



Into the Light

All things are possible with God!
July-August 2023

Remember Me

By Bob Van Domelen

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord! (Psalm 25:7 ESV)

A little more than a year ago, I received a letter from a man who was nearing the end of his court-ordered sentence. He shared briefly about his concerns for getting a job or finding a place to live but added that those would eventually happen.

What concerned him most was returning to his hometown, walking down the street, and seeing people go out of their way to avoid contact with him. He imagined them saying, "There's that pervert. What's he doing here?"

For them, he would no longer be recognized as the man who used to work at the hardware store or the neighbor always willing to lend a hand when something needed doing. For them, the good things he had done before his arrest were forgotten, and all that he might have done in prison to change wouldn't make a difference because they didn't care.

He closed his letter by adding, "What difference does it make if I am an outcast? I might as well molest a child again and get sent back to prison. It's what everyone expects of me. Why should I disappoint them?" I answered his letter, but I don't know if it did any good.

I haven't heard from him since that letter. Still, I think of him often and pray he is doing well. Most of all, I pray that he is being encouraged by people who really care about him, people who remember him working at the hardware store, people who remember the many times he helped others out.

His letter was one of identity – how he saw himself and how he believed society would see him once he was released. This is a question I have thought about quite often over the years, and I am convinced that how I see myself is the most important choice.

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions

Without hesitation, I can drag up my past sins. I can see the harm that I brought to the lives of so many, the trust I destroyed in search of my choices. There was a time I believed I would never be able to move beyond those memories, and if I couldn't, then I was destined to be lost in my own 'mud and mire.' (Psalm 40)

David's prayer was my prayer for I knew that God was the only one who could put things as they should be. Yes, I had to accept the consequences of my actions, acknowledging that I had no control over what that might

look like, but my plea was that what I had done would not define my identity in God's eyes.

The change from my distorted image of myself to one that spoke of God's presence in my life didn't happen overnight. At some point during my time in prison, a chaplain shared a verse that remains one of my favorites.

¹¹ "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

If God had plans for me, I had to believe they would be better than any I might envision for myself. And they are!

according to your steadfast love remember me

Sometimes I think we all expect God to act as we think He *should* act, but we base those expectations on things we have experienced with others in our lives. If we push a best friend too hard, eventually we are minus a best friend. It's how we humans respond to one another.

But God says, "*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.*" (Hebrews 13:5 NIV) That sounds to me like a very serious commitment, one that I decided I could believe. One that gives my journey meaning and purpose.

Some translations use "according to your steadfast mercy." I don't believe that one can love without mercy; one cannot have mercy, real and complete, without love; and Jesus is the only one who lived among us capable of both. That brings me to how we see ourselves and how God sees us.

The man who wrote me feared his release because of how he believed others identified him – a pervert. This fear grew to the point where he felt he had no choice but to reoffend. It was what he believed others expected of him. I can understand how he came to believe that distortion. I just can't identify with it.

Here's a simple reality for you to consider. If a man with a past that included molesting entered a room filled with ministers, there would still be at least one minister who had strong reservations about this man being allowed in that group setting. This minister might speak words of welcome, but those words would be at odds with how he really felt.

Our job is not to convince the world that we have changed – someone will always deny that such a change has occurred. We are, however called to open our lives to God's mercy and love. When our choices are based on the examples Jesus provided, our lives will reflect change, not because we *tell* people we have changed but because we *have* changed.

²² After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' (Acts 13:22 NIV)

This is how God sees us. This is an example of the love and mercy shown to David, a love and mercy that changed David's identity from adulterer and murderer to 'a man after my own heart.'

for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!

Why would God extend love and mercy? Why would God overlook David's sins/crimes? Our sins/crimes? He does all of this because it is in His nature to do so. He wants you and me to spend eternity with Him in paradise.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?" ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³ Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:39-43 NIV)

Jesus did not say "I don't think I can do that because there are a lot of people who want me to send you to hell." He said what He did because the man recognized and admitted his failings. Most of all because he asked. And so I say, "Jesus, remember me!"

All things are possible with God!

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.

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 foremost, for our victims and for all victims, that each day for them is a new day, a day without fear, and a day of healing.
- For those who fear reentry, that their trust and faith in God's plan will remain their daily focus.
- For those who feel hopeless in the face of public condemnation, that they will always remember that God has forgiven them and calls them to be with Him for eternity.
- For those who have decided that it is their responsibility to repair the damage their choices have caused, that they come to believe that God will meet

the need of their victims and bring healing. They are called to pray God's blessings on them. God will respond.

