



Into the Light

All things are possible with God
July—August 2018

God Will Restore What You Cannot

-- Revisited--

By Bob Van Domelen

Note: This was the lead article for November 1999 and, like the May-June edition, I decided to reprint it and add some current reflections.

1999

As a young college student, I spent a fair amount of time planning for my future. The career I had chosen promised a life of opportunity, the knowledge that I was helping to make a difference in the lives of others, and the promise of recognition as a leader in my field.

The plan I had so carefully constructed in my mind was taking on life and moving as I had expected in the years following graduation, but life was not *all* as I had planned. I had not counted on the depth of my own sexual brokenness. In 1985, I was arrested for molesting and the dream so carefully arranged was over.

Not a week goes by that I don't receive a letter from an offender who writes of losing a family, a job, or a dream envisioned for himself which had become a nightmare. The majority of those letters also point to God's presence in their lives coexisting with the fear they have of prison and the greater fear they have of returning to communities that no longer welcome them.

As I look at my own life and what has been happening these past fourteen years, it all seems to fit a single concept—restoration. God has been restoring to me what I could not restore for myself. In some ways, this last sentence scares me a bit because I want to be able to define it all for you. I want to show you something but can't because the very thing I want to show cannot be seen or clearly defined. But I can give you a word that defines the process. The word is faith.

Paul writes in Hebrews 11:1-2, "*Faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see.*" (CEV) Faith is not giving God a picture of what I want and then sitting back while He brings that picture into reality. Faith is trusting enough to surrender my plans and my very existence to the plans of God.

Restoration, by definition, is the process of repairing or correcting something that became flawed or broken. What is being restored was once the way it should have been. I was not born a molester but I became one. Somehow my life had become seriously flawed, and the direction my flawed behavior took grieved God and hurt countless people.

Having a desire that life should be as God means it to be is not an unworthy desire. Wanting a second chance to

show that I can be trusted is part of the restorative process, but it is not a process in which I am the one in control.

From the point of view behavioral modification offers, I am to learn proper boundaries, effective relapse prevention techniques, and systems of accountability. All of that is worthy and acknowledges a personal responsibility to do whatever it takes to avoid reoffending.

But the process falls short of restoration if I am still as I was fourteen years ago. Unless something in me changes, my family and community remain the grass on the other side of the fence. I believe that unless I surrender myself to God, nothing changes.

The psalmist David wrote, "*Before I confessed my sins, my bones felt limp, and I groaned all day long. Night and day your hand weighed heavily on me, and my strength was gone as in the summer heat. So I confessed my sins and told them all to you. I said, 'I'll tell the Lord each one of my sins.' Then you forgave me and took away my guilt.*" (Psalm 32:3-5)

Most of the world would quote the phrase, "Confession is good for the soul," but *their* confessions would not necessarily bring about fresh charges and more prison time. Some treatment groups even begin sessions with the same reading of rights as were offered at the time of arrest. "Anything you say can and *will* be used against you." It is no surprise to me that secrets remain secrets under such circumstances.

Many have written to say that rape and/or physical violence (even killing) might result from a disclosure of their offense to a general population which views molesters as the bottom rung of the social structure in prisons. I can't disagree with nor will I minimize the legitimate fear they have in their circumstances. At the same time, I stand by David's words, "I'll tell the Lord each one of my sins."

The psalm continues, "*You said to me, 'I will point out the road that you should follow. I will be your teacher and watch over you.'*" (vs.8) As God is my teacher, I have a responsibility to listen closely to what I am being taught, and I have a responsibility to be obedient to the direction God gives to my life.

God has *not* given back the career I once considered part of my master plan, *nor* has He erased the hate and distrust others have of me. I am *not* in the financial position I once felt was important, *nor* am I free of all traces of temptation. Based on these comments, some would say that God has failed to live up to His side of the bargain, but I would disagree.

God has given me a peace that I cannot explain to you and a confidence in the belief that I am greatly loved. These gifts are beyond any written or verbal description I might attempt; yet I accept them as reality. The seed for acceptance of these gifts came while I sat alone in an interrogation room in 1985, weighing my words of denial against the desire to be free once and for all from the behaviors and fantasies that had brought me to where I sat. The surrender that followed has become an ongoing, day-by-day decision to give God complete access to whatever in me needs to be healed.

"The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast." (1Peter 5:10) It will not be you who restores but the One within you, and God *will* restore what you cannot.

2018

As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp. (Leviticus 13:46) The reference, of course, is to those with leprosy yet I am reasonably certain that many with sex-related offenses feel a connection as modern day lepers.

But I think the connection we want as 'modern day lepers' falls short because verse 45 declares *"Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!'"* It was not enough that the leper's body displayed to all the death that was theirs. They were also required to make sure their outer appearance proclaimed the same message to anyone coming near.

So far it doesn't look like I am making *any* connection to the words of 1999, but I am. It comes down to restoration and change.

I didn't leave prison in tattered clothing or with my face covered. As a matter of fact, unless someone knew me, there was nothing about me that announced my crimes, nothing that yelled UNCLEAN, UNCLEAN! But in another sense, I am not restored because I cannot live wherever I want. Although I am retired, employment options are limited and also depend upon an employer willing to hire someone like me.

