



Into the Light

All things are possible with God!
March-April 2024

Are You Listening?

By Bob Van Domelen

“In my distress I called to the LORD, I called out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears.” (2 Samuel 22.7)

It was not all that long ago that I could sum up my prayers with *How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?* (Psalm 13.1 NIV). For many who struggle with sexual issues, the question is raised daily. What they want to know, what all who struggle with some major issue in their lives want to know is when will things get better? Will they change? *Can they change?*

Hindsight is a remarkable gift if used sparingly for it allows us to see much of our past lives like so many colors on a canvas. Sometimes the tensions in our pasts were unbelievable, despair far easier to understand than any form of hope. But we survived the moments if only on a day-to-day basis up to the present moment. The fact is, we survived, and the irony is that some of the situations outside of ourselves we face really haven't changed at all. But we have - if only for moments at a time.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me (Psalm 51.12). Another translation more simply states *Give me back the joy of your salvation* (New Jerusalem). Give it back? That must mean at some point or another I had joy in all its fullness. When? What did that feel like? Did someone take it while I wasn't looking, or did I give it away because I was bored with having it?

The truth of the matter is that joy is fleeting. We can spend a life searching to duplicate the feeling of joy without being able to say, "Yes! That's it!" In *The Joyful Christian*, C. S. Lewis wrote that joy is a desire turned not to itself but to its object, and that the object is God. He also wrote that by the time we recognize the joy we are feeling, all that remains are the traces of its presence. A fingerprint.

Yet I have noticed that so many of the good times or moments (loosely defined as the absence of chaos, frustration, or other negative qualities) all seem to have His fingerprint on them. Acknowledging His presence reminds me that God is completely aware of the struggles I face every day.

So often my prayers are for a freedom from this or that, a successful conclusion to a project, or the request for His presence in the lives of others. At a meeting, I asked those present what they would think if after offering their petitions

God was to say, "So?" Would that be callous of God, a contradiction to Christian beliefs? I am not saying that we should stop asking God, only that we look at things from God's position a bit.

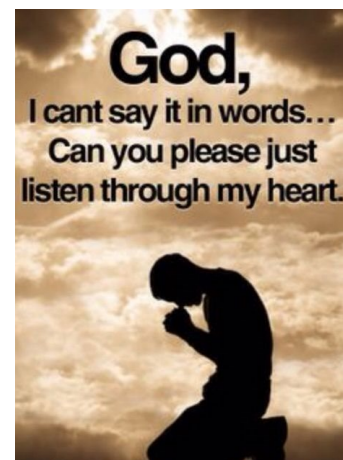
When Jesus appeared to the disciples on the shore of Tiberias (John 21), He asked Peter "Do you love me?" three times. Theologians draw the parallel of that scene by a charcoal fire to a similar fire in the courtyard the evening Peter denied knowing Jesus. It is, they offer, a healing of memories and a forgiveness Peter needed.

Could not Jesus have just as easily asked Peter, "Hey, I thought you were my strongest ally. Why did you deny me?" But He didn't. Instead, He asked, "Do you love me?" And again, He asked *three* times!

Something in my heart responds strongly to the thought that Jesus wants me to love Him. That's not conditional upon the outcome of so many of my prayers. It's supposed to be *first* in the order of things. And if my prayer requests are not answered in the fashion I had hoped, loving God is still the most important thing in my life.

I may have strayed some from the original focus of this article, but I don't think too much. The good times *are* times when I am linked with God's will. His presence means that I am more apt to make a choice that fits His plan, even if the choice fails to bring the relief for which I had hoped.

Peter loved Jesus, but he denied knowing Jesus, and he wept bitterly over his denial. Jesus simply asked, "Do you love me?" and then told him "Feed my sheep." We all struggle with something. We all ask God for freedom and victory. He *is* listening. Are you?



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 are in reentry and struggling to find housing, that their search will be successful.
- For those who wear the label 'leper', that they come to accept the image God has of them, an image that brings them peace.
- For those whose childhood included abuse at the hands of others, that acknowledging such abuse was not God's intent for their lives any more than the abuse they brought on others.
- For chaplains, that they help those who seek counsel to learn how to rest in God's love.
- For victims, their families, and friends, that the sin committed by one who has offended doesn't block the power of God's love and forgiveness.
- For families and friends, that they stand alongside their loved one, not pushing or pulling, but encouraging the change that must come.
- For Bob, that as he gets older and experiences issues all 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 well as being a resource for those so in need of that information.
- (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.

