



Into the Light

All things are possible with God!
July-August 2024

I Used to Sound Like Eeyore (In Two Parts)

By Bob Van Domelen

Part One (Written in 1993)

Alan Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* contains more than one memorable character. Christopher Robin, Pooh, Piglet, and Tigger literally leap off the pages during story-telling time. For me, there is one character who not only comes to mind more than the rest, but a large, stuffed version of him sits on a shelf above my computer. The character is Eeyore.

Most of the time, his character in the stories was an example of isolation and low self-esteem. Most little kids would say "Eeyore is always so sad."

Even now, I can hear his deep, drawling voice as he speaks to no one in particular yet to everyone in general, "Nobody likes me; everybody hates me." In one of the stories, Christopher Robin's "Good morning, Eeyore" is met with Eeyore responding, "If it is a good morning, which I doubt."

So what has Eeyore to do with my struggles or those of anyone who struggles with darkness?

During a phone conversation with a friend, I began to consider how I often prayed years ago. I would say "Dear Lord, I hate where I'm at. Help me! No one understands my problems or even wants to try."

God answered those prayers, but I was too steeped in the muck and mire of my own inner turmoil to acknowledge that He did. I looked at His gifts with eyes that almost spoke "Are you sure You can't do better?" My attitude, like Eeyore's, was born out of my inability to see past the negative world I envisioned was mine.

In some ways, I am reminded of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a portrait sitting in the attic which aged while its subject, Dorian Gray, never did. My portrait was filled with hurts, angers, and a host of other blemishes, each anchoring me within the confines of a rigid, yet ugly frame. Ironically, instead of throwing that canvas out, it was all too easy to grow accustomed to it. When that happened, everything I felt, said, or did, was filtered through a soul that saw darkness rather than light.

So where did my Eeyore go? Well, he sits on a shelf above my computer, remember? He sits there not as a symbol of who I am today but of the person I once was. His saddened eyes help me remember lots of things, not the least of which is how much I wanted to be loved but

didn't know how to accept love when it was offered.

A friend of mine trusts me when I start to ramble, because he knows that sooner or later an idea will come out of me that makes sense. Wading among images I have of Eeyore and of portraits sitting in the attic, I concluded that for things to change for any of us, we must start with a fresh canvas.

Because I'm no more artistic than most people, the big question becomes "What am I supposed to draw?"

The answer can only be found when I try to see myself as God sees me—not only as He sees me now but also as He saw me in the past as well as how He'll see me in the future. This is where I let the brushes flow in broad, sweepingly positive motions. Lots of bright, "I want to smile from the inside-out" colors mixed with deep, "I am loved and contented, yet waiting" tones.

Filling every other part of the canvas is the presence of God's love. It is an ever-changing portrait that keeps getting better and better, not a collector's edition destined to sit in some gallery. It changes because I change, and colors I've never seen take their place as I make space available on the canvas. There can be nothing new until I am ready to give up the old.

There are times I still behave like Eeyore, but those are becoming less frequent. There are still times when I sound like my stuffed friend, but with God's grace and love, the canvas I call my life is getting better every day.

Part Two (Written in 2024)

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139.13)

When I wrote Part One, I was focusing my attention on the issue of self-image. Most people will admit that their self-image could use a positive boost every now and then, but not everyone has to deal with a criminal record, especially for offenses considered vile and disgusting. Many would consider the image of Eeyore not only appropriate but also deserved. "Nobody loves me; everybody hates me."

In 1993, sex offender registries and civil commitment for SVPs were a year away from being officially established with government approval. Residency

restrictions, though practiced in communities, had not yet gained the attention they have today. In a few short years, it seemed the big question was “How do we protect our kids from those sex offenders?”

Of course, community concerns could only focus on those who had been caught and were serving time or those in reentry. Sentences got longer; parole was not option for sex offenders; and release from prison included increased restrictions as part of probation. Employment, housing, and support (especially from churches) became more difficult to find for anyone with a prison record, but much more so for anyone labeled a sex offender.

I have to tell you that I am getting depressed just putting these things on paper, but it is a reality that must be faced. While changes may be coming, you and I cannot demand when or how they will happen. The truth is, we get to live inside whatever framework others decide. And herein lies the reason for this two-part article.

Everything I shared in the first part sharing how I have set aside Eeyore as a character representing life as I see it or life as I live it was true. But every now and then I can hear Eeyore’s “Nobody loves me; everybody hates me.” And when that happens, I know I must return to the basics.

For you formed my inward parts

The very core of my being, the place that makes me who I am, was formed before I came into being by God. He had a plan and purpose for you, for me, and it is unique. None of us is the same, and each of us bears God’s presence because we are His heirs (Romans 8:17).

you knitted me together in my mother’s womb

As we grew older, we might have come to feel alone and separated from those meant to love us (“Nobody likes me; everybody hates me”), but we didn’t begin life that way. We were intimately connected to our mothers as we grew in her womb. We heard every heartbeat, felt every joy, and experienced every sadness.

For some of us, the love that brought us into being became harder to find and more difficult to feel as we grew. That was not God’s intent, not the life He designed for us. But it happened. And in the darkest times that followed my arrest, I felt God’s presence, and I felt it again and again in the presence of others who encouraged me to see myself as God saw me. One day, I believed them.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made

Please don’t misunderstand. I haven’t set aside my past as though it didn’t exist. I pray daily for those harmed by my choices, and I try to honor them by living within appropriate boundaries. Most of all, I do praise God for in Him I was fearfully and wonderfully made.

