I was the only one who hoped there would be something different but as the author said, "Been there, seen that, and done it.

I encourage all those who are not on a unit with SOTP to consider utilizing AA and NA or SATP and apply the principles to their own addictions and habits. I did and the results have been great! Who would have thought that an SO would be the trusted servant coordinating our AA and NA meetings—and without big substance abuse issues, either. Thank you, God! Twenty-two years non-stop AA and NA!

Have you ever addressed the issue of innocence in your newsletter. Wearing the scarlet letter and being abused by society is bad enough. What must it be like for someone innocent of the crimes that put them in prison?

[Note: I believe that there are individuals innocent of sexual assault charges in prison or charged beyond what they have actually done, but I am at a loss.]

This life is not about us. It's about God and being a servant to others. It is when we start to live for ourselves and not for God that we begin to fail. When we stop being selfish and start being selfless our life always tends to improve and our blessings grow.

I have faith and trust God got me this far and that He'll bless and guide me through the rest of it—each day until this temporary life is done.

I have inherited the righteousness of God through Christ. Man has a different perspective. It is also imperative for me to always remember "If God is for me, then who can stand against me?" It may be easy to say that but when the rubber hits the road, will I live like I believe it?

I've heard a warden say to us "You are not here for education or rehabilitation. You are here to do time!" Thus, as Bonhoeffer wrote during his imprisonment by Nazi Germany in WWII, "When we make security our god, we end up dehumanizing every person involved—wardens, officials, and inmates.

I just got started with the Praise and Worship team at our little chapel here. I play guitar (electric) and sing using a PA system. God blesses us so much that at times we tend to overlook just how much. So I make a point in my life to constantly thank God for everything in and about my day.

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.

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 find strength in our daily walk with the Lord.
- For those who are cut off from family and friends, that they trust God's desire for reconciliation and restoration.
- For those are nearing a time of release, that they find the strength to concentrate on things in their control and courage to trust God for the rest.
- For those who have been unjustly accused, that truth will come to light.
- For those who face a continuing battle with their addictions, that they allow the chains to be broken and darkness replaced with light.
- For family members, that they see the importance in their role as prayer warriors.
- For those in treatment, that they build on what is needed and set aside what is not.
- For chaplains and prison ministries, that they understand how God is using them to bring healing.
- 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.

A Reflection from 1998

One Saturday morning not long ago, I turned on a TV while getting dressed. Because I had no intention of sitting through an entire program, I didn't bother to switch channels despite the fact that I was watching an infomercial.

People with smiling faces eagerly spoke of making thousands of dollars the very first month they were in business. Others, more seasoned in the trade, shared annual incomes fitting the rich and famous. And it was all so easy. Just follow the guidelines written by the man making a fortune selling *his* guidelines and success was guaranteed.

Some people try to package and promote Christianity in the same manner. Most sentences start with "All you have to do is. . ." and close with "And that's all there is to it."

I believe with all my heart that the words "Jesus, I want to accept you completely into my heart" are all the invitation necessary, but the words are a *beginning* and not an *end*.

The world is full of self-help books, and many of them are excellent in terms of the information they offer. But they are little more than an invitation to the change desired

unless the reader is willing to become an active participant in the process.

There was a time when you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Well, then, live as children of light. (Eph.5.8) The verse reads "you were darkness" and not "you were *in* darkness. Matthew Henry wrote in his commentary "The state of sin is a state of darkness" and adds that sinners don't know where they are going or what they are doing. Those in the light, however, have an obligation to "seek diligently" the way of the Lord.

That doesn't sound to me like an easy thing to do or something I can achieve without active mental participation. I must will myself beyond the choices I made "in darkness."

God's laws are not shifting despite the efforts of some to make them conform to changing times or political opinions. *Let no one deceive you with worthless arguments.* A sin is no less a sin if done in secret or between consenting adults, for all sin will eventually be exposed to the light.

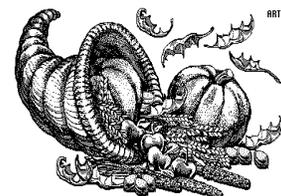
With each passing sentence I write, the process of change seems more difficult, no, almost impossible. But God knows my heart—He knows your heart—and when I silence my anxiety I can feel His presence and His love. My heart is stilled and humbled in the shadow of the cross and my spirit is naked before the love of Jesus.

A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew in me. My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn. (Ps.51.12,19) No matter how hard I try to think otherwise, these verses are beginnings and not ends. I petition God to be the man I am supposed to be in His will, asking for the strength to move from day to day. At the end of each day, however, I am brought face to face with the reality of having failed. I sleep with the belief that another day is coming—not that I will have a *perfect* day but that the One who is beyond perfection is with me.

There is not one of us who could stand transparent before the world without feeling embarrassed for things we have done, said, or thought. Some of us try desperately to "protect" our secrets from the eyes of those who consider us beyond such secrets. Others wrap themselves in their past identities like putting on a soiled garment, unable to see themselves as anything but the despised of the world.

Make no mistake, there is nothing easy about the path we choose toward God. The easy path is not easy at all because it leads to more darkness, more suffering, and more offending. The call to repentance and change is one day at a time with our hearts focused on God.

Do you not know or have you not heard? The Lord is the eternal God, creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint nor grow weary, and his knowledge is beyond scrutiny. They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles' wings; They will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint. (Isaiah 40.28, 31)



Give thanks to God with all your heart

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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!"

