



Into the Light

All things are possible with God
September—October 2019

I Have Chosen You

By Bob Van Domelen

⁹ *I have called you back from the ends of the earth and said that you must serve but me alone, for I have chosen you and will not throw you away. ¹⁰ Fear not, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed. I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41.9-10 TLB)*

His name was Johnny and we served time together. I didn't know him all that well but he is etched in my memory for two reasons. He participated in a pen pal program my hometown church offered and I taught him how to tie a tie.

He was walking one afternoon holding a letter in his hand when I came up on him. His hand shook as he handed me the unopened letter and asked "Would you open this and read it to me?" I was about to make some smart aleck remark but the look on his face told me to keep the remark to myself.

I opened the letter and read it to him. It was a "Hi, I was given your name to write" kind of letter, yet he was crying before I even finished reading it.

Johnny had been in prison for more than 20 years and according to him, he had never received a letter, never had a visit in all that time. It's not hard to believe that the world had chosen to forget he existed. Johnny certainly believed that. Ignored more often than not by most of the other inmates, I think Johnny was a lonely man. Maybe it's better to say he *felt* all alone and sometimes that's harder to deal with.

Unlike Johnny, I was incredibly blessed during my time in confinement because my wife had made the decision to stay with me. But she had made it clear that I had work to do, changes to make. I received 'News from Home' letters regularly and she came for visits almost every week. And yes, I do thank God for her every day! By the way, this year we will have been married 50 years! Praise God!

I have called you back from the ends of the earth

Loneliness feels like being in a dark place where joy has no hope of survival, where calling out is met only with silence, and where one's world feels like the end of the earth – a place where no one else wants to live.

To the Jewish people, their exile had taken them far from their homeland, the place God had given them and the place to which they were called to return. To an inmate, prison is a consequence of choices made that harmed society. At the conclusion of a sentence, many return home. Many start over. To someone on a state registry, reentry is more uncertain and for some not possible.

Over the years I have learned that God was not calling me back from a place. He was calling me back from that darkness in which I had lived for so long. He was calling me to the light of His presence, to a place where I knew choice, and to a belief in the man I was called and created to be.

you must serve but me alone

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other." (Matthew 6.24)

It took me a long time to realize and accept that I was addicted. Fantasy drove me to seek out pornography and pornography fueled my fantasies, fantasies that made victimizing others not only possible but desirable. As much as I believed I loved God, I loved my addiction more.

God's word invited me to place my brokenness in his hands, a choice that I feared might break me. After all, what I believed was the *real* me certainly had no right to expect God would ever forget all I had done.

for I have chosen you and will not throw you away

There. *That's* what I feared. That God would simply throw me away like a filthy rag. Over and over I had chosen to meet my dark desires and turned my back on the goodness that I knew was the love of Jesus, the presence of the Holy Spirit. And if truth be known, despite the image I presented to those who knew me, I felt alone and I hated the fact that I had created my own prison of guilt and shame.

I had to wonder, though. WHY? Why would the creator of everything continue to invite me out of my alone place given all I had done to create it? The only answer is that in choosing me (and you), God is saying "I love you!" That's why.

Fear not, for I am with you

Stop and think about it. God's word says "Fear not, for I am with you." If God is with us, how can we be alone? Okay, I agree with those of you saying "But that's not the same as having people who love you. I can see and touch people, but I can't see and touch God. And because I can't, I am still alone, still lonely."

²⁸ *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11.28-30)*

These verses are the gentle invitation each of us is given by a loving Heavenly Father, an invitation to come out of our loneliness and brokenness and spend time surrendering all that weighs us down. They are also a reminder that true connection is not found first in others but deep within our

own hearts. The presence of God makes possible the healthy connections we will make with others.

In the 60s, posters were a big thing. One which seemed very popular at the time was "Bloom where you are planted." Another stated "If you aren't happy where you are, you won't be happy anywhere." The thinking was simple and to the point: Your happiness, peace, and connections are what you make them because they start within you. They start within me.

If you are sitting in a cell of loneliness because it's the only spot where you can physically exist, make that place healthy. Make that place holy by creating space for God within. He'll be there because He wants to be with you.

Do not be dismayed. I am your God.

It is hard to find hope in some environments – like in prisons and civil commitment facilities. Depressing would be a word to describe most places where men and women are contained while they serve court judgments. I would never suggest that such places can be a ray of sunshine each and every day. But when I find myself in an environment that is both dark and life-taking, I settle my mind and declare God's presence. Sometimes what follows is like seeing a sliver of light at the end of a tunnel. But it *is* light. It *is* hope and healing. So I tell you, look for it. Move toward it.