- For chaplains, that they offer those with sex-related offenses the same hope of salvation as they offer anyone else.
- For victims, their families, and friends, that they experience the peace that surpasses all understanding.
- For families and friends, that they find a way to understand and deal with the anger they have without casting aside their loved one as beyond forgiveness.
- For Bob, that as he gets older and experiences issues seniors face, he will rely on God's love in all things, that he will continue to seek ways to serve.
- For this ministry, that Broken Yoke Ministries continues to be blessed with the financial support needed to meet basic expenses like this newsletter.
- (As Always) For those who are still abusing, that they will come to understand the devastation they bring on their victims and that they seek help for themselves.

Bits & Pieces

The following are taken from letters I have received. Some are meant to offer hope and encouragement to you while others call out for us to be in prayer.

"I know God won't give me more than I can handle, but sometimes I wish He didn't trust me so much." (Mother Teresa)

"Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny." (C S Lewis) I believe I am on such a journey because my life is in Him. Whatever He plans for me will be extraordinary!

Today I am almost 16 years removed from that day [of my arrest/sentencing], and I am a healthier, saner, and rational human being. I am determined to seek out how to continue being a righteous soul in the face of whatever adversity comes my way – as it surely will.

I am still adjusting to the outside world, but it is coming along real well. My PO is super, and I couldn't ask for anyone better. All I can say is God is blessing me far more than I could have ever realized.

I have no reason to complain. I have life, limb, and health, family and friends, and no one treats me like a sex offender or how one would expect an offender should be treated. A lot of my anxiety is based on lingering shame and wanting to just get back to normalcy – whatever that is going to look like going forward.

An old saying or proverb states, "You never know God is all you need until He is all you got." St Paul says, "I consider all losses to lose everything in order to gain Christ!" How far can we go with this? It is indeed a great challenge.

I think most people leave prison unchanged – they just discovered new ways to get away with what they do. Very few change for the better. Fortunately for me, I suppose, I don't want to be that same person I was when I was arrested by the time I get out, IF I get out.

I don't want to live my life by the dictates of sin – whether reveling in it or constantly battling it. Rather, I want to open myself to the miracles of God's love and guidance that happen every day. I've stopped struggling to meet God's standards so much as feeling His hand in everything and seeing His face in all those faces around me. I still repent every day, aware that I am not worthy to unstrap His sandal, but I think to repent is not to fight myself. Rather, I need to give myself to the One who loves me and calls me, healing me with His kindness.

So many of us are living as poor beggars, only because we as Christians are ignorant of our wealth. Just look at the contents of our heavenly bank account: adoption, acceptance, redemption, forgiveness, wisdom, inheritance, the seal of the Holy Spirit, life, grace, citizenship – every spiritual blessing. We have all the resources needed for living and I think that's something to shout and praise our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, about!

God doesn't concern Himself with the 'who' we were, but He gives us the light to never be in the dark again. God says a word, and we are changed. God takes our burdens away. I know I will have struggles and may never survive prison, but to die is to gain with Christ, and I will live for Him.

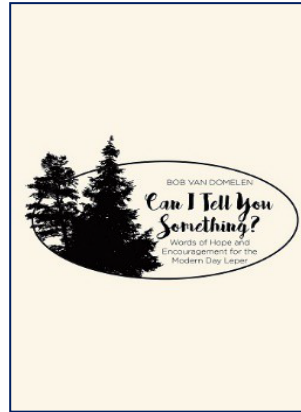
I truly thank you for the newsletters. I do find how you can relate to everything I am feeling and going through helpful. I am not on this journey alone. [Whenever we share our stories, we will always find others who identify with them, so we really are not as alone as we think. Bob]

I truly feel that my reentry into life in the world began on the day I was arrested.

Broken Yoke Ministries is a not for profit 501 (c)(3) corporation and operates solely on the contributions of people such as you.

All donations to this ministry are tax deductible and will be recognized. If you cannot support us financially, pray for us.

The bottom line is that we need YOU to help make these newsletters possible. So, pray about becoming a partner with this ministry.



Can I Tell You Something?

By
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Available for purchase on the internet at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and several other retail websites. Please help get the word out.

CMCA Correctional Ministries Summit | May 19-20, 2023 | Wheaton College, IL



"May the God of HOPE fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." - Romans 15:13

CMCA

Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association
2023

Things I Missed Sharing

The annual CMCA Summit is really a must for anyone who serves in a jail- or prison-related ministry. It is a time of being renewed, encouraged, and recognized for service to individuals needing hope and encouragement.

