



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

May—June 2014

As for Me

By Bob Van Domelen

¹⁵ *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)

In a letter I recently received, a man I have been writing for several years shared his choice to participate in a weekend program being offered by a team from Prison Fellowship to *all* who might be interested. The signup sheet did state that the program was focused on those within 18 months of release, but because the word *all* was included in the invitation, he signed up.

Two men on his unit questioned his decision, however, adding that he was not within 18 months of being released. His answer to the two caught my attention.

"I'm going to take advantage of everything I can to be prepared for when I *do* get out." He added, "I get to choose my attitude—to make the best of the day or to be miserable."

Based on the contacts I do have in prisons around the country, I think it would be very easy for someone with sex-related offenses to feel overwhelmed by the system, other inmates, and the outside world. Referred to as modern day lepers, they are turned down for even the most basic of programs because of their offenses.

Parole hearings add to the frustration—grants are rare for this population, so why get one's hope raised only to be told the "nature of their crime" warranted more prison time.

Preparation for these hearings is like trying to find the way out of a complicated maze, one which really has only one right path. A home that seems to fit all the requirements, for example, might be across the street from a small overgrown patch of land that was once called a park. That makes it a violation because no one ever removed the word "park" from its description.

Inside, treatment programs are usually restricted to the final years of the individual's sentence. In some states, other programs, like anger management, are withheld until SOT has been completed. Inmates with non-sexual offense charges get to begin treatment in those programs as soon as a place opens up. The list goes on but you get the idea.

My friend was right when he wrote "I get to choose my attitude" because he is clearly aware that his choices define what the day will be like. Will it be perfect? Not by a long shot but it will be better than the alternative of deep depression. His choice will be one of direction and of taking healthy control over something that actually is in his power to control. And for that, I say "Go for it."

But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve

Chapter 24 of Joshua relates how Joshua assembled the tribes and the leaders together to renew their covenant with the Lord. He shared all of the things God had done for His people since their exodus from Egypt and then challenged them by pointing out that God was a holy and jealous God.

The people of Israel had proven on many occasions that God was not their first choice, but Joshua's challenge "*but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord*" sparked something in them. The people responded to that challenge by saying that they *could* serve him, and they gave legal witness to their commitment. Verse 31 records that Israel did serve the Lord "*as long as that generation lived.*"

What has all this to do with anything? How does it change life in prison, alter society's attitude toward those with sexual offenses, or guarantee any kind of positive future for them? In the eyes of the world, probably nothing.

But for the one who looks to God, depends on God, and recognizes God's grace, love, and mercy, it is everything. There will certainly be days, however, when even the eyes of the faithful will be dimmed and depression will weigh them down like a heavy anchor.

"*We will serve the Lord*" is not a magic catch-phrase guaranteed to make everything instantly better. It is a commitment that says "Whatever happens or doesn't happen, I choose to love and serve you, Lord." There will be days when that feeling of commitment will be challenged but if you balance where you have been against where you want to be, the life God inspires in you is far greater than the darkness of the past. Choose life!

Commitment is a desire for conversion, for change. Being in confinement doesn't make that pledge easier or more difficult than the pledge would be for someone not in confinement. There is a surrender involved and surrender demands total trust in God. In moments that are calm and relatively stress-free, the words "I surrender" are easy to say. In the midst of confrontation or conflict, they are not.

We say "Set me free, O Lord" in our prayer yet cringe when God shows us the diseased thinking that makes bondage possible. Surely Jesus wasn't talking about our deepest, darkest secrets when he said "*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" (John 8:32) We say "Anything but that, Lord! That sounds too much like a question asked in group, a question we would rather not answer." But knowing that truth, exposing it to the light, and

trusting God to be with us as we deal with it is what will break the chain of that bondage.

I had the opportunity to share with a priest the ministry I feel blessed to do. His sermon that morning had been on challenging us to look to those in prisons, passing one day after another without feeling much hope. Where years ago words like reforming those incarcerated were often heard and many times actually attempted, he spoke sadly of the reality of how states warehouse those in prison.

Rather than spending money on rehabilitation programs, he spoke of building new prisons capable of housing even greater numbers. I don't know how others listening took his words or if the memory of them lasted beyond the doors, but I got to experience his heart.

We didn't share much but we did get honest very quickly, and in the moment of our parting, I saw something in his eyes I have not seen too often, joy. His smile was genuine and his blessing was sincere. And in that moment I felt light, happy even.

God provides blessings like this for all of us. We just have to be available to receive those moments. We have to be listening for them, watching for them, and believing that they *will* happen.

A Note from Joe

I don't worry about the things that I have no control over. I had no problems with the halfway house while I was there, I have not had any problems with probation, because I have been totally honest with them and have never tried to do anything that is outside my restrictions. I have had no problems with people in general because I don't create relationships with people that are not good for me. It did take me a little while to find my apartment because some places do not want registered offenders to live on their property but I did not let that get me down. I just continued to look till I found a good place to live.