***I will strengthen you; I will help you;
I will uphold you***

Calling on God in moments of fear, panic, or loneliness is a good thing but even when I recognize God's presence I also recognize that there is work to be done, changes to make, and goals to be set. To remove a weakness demands that it be replaced with a strength, an alternative. Deviant fantasies don't just disappear because we tell them to go away. They disappear when the alternative choice, the healthier choice is more attractive or desirable than the fantasy.

God does strengthen, help, and uphold anyone who seeks to be whole, who decides temptations are a fact of life that can be overcome. In the beginning I felt it was God's job to take away my struggles, but it wasn't. It was my job. Unlike the past, however, I learned to reject the idea that on my own I could control these things because I couldn't. Most important, I learned that God doesn't stop loving me *through* my temptations. He never stops calling me and encouraging me. And the more I trust God, the less lonely I feel and the more connected I am with God's people.

*"And behold, I am with you always,
to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28.20 ESV)

Such a promise! Such a declaration of love for each of us! So the next time you are feeling alone or lonely, still yourself and listen for the heart of God beating within. It's there.

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 get scared about [the fact that] three years from now I'm released. I'm going to be homeless and this state is tough on sex offenders. I don't ever want to come back to prison.

I am serving a life sentence as a sexually violent predator. I struggle with believing God can and will save me. I believe in Him and His word but my life is over and I have amounted to nothing. I don't feel like a man. I feel like a failure.

I believe God has put me here for a reason and a season because, in essence, this is the kind of treatment I have longed to get into – treatment that can hopefully help me to figure out where I went wrong, how I can fix it, and how I can keep from falling into the same lifestyle that has prevented me from excelling in life.

I have given up trying to do anything any more. I work and sleep and that's it. We can't have a life in prison so what reason is there to move on. Even if I got out, where would I go and how could I start over at 70 years of age when there is nothing out there for me?

I am not where I used to be. I'm not where I want to be. But I am where God needs me to be at this time. I am working and doing what I have to do to shine the light of Christ in the dark places. It's not about me. It's about the Lord.

I've learned that God gives man a choice by his grace knowing man will abuse that endowment; at times, man's choices hurt other people; God is not responsible for these wrongs; and the effects of wrong choices can have a catastrophic effect on others.

I thank my Heavenly Father for making known to me His path for my life, step by step, moment by moment.

What others do [in here] is not my business and I am only responsible for myself and what I choose to do. I pray all the time regarding my morality because I don't want to do what I see others doing – and I so desperately want to stop being alone because I only set myself up to fall into temptations when I am all by myself.

(From one in reentry) I heard God speak to me when I was sitting in that detention cell on the first day of my arrest, I was at such peace. It was amazing! The times after were tough but God got me through it every step of the way. I learned to listen to the voice of God in jail.

Your Support Matters

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**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 those who feel completely alone, that they come to feel God's presence in every moment.
- For those who feel they have nothing to give and no reason to live, that they will recognize that there is someone desperately needing *them* to help them move forward.
- For those who feel God has abandoned them, that they experience a renewed faith encouraged by those around them, those willing to share *their* faith.
- For those who struggle with anger over being abandoned by family and friends, that they will find peace in the new relationships God presents to them each and every day.
- For churches, that they are reminded of the willingness of Jesus to cure the sick in both mind and body, remembering their role of being Christ's hands, voice, and heart to those crying out.
- For those unable or unwilling to accept responsibility for what they have done, that they are able to break down the barriers they have constructed in their own lives so that they can finally see the harm they have brought.
- For family and friends, that they understand that healing and change for an offender come in believing that they still matter are worth loving.
- For Bob's health, that the ministry God has for him will continue to be an encouragement and hope for others.
- For this ministry so 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.

To change from what we were to what we hope to be requires us to recognize the 'what' in us that needs to be changed

God Knows You

Psalm 139.1-18

- ¹ O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.
³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.
⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.
⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.
- ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit?
 Or where shall I flee from your presence?
⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
 If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.
¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,"
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.
- ¹³ For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. ^[a] Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.
- ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
 How vast is the sum of them!
¹⁸ If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.

You are NEVER alone!

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Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.

PO Box 5824

De Pere, WI 54115-5824



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A Little Humor...

A couple had their first baby. After a week or so the mother thought she could use a break and went shopping, leaving the little baby with the proud father.

It was only a short while before the baby started to cry. The anxious father tried all of the tricks that he remembered his wife doing but nothing worked. Finally after a half hour of non-stop screaming, he took the baby to the doctor.

After checking all of the regular things the doctor discovered it was just a dirty diaper.

"I don't understand" the perplexed father said "I knew it was dirty, but the diaper package said specifically that it was good up to 8 pounds!"