My workshop, *The Church and Registrants*, was not the first time I have shared with members of CMCA but it certainly was memorable for me. The months leading up to the actual day offered challenges in preparation and, I think, some challenges that I'd call spiritual warfare. I have come to expect problems and negative situations preceding any sharing I do on the topic of the Church and registrants (us).

I believe Satan wants us to believe there is no hope. Worse, I believe that Satan would have us believe that God no longer loves us. After all, didn't Jesus say, ⁶ "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. (Matthew 18:6)

It isn't difficult to believe that these verses were meant to place us outside any hope of salvation. But we can never forget that Jesus died for us. He died so that we

might be saved. Saying otherwise would be to stop reading God's word at verse six. And that, sadly, is what many people believe.

My workshop, as the title stated, was meant to offer the ideas of someone thankful for the cross Jesus bore. I spent seven months gathering information, developing a folder filled with handouts attendees could take home, and praying - lots of praying.

Past presentations have taught me that at some point I will step away from the podium and my notes and speak 'off the cuff', so to speak. I trust the Holy Spirit when that happens, especially when I return to my notes and wonder how what I just said fits with what I had prepared. It always does, though I don't remember what I actually said in those moments.

At the end of the workshop, attendees filled out an evaluation form, rating what they liked and where suggestions for improvement could be offered. I am not unlike anyone else in that I like to read compliments. I like knowing that seven months of preparation were appreciated. But now that I am getting older, I find that the important part of the evaluation was in the suggestions for improvement. So I will offer some of those with you here.

Recidivism Statistics

When social media continually points to a high percentage of those in reentry reoffending, they are believed because the average person expects a reporter to check and verify that percentage.

At least one attending the workshop said it might be helpful had I shared recidivism rates to help them eliminate false beliefs. A 9-year Bureau of Justice Statistics study (2005-2014) showed a 6.7% recidivism rate in the first year and a 2.6% rate in year nine.

Family of Offender Viewpoint

While I do include some comments about my own family's response to my crimes in workshops, it is certainly not an in-depth sharing. Though there are probably studies done on the effect of abuse of family members of a victim, I don't know of them.

Sharing what I think is an important point, outsiders believe that family members, especially spouses, *must have known* what was happening when in truth that is unlikely given the secretive nature of the offense. As a result, friends disappear as do offers of support from people who in other circumstances would call themselves good, Christian people.

Children of an offender are often bullied and accused by classmates of being willing participants somehow. Weekends for those families still intact might include visits to a prison where they spend an hour with their father or mother in a very controlled environment.

More Do's

One attendee was hoping to find more positive suggestions to help returning citizens. In the information folder everyone received, I included a trifold titled *Dining with Sinners*. In that document, I included the following:

- Setting aside rooms and times for support groups such as SA to meet at the church.
- If attendance at services is not possible, find individuals willing to do a Bible study with the registrant. A small group setting rather than one-

on-one would be the best as it would mirror the church community.

- Helping any in re-entry with their immediate needs upon release such as food, clothing, and housing to the extent you are able.
- Being involved in developing a better understanding of issues related to those with sex offenses. Open discussions with registrants will provide insights not otherwise known.
- Reaching out to other churches in the area to help them be Christ for registrants God might send their way.
- Most important, registrants need to feel part of something, and a faith community connects them with people and reinforces their relationship with God. Without this connection, it is all too easy to walk in isolation, an isolation that supported the choices they made that they should not have made.

A Repentant Heart

Although I try to share my heart regarding repentance when I do workshops, I know that some wonder if I am. A pastor once told me "Our restrictions will be in place until we are sure that there is evident repentance." Not sure why, but I failed to ask how he would recognize that, especially when it can be argued that many of us know how to manipulate others.

All I or you can do is live each day in surrender to God's mercy and steadfast love. Repentance is not measured in tears or a bowed head.

When I walk among the CMCA membership, I feel like I am one of them. I feel identified as someone, like them, who serves at the pleasure of God. Thank you, CMCA!

A Little Humor . . .

Just a few quick ones

A pair of cows were talking in the field. One says, "Have you heard about the mad cow disease that's going around?" "Yeah," the other cow says. "Makes me glad I'm a penguin."



Two Hollywood stars ran into each other at the door of their psychiatrist's office. "Hello, there," said one. "Are you coming or going?" "If I knew that," said the other, "I wouldn't be here."

A gawky lad from New England came to New York with his girl and took her to nearby Playland Amusement Park. They had heard a lot about the Tunnel of Love and were especially anxious to try it out. But when they got home, the kids expressed disappointment.

"Shucks," the boy said, "it was dark and damp and uncomfortable. Besides, we got soaking wet."

"How come?" asked a friend. "Did the boat leak?" The kid looked amazed. "There's a boat?"