The object is not to give up just because you face some negativity. I remember all the time that it was I that got me into the situation I am in. It is nobody else's fault. I had to accept the fact that some people want nothing to do with me and it is not their fault. I do not concentrate on those people, I hold my head high and move forward with my life. I don't live in a pity party. That would only get me depressed. I am beyond depression because God loves me no matter what other people think about me.

I enjoy each day of life that the Lord has given me and don't get stressed over things that I have no control over. That type of attitude has been like having a great weight lifted off of my shoulders. When I was young I thought people at 60 were ancient now that I am 69 I know that I will not live forever and some day God will call me home and when that day comes I am ready for him.

I know that the next part of my life will be greater than anything that I can imagine, and I will meet my mother and father and others that I have known and have passed on. I enjoy my life here and now and will enjoy my after life also. If I spend my time worrying now I won't have time to enjoy the present. I have come to the conclusion that if a bomb was coming toward me I would go out in the street and look up at it with anticipation of meeting my Lord and Savior and not try to prolong my life here in a warring world.

[This was a recent note Joe sent to me. Be blessed!]

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 don't know the way in which God wants me to please Him; the fact that I desire to please Him does, in fact, please Him.

Not everyone is attractive but everyone can be presumed sensual and therein really lies the attraction.

I know that my Lord and God has answered prayers and the needs of my heart—which I often fail to state in my prayers—and that He knows me better than I know me. Being a new creature in Christ, I've pled the precious blood over my fears, worries, lusts, and other sins.

Never cease from praying. It is our greatest defense against all evil. There are good days as well as bad. . .it does get better and joy does come in the morning. Even if all reject me, God always accepts me. Be thankful for those He puts in our lives in here who do befriend us and look beyond our past. Be grateful and focused on what we have, not on what we do not have.

May we fully repent from all the thoughts, fantasies, beliefs, attitudes, words, and acts that led to us committing our crimes and anything that keeps us in the abuse cycle. May we see the wrongness and destructive nature of such casual pleasure seeking and thus see our need for repentance.

I've realized that I have a lot to be thankful to God for. Every day I wake up is a new chance to serve Him and to spread the Gospel. I don't always see what blessings the Lord has given me—I usually focus on the challenges in front of me and my failures behind me. Not very uplifting thoughts and something to work on.

Corrie Ten Boom, who was enslaved in the internment camps of Germany and endured much worse conditions [than I], still had faith and was strong in the Lord. She watched her family die and those she loved be killed around her, yet she said "No pit is so deep that He is not deeper still." I know that to be true even when it doesn't feel like it and I don't physically see the evidence. In Jesus, in spirit, all is well, calling things that aren't as though they are. So difficult to do!

The problem that most here fail to consider is that when you punish the many for the stupidity of the few, many think "Well, if I'm going to keep all the rules and still get punished, I may as well break them, too." I don't think that way but there are many who do.

There is a peace in letting go but for someone like me who like to have all the details planned out, all the t's crossed and the i's dotted, it can be maddening.

I truly enjoy "Into the Light." Once again I am humbled by the comments in "Bits & Pieces." It's sad that others feel hopeless.

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 learn to wear the new identity we have in Christ Jesus.
- For those who feel abandoned, that love, support, and encouragement are available for all willing to look and listen for it.
- For prison officials and employees, that rules should reflect a goal that is positive for all involved.
- For churches, that they understand themselves as a refuge for the sick, the tired, and the weary. In short, the church is called to be a place of healing for sinners, not merely a sanctuary for those who call themselves saints.
- For those in treatment, that affirmation from God during their times of challenge will always be there.
- For those in civil commitment, that they never feel that they are the lost and completely forgotten among us.
- For family members, that the love they offer is a lesson in how to love correctly.
- For prison ministry volunteers, that they find the grace to continue serving in the face of a rigid system.
- For those involved in the preparation for "Impact 2014," that their efforts will bring out a successful conference.
- For my workshop "Sex Offenders in Our Churches," that the message is one of communication and restoration in the name of Jesus Christ.
- 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.

LORD, enter into the center of my weakness, bring healing and restoration.

Just a reminder for your prayers:



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

Therefore, thus says the
LORD,
"If you return, then I will restore
you—
Before Me you will stand"
Jeremiah 15.19

Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.

PO Box 5824

De Pere, WI 54115-5824



All things are possible with God

A Little Humor . . .

A duck walks into a bar, and asks the bartender, "Do you have any grapes?" "Nope" responded the bartender, "try somewhere else." The duck walks out and comes back in, "Do you sell grapes?" "I told you already I don't." responded the bartender, "Stop bothering me." The duck walks back out and then back in again. "Stop right where you are!" the bartender screams. "You ask me again if I have grapes, I will take a hammer and nail your feet to the floor." The duck walks out and then back in again. "Do you sell nails?" he asks. "No" responded the bartender. "Do you sell grapes?" (Sorry if you remember me using this before but I still think it's funny!)

