



# Into the Light

All things are possible with God!  
May-June 2024

## Testing, Testing

By Bob Van Domelen

*Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for your love is ever before me, and I walk constantly in your truth. I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. (Psalm 26.2-5)*

Most of us have at least one memory of someone stepping up to a microphone and, after blowing vigorously at it several times, saying, “Testing, testing.” The result often was an unexpected, ear-piercing screech of feedback, the one testing the microphone leaping back as though attacked by the sound. We might have thought the experience a nuisance, but it did validate the notion that something might not be right.

Not long ago, an inmate wrote that this newsletter was sounding more like one persecuting him than one supporting him. His complaint confused me, and I wondered what it meant to have gone over to “the other side.” Wasn’t the ‘other’ side where I wanted to be, a man who would not consider abusing a child? Perhaps he was suggesting that I felt he only got what he had coming, but I just don’t believe that to be a valid statement – at least as far as I was concerned.

The other morning, the phrase *Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind* almost jumped at me. Immediately I asked myself, “Do I really ask God to do this in my life?”

Part of me was afraid of God bringing to light something I had hidden even from myself. Part of me wondered if I really wanted more testing in my life or more need of surrendering my will to the will of God. And part of me remembered how much I had once believed God’s love for me depended on what I did for Him, and for a moment I was afraid that I would not measure up. I was afraid He would turn His back on me.

Then I thought of the man’s letter, and I considered another point. For every person who molests (and in some ways for every *sinner*), the consequence of abuse affects him/her on at least three levels: living in the face of victim and societal response, in the face of the person he is and is becoming, and in the face of the wounded child within himself.

At the very least, this is a difficult balancing act to maintain, and I doubt that anyone can make the three levels be equal. There is a need, no, a responsibility to become accountable at each level, and some might feel that their own abuse as children explains and maybe even

justifies the offenses committed. But this can never be.

*Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind.* The child in me looks up, wondering who is saying those words. Not everything was as it should have been while I was growing up, but I cannot say that I lived in terror as some did. But things happened. Some I chose and some were chosen for me. Even then, I knew when something was good and when it wasn’t regardless of how the behavior was chosen. Even then, I knew God reached into my heart.

*I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked.* If I wanted a list of the ways in which I fell short as a young man and then as an adult who went on to abuse, this short one might do. I sat with deceitful men and felt most comfortable with others like me, hypocrites who showed one face to the respectable world and another when in the shadows of lust.

In adult theaters and bookstores, I found my assembly of evildoers, places where the wicked gathered and drank their fill of the poison that clogged their moral veins and blurred their vision of righteousness. I wanted to say, “I’m just looking around. I won’t be staying, and I certainly not interested in the things that attract you.” But I’m sure some of those other men were saying the same as they looked at me. The one thing we all knew was that we would not tell.

*Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind.* When it counted, I failed every test. The downward spiral of my desires could only have the result it did. Whether they wanted it or not, others were harmed: my family, my victims, and those who had placed their trust in me. Accountability was just a word, the main goal in life being an escape from detection.

If you are keeping track, we have covered two of the three levels, and I have been covering them in reverse order. Living in the face of victim and societal response is something that is held over me, something over which I don’t have much control. The world thinks in terms of punishment and protection—punishment for offenders and protection for all children from the likes of me. They set the rules, and the rules they set don’t necessarily take my needs into account.

If I sometimes write in a manner that seems to agree with the actions of society, actions based on rules which provide little in the way of practical healing for offenders, it is because all the shouting in the world will not convince



society to seek more balance. I am not agreeing with those who threaten the lives of molesters released again into society, nor do I agree with prison sentences that cover a lifetime and end in civil commitment.

There is only one manner of living for the man or woman who has been a sex offender, one form of accountability which gives balance to the other two levels. I believe that a person must be accountable first and foremost to God, daily asking God to test and try me, examining heart and mind. This accountability is as valid for those in prison as it is for those who have been released.

I cannot sit with deceitful men and women, because my life must be transparent and free of hypocrisy. Adult bookstores and theaters promote the very darkness I can no longer enter. My speech must reflect the state of my heart. Psalm 139:24 says, "See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." In other words, lead me in *Your* ways, O Lord.

Why is it that we fear having our "offensive way" exposed if it is something that makes life less than it could be? I am no paragon of virtue, no walking saint free of sin, yet there are moments when I "know because I know" that I need to grieve those parts of me that are not of God.

At the same time, as accountability with God increases, He opens my memory to my childhood, fixing what was broken, and if not fixing it, then giving me an understanding of what happened so that I am not crippled by the memory.

