



# Into the Light

*All things are possible with God*

March—April 2020

## My Journey

By Mark

I have been out of prison for more than 16 years. A short time ago, a friend I hadn't heard from in quite a while reached out and told me that in cleaning out his office, he had found a file of the letters I had written him while I was in state prison for grooming and molesting a young girl I met online.

My friend had been the pastor of my church at the time I was arrested - the church I had been a part of with my wife and three young kids, where I led men's retreats, and where I made Sunday morning announcements. It was also the church I had betrayed and embarrassed by my horrific sins, a church that was left to pick up the pieces and take care of my family in my absence.

After a recent coffee with my friend, I headed home to read those letters and found myself flooded with memories. The early letters I wrote were raw because I was so scared to be where I was. They were also whiney, begging for prayer, uncertain, unfocused, and terrified.

Over time, the letters changed. My faith grew. I saw God at work in me and in the men around me. I had written how three months in, I manned a table for Project Angel Tree where I saw man after man approach my desk while I filled out their forms requesting Christmas presents for their kids. Their pain broke my heart because it was my pain too. And out of that moment sprang so much ministry - guys coming to me for prayer; getting involved in helping in prison; stepping outside of my own needs, fears and thoughts; and starting to minister, help, and pray for others.

The letters brought to mind God's protection and wisdom. Like re-reading the Psalms, I was able to remember all of the times God stepped in, touched lives, smoothed out issues, calmed the waters, and touched my heart. In my letters home, I wrote mostly about the positive and avoided the negative but, of course, I was living with both. Even 16 years after release, the good and bad I experienced then are still in my memories.

I was so blessed in reading the letters my pastor had saved because I was able to remember the faith-building, the hope, *and* the lives that became part of mine. There WAS hope, there WAS a better life, and God WAS at work.

Upon my release in 2003, God didn't restore my marriage and, for several years, my own kids didn't want anything to do with me. The three years of restrictive parole were hard; some of my church friends still didn't want anything to do with me; and it was many years before I was back on my feet financially. Like so many, I'm on the state offender registry.

And yet, and yet, I am closer to God than I ever was before. I have now been married for ten years to the amazing woman of grace God brought into my life. My kids, now adults, and I spend a lot of time together. I have a job with travel and benefits and lots of responsibility. I am part of a vibrant church. Most of all, there IS hope, there IS a better life, and God IS at work. DO NOT LOSE HOPE!

*Mark is currently involved with Alliance for Constitutional SO Laws (ACSOL) in California. He is also part of a large church and lives the life he imagines many men do. He shared that some of the people he knows and associates with know his "whole story" but others have no idea. I don't believe that we are meant to walk in communities with a sign around our neck but when it is necessary to disclose, it happens because it was meant to happen.*

## Some Thoughts. . .

By Bob

I shared the following in responding to a few letters recently received: "*When I consider my life over the past 35 years, the moments that fill me with joy all have their foundation in Jesus. All of the opportunities to speak encouragement and hope at conferences and in media have all come about because God willed it to be so. Likewise, all that is to come in the future will have been given birth by God's love - and that quickens my heart.*"

In a few months, I am blessed to be part of a workshop being offered at the Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association Summit in Wheaton, IL. My portion of the workshop will address a simple title, "What Next?" While I don't have the ability to predict with any accuracy everything a registrant coming out of prison will face, there are some issues that mirror my experiences and those of others who correspond with me.

### Don't Let Others Define You

It is all too easy to surrender the grace and love of God by wearing the labels of sin. That doesn't mean we have not been guilty of actions that brought us to prison. It *does* mean that if our daily walk is surrounded by a definition of sin, our decisions are focused more on attitudes of others than on God's design.

### **You are NOT alone**

I know that this can sound wrong when family and friends have deserted us, neighborhoods refuse us housing, and even faith communities decide we are not to be allowed space to worship with them. Those are, in fact, realities many of us will face or are facing. But it is important to know that such rejection is not total or that life for us is hopeless.

Some of the greatest blessings others have shared with me were experienced during times when they felt alone and certainly unloved. Simple blessings: a greeting, an offer of prayer, a touch of connection, an invitation to connect, and other moments of God's love coming into our lives.

Recently a man approached at the end of a bible study and extended his hand. As I took his hand, I was surprised at being enveloped in a hug (against the rules) that only lasted a moment but did happen. Separating, he said "Thank you for talking to me."

I learned his charges were difficult and I suspect known by others in his pod. Not knowing them at the time, I had engaged in conversation before the meeting started, even make a joke that got him to chuckle, but his hug signaled just how important even simple conversation was to him.

### **See what God has done**

When Mark reread the letters he had written, he saw himself with a clarity he might not have had as he was writing those letters. His memories of prison experiences included awesome events where he both personally felt God's presence and observed that presence in others.

Like Mark, my memories are filled with God moments. Often in those moments when I initially felt everything was hopeless, God always placed someone in my path to remind me that He was still there, still loving me and calling me. As many who write me will share, it can be difficult to *feel* God or believe that things will be better in the middle of hurt, but healing does come and our spiritual vision becomes clearer with time. The truth is that God is *always* present!

### **Don't isolate**

I am convinced that at the heart of serious sin is a core of secrecy – the existence of two people living within. The visible is what we allow others to see because it is a wholesome image. The secretive side, however, is the place where we hide our failings and worse, our struggles and temptations.

