



# Into the Light

*All things are possible with God*  
May—June 2015

## Do You Still Love Me, God?

By Bob Van Domelen

*“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.”* (1 Timothy 1:15-16)

Over the years I have heard it said that if I describe someone in a certain manner often enough, that description becomes locked in my mind. Would it be too far a stretch to think that if someone in prison for sex-related offenses is always referred to as a sex offender, the person will *always* be considered a sex offender?

Would it be a further stretch to think that if churches continue to reject someone with sex-related offenses from their faith communities, the person will eventually see this rejection as God’s decision? After all, are not faith communities meant to be Christ’s hands, feet, eyes, voice, and heart to all who seek God?

Given this continued kind of rejection and condemnation, I don’t really think it would be stretch for some to ask “Do you still love me, God?” because love, support, and encouragement are outward signs of “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The absence of these outward signs becomes a growing wedge with God seeming to grow more distant.

Spiritually, those rejected are being forced to live apart from the very faith communities that could heal and bring change. Spiritually, those rejected are forced to wear signs announcing their crimes, their sins so that others don’t become infected. Spiritually, they are being cast aside as the forever broken.

God becomes more distant; the cross of Christ is meant for everyone *except* those who sexually offend; and sadly for some, that repetitious rejection will eventually become “God doesn’t care about me. God doesn’t love me.”

### **Christ came into the world to save sinners**

Jesus asked the woman caught in adultery, “Has no one condemned you?” (John 8:10) He followed that by saying something unheard in such circumstances, “Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.” (vs 11)

I have often thought about this response Jesus made because there is no indication that He took away any and all temptations from her of her past life. Rather, Jesus simply tells her to leave her life of sin. If it had been me in that circle of condemnation and if Jesus said those words to me,

how would I have responded that day, the day after, or in the months that followed? Would I have left my sinful past? Would I have faced temptation with the knowledge that I could say “No” when tempted? And in fact, is this what the woman did with *her* new lease on life?

### **Of whom I am the worst**

“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9.4) For someone who had spent his life as a Pharisee, the voice Saul heard must have shaken him to the core of his being. And given that he had persecuted those following Christ, it isn’t hard to see how Saul might have described himself as the worst of sinners.

Those with sex-related offenses against children are frequently confronted with “it would be better for [those who cause a child to stumble] to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18.6) Jesus spoke those words and for anyone looking to justify the exclusion of such a person from their church or neighborhood, verse six is where they stop reading. There is no mercy—only condemnation.

For the longest time, “of whom I am the worst” was the point at which my eyes stopped. I didn’t really read any further because those words pretty much spoke to what I believed about myself.

### **I was shown mercy**

Looking back, I know that I was blessed beyond what I had a right to be. My wife and my children still loved me and *that* was a true gift. Though they couldn’t forget what had happened or why I spent years apart from them, I believe that they looked at me as they man I *was supposed* to be. In some ways, their response was the very grace God offered me and a reminder that God doesn’t define any of us by our sins.

### **In me, Jesus might display his unlimited patience**

It is pretty common for us to define God in human terms because we really have no way to do otherwise. So when I consider the world for those with sex-related offenses, I see society’s impatience, frustration, anger, and a host of other negative emotions serving as a wall to an offender’s change and healing. The mortar locking those negative emotions in place is the mortar of human nature and therefore a very human response to crimes that seem beyond belief.

The life and teachings of Jesus speak to us clearly of forgiveness and of being examples of Christ’s love. The walls don’t come down, however, just because they should. I think they don’t come down because people fear what it would be like to not have them in place as *their* protection. They don’t come down because they have become

society's way of supporting victims, of standing arm in arm against child molestation and other crimes of sexual assault.

I have to confess that I construct my own walls though they are mostly a negative response to the rejection of others. I want people to be as *I want them to be*. This is where it gets difficult.

If I am to trust in God and to believe that God loves me, then I must accept the fact that God loves those who don't love me. I don't get to decide who God loves or doesn't love. I don't get to decide how others should deal with me, though I do get to decide how I deal with others.

Maybe life for some of you has just gotten too difficult, too lonely, and perhaps too hopeless. Maybe for you "Do you still love me, God?" feels like an appropriate question.

### **[May we] believe on him and receive eternal life**

It would be great if believing on Jesus would result in life being just what we would like it to be. It would be great if believing on Jesus would bring about a spirit of reaching out by all people toward the ongoing healing for victims and offenders alike. But there is nothing in the verse that implies things will be different in the world around us just because we believe. The verse simply reminds us of the inheritance we have in Christ Jesus, the eternal life with Him in His heavenly kingdom.

Some days that might not be enough for you or even for me, for that matter. That's when we all have to remind ourselves of the unlimited patience Jesus has for us. He knows we will fall. He knows we will doubt. And He knows some of us will despair.

Despite all that I see around me in this world, I am convinced beyond a doubt that I am loved by God. I pray that when you find yourself asking "Do you still love me, God?" you will hear a resounding YES in the deepest parts of your being—*because He does!* You are worth loving!

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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.*

I now realize that it is important to seek professional mental health care when it is or might be needed. Equally important is the fact that to ask for help is NOT a sign of weakness, defeat, not being a "man," and/or failure. I am not a failure when I ask for help. I fail when I don't.

