



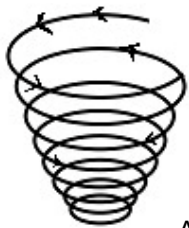
Into the Light

All things are possible with God
November—December 2017

In What Direction?

By Bob Van Domelen

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3.5-6)



Not long ago, I heard a speaker talking about the issue of downward spirals in the lives of those who struggle with various issues. He made a simple, yet valid point sharing that to the struggler these spirals don't look much like the one I am including here.

Actually, the person journeying downward sees life pretty much as a flat line. There is no up or down - just straight ahead.

At some point, however, it becomes clear to the struggler of pornography, for example, that there is little light and a lot of darkness where they are. In my life, this realization brought me considerable anxiety. "What would people think if they knew?" "How did I get to this place? This isn't me?" "How can I get help without sharing details?"

Standing directly in the path of my choice to change was the wall of addiction I had so carefully built because of repeated failures. Each time I managed to climb upward, there was a newly constructed layer reaching ever higher. Whether a wall or a descending spiral, it all seemed just too much to overcome to me.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart

Most people in the throes of addiction have sane moments, brief periods of resolve. "I'm done with this! No more! That was the last time!" More often than not, this takes place in the aftermath of a fall or surrender to that demon. In my case, guilt and shame crowded out any perceived pleasure there might have been as though such pleasure had never existed. I'd pray "I'm sorry, Lord, *again*."

I believed in God's forgiveness because if I didn't, there could be no hope. Having shared my heart and my brokenness with the Lord, in that moment I felt I could begin the journey up that spiral. I felt God's strength nudging me in the direction I was meant to go. And this worked - until the next fall. "I'm sorry, Lord, *again*." Sometimes, I will confess to wondering if God really wanted to help me because I seemed to be getting nowhere.

One thing crucial to trusting in the Lord, however, is the need to be in relationship with Him. How is it even possible to trust God "with all your heart" if we are not willing to share ourselves completely with Him? But it is logical to see how we tend to treat God like we treat one another.

Imagine trusting a stranger with the most intimate parts of who you are. Would you do it? My guess is that we all tend to trust to a certain degree but hold back the really important stuff just in case we feel our trust has been misplaced. This alone should explain why treatment programs are so difficult and often ineffective.

Writers share with me experiences of baring their souls to a cell mate only to find what they shared used against them. God's way is not the way of men. "*A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice* (Isaiah 42.3)." God will bear you gently in the palm of His hand.

and lean not on your own understanding

It might be a small step for some to think that these words tell us we should walk around clueless but such a step would be in the wrong direction. We learn as we grow, trusting the wisdom and advice of those in place to teach and guide. If things work as they should, what we have learned forms the foundation of our choices,

But most of us reading this know that sometimes what we hear is little more than a 'buzz' we know will deaden once our addictive cycle kicks in again. Some go so far as to say "What's the point of trying?" I would agree if all one does is chase words or look for more 'buzz' moments because there is no substance in those things alone. What these things should do, however, is point to a better, more lasting source of encouragement and direction.

In all your ways submit to Him

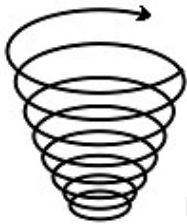
I entered the correctional system knowing that I was no longer free to do everything I wanted to do. Like everyone else, I got up when told to get up, stood for count, stood in line for meals, went where I was told, and requested permission for most everything else. Institutional rules seemed without end and not knowing a rule was no excuse if found guilty of violating it.

One lesson I learned from all this was that prison life was one of required submission and if nothing else, this kind of submission demanded my attention. Any deviation from this could result in a disciplinary ticket and possibly some form of punishment.

One Sunday, the chaplain proclaimed "and in all your ways, submit to Him" and I realized that most often I approached God on *my* terms and *my* timing. While my submission to prison rules was based on fear, submission to God's way meant grace and blessings. I needed to surrender myself completely - not my timing but God's timing. It didn't take long for me to see how the prison

experience was teaching me how to trade submission out of fear for submission in search of God's love and grace.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12.2) As difficult as prison life could be, the daily repetition of submitting to institution rules taught me that conforming to God's will was not beyond my ability. Though not always easy, it is definitely possible.



It took me years to realize just how deeply I had descended and as I hinted at earlier, the path in the other direction seemed beyond me. But I was committed to submission, to surrendering as much of me as possible so that God could do His thing in my life. I had no illusion that the path would be without its setbacks, but I did trust in the final destination. I trusted God.

He will make your paths straight

God is not in the business of changing us without our active participation, so this part of the proverb does not mean we get to sit back, do nothing, and have God fulfill our every wish. I believe that God nudges us when we are willing to be nudged.

Early on, I also believed that I knew what my main issues were - sexual dysfunction and inappropriate thinking. So when I surrendered, I prayed "Okay, God, let's get at these issues so that healing can begin." I often share in workshops I teach, however, that God decided that I first needed to give up smoking – and grudgingly I did.

It was only later and after dealing with what I felt were other non-related things that I came to understand God knew I had control issues. Though I had surrendered, I hadn't really surrendered because I thought I knew the steps to take just as well as God.

Now, many years into this journey begun in prison, I am more flexible than I was then, more willing to be obedient when God calls me to be obedient. Despite everything that has happened, though, I know that the spiral still exists. The question I face is "In what direction will I choose to go?" □

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.

