



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

March—April 2017

Perfect in Weakness

By Bob Van Domelen

⁷Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12.7-9)

After reading these verses, I believe many of us have wondered what the thorn was that God gave to Paul to keep him from being conceited. And if we are honest, we'd like to believe that the thorn was some weakness of Paul's that we identify with in our daily living, a flaw in how we make choices or the choices themselves.

There have been countless sermons preached on what 'the thorn' might have been but I have decided, for myself at least, that the specific nature of the thorn is not as important as the fact that the thorn existed in real ways for Paul – just as my thorn exists for me.

The phrase "a messenger of Satan" did strike me as significant, though. Whatever comes from Satan is meant to turn our eyes from God as well as from whatever grace, love, and mercy God wants to give us. So the weakness, the sin itself, is actually less important than knowing that we turn our backs on the source of all goodness. Satan's victory comes in knowing that he has our attention as well as our willingness to choose something capable of blotting out God's presence in that moment.

I don't think it is a stretch to say that any addictive or compulsive negative behavior could be considered a thorn. After all, few days pass without the thorn making its presence known – a temptation, a misguided desire, an inappropriate focus. To tell the truth, I have never met or written anyone dealing with age-inappropriate attractions who wouldn't join Paul in pleading with the Lord "to take it away." Granted, not all plead in such a way, but the few exceptions I have known were those who believed there was nothing wrong with their attractions in the first place.

My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness

It took an arrest and time in prison for me to accept the fact that I was so out of control that not even heartfelt prayer could alter my behaviors. As I have shared in the past, I would pray every evening for an end to the thoughts that

brought about sins against the innocent, but I always would close those prayers "But don't let me get caught." It was that condition and not God's grace that kept me from breaking the bondage of my fantasies. I still wanted complete control and that control was my undoing. God's grace made me realize the pit I had dug for myself; it was my desire to avoid the responsibility and consequences for my actions that kept me there.

Some inmates have argued that secular treatment, especially prison sex offender treatment programs, is a denial of God's grace. They claim that to relive past sins in written biographies is to keep visible what God calls us to set aside. And they quote 2 Corinthians 5.17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" and suggest that treatment is focusing on the old rather than the new.

God's grace is, I think, the ability to see God within that treatment program. God's grace also helps us see patterns in our choices that have become reflex choices rather than conscious decisions of right over wrong. The more I was exposed to my old thinking and how wrong it was, the more I desired to be the new man God wanted me to be.

Treatment reminded me that though I was growing in my ability to recognize and choose good, the option to choose otherwise was always present.

I believe that if there is a flaw in treatment, it would be that the goal seems to be NO temptation, NO fantasies, and NO hidden thoughts of past sin. Failure to achieve 100% freedom is in their eyes, I think, a signal that an individual is more apt than not to reoffend. I

believe that recognizing the potential for reoffending, recognizing that fantasy and temptation are still possible combine to keep me real. And in the desire for realness, for the new man, I seek God's grace because it IS sufficient in how it guides my choices.

I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses

Have you noticed a simple truth: Paul never told anyone what his thorn was. At the same time, he never tired of sharing all that he had been through as a servant of God, a messenger of God's love.

If you take the time to read Chapter 11 of 2 Corinthians, you will see all sorts of reasons *not* to follow Christ, Paul describes being beaten, whipped, stoned, lacking food and sleep, and other less than desirable situations. Yet this God who told Paul "My grace is sufficient for you" is the God



Paul chose to follow. In short, none of us will be spared the hard things that happen in this life as we journey toward eternity with God.

It is one thing to tell others that you spent time in jail or prison for some legitimate cause. It is another to say "I spent time in prison for molesting." Who wants to say that? I certainly take no joy in being that transparent when I speak at some conference or church meeting. So how does one 'boast all the more gladly' for a criminal record such as mine and yours, too, if the description fits?

I have spoken to groups and never once mentioned why I was in prison. The topic I was asked to cover didn't demand that kind of sharing. At the same time, I have prepared workshops where I felt no disclosure would be needed only to leave the prepared outline to bring the issue up myself for some reason that only God knew at the time. And when that happened, I trusted God. I believed that it was His reason that mattered. I believed that He would protect me. And He does.

That Christ's power may rest on me

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5.48) Before you start to say "Perfection is impossible" let me share a thought or two on that subject. You're right, as humans capable of all manner of sin, none of us can be perfect – at least not in this world.

But to surrender our lives to God, to give all control to the extent that we are able to Him, is to bring to life our awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit within our deepest and most personal places. Perfection, then, is calling out to the perfection that is within, the perfect love and grace of God through the Holy Spirit that dwells there.

To be honest with you, I have witnessed occasions where the only logical reason something happened or something was said was because of Christ's power, not mine. But I got to see those moments even if I failed to recognize them as they actually happened. And when I weigh those moments of understanding against my past choices, my past history pales by comparison.

