



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

July – August 2021

Testing, Testing

Revisited from 2001

By Bob Van Domelen

Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for your love is ever before me, and I walk constantly in your truth. I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. (Psalm 26:2-5)

Most of us have at least one memory of someone stepping up to a microphone and, after blowing vigorously at it several times, saying, “Testing, testing.” The result often was an unexpected, ear-piercing screech of feedback, the one testing the microphone leaping back as though attacked by it, and everyone else in the room placing hands over ears while cringing. We might have thought the experience a nuisance, but it did validate the notion that something might not be right.

Not long ago, an inmate wrote that this newsletter was written by the hand of someone who persecutes registrants rather than as a newsletter which supports them. His complaint confused me, and I wondered what it meant to have gone over to “the other side.” Wasn’t the other side where I wanted to be, a man who would not even consider abusing a child? Perhaps he was suggesting that I felt registrants only get what they have coming, but I do not believe that to be a valid statement.

The other morning, I read the above verse and the phrase *Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind* leaped off the page. Immediately I asked myself, “Do I really ask God to do this in my life?” Part of me was afraid of God bringing to light something I had hidden even from myself. Part of me wondered if I really wanted more testing in my life, more need of surrendering my will to the will of God. And part of me remembered how much I had once believed God’s love for me depended on what I did for Him, and for a moment I was afraid that I would not measure up.

Then I thought of the man’s letter, and I considered another point. For every person with a sex-related offense (and in some ways for every *sinner*), the consequences of abuse affect that person on at least three levels: (1) living with knowledge of the wounded child buried inside, (2) living in the face of hoped for personal changes, and (3) living in the face of victim and societal response.

This is a difficult balancing act to maintain, and I doubt that anyone can make the three levels be equal indefinitely. There is a need, no, a responsibility to become accountable at each level, and some might feel that the abuse suffered in their childhood explains and maybe even justifies the offenses they committed. But this can never be.

Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind (The wounded child)

The child in me looks up, wondering who is saying those words. Not everything was as it should have been while I was growing up, but I cannot say that I lived in daily fear like some I know. Things did happen in my life. Some experiences I chose and some that were chosen for me. Even then, I knew when something was good or when it was not regardless of how the behavior was chosen. Even then, I somehow knew God was reaching into my heart.

But I also knew at some level that each negative choice pulled me away from the path I was meant to be on. I just did not know how to fix things. I did not know how to get back on the right path without having to admit my role in all that was happening. So, as a solution I lied to myself. I told myself that I wasn’t on the wrong path, just a different path.

I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked (Hoped for changes)

If I wanted a list of the ways in which I fell short as a young man and then as an adult who went on to abuse, a reverse of the words above might do. I sat with deceitful men and felt most comfortable with others like me - hypocrites who showed one face to the respectable world and another face that lived in the shadows of lust.

It was in adult theaters and bookstores that I found my assembly of evildoers. Those were places where the wicked gathered and drank their fill of the poison that clogged their moral veins and blurred their vision of righteousness. When someone looked at me, I wanted to say, “I’m just looking around. . . I won’t be staying. . . I’m certainly not interested in the kind of things that you are looking at.” Most likely, they were thinking much the same as they looked at me. But the one thing we all knew was that we would not tell on each other.

With time, it became clear to me that each visit to the dark places carried two memories – the draw to return because imagined pleasure to be gained and the memory of the shame and guilt I felt as I hurried to get away. The deeper I went, the more obvious was the fact that I was sinking in a swamp of my own making.

Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind (Victim and societal response)

When it counted, I failed every test. The downward spiral of my desires could only have the result it eventually had. Whether those who were affected by and participated in my choices approved or not, they were harmed. They were not

strangers. They were my family, my friends, and those who had placed their trust in me, and I had let them down. Self-control and accountability were just words to me because, in my mind, escape from detection was the main goal. My prayer at night was always the same. "Please help me, Lord, to stop all of this – but don't let me get caught."

Living in the face of victim and societal response is a consequence of my actions. The world thinks in terms of punishment and protection—punishment for offenders and protection for all children from the likes of me. Society sets the rules and the rules they set do not often take my needs into account. Healing and change are possible, but they are more likely to happen when there is support and encouragement toward those goals. Treatment programs focus on accountability and relapse prevention, but they do little to speak of the walls that will have to be faced when in reentry or how to deal with them.

If I sometimes write in a manner that seems to agree with the actions of society, actions based on rules which provide little in the way of practical healing for offenders, it is because all the shouting in the world will not convince society to seek more balance. I am not agreeing with those who threaten the lives of individuals who have molested being released into society, nor do I agree with prison sentences that cover a lifetime and end in civil commitment.

I believe that a person must be accountable first and foremost to God, daily asking God to test and try, examining heart and mind. This accountability is equally as valid for those in prison as it is for those who have been released. For when such honest accountability is in place, society is protected. Children are protected.

I cannot sit with deceitful men and women, because my life must be transparent and free of hypocrisy. Adult bookstores and theaters promote the very darkness I can no longer enter. My speech must reflect the state of my heart. Psalm 139:24 says, "*See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.*" In other words, lead me in your ways, O Lord.

Why is it that we fear having our "offensive way" exposed if it is something that makes life less than what it could be? I am no paragon of virtue, no walking saint free of sin, yet there are moments when I "know because I know" that I need to grieve those parts of me that are not of God.

At the same time, as accountability with God increases, he opens my memory to my childhood, fixing what was broken, and if not fixing it, then giving me an understanding of what happened so that I am not crippled by the memory.

Finally, as accountability with God increases, I can deal with the world and with people to whom I must be accountable, knowing that my freedom really does depend in large part on how honest I am with myself and with God. The man the world sees in me must "walk the talk," for the talk is God's love.

