



Into the Light

All things are possible with God
September—October 2016

Earthen Vessels

By Bob Van Domelen

Sometimes we pick up the bible and open it much like we might a dictionary although these days we might search Google, the internet, computers and cell phones for that answer. We might look for a word – either because we want to check its spelling or because we heard or read that word without knowing what it meant.

When some use the bible this way, they get frustrated because the word ‘alcoholism’, for example, is not found in the bible. As a result, if God’s Word doesn’t include ‘alcoholism’ then they feel the choice is theirs as to how to deal with that word, especially on a moral level.

Recently my morning readings included the fourth chapter of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. As I read the verses (7-11), I found it very personal, very much what all of us with sex-related offenses need to hear. Though the words apply to *all* people, I write this column for you *and* for me because of our shared background, our shared need for hope and encouragement.

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

Years ago, I remember wondering what the treasure was and why it was stored in jars of clay or earthen vessels. At that time it was explained to me that the treasure was the Word of God, a message of love offered to all open to receive it. Once that connection was made, I realized that I was the jar of clay, the earthen vessel constantly being molded by the hands of the Divine Potter. I also realized that I am a fragile vessel, capable of developing cracks that over time only the Potter could love.

Being the fragile vessel holding the treasure of God’s word, I understand that the contents of that word within me originate from the very heart of God. We are all blessed with God’s love, grace, mercy, and wisdom far beyond our ability to understand yet available to us to the extent we am open to those gifts.

Sometimes, we might feel that all those blessings are meant for other people who have not sinned in the manner we have sinned. But trust me, those blessings are meant for us as well.

⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair

Once our sins come to light and are exposed in our communities and churches, they end up in the courts where judgment is passed and retribution is assigned. Then those sins are again publicly denounced in the media.

I do remember that after my arrest when I found my name again in the newspaper, I felt *everyone* knew what I had done. Worse, I saw my family unfairly exposed to criticism and condemnation for my crimes. To at least some extent, those feelings are still with me today, 31 years after my arrest, although I no longer feel crushed by them.

Most of you who have corresponded with me have asked the same question. “Why did I do that?” I believe that the question motivates us all to be transparent, to be honest, and to trust God to bring truth to the surface. While we might be tempted to feelings of despair over how the world views us, the drive to change can overpower those feelings.

⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

I am pretty sure that some of you might argue that you *have* been abandoned. You get no letters, no visits, and your attempts to communicate with family and friends are met by “Letter Refused” or calls rejected. Because of public media, you also cannot help but know of the refusal of most communities restricting or denying your return, churches rejecting you as part of their faith communities, and employers unwilling to give a second chance by hiring you. So what’s left?

My response is that there *are* people praying for you and me, people hoping that God’s mercy and love will continue the healing process we seek and the change we long for. These people don’t take out ads in the paper announcing their willingness to be supportive but they are still there. My experience has been that they pop up in unexpected ways and sometimes I don’t even know it until the actual moment has passed. They are God’s people and they count you and me as fellow travelers on life’s journey. I will admit, however, that such a notion takes faith to accept because the protests of the world are so loud and consistent.

¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

The verse seems to be a bit of a puzzle because it proclaims that we carry both the death *and* the life of Jesus with us – not as a sign we wear around our neck but as a living, breathing relationship that proclaims the mystery of salvation.

And guess what? No prison can refuse or eliminate that relationship. No guard can take it from you or claim it is not on your property list. No amount of rejection from *anyone*



can diminish the power of the love of Christ that resides within you. It's yours because Jesus made it so.

¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.

To the extent that you are willing to accept this truth, you are a walking miracle. You have chosen to bow your head in submission to God's hand at work in your life. You have allowed your dark places to be flooded with His light – not to shame you but to show you by comparison how Satan's darkness holds no joy, no hope for eternity.

You are a walking miracle because you submit to the discipline of others, sometimes people who do not share your hope for change but demand what they do because a text manual tells them to demand it. You are a walking miracle because your "faith is confidence in what [you] hope for and assurance about what [you] do not see." Granted, there are far too many days when our faith is tested and our hopes feel like pipe dreams, but I can assure you that God takes great joy in our expression of faith.

¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

Of the verses I have shared, this is perhaps the most difficult because it is easy to see death in *us* (to the darkness in which we once lived) while recognizing life as perhaps we would like it to be at work in *others*. Maybe we think "Why must we die while others get to live?"

The process of death to sin in our daily lives, however, is actually our witness to others. Some will see it, others won't. But for those who have been willing to watch the whole process – our arrest, our confinement, and our struggle toward reentry – there will be an opportunity to see the power of God at work in and through us. This witness gives the potential of God-centered life to their own lives.

