



# Into the Light

*All things are possible with God*

March—April 2014

## It's Not About Others

By Bob Van Domelen

### Part I

<sup>11</sup> And God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"<sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Genesis 3.13)

I have sometimes wondered why both the man and the woman didn't just say "I ate the fruit you told us not to eat." Period. Instead it was "The woman gave me" and "The serpent deceived me" added in the hope of shifting the blame. Why couldn't story just be about accepting responsibility for what was done?

The man, by the way, actually went further than the woman because when he said "The woman YOU put here with me" he implied that it was really God's fault and not his. "After all," he may have reasoned, "without the woman I would not have disobeyed God."

Despite their attempts to sidestep guilt, "I ate" was their confession. Centuries later, we are still trying to shift blame we deserve for our negative choices. Centuries later, we prefer hiding our weaknesses rather than confess or acknowledge the harm they bring – to us or to others.

Fearing punishment is a logical reason to deny the wrongs we do when confronted with them. As children, however, we sometimes got away with our misdeeds by placing the blame on someone else, so it makes some sense to think we can still using the tactics of children as adults.

We might also attempt to minimize our guilt by pointing to circumstances or conditions we claim motivated us to do something. I can't disagree with that. Many of the letters I get say things like "If I hadn't lost my job," "If my wife had understood me better," or "If I hadn't been drunk at the time" as explanations for what they did. Some individuals write about growing up in homes where physical or sexual abuse was common, so much so that the behaviors were almost considered normal. They definitely weren't normal, but I think I can understand.

Regardless of circumstances or family history, we do what we do because *we choose to do it*. And if getting drunk, taking drugs, or swimming in pornography helped set the stage for behaviors, that is all they did—set the stage or made it possible for lines to be crossed. Yet like the man and woman in our verses from Genesis, the bottom line is that We did it."

I would never suggest that our environment had no role in our sin choices, but I do believe that we cannot lay the blame for what we did on anyone or anything else.

Some might feel what I have just said is like adding a huge weight to their shoulders, pushing them deeper into the depths of hopelessness. But I think that the feeling comes because they believe the weight is theirs alone to bear. For those who feel this way, Jesus reminds them:

<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."<sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.<sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11.28-30)

Even though these words are truth, each of us has to believe and accept them as *personal* truth. It's not what others believe. It's what *we* believe.

### Part II

<sup>5</sup> Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding (Proverbs 3.5)

We live in a world of expectation and uncertainty. Having spent time in prison, I remember all sorts of situations that would keep me awake at night. I worried about my personal safety, cell mates who often were frightening, getting a ticket, dealing with the guy who spread stories about me but denied them when confronted, program reviews, parole hearings, and most of all, my family left to deal with things that I brought on them. I always started my worry sessions with the belief that I could fix things. Wrong.

Despite what I would call a very active prayer life that included as many chapel activities as I could attend, I was usually slow to let go of the worries I had. I believed God was with me but somehow I also thought that God was nodding in agreement with my self-centered thinking. Again, wrong.

And when I believed that I was trusting in God, most of the time the solutions I prayed for certainly looked like *my* solutions and not God's. I was leaning on my own understanding, my own flawed decision-making tools that had never worked all that well for me *before* prison. Though I have gotten somewhat better at leaning on God, I still have a way to go in that department.

By the way, those approaching an end to their time in prison cannot help but recognize the problems facing anyone with sex-related offenses trying to start over. The prison system doesn't help much by requiring a comprehensive release plan that includes things like

housing, employment, and a support system. For most, this is next to impossible because there are simply too many unknown hurdles to be jumped while still confined.

There is a difference, however, between doing what can be done and accomplishing everything that is asked. Trusting God doesn't mean sitting back without any personal effort. Trusting God means sending out letters, asking for help, yet believing that God will meet the needs of those who do trust. It's not about others rushing to meet needs. It's about each person trusting God to put those people into the picture and then thanking God for doing so.

### Part III

*<sup>15</sup>But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.* (Joshua 24.15)

There is a single word that comes to mind when I read this verse—commitment. Serving the Lord in the secret rooms of our heart without the reality of His presence overflowing into our daily choices and into our relationships just doesn't work.

I remember the story of a young minister who daily sought the Lord in his life. God blessed his prayers with a growing congregation. Over time, however, the young minister felt overwhelmed by the end of the day by the needs of his congregation. He went to bed exhausted and his prayers either short or set aside for another time. Following this pattern more often than not, his personal prayer time decreased until it was almost non-existent.

One day a member of his congregation came to his office saying that God had given him a message to share. Excitedly, the pastor asked "What is it?" The message was simple. "God misses your company."

The lesson is the same for all of us. God loves the sound of our voice and the beat of our heart blending with His. It's not about others. It's about the relationship we are each called to have. Can anything be better than that? □

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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.*

Scripture says, "Whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." I think the church has reduced itself as a unit to please the culture rather than please the creator.

*I don't blame people for giving up on the hope of getting out because the lawmakers and those in authority make it impossible to have such hope. It is unfortunate but that is a fact of the matter. I want to know "What do you say to people who have lost all hope of the possibility of getting out?"*

One of the many cool things about God is that he knows what we are going to pray about, when we are going to pray, and even when we don't pray. He knows our hearts.