All things are possible with God!

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.

"The wind is kicking up outside, but it makes little difference. My eyes feel like they have a handful of sand in them anyway. All my life I have been self sufficient but now I find myself useless to a degree." I have been blessed to know this man who, following his time in prison, sought to help others with his ministry. Rev Manuel Corral (NM) passed away this past December.

It's much easier, I believe, to remain passive about the subject [of sexual struggles] than shining a light on it that can bring healing and victory.

But for us with faith, there is hope because God specializes in the impossible. We must be diligent to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, looking to the author and finisher of our faith and future. I don't know what the future holds, but I do know who holds the future.

It's so easy to take the wrong road (even in prison) when you take your eyes off Jesus and Father God.

Dr David Jeremiah once wrote, "God is not our heavenly bellhop waiting to do our bidding in difficult situations."

God didn't instantaneously relieve me of my addictive behaviors or miraculously heal me of my related problems. If he worked an 'instant' fix, I would likely have little or no appreciation for Jesus in my life, nor for the seriousness of my former problem behaviors. Instead, the pain and struggle of working to overcome my thought patterns and offending behaviors (years of work) led to a great appreciation of God.

I have realized that while in prison I spent a lot of time with God. I'm ashamed to say this, but here on the outside I get distracted a lot and realize I neglect God. It's a constant effort to make time for HIM! But I also know He never leaves me. And He will always remind me to come to Him.

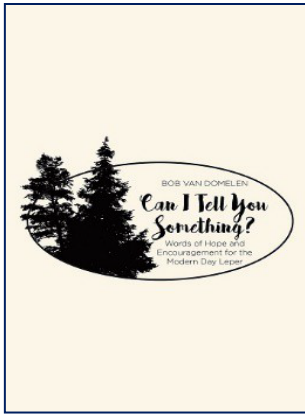
Another inmate lent me his copy of Can I Tell You Something, and I wept. I know that Mr Van Domelen was filled with the Spirit of God as he wrote it. I had a friend send me two copies of the book. I plan to highlight the heck out of one copy and read it along with my cellie.



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This column is based on letters I get. If you want to share, please consider contributing.



Can I Tell You Something?

By
Bob Van Domelen

Although I will not be teaching a workshop on registrant issues at this year's Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association Summit, I will be placing an ad in their program booklet inviting consideration for my book. I also plan to share the uniqueness of *Can I Tell You Something* with those I meet there.

In addition to Amazon and Barnes & Noble (as well as a number of smaller distributors), I will be sharing that I am offering the book for a donation to Broken Yoke Ministries. The ministry website (<https://brokenyoke.org>) has a donation option using PayPal, so all that is necessary is to provide the proper shipping address for whom the book will be gifted.

When you share the website with family and friends, they will also have access to a considerable amount of resource material free for downloading or reading while online. Please consider sharing this information. A book that isn't read doesn't have much reason for existence.

Knit Two, Purl Two

¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb."
Psalm 139:13 NIV

Several years ago, my doctor said, "Bob, there is a history of arthritis in your family. To help prevent your hands knotting up, you ought to try needlepoint." I looked at him and answered, "I don't think you are going to get me to do *that!*" "Why not," he responded, "Rosie Greer does it." Greer was an all-pro defensive tackle when I was in my youth, so I know the good doctor was trying to get me to see that 'real men' can needlepoint. I just wasn't buying it.

My wife and I decided to spend the following New Year's Eve at home, feeling a quiet night was a better idea. Making conversation, I brought up the needlepoint subject and asked about alternatives. "Knitting" was the answer, so out came some yarn my wife had, a pair of needles, and a desire to see if I could actually knit.

My first attempt at 'casting on' (starting a project) met with dismal results, so much so that my efforts fell just

short of being a joke. No, they *were* a joke! A call to my mother-in-law for advice, given after she finished laughing, got me started. The result of my first venture was a scarf that defied its definition of being a scarf, but over the years I got better. These days I call unwanted holes and noticeable errors artistic choices. That's not true, but it makes me feel better telling people that.