The International Megan's Law restricts where I might travel in other countries and who must be notified if I do. Sadly, I know of men where even church attendance is restricted or even denied. Restored?

This truth came home to me recently when a man I write shared that his parole agent told him he needed to do more than just work and stay in his trailer. At the same time, the rules he is required to follow seem to go out of their way to make any social engagement impossible. Restored?

Okay, that's the hard reality but if you stop there in your thinking, nothing good will come. There are men I know who have been out for several years, men whose lives are productive and a source of encouragement to me – just as my life is to them. What we share is this.

First, despite days and situations that fall short of being good, we trust God to fill any void within ourselves with his loving presence, his grace, and his mercy, especially for when we are less than we could or should be.

Second, we recognize that the process of living for ALL of us truly is one step at a time. Good, bad, or indifferent, the situations we face are common to all. How we deal with them is the key and, as scripture reminds us,

¹⁷ *pray continually,* ¹⁸ *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* ¹⁹ *Do not quench the Spirit.* (1 Thessalonians 5:17-19)

Third, we try to see God's love in all things and in all people although like everyone, we sometimes fail to see God's blessings right in front of us – in situations or in people. I have written on many occasions, God will meet our needs *because He loves us!* How he meets our needs is his to define.

We are a new creation, a work in process, a miracle in the making! One step at a time, my friends. One step at a time. □

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 shake my head in sadness at what the world has become but I also realize as a Christian I can't look down my nose at someone who is <fill in the blank> because then I devalue them. Instead I need to show them the light and help them come to know Christ and change their ways.

Being reminded of past failures, as painful as that may be, might actually serve as a reminder that we need to remain diligent by not repeating those past failures.

I am not the kind of person who says "I believe" yet my life shows no changes whatsoever. Although I still have a lot of room for improvement and growth, I can honestly admit my faults and wrongdoings with everyone.

We could say we are addicted to sin (we don't change because we enjoy our sin too much) which is why we need to be buried in Christ and rise as a new man. That's why we need a renewing of our minds in Christ.

I believe the holier a man is, the more he mourns over the unholiness that remains in him. (Charles Spurgeon)

You may see me struggle, but you will never see me quit.

There are some people who really don't want to change their lives, only their circumstances.

Again, a special thanks to my friend, Bob, whose generous gift of stamps made the mailing of this edition of *Into the Light* possible. Please keep him in your prayers of thanksgiving just as I do. He is a blessing to this ministry!
<Bob>

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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 worrying about tomorrow, that they might trust and follow God today, for today is what matters.
- For those who focus on all they have lost, that they will see their transformed lives a witness to others and an open door to God's blessings.
- For those try to live so as to impress others, that they find living as God calls them to live will restore relationships and create new, God-centered ones.
- For all with age-inappropriate attractions but have not acted on those attractions, that they are able to focus on the good that is in them – not the darkness.
- For those who feel the pain of separation because of their charges, that they will use this time to become the person they were created to be.
- For the families and friends of victims, that continue to do all they can to be part of the healing process.
- For family and friends of offenders, that they listen for the ways God would have them help bring healing to all involved.
- 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
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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.

Note: Some institutions have changed their policies regarding mail and no longer will accept address labels. Please let me know if that policy affects you.

AT DAY'S END

Is anybody happier
because YOU passed their way?
Does anyone remember
that you spoke to them today?

The day is almost over,
and its toiling time is through,
Is there anyone to utter
now a kindly word of YOU?

Can you say tonight in parting
with the day that's slipping fast ...
That you helped a single person
of the many that you passed?

Is a single heart rejoicing
over what you did or said?
Does the one whose hopes were fading
now with courage look ahead?

Did you waste the day or use it?
Was it well or sorely spent?
Did you leave a trail of kindness,
or a scar of discontent?

As you close your eyes in slumber,
will Our Creator quietly say ...
"You have earned one more tomorrow
by what you have done today"?

~By John Hall

Attending the Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association Summit this year was a blessing for a number of reasons. First, several of those in attendance have prison records yet now serve in some way to help others still in prison or those in reentry. What they and I feel when we walk into a room or share something is that our past offenses are not held against us – we are accepted and we are encouraged.

Second, I had the opportunity to share my thoughts how churches can better respond and minister to those of us with sex-related offenses. During my workshop, I felt humbled by the issues I know pastors/ministers face in communities not especially excited by our presence.

If we expect or hope to make a difference, it starts with the simple act of living as God calls us to live. And at the end of the day, sometimes that really blesses those we pass.

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A Little Humor. . .

Frank lived next door to the city crazy house. One day he was happily minding his own business when he heard some chanting coming from next door. "Twenty one, twenty one twenty one." After listening for a few more minutes, curiosity got the better of him and he strolled over to see if he could figure out what it was all about.

As he neared the house, he spotted a small hole in the wall near the door, so he bent down and looked inside. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a finger poked him right in the eye. As he fell back clutching his eye, he heard "twenty two, twenty two, twenty two."

