



Into the Light

All things are possible with God
January—February 2018

Prepare

By Bob Van Domelen

⁴ *Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain* (Isaiah 40.4 KJV)

Every now and then I find that a verse nestles its way into some part of my brain – just out of reach but present nonetheless. The words slip into those cracks of silence when I think I have nothing else to consider; they slide out in the middle of some unrelated activity; and they surface in those moments just before waking. I don't mind that but I sometimes wonder what's going on.

When I sought some understanding in bible commentaries, I found that the words described the incredible task faced by kingly engineers of the period in building roads in the East. But I also read that there was another meaning: the meek would be exalted, the proud brought low, *wrong ways would be straightened, and rough edges would be made smooth*. It was, as the commentator wrote, a way of describing the work of preparation for the coming of the Lord.

When I was a boy, I played with ideas as to what my future might hold, but as I grew older I found myself reshaping those plans. By the time I was an adult, married, and working in a career that matched my choice of college education, I told myself that all that was left was to progress up the ladder of recognition in my field and to enjoy family life.

What I had not counted on was how seriously flawed I had become. Despite wishing those flaws would simply disappear, they did not. At some point, my hidden life was as real to me as the outside life I allowed others to see. But that hidden life was too dark to admit or expose in any way without being rightly condemned.

**Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God**

By the time this edition of *Into the Light* reaches you, the prophetic words of John the Baptist might be lost for some in the aftermath of yet another celebration of Jesus' birth. But I am pretty sure that his words are meant for more than a single event in time. As a matter of fact, the image of a highway and of the journey we are all called to make is very real each and every day.

As difficult as life might be for someone with sex-related offenses in prison or reentry, those issues actually pale in the face of the single-most important part of the Baptist's ongoing message. Prepare!

Yet I do understand how it might feel like this preparation is pointless when the world around us closes its

doors, restricts not only where we live and work but also where we worship. There *are* churches willing to reach out even if in a cautious manner and rejection is *not* universal. Successful reentry, however, is not for the timid.

**the crooked shall be made straight
wrong ways would be straightened**

Everyone sins. Everyone has issues and perhaps you have said "I wish I had *his* problem and not the one I have" because change for others looks far easier than personal change.

Some time ago when I shared this with a friend, he looked at me and said "Yeah, I have problems but at least my problems wouldn't put me in prison. And I *never* would have done what you did!" That was pretty much the end of that conversation because he was right.

While in prison, however, I quickly learned that keeping quiet about my charges was a requirement for self-protection even though the prison grapevine was such that my silence didn't make much difference. Despite the fears I had, I entered prison believing that my "wrong ways would be straightened."

Every morning I woke and prayed "Lord, protect me today. Let me grow in you. Let me see you in others. Let others see you in me." This simple prayer was a form of preparation for whatever would happen that day. I trusted God to meet me wherever and whenever He chose.

When I eventually was placed in a treatment group, I started praying before every session that I could be open to truths about myself that the Lord wanted me to face while at the same time help me be able to discard what didn't mesh with His word.

During some sessions it would have been easier to proclaim "God has made me new; I should not be thinking or talking about the 'old' Bob." But if I asked God to show me what I needed to change, should I be the one to decide how God makes that known to me? Besides, God knows all of the dark places in me that need His healing light and He knows best how to get my attention.

**rough places plain
rough edges made smooth**

To the engineer charged with building roads, a major obstacle would have been whatever stood in the way of the route decided upon. Maybe that would have been rocks of varying sizes or possibly ditches that needed to be filled in, but for the road to be completed and passable, it would have to be made smooth.

The road in my life's journey started smooth but became almost impassable by the time of my arrest. I had

cluttered it with self-centered pride, distorted sexual identity and desires, and a conflicted spiritual focus. One of the blessings, yes, blessings of being arrested was in knowing that I had been stopped from creating even more damage. The law did what I had been unable to do.

I know that I am not alone in what I have shared with you because the letters I get confirm similar feelings of being out of control. The letters also give voice to frustration as rejection and condemnation are heaped on from other inmates, prison security, treatment facilitators, family, and just about everyone else. That's why I suggested earlier the need for us to prepare.