*I am not the same person today that I was when I offended. I am changed because I remain committed to change.*

Colossians 3.12 is a good scripture to pattern your life by but sadly we as flawed humans have a hard time clothing ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. The last, patience, prison teaches us. We either learn it or we go to the hole for punching someone out.

*When I came to Christ, I told him He would have to take my sexuality because I couldn't face that battle. He took away*

*the power perversion had over my mind, but I wasn't completely free of temptation, even very powerful and almost overpowering urges. I couldn't hope to battle sexual issues all at once, but with God's strength I can do it day by day.*

My heart went out to the guy who was told in a parole hearing that he'd have to do two more years primarily because he has not found a place to live. I stopped immediately to say a prayer for him. [*I hope that we all feel led to prayer after reading the needs of others, to thank God for the successes, to listen for the lessons to be learned from one another.*]

*In my life, the weakest moments when I feel most desperate are the very times when God is free to do His greatest work by empowering and strengthening me. It is in these difficult times when I whisper "Father, I cannot go on" that I am granted the best equipping and the greatest enabling to endure diversity.*

No matter what is going on in my life, there is power available to the children of God.

*Honoring authority and submitting, as God has instructed, plus time passed has resulted in my now having minimum supervision. I can just go about anywhere I want and do the things I enjoy. Being on parole is not like I heard when I was in prison. The burden of parole is self-inflicted. Our freedom is in Christ alone. He will honor our faithfulness with true freedom and peace.*

I don't begin to believe that my past temptations (sexual or otherwise) will not at some time rear their ugly heads and try to creep back into my thinking. I am, after all, made of flesh and flesh desires flesh just as fire desires wood. My sinful nature always wants to take control but with God's help I make it through and grow daily.

*I don't know why it is so hard for me to accept God's unconditional love, but years ago it was. I suspect a poor self image contributing to my feeling of unworthiness may have led me to refusing God's love. It took a while to realize I was not coming to Him based on my worth. Rather, I was coming to Him based on His grace and my position is secure in Christ. As my pastor explained it, "To put yourself down as beneath His grace is to trample on His loving, generous gift."*

We want to live each day fully. To do that, we need to maintain a youthful attitude instead of letting ourselves grow old and useless to the kingdom.

*Over the years I have learned to relax and trust God. If He wanted me out, I've given Him the materials to work with so far as my record in here goes. Now I'll rely on Him to have me where He wants me and I'll try to see His plan in every place and situation.*

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## *All things are possible with God!*

## 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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MIND • MISSION • METHOD

### RENEW 2015: Correctional Ministry Summit May 28-30, 2015 Wheaton College, IL

Some of you might remember that I was blessed to offer workshops on reentry for those with sex-related offenses at the first two summits (2013 and 2014). The workshop I sought to have approved for this year was not chosen. The proposal I offered dealt with the critical need for those serving prison populations (chaplains, etc) as well as individuals and ministries part of the reentry process to seek realistic ways to address the issue of hope as well as the lack of it in the lives of both the confined and those in reentry.

Though not a presenter, I will try to make connections with those in attendance to share my feelings on how critical this issue is. I make no secret of the fact that even churches are backing away from their part in the healing and change necessary for men and women in this situation, so I will not hesitate to see what doors can be opened at this summit.

I am counting on the prayers of the people reading this newsletter because you already know what is needed. Please storm heaven – especially May 28-20 – and ask God's blessings on everyone involved.

**If you have family or friends, tell them about the website for Broken Yoke Ministries:**  
**[www.brokenyoke.org](http://www.brokenyoke.org)**  
**Newsletters, links, information**

## 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 God's love for us is unconditional and always available.
  - For those who feel completely alone, without any support, and without hopes or dreams, that they take the hand of God in their choices and feel His grace and mercy in everything.
  - For those frightened by an uncertain future, that they come to see that not one step is taken without God knowing and caring.
  - For those who have lost family, that they still have the power to love those who have turned their backs despite the lack of any response.
  - For those who witness God's love, that their witness to others is strengthened by a willingness to serve as *God desires*.
  - For pastors, that they look for the presence of Christ in all their flock—including and especially for all in reentry.
  - 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!*

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## Dad

My dad passed away a few months before my 16th birthday. I remember thinking that it wasn't fair. I remember being angry at God. And over the many years since then I struggled with the questions "Would dad be ashamed of me now?" and "Could dad still love me after all I've done?" Sounds like the title of the main article but these *are* questions I have often asked myself.

My dad was a good man, a loving husband to my mother, and a good father. So many stories I hear from men in prison paint fathers as abusive, uncaring, and distant. The only distance between my dad and me was created by *my* belief that he just wouldn't understand me or my interests. Why risk being rejected?

Dads are very complex. I know because I am one. But I also know that regardless of the problems, I can love my dad *because I choose to love him!* He doesn't have to be any more perfect than I am. He doesn't have to "get it right" before I can love him. And at the end of the day, doesn't our Heavenly Father see us in the same way? So take a breath, invite the presence of Jesus, and love the man you call dad. Remember, it's your call.

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***A Little Humor . . .***

Two old ladies were discussing their husbands over tea. "I wish that my Robert would stop biting his nails. It gets me very upset.



"My Calvin used to do the same thing," the older woman replied. "But I broke him of the habit."

"How?" the first woman asked

"I hid his teeth."