Look for God in every moment and in every person, trusting that healing comes. Compared to God, we are incredibly weak and prone to darkness. Focused on God, we open ourselves so that more of who we are reflects the light of God's love and God's design for each of us. And as always, 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.

This particular prison is the last place on earth I wanted to go to but God, this prison is better than I thought for it has great church programs, weights, and it is closer to my family. It could be worse.

I thank God that He allowed me to experience a part of myself that I had walled in for so long. I wasn't strong enough before to handle that and fail even now before gaining the necessary resolve of will. Every day gets better.

I still face temptations but I confront them with the love I have growing in me for others.

God's love never ends. His love extends past and through so much. Through every sin, failure, and weakness, there is mercy. So much mercy and grace in abundance!

There is still a part of me that wants to go out and sin in the ways I have done for so long but if I sit here and do nothing, then the way I have been will remain. If I continue to work in retraining my thinking and come into the light more, then my sin keeps losing the death grip it has right now.

I don't think that many Christians realize that in ostracizing, disowning, or condemning sex offenders who are trying to improve and turn their lives to Christ, they are, in essence, disavowing and rejecting the Atonement [Christ offered]. If they don't think an inmate trying to turn to Christ is worthy of the Atonement, they are saying, "Jesus, your Atonement is not perfect, it is incomplete, and only applies to a certain group of people I think are deserving." What I hope is realized someday is that anyone trying to follow Christ is a child of God and worthy of salvation.

Everyone needs a soft word, a firm embrace, and a gentle reminder that someone loves them – even if no one agrees with us. We are the hands and feet of Jesus and He will judge us for looking the other way or allowing an injustice to take place when we could have stopped it. God is our strength and wisdom during the hard times. Rest in Him!

As humans we forget that time changes every one of us. When a man goes to prison he expects his wife to be the same. Having to work two jobs to maintain three children, however, tires her out. He complains that she doesn't visit him but does not consider the time absorbed by those two jobs.

Broken Yoke is not just ministering to inmates and ex-inmates but also trying to effect change in the perception of others. This adds a sense of hope to those who read the newsletter as the Church in particular comes to accept sex offenders as sinners who need God's deliverance just like anyone else. They are not lepers or individuals who have committed the unpardonable sin. They can be part of revival.

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.

Two Friends

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 remember we can be strengthened and made strong in Him whose love for us never fades - it always seeks and calls us.
- For those who feel completely abandoned and unloved, that they come to believe that they are not alone, that there is always someone in their corner praying and supporting.
- For those who start each day believing in God's presence, that they are able to share that Presence with someone desperately needing it.
- For those running out of hope for a normal future following prison, that while reentry is difficult, God will meet their needs.
- For our country's new president, that he sees his part in meeting the needs of people otherwise rejected and cast off with his own humane attitude and a God-centered efforts.
- For those in reentry and experiencing success, that they reach out and share their positive message with brothers and sisters needing to hear it.
- For the continuing time or preparation for Bob and Maggie in their efforts to encourage effective discussion, that they find ways to help others consider positive steps in protecting churches/children while offering effective ministry and support.
- For victims, that they might regain power over their lives and walk in freedom.
- For treatment personnel, that they might believe in the foundation of what they do as helping bring about healing 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.

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All things are possible with God!

A story tells that two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey, they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, he wrote in the sand:

**Today my best friend
slapped me in the face**

They kept on walking, until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but his friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone:

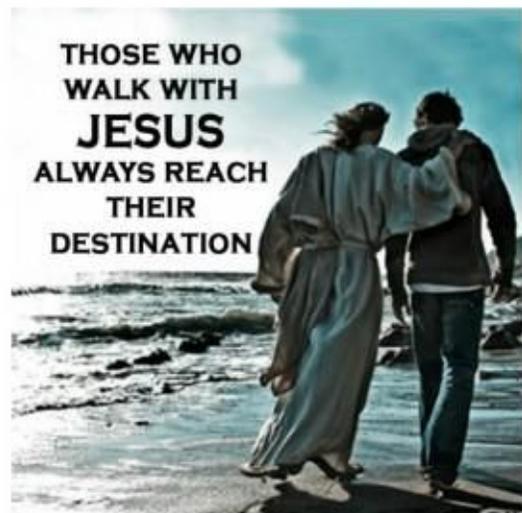
**Today my best friend
saved my life**

The friend, who had slapped and saved his best friend, asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand, and now, you write on a stone, why?"

The other friend replied: "When someone hurts us, we should write it down in sand, where the winds of forgiveness can erase it away, but when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it.

Learn to write your hurts in the sand and to carve your blessings in stone.

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A Little Humor . . .



A completely inebriated man was stumbling down the street with one foot on the curb and one foot in the gutter. A cop pulled up and said, "I've got to take you in pal. You're obviously drunk."

The wasted man asked, "Officer, are ya absolutely sure I'm drunk?"

"Yeah buddy, I'm sure," said the cop, "Let's go."

Breathing a sigh of relief, the wino said, "Thank goodness. I thought I was crippled."