I shared earlier that I don't believe we are called to wear signs around our necks announcing our past but when it is necessary to disclose, it happens because it is meant to happen. Likewise, if we are honest with ourselves, we will remember saying things like "I can handle this" or "I'm in control" in the midst of periods of temptation. If memory serves me, I couldn't. . .and neither did you.

Wisdom, however, tells us to pray about the timing of any disclosure as well as asking God to let us know the person to whom we disclose. Part of our prayer should also be that whoever we include knows to pray as to how to best help.

### **Trust God**

The words sound pretty simple but in the face of uncertainty they can be challenging. But I believe trusting God comes when we have a relationship with him, when we walk daily

with Jesus, and when we follow the prodding of the Holy Spirit. Our relationship is built on a foundation of conversations that include words of love, a desire to serve in whatever manner God wills, and obedience in our daily walk to God's commands.

With that foundation we eventually learn that though God answers our needs in unexpected ways, he answers. This is what I ultimately share when I get letters asking how to find a job, a home, a church, or a support system. But as much as I am able, I also offer suggestions that might help. I have not arrived at my final destination but I am trusting God that it will be with him for eternity. Do I hear an Amen?

## *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.*

My only identity for myself needs to be in Christ and in His love. But when this other identity or image (attached by the state or culture) involves shame issues, my identity in Christ is powerfully attacked by Satan – one of his biggest tricks.

*I have been in prison for 20 years now and have worked so hard to change and become a person that will no longer create a victim, but the parole board still feels I am a monster. At times I wonder if I will ever see freedom again, but I trust in our Lord for the final word.*

Any success I will ever have will be the result of my surrendering my will and my life to God and to walk in obedience to His word. My responsibility is to diligently seek Him.

*I believe that my freedom is a spiritual freedom that is given to me by God himself through His Holy Spirit by confession and prayer. When I am able to resist temptation, God will get all the glory.*



## *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 overwhelmed by temptation, that they find supportive connections willing to encourage them in making God-centered choices.
- For those who are nearing a time of reentry, that they place their trust in God to meet their needs while continuing to bless their daily walk.

- For those who believe their sins to be so great as to be unforgivable, that they see Christ's death on the cross as being their redemption.
- For those who believe change is not possible, that they see themselves as ones healed just as Jesus healed the lepers.
- For churches, that they echo the lessons Jesus taught, lessons of forgiveness and hope when both seem unattainable.
- For the families, that they recognize each member as important and worthy of love regardless of circumstances.
- For all of us, that we remember the importance of a kind word, a touch, or a connection.
- For Bob's health, that the ministry God has for him will continue to be an encouragement and hope for others.
- 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.**

### Special Needs

I am very aware that the majority of those reading this newsletter are incarcerated. Over the years I have rarely asked for financial help other than support needed to attend a convention. Would you please pray that funds become available for the following? Thank you.

CMCA Summit 2020  
Annual hosting fee for Broken Yoke's website  
General office supplies  
Monthly telephone fees  
Membership fees (CMCA, NARSOL, etc)

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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

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## Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association Summit 2020

May 14-15  
Wheaton, IL

This is some basic information to help you get to know a little more about this event. The CMCA Summit is unique:

- With a mission of bringing together Christians engaged in all areas of correctional ministry: Jail/Prison Ministry, Reentry, Juvenile/Youth Ministry, Chaplaincy, Advocacy. Over 119 organizations and 38 states (including Canada) were represented in last year's Summit.
- With practical training from over 30 workshop selections.
- With training and encouragement from plenary speakers bringing a wealth of experience and commitment to corrections.
- With high quality exhibits featuring tools to equip organizations for ministry.
- With networking opportunities through meals and pre-summit activities

If you know of someone who might be interested in attending the summit, encourage them to visit this link:

**[www.cmcainternational.org](http://www.cmcainternational.org)**

and click on "Events." They can also write Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, 500 College Ave. Wheaton, IL 60189

<sup>7</sup> Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;  
be gracious to me and answer me!

<sup>8</sup> You have said, "Seek my face."

My heart says to you,

"Your face, LORD, do I seek."

<sup>9</sup> Hide not your face from me.

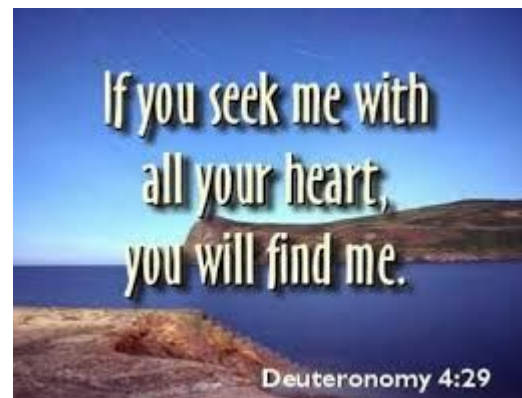
Turn not your servant away in anger,

O you who have been my help.

Cast me not off; forsake me not,

O God of my salvation!

Psalm 27.7-9



**Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.**

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

Did you hear about the sick juggler?  
They say he couldn't stop throwing up!

Did you hear about the calendar thief?  
He got 12 months; they say his days are numbered.

Why did the dinosaur cross the road?  
Because the chicken joke wasn't invented yet.

Did you hear about the guy who gave his cat a bath?  
He still hasn't gotten all the hair off his tongue. --

Sorry about that!