*As a human, I'll never be free of evil but I get to choose which evil I feed!*

The attitudes of the public, the media, John Walsh et al will always be louder than our honest, remorseful apologies—except to God's ears.

*I'm sick and tired of trying to please everybody else when I should worry about my own soul and where I'll head if I don't follow God out of love for him. I fear him but I want to love him as well. However, pleasing people is what I've been doing all my life so far. Therefore I will no longer be a people pleaser. Loving others, yes, doing that which is wrong in his eyes, no. I may make honest mistakes, however, and I will ask for forgiveness and try not to do them again.*

I fully believe in prayer, but my faith is not in prayer. It is in him who hears and answers prayer.

*Instead of just listening to the beautiful sound of God's "Amazing Grace," I need to embrace it. I need to let it become a reality in my life. And I need to focus on what is right with me because of God's grace. I think that I and other believers who have failed the Lord miserably at one time or another would do well to cling to the message from that dream.*

I walked into my cell about two months ago and saw this paper (*Into the Light*) lying on my bunk. My first thought was that someone was trying to get me to read more propaganda. As I picked it up, intending to throw it in the garbage can, I saw it was from Broken Yoke Ministries. I turned, still intending to throw it in the trash, when my conscience said "You need to read this." I still proceeded to throw it away when a second time my conscience said "You need to read this." So I said "Okay, I hear you (Holy Spirit)," and granting I sat down on my bunk and read the whole thing. As I read, I realized why God led me to read it.

*When the day begins and when it's over, I have to make the choice to recognize God or not. I choose to believe even though my life is so messed up. There is no other source of hope for a greater eternity. The whole thing about God is belief, trust, and respect.*

I can tell you that during those times when I am in a slump of depression, my sexual struggles are greatly increased. Now that I am feeling more stable, those struggles have decreased. Something I just never realized, I guess, is the direct connection between mental health and struggles. I suppose it's because that's how I've medicated for so many years, just as alcohol or drugs turn on those who use them in difficult times.

*Lord, we aren't what we want to be, and we aren't what we need to be, and we aren't what we're going to be, but thank God Almighty that we aren't what we used to be. (An African Prayer)*

It is a sad and anti-Christian situation when it is against "policy" to care about another human being. In fact, in some ways it seems almost inhuman. God did not create us to be

coldly detached, and it is when we become that way, we forget the feelings of others. That's when we begin to see others as objects—less than human—a means to an end.

*Sadly, the general consensus of public opinion is that if a person is a sex offender or even a convicted felon, they are no longer worthy to be considered human and by no means can their lives ever amount to anything.*

I want someone to say "Sure, will arrange or help you find housing so you know where you'll sleep the first night out." Not too realistic, it seems. So this is a situation where I need to choose my reactions and change my expectations, or at least be at peace with my choice of disappointment.

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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 come to understand God calls us by name and desires our love.
- For those who cannot stop worrying, that today must be the focus. Tomorrow, when turned to the Lord, will take care of itself.
- For prison officials and employees, that they never forget the individual person has been created in God's love. Inmates are more than dollar signs.
- For churches, that they hear God's call to serve and to remember the example Jesus gave.
- For those in treatment, that God's plan is always evident—even if the program doesn't acknowledge that.
- For those who make our lives difficult, that they feel God's blessings.
- For family members, that the family will always have the ability to grow in wisdom and love.
- For prison ministry volunteers, that they find the grace to continue serving in the face of a rigid system.
- For those involved in Hope for Healing, a restoration prayer gathering for the abused, that efforts in reorganizing and clarifying goals will find success.
- For all who feel abandoned, that they will always know God's presence 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.

**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.**

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## **Please Note—Another Reminder**



Our mailing list program died and existing address information got corrupted, so I am starting over with the hope that those who don't receive the newsletter will write. In addition, all newsletters will have to be mailed first class and that is an expense I had not counted on. If you are able to help with a donation, the gift will be a blessing and will be put to good use. My apologies for any inconvenience.



Workshop Title: **Sex Offenders in Our Churches**  
Presenter: Bob Van Domelen

Description: *Most people have heard of NIMBY, an announcement to make it clear that sex offenders in re-entry are not welcome. Yet there is a growing concern that churches might be making the same announcement. This workshop will attempt to lay a foundation for a Christian response to the modern day leper. We will define support, questions of forgiveness and conversion, and church discipline as it applies.*

The organizers of this summit have blessed me with an invitation to present on Friday, May 30, at 1:30PM. The people who will be attending Impact 2014 share in a desire to better serve in jail or prison ministry and/or re-entry support through effective networking and education. Please keep this event (May 29-31) in your prayers and pass the word to those who might be interested. Further information can be found at

[www.cmcainternational.org/events](http://www.cmcainternational.org/events)

***Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.***  
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### ***A Little Humor . . .***

Upon entering a little country store, the stranger noticed a sign warning, "Danger! Beware of dog!" posted on the glass door. Inside, he noticed a harmless old hound dog asleep on the floor beside the cash register.

"Is that the dog folks are supposed to beware of?" he asked the owner.

"Yep, that's him," came the reply.

The stranger couldn't help but be amused. "That certainly doesn't look like a dangerous dog to me. Why in the world would you post that sign?"

"Because," the owner explained, "Before I posted that sign, people kept tripping over him."