"Testing. . . testing," was the voice I heard. "Here I am, Lord," I answered. "What do you want to know?"

A Few Thoughts . . .20 years later

One of the benefits of reading something I wrote 20 years ago is that I can ask a simple question. Has my thinking changed? I will admit that I altered the above article somewhat because back then I described myself as a 'sex offender' and I no longer see myself in that way. To wear the label, I think, is to justify any relapse because the action falls into the category "What did you expect from a sex offender?"

But other than that, my answer would be no, I still believe what I have written. And I would add the following ideas.

Asking for forgiveness opens the door to being reconciled – first with God, then with others (including victims), and finally with self. God forgives. Jesus died on the cross to atone for my sins and to reconcile me with the Father. Some people forgive but others do not, so reconciliation may or may not happen in every case. But then, it is not my responsibility to make that happen. My responsibility is to pray, believing that God is in control. Finally, until I can stop saying "God forgives me, but I cannot forgive myself," I will not be reconciled with myself. The commandment is:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39)

I love God and my neighbor *because* I have found peace in knowing God loves me and calls me. And God loves and calls you as well. Be blessed in that knowledge and live in the center of its truth. □

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 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 live in the grip of their secrets, that God gives them the strength to break those chains.
- For those who recognize the addictive nature of their choices, that they find the encouragement and support they need to replace life-crippling decisions with mind- and spirit-healing ones.
- For those listening for God, that his voice becomes clearer every day.
- For families and friends of registrants, that they make the decision to focus on encouragement rather than condemnation.
- For chaplains, that they serve as God calls them to serve – witnesses of his love.
- For churches/pastors, that they reject all sin while offering the same forgiveness they themselves seek.
- 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.
- (As Always) For those who are still abusing, that they will come to understand the devastation they bring on their victims and that they seek help for themselves.

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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 once resisted change. In fact, I hated it. But now I realize that change is necessary since I could not heal myself. I needed major surgery on my wicked heart before I could enter the recovery room.

Being teachable moved recovery forward. I stare much less in the rearview mirror. I am no longer on a slippery slope but standing on much more solid ground. My deep reservoir of anger is much shallower.

God is blessing me every day. Sometimes I can get caught up in the chaos of the world but when I sit and think, I am reminded that he has it all under control. All I need to do is be obedient to him and watch what he can do.

Being in prison is like being behind a sheet of glass on one side of a raging river and everyone else on the other side. All I can do is pray, call, write, etc., but that's it. My world ends at the fence line. I have no control on the outside and only a little control on the inside. I have to trust in the Lord Jesus and his plan to provide.

It is a hard walk to prove to people that people like me can and do change. We are not given many chances to step into leadership roles. No one believes us. To them, I can't change, won't change, and am not worthy of a chance.

I finally got to meet my daughter for the first time since she was a baby, and I also reconciled with my dad. I haven't seen or heard from him for a long time and then, out of the blue, I got a letter from him.

Can I Tell You Something?

Words of Hope and Encouragement
For the Modern-Day Leper
An Update

Since the last edition of this newsletter, I have been offered a contract with Covenant Books to publish my book and signed a contract with them. By God's grace, the publishing fees have already been met, no small feat considering the cost was stated at \$3445. If the book sells, this dollar amount will be returned in royalties and will then be used to purchase copies I hope to offer inmates free of charge.

While I have no specific date when the book will reach the market, a timeline sent me by Covenant Books points to sometime in December or January. Please continue to pray that this book will be just what it is meant to be, a source of hope and encouragement for all who read it.

Broken Yoke Ministries is a not for profit 501 (c)(3) corporation and operates *solely* on the contributions of people such as you. All donations to this ministry are tax deductible and will be recognized. If you cannot support us financially, pray for us. *Unused stamps* are also very welcomed and a good way for those in confinement to be in partnership with this ministry. The bottom line is that we need YOU to help make these newsletters possible. So pray about becoming a partner with this ministry.

Prayer of Life Surrender

Father, take my life I pray, and use it as you will. I choose today to surrender my all to you. You know the thoughts of my heart, and I have not come to this decision lightly, but know that this must be the path that I take from now on.

Father, I pray that moment by moment I may be looking to you. I pray that I may in-breathe your will for my life through the Word of God and out-breathe your blessing to others, whom you may choose to place in my path.

Lord, I know that it is a dangerous prayer, but I ask that you do whatever it takes for me to live entirely in your will and to be able to say in every circumstance of my life, "Your will be done and not mine." Look deeply into the very core of my being and root out all things in me that are displeasing to you, Lord.

Search out my heart and change me into the person that you desire me to be, whatever it takes. May I decrease in my importance and desires until I am nothing, so that you may increase in every area of my life until you become my all in all.

Lord, today I choose to surrender my whole life to you and pray that whatever the cost, you would take full control of all that I am and all that you want me to be, from this point on.

I ask this in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

(KnowingJesus.com)

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A Little Humor

No.1 On a recent visit, my father asked for the password to our Wi-Fi. "It's taped under the keyboard," I told him. After three failed attempts to log on, he asked, "Am I spelling this right? T-A-P-E-D-U-N-D-E-R-T-H-E-K-E-Y-B-O-A-R-D?"



No.2 Whoever said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results has obviously never had to reboot a computer.

No.3 A man's bragging about his promotion to vice president got so out of hand even his wife was annoyed. "Look, being a vice president isn't that special," she said. "They even have a vice president of peas at the supermarket!" Not believing her for one second, the man called the supermarket and demanded, "Get me the vice president of peas!" The clerk replied, "Fresh, canned, or frozen?"