The constant battle between the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in my spirit and my sin nature was always confusing and at times exhausting, troubling, and sorrowful. I really wanted to be a good person, so much so that I developed that persona but internally I was not a good person.

The homeless rate of those who are required to be put on a registry is climbing. The state knows this yet buries its head in the sand as if nothing is going on.

Being a sex offender doesn't make God's plans impossible; our own selfish desires and actions make His plans impossible.

I have allowed my time to become unbalanced – something that came to me in reflection. I was not spending time on the things that will keep me growing. I didn't become lazy, I just was not balanced, so I need to refocus and get back on track.

I am a huge advocate for true therapy, treatment, and support, yet even a bigger advocate for truth and using the truth of our offenses as a way of educating society.

We as a population need to be continually reminded of God's love, mercy, and grace because we often cannot forgive ourselves for what we have done. It's funny in that respect because society actually helps us out because of their rejection of us and by refusing to forgive us.

God is the most wonderful Father, Creator, Master, Lover of my heart and of my soul that is, was, and ever shall be! He loves me too much to give up on me, to be rid of me, to ignore my hurts, pains, and sorrows due to my failures. He has never called me a name other than 'friend' or 'the one that I love.'

(Re Churches) It is unfortunate that those who are sick and need of a physician are ridiculed by His nurses.

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.

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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 remember to seek God each and every day, thankful for the manner in which He blesses us and sustains us.
- For those who struggle with direction – especially in an unknown future – that they remember that God’s promise of life everlasting is theirs and it’s the best direction.
- For those seeking change in the midst of addiction (even while still in prison), that they keep God in every moment for grace and strength to make God-centered choices.
- For those in reentry, that the lessons learned while in prison will sustain them and strengthen them.
- For all with loved ones on the outside who are seriously ill, dealing with the issues of age, or in the final stages of their journey here on earth, that they will feel the prayers incarcerated loved ones offer.
- For chaplains, that they feel God blessing them and helping them walk the fine line that sometimes exists in their profession.
- For victims, that they might listen for God’s grace and mercy as they seek to deal with what happened.
- For treatment personnel, that they might always seek to offer hope and change by looking at the needs of individuals as well as for all in group treatment.
- 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.

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All things are possible with God!

God’s Plan

By Bob

Most of us would agree that God does not abandon us and we probably would agree that since God knows all things, He has everything planned. But when we are in prison or in the shadow of our sins, sometimes it’s hard to see God’s hand in taking care of us. And if we are sex offenders, it is even more difficult to believe that God plans to give us the future we hope for.

First of all, prison is a consequence that is supposed to be in direct proportion to the wrong that society says we have committed. It could be argued that in some states the length of prison sentence given is wrong or too severe, but that wrong will be assigned to others for their choices—not to us.

God is not, however, about erasing the consequence of what we do; God is about *being with us* through every part of that consequence. Most importantly, God is about reminding us that we are loved, that we are called.

Second, being cared for by God does not mean that there is always enough money for snacks at the canteen. (Some men tell me there are days when there isn’t enough money for a stamp or an envelope.) Being cared for is not about having a TV or radio. It is not even about having a cellmate who doesn’t snore or make life difficult. God’s care for us is about having our needs and not our wants met.

Here is something I share frequently with individuals who tell me that God is absent or that life is too hard: “Turn around and see where you have been. And pay special attention to the fact that you have made it this far.” God does some of His best stuff when we aren’t telling God how to do it.

The point is that you *are* in the palm of God’s hand (Isaiah 49.16); you are the Lord’s (John 17.10). How could God ever turn His back on you? If you think it is your sin that separates you from His love, that thinking would never come from God, but it *would come* from the prince of darkness.

Third, the “plans to give you the future you hope for” part will need some explanation because from where most sex offenders stand, the future looks pretty bleak.

Most offenders who write me sooner or later share a dream to be able to start over; to find a place to live and have a job that provides for their needs; and to find a church where they can worship and be part of a faith community. God willing, those will become reality.

Note: I came across this piece I had written not long ago but could not remember using it. The thoughts expressed, however, seemed to connect with the main article, In What Direction, so here it is. If I have shared this recently with you, my apologies.

A PRAYER

As I start this day,
 help me remember that I belong to you,
 and my desire is to act accordingly.

Keep my feet from stumbling
 and my mind from wandering
 into distractions that could steal
 precious time and energy
 from the most important things
 you have designed for me.

I’m proud to be your child, Lord.
 And I’m so grateful that you died for me
 —rising again on your own new morning—
 so that every day could be filled
 with the wonder of your love,
 the freedom of your Spirit,
 and the joy of knowing you. Amen



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A Little Humor . . .

As Pete and Larry had not seen each other in many years, they had a long talk filling in the gap of those years by telling about their lives. Finally Pete invited Larry to visit him in his new apartment. "I have a wife and three kids and I'd love to have you visit us."

"Great. Where do you live?"

"Here's the address - and there's plenty of parking behind the apartment. Park and come around to the front door, kick it open with your foot, go to the elevator and press the button with your left elbow, then enter. When you reach the sixth floor, go down the hall until you see my name on the door. Then press the doorbell with your right elbow and I'll let you in." "Good. But tell me...what is all this business of kicking the front door open, then pressing elevator buttons with my right, then my left elbow?"

Pete Answered, "Surely, you're not coming empty-handed."