"Prepare for what?" For one thing, we need to prepare ourselves just as athletes do when training but training toward a much greater goal – accepting and living as heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven. As my pastor reminded me, "You need to tell others that you are a child of the Most High." It is this journey that we travel, a journey that brings healing and new life.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5.17) We are new in the sense that we surrender to the Lord's mercy and love and in doing so truly repent of the harm we done. There can be no real surrender, however, until we recognize our victims and pray for their healing.

Forty years ago, I could not have done what I just suggested because I couldn't see beyond me. I couldn't even really see how I had harmed so many.

One day, I read *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up"* (James 4.10 KJV) with new eyes. I believed that God would give me the grace to trust Him completely and that he would indeed lift me up. And He has!

Every day I remind myself that preparation comes because of commitment and determination. The road we travel is not easy but with God makes the journey is possible. □



All things are possible with God!

Broken Yoke Ministries
www.brokenyoke.org
Newsletters, links, information

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.

There are times when it is harder to count blessings than the issues I face. I pray to have more Godly times than not but I believe God is always there with me regardless.

Humanly, I am mature. Spiritually, I am not. So it is time for me to be a man of God and be done with all childish ways. I used to be semi-serious in my walk with God. Now I need to be fully serious in that walk.

I try to search my actions each day for signs of love – I find at least a little friendship and common courtesy are usually available even in here. Love certainly seems to be on the endangered species list in my world but I've always struggled with my inability to express love much less recognize it in a healthy form.

I have heard from fellow inmates concerning what God has 'told' them. Wishful thinking and hearing God are not easy to differentiate in my experience. But if I find a promise in God's word, I know for certain it can be received as absolute truth.

I recently wrote "I want to know, is it safe to be me? I don't want to be tough, I want to love. I do not want to be a player, I want to respect women. Not a thug but a community leader. I want to read books, bike ride, skate, go to plays. I love going to church, helping the homeless, etc. – all the things my ego said not to do; all the things that the hood and so-called guys would say 'You'll be a fool, look lame and treated for doing so, to be a momma's boy or to want my father even though he wasn't there.'" So you see, the Spirit man is all new to me but he is who I want to become.

God will not change us unless we are willing to change. He will not force us to change though He does want us to change to fit His will for our lives. He knows everything ahead of time – knows what we are going to do before we do it (even the bad stuff) – but loves us anyway.

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 seek to prepare ourselves by looking for news ways to surrender our brokenness.

- For those who feel weighed down by rejection, that they remember that they are children of the Most High God and heirs to the Kingdom.
- For those believing that nothing positive remains for them or that there can be no future for them, that they watch for the miracles God has ready for them each and every day.
- For those in reentry, that they continue to trust that God will meet all their needs.
- For family and friends, that they continue to pray for loved ones in prison.
- For chaplains, that they are blessed for the ways in which they point those in desperate need of love to God's open arms.
- For all who read *Into the Light*, that they find hope and encouragement in the words shared.
- For victims, that they find ways to move beyond defining themselves as victims in order to reach the potential God has always had in store for them.
- For treatment personnel, that they might always seek to offer hope and change.
- 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.

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.

For those of you able, consider your Amazon purchases using Smile.Amazon and selecting Broken Yoke Ministries as your designation.

A Prayer for Restoration

During my time of incarceration, I prayed the following psalm every morning because it was, I felt, a prayer of confession, an opportunity to ask forgiveness. *A broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise*. No matter how low I might have felt over the memory of my sins, I was always reminded of God's divine and everlasting mercy and forgiveness.

Maybe you'll find some of the same comfort I did and still do in meditating on David's words. At least I hope that you will. Be blessed in this coming year, be blessed and know that God's for you is unending.

Psalm 51

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

¹⁸ May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.

PO Box 5824

De Pere, WI 54115-5824



All things are possible with God

A Little Humor . . .

A devout old shepherd lost his favorite Bible while he was out looking for a wayward lamb. Three weeks later, a sheep walked up to him in the field carrying the Bible in its mouth. The shepherd couldn't believe his eyes. He took the precious book out of the sheep's mouth, raised his eyes heavenward and exclaimed, "It's a miracle!"



"Not really," said the sheep. "Your name is written inside the cover."