I did learn, however, that whenever I asked advice from the owner of a local yarn store, I was given lots of personal attention. My questions were initially met with "You knit?" with a look that said, "Are you serious? You're a guy!" It's nice to be affirmed.

As some of you know, I have learned to make socks, scarves, blankets, shawls (for our church's Shawl Ministry), and a few other items. But knitting also taught me other things along the way.

Stuff Happens

I am one of those people for whom the desired result (or even the process) is planned out so that things work as expected. Sometimes they don't. For example, I once knit a vest sweater for one of my sons – not once but three times. The first effort proved I didn't understand the pattern I was supposed to follow, so the product was a bit weird looking.

Determined to avoid the same result, I was more careful making my second effort and proud of myself because that sweater *looked* like a sweater. I was caught up short, however, when I realized this sweater I made would have fit a Green Bay Packer wearing shoulder pads and still looking too big. My choice of yarn was not only wrong but disastrous. Correcting that, my third attempt was closer to what I had envisioned.

Knitting and Prayer

When I was inside, most days included bible study (alone or with others). Taking walks during rec, I let my mind be open to God as I looked beyond the barbed wire fences. I still try to make time each day for these encounters, but if I am honest, I let myself get busier than I should. That's why knitting helps.

Sitting with yarn to my right, the pattern on my left, I work the needles and when the repeats become comfortable, I pray for the person who will receive what I am working to finish. Sometimes, I simply try to be quiet for a change so that I am open to what God wants me to hear in *my* heart.

You Knit Me

Even when I have a finished item in hand, I find myself wondering what changes might make it even better. A different color? A better stitch pattern? But I also see the one or two "oops" areas where I used the wrong stitch or miscounted. I'm the only one who really sees those errors, because I know they are there.

I can tell you from experience that there is an intimacy in knitting. Every stitch is touched, every stitch is seen connecting to another, and it is one single string of yarn. When I read "you knit me together in my mother's womb," David was saying God touched every part of his body's construction inside his mother's womb. Things don't get more intimate than that.

But if I am created in God's image and likeness, doesn't that mean I should be a lot better than I am? And what of the mess I made of things, the harm I brought so

many by my choices? Just thinking about this reminds me of what I felt after my failed efforts with my son's sweater.

Satan wants me to feel this way, to believe that I have destroyed what God intended and that I am no longer His. I have listened to those lies in the past and will not believe them for they are not words of life but of death.

For years, I have found the words of a 17th century monk, Brother Lawrence, very encouraging – especially as he describes his relationship with God.

My King is full of mercy and goodness. Far from chastising me, He embraces me with love. He makes me eat at His table. He serves me with His own hands and gives me the key to His treasures. He converses and delights Himself with me incessantly, in a thousand and a thousand ways. And He treats me in all respects as His favorite.

The same God who knit Brother Lawrence in his mother's womb, knit me. Knit you!



A Little Humor . . .

Just a few quick ones

A bear walks into a restaurant and says, "I want a grilled . . . cheese." The waiter asks, "Why the big pause?" The bear replies, "I don't know. I was born with them."

How do you make a tissue dance?
You put a little boogie in it.

I bought the world's worst thesaurus yesterday.
Not only is it terrible, it's terrible.

I couldn't believe that the highway department called my dad a thief. But when I got home, all the signs were there.

Once my dog ate all the Scrabble tiles. For days he kept leaving little messages around the house.

I passed a sign that read "falling rocks". So, I gave it a try, and no, it doesn't.

Why don't elephants use computers?
Because they're afraid of the mouse!

Why don't cows ever have money? Farmers always seem to milk them dry.



Psalm 139

O LORD, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.

²You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.

³You see me when I travel
and when I rest at home.
You know everything I do.

⁴You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, LORD.

⁵You go before me and follow me.
You place your hand of blessing on my head.

⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand!

¹⁷How precious are your thoughts about me,
O God.

They cannot be numbered!

¹⁸I can't even count them;
they outnumber the grains of sand!
And when I wake up, you are still with me!

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴Point out anything in me that offends you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

I AM
fearfully
AND
wonderfully
MADE.
PSALM 139:14