Finally, as accountability with God increases, I can deal with the world and with people to whom I must be accountable, knowing that my freedom really does depend in large part on how honest I am with myself and with God. The man the world sees in me must "walk the talk," for the talk is God's love.

"Testing. . . testing," was the voice I heard. "Here I am, Lord," I answered. "What do you want to know?"

*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 in treatment, that they may safely experience accountability as well as freedom from secrets that bind them.
- For those in depression, that they find balance in their lives, no matter where they are, and the faith

to believe "that we know that for those who love God all things work together for good."

- For those who are willing to support, that their boundaries for accountability are lovingly offered, free of judgementalism.
- For the church, that the need for protection is matched with a willingness to encourage.
- For those suffering the effects of abuse, that they will find the support they need to reject the idea that they are forever damaged.
- For our communities, that someday soon they will see healing and change as critical for all in need.
- 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.

## 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 job hunt [on the outside] is rough. I have applied for 121 different positions and have not landed anything yet. I have applied for a wide range of jobs from warehouse, customer service, receptionist, office assistant, office administration. I am going to keep working at it. God has a plan, and I am sure a job that I am meant to have will appear in the future.

*Being in the free world for over a year, I have been attending SAA meetings and will be picking up my 9-month chip next month. The chips won't keep you sexually sober but do mark your progress. I enjoy the meetings and have been introduced to a group of guys who know what I am talking about. That's something I've never experienced. I was in treatment in prison and am pro-treatment. It was a starting point for me that I accepted I had a problem and needed help.*

I am in a treatment group, and I really like it. While it is a treatment group, it feels more like a support group. The facilitator is awesome, and I look forward to going to it each week.

*Thanks for letting us know that God still loves us and will still use us for His glory if we let Him. I know I am not the same person I was the day I was arrested and am a better person today. Don't get me wrong, I still have a long way to go and must still pay for my actions that have placed me where I am.*

My cellie and I are reading a chapter each night of your book, *Can I Tell You Something*. We are highlighting passages in each chapter that stand out, enlighten, and encourage us. And to be honest, sections of each paragraph on every page are highlighted.

*My main problem now is that God wants my core. He has been getting the bad stuff, now He wants the good stuff. I'm scared of giving that to God. I know, I said if God wants it, then God gets it, although that is easier said than done. I think that this was what He was after in the beginning.*

One good development here has been the formation of a 'transition church' that is growing – some 70+ attending at last count including former inmates and their spouses. Many are former sex offenders not allowed to attend 'regular' churches by parole/probation officers. (This sounds like an excellent solution! – Ed.)



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

## Earthen Vessels

By Bob Van Domelen

Sometimes we pick up the bible and open it much like we might a dictionary, although these days we might search Google, the internet, computers and cell phones for that answer. We might look for a word – either because we want to check its spelling or because we heard or read that word without knowing what it meant.

When some use the bible this way, they get frustrated because the word 'alcoholism', for example, is not found in any of the scriptures. If God's Word doesn't include 'alcoholism' they feel the choice is theirs as to how to deal with their drinking, especially on a moral level.

Recently my morning readings included the fourth chapter of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. As I read the verses (7-11), I found it very personal, very much what all of us with sex-related offenses need to hear. Though the words apply to *all* people, I write this column for you *and* for me because of our shared background, our shared need for hope and encouragement.

***<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.***

Years ago, I remember wondering what the treasure was and why it was stored in jars of clay or earthen vessels. At that time, it was explained to me that the treasure was the Word of God, a message of love offered to all open to receive it. Once that connection was made, I

realized that I was the jar of clay, the earthen vessel constantly being molded by the hands of the Divine Potter. I also realized that I am a fragile vessel, capable of developing cracks that over time only the Potter could love.

Being the fragile vessel holding the treasure of God's word, I understand that the contents of that word within me originate from the very heart of God. We are all blessed with God's love, grace, mercy, and wisdom far beyond our ability to understand yet available to us to the extent we are open to those gifts.

Sometimes, we might feel that all those blessings are meant for other people who have not sinned in the manner we have sinned. But trust me, those blessings are meant for us as well.

***<sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair***

Once our sins come to light and are exposed in our communities and churches, they end up in the courts where judgment is passed, and retribution is assigned. Then those sins are again publicly denounced in the media.

I remember that after my arrest when I found my name in the newspaper, I felt *everyone* knew what I had done. Worse, I saw my family unfairly exposed to criticism and condemnation for my crimes. To at least some extent, those feelings are still with me today, 39 years after my arrest, although I no longer feel crushed by them.