I have used the following verses to close at least one other article in the recent past and the words of that psalm fit once again as a closing for this article. I pray that you will be blessed by the repetition.

¹ *I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.*

² *He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.*

³ *He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.*

**Many will see and fear the Lord
and put their trust in him.**

(Psalm 40.1-3)

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'm learning that Jesus is my hero and I don't have to prove myself to the world for acceptance and reputation. My credibility with my victims is shot, yet God is credible and He is restoring me – all the work of the Holy Spirit.

I just finished the July-August Into the Light. "Sins of the Flesh" by Charles are some powerful words. [Several letters received spoke of how they felt personally connected to his article. Thank you, Charles!]

Millions are spent on drug and alcohol addictions and most of those people destroy lives of children by getting them hooked and using those children to sell their poison, yet churches and organizations open their wallets and doors to help those addicted. I don't see any difference. A young life destroyed is a life destroyed.

I recently heard a pastor ask "How can you say you love God who you can't see and hate and reject your brother who you can see?" There are some here who are Christians who reject me and will not sit at the same table next to me or next to me at the chapel. I am grateful, however, for those who will associate with me.

Thanks be to God, we will be starting a group in the new few weeks just for sex offenders. We already have 12 men and more want in. [I have noticed an increase in the number of small, independent support systems started in the yard or day room by individuals wishing to deal with issues. Please pray for them.]

Today's perpetrators are yesterday's victims – ignored. I am an advocate for therapy, counseling, treatment, and a huge support system to be in place. I think there's something missing in how things are done now and if no one tries to find out what that is, it will always be missing. Then nothing changes except for the rate of recidivism.

So much of the time I have seen men get so involved with the "busy work" of religion that they allow that busyness to get in the way of their having a true relationship with our Father God and His Son. The really sad part is that the outside church leaders seem to encourage this line of thought.

I must say that the 'woof, woof' joke was terrible!
[Sorry about that. . . I try]

Sometimes when another inmate treats me with honest respect, it is shocking and I have to ask "Wow! How did that happen? Did I really do something to cause that? And can I repeat that more often?"

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.

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 recognize the treasure that we hold within us and that each day becomes another opportunity to thank God.
- For those who feel overwhelmed by the prospect of reentry, that they will be blessed knowing that even though things might be uncertain, God is always with them.
- For those who feel alone, that they have the strength needed to be open to friends where none are apparent.
- For those churches struggling with their response to anyone in reentry, that they find in God's Word the encouragement they need to be an open witness of Christ's love.
- For chaplains who are overwhelmed with responsibility, that they have our prayers and gratitude.
- For ministries reaching out, that the seed they plant will bear much fruit.
- For those families rejecting a family member in prison or reentry, that they might come to see their lives as diminished by that decision.
- For victims, that they might regain power over their lives and walk in freedom.
- For security staff, that they serve inmates with the same respect that they seek from inmates.
- 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.

MORE COMMENTS

SHARED WITH CMCA WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

Offered by individuals completing the survey

Church Issues

I don't have a church foundation on the street and my release date is up in the air as I might be considered for civil commitment. I don't have a place to go and family do not want me living with them.

One of my major disappointments is that my pastor said he would visit me and has not come in over four years.

Employment Issues

This might be the most difficult survey I have ever completed. Part of the problem is in defining hope and support as well as with being 'encouraged.' These days you don't apply for a job except on the internet and my probation rules forbid internet access.

Gaining information prior to release is next to impossible for the same reason. Companies presume I have access to the internet and have an email address. Pastoral support seems either 'on fire' or 'ice cold.'

Hope Issues

I don't think I will get out. So the only hope I do have is my faith in the Lord. This is my first time being down. It is overwhelming for me at times in here.

I don't see a future but God does so that must be why I am still alive – that and why I have not been able to kill myself. I have many years before I come up for first time parole hearing (2028) and many years to finish my sentence. I don't give up hope.

Outside Issues

I have concerns about my release since so much has changed in the world these past 15 years besides the fact that I have seen more than a few guys come back to prison on technical violations that have nothing to do with their crime—things like being late for an appointment or getting home by a certain time.

In 2013, I was beaten down with a lock in a sock by three men resulting in a close head injury, fractured skull, broken facial bones and ribs. I'm still overwhelmed with PTSD. Due to these medical issues I have to focus closely on my medical care where I go, transportation issues, counseling, etc. I am unfortunately going to need support which seems overwhelming at this point to find. The Lord is my provider and I will survive through this. God has brought me to this place in my life and will carry me through. He will give me the necessary temperance and courage to move forward so perhaps I can help others.

Broken Yoke Ministries
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A Little Humor . . . possibly a repeat.

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!"