Most of you who have corresponded with me have asked the same question. "Why did I do that?" I believe that the question motivates us all to be transparent, to be honest, and to trust God to bring truth to the surface. While we might be tempted to despair over how the world views us, the drive to change can overpower those feelings.

***<sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.***

Some of you might argue that you *have* been abandoned. You get no letters, no visits, and your attempts to communicate with family and friends are met by "Letter Refused" or calls rejected. Because of public media, you also cannot help but know of the refusal of most communities restricting or denying your return, churches rejecting you as part of their faith communities, and employers unwilling to give a second chance by hiring you. So, what's left?

My response is that there *are* people praying for you and me, people hoping that God's mercy and love will continue the healing process we seek and the change we long for. These people don't take out ads in the paper announcing their willingness to be supportive, but they are still there.

My experience has been that they pop up in unexpected ways and sometimes I don't even know it until the actual moment has passed. They are God's people, and they count you and me as fellow travelers on life's journey. I will admit, however, that such a notion takes faith to accept because the protests of the world are so loud and consistent.

***<sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.***



The verse seems to be a bit of a puzzle because it proclaims that we carry both the death *and* the life of Jesus with us – not as a sign we wear around our neck but as a living, breathing relationship that proclaims the mystery of salvation.

And guess what? No prison can refuse or eliminate that relationship. No guard can take it from you or claim it is not on your property list. No amount of rejection from *anyone* can diminish the power of the love of Christ that resides within you. It's yours because Jesus made it so.

***<sup>11</sup> For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.***

To the extent that you are willing to accept this truth, you are a walking miracle. You have chosen to bow your head in submission to God's hand at work in your life. You have allowed your dark places to be flooded with His light – not to shame you but to show you by comparison how Satan's darkness holds no joy, no hope for eternity.

You are a walking miracle because you submit to the discipline of others, sometimes people who do not share your hope for change but demand what they do because a text manual tells them to demand it. You are a walking miracle because your *"faith is confidence in what [you] hope for and assurance about what [you] do not see."* Granted, there are far too many days when our faith is tested and our hopes feel like pipe dreams, but I can assure you that God takes great joy in our expression of faith.

***<sup>12</sup> So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.***

Of the verses I have shared, this is perhaps the most difficult because it is easy to see death in *us* to the darkness in which we once lived while recognizing life as perhaps we would like it to be at work in *others*. Maybe we think "Why must we die while others get to live?"

The process of death to sin in our daily lives, however, is our witness to others. Some will see it, others won't. But for those who have been willing to watch the whole process – our arrest, our confinement, and our struggle toward reentry – there will be an opportunity to see the power of God at work in and through us. This witness gives the potential of God-centered life to their own lives.

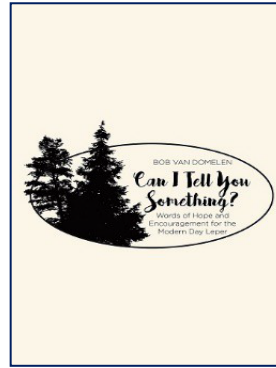
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<sup>1</sup> I waited patiently for the Lord;  
he turned to me and heard my cry.

<sup>2</sup> He lifted me out of the slimy pit,  
out of the mud and mire;  
he set my feet on a rock  
and gave me a firm place to stand.

<sup>3</sup> He put a new song in my mouth,  
a hymn of praise to our God.  
Many will see and fear the Lord  
and put their trust in him.  
(Psalm 40.1-3)

***All things are possible with God!***



# Can I Tell You Something?

By  
Bob Van Domelen

I realize you have been seeing this ad for some time, but it will continue to appear in this newsletter as a reminder that the book is available and worth considering. Some of you might be seeing *Into the Light* for the first time and, therefore, this ad for the first time. Please spread the word!

## A Little Humor . . .

*Just a few quick ones*



A cruise ship passes by a remote island, and all the passengers see a bearded man running around and waving his arms wildly. "Captain," one passenger asks, "who is that man over there?" "I have no idea," the captain says, "but he goes nuts every year when we pass him."

A guy goes door to door looking for work. One homeowner hands him a brush and a can of paint and offers him \$150 to paint his porch. A few hours later, the guy comes back to the homeowner and says, "I'm finished. But you should know that your car's a Ferrari, not a Porsche."

Today at the bank, an old lady asked me to help check her balance. So I pushed her over.

The other day, my wife asked me to pass her lipstick, but I accidentally passed her a glue stick. She still isn't talking to me.

God, we come before you  
and thank you for your presence with us.  
You promise to never leave us or forsake us.  
Even on days that are long  
and leave us feeling weary and empty,  
we know that you have not left us.

On the days when our circumstances have consumed us,  
you hold us.