This belief makes it possible for me to recognize the contempt society might always have for me without surrendering the man I have come to be *and* the man I am yet to become. God willing, the same is true for you.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

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 reentry, that they trust that God’s plan will be realized but in His time.
- For those cut off from family and friends, that they are able to continue their prayers for restoration and healing, prayers supported by the choices they make each day.
- For those who are having difficulties because of the actions of their loved one, that they are reminded of Christ’s death on the cross, an atonement for ALL who have sinned.
- For the church, that they look on one another as works in progress, examples of God’s mercy.
- For those who have been both victim and offender, they find a way to accept healing for themselves and pray for the healing of their victims.
- For society, that it can one day look for solutions that offer support for victims and offenders, being just and understanding of how hard this can be.
- 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.

(Shared because it is a question often raised or thought) Somebody is going to explain to me what it means in the Bible when it says, “God provides all a believer needs.” Since He comes nowhere near providing all I need in dealing with the Parole Board, what am I doing wrong that keeps me from being a believer?

I don't go to church services for two reasons. First, I would have to miss a day of work, and second, the outside preachers don't really preach anything.

Not long ago, I was standing outside by the fence and a little bird landed on my pantleg and stayed for a bit before flying away. Very different.

Funny how positive change in our correctional system is seen as clamping down with more austere measures, when those actions do much harm.

When I first started reading *Into the Light* 20 years ago (when I was a babe in Christ), I felt persecuted and/or convicted because I had failed to realize that I needed to turn all my guilt over to God as He had forgiven me. So, when I read certain articles, I took them to heart and was convicted in my heart with things I failed to realize, things I still held onto.

Your newsletter is a real blessing to me. I am praying that I will be able to give back to all the prison ministries who have been there for me, to pay it forward to the next individuals.

I started reading your book over the weekend and will pass it on to someone else once I am finished. It will undoubtedly make the rounds and be read by many.

I know God is there, but I am in such a deep depression that I can't get out. I can't take it anymore. I have been in prison for so long I lost everything. I thought I made friends in here, but they were not friends.

It is good that some churches are reaching out to us all in prison. I have seen men in here who have no one. They wait for mail time or visits, but none come. Their hearts are broken, and they feel no one cares. I try to pray for them.

Even as an outlaw biker and a drug dealer, I have never seen those in authority as the enemy. When I came to prison, I never saw the staff in that light either. God has blessed me with the ability to judge individuals by their actions and not by their career or race. The staff never put me in prison. I did!

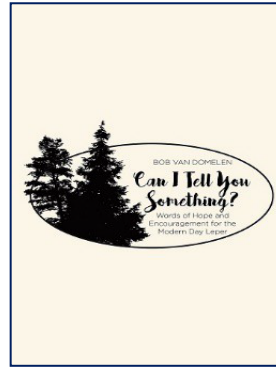


Write Bob at:

Bob Van Domelen
Broken Yoke Ministries
PO Box 5824
De Pere, WI 54115-5824

Bits & Pieces is based on letters I get. If you want to share, please consider contributing.

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Can I Tell You Something?

By
Bob Van Domelen

I recently received a letter from an inmate requesting a second copy of the book. He shared that everyone on his unit had read his copy, and the book came back to him somewhat worse for the wear. It was a request I was happy to fulfill.

Some supporters of this ministry have made donations for the purpose of helping me send free copies to those requesting one, so if you are interested, just write and share the mailing address I will need to use.

A Letter of Hope

I received the following letter recently and, with the writer's permission, wanted to share it with you. I have removed some information (names/cities) because similar stories are happening, and I am hoping that you will see yourself as one of them.

Good morning, Bob!

I hope this email finds you well. While the last four months have been wonderful, they have come with their struggles. I have applied to 340 different jobs, and had a few offers pulled after the background check, despite telling them everything before being offered the job.

There has been family drama with my sister not being ready for me to meet my nieces and nephew. The drama was not caused by me. It was also disappointing when my agent denied my request to attend a Bible study.

Through it all I kept praying and telling myself that God has a plan and in His time that plan will be revealed. My friend and I would always talk about God's plan. Every time there was a setback or bad news, we would reference God's plan and how His timing is perfect.

God's timing is perfect, and he has started to reveal His plan this week. About a month ago I applied for a job with a manufacturing company. On Monday, I had a phone interview; Wednesday an in-person interview; Thursday, they reached out to my agent; and Friday, they offered me the job. I started on May 13. Some of the jobs I was applying for and the couple that I was offered were dead end stop gap jobs that I would not even be able to survive off what I would be paid. This is a job that has growth potential, and I will earn enough money to eventually get my own apartment.

If that was not enough, this week my friend got

approved as a chaperone, and that has started to pave the way for me to attend church. I have a meeting with the Pastor at an area church, and once I have this meeting, my agent said he will approve my attending church with my chaperone.

God had more blessings to give me this week. My sister called and she is ready for me to be part of her family. She invited me to come with my parents to their house. She and her husband met with my agent the other day, so I am just waiting for approval for me to go. Another part of God's plan and timing. I am so happy that my sister is ready for me to be part of her family.

It has been a week of blessings. When you trust in the Lord and put your faith in Him, His plan will be revealed. We just need to remember that things are done in His time, not our own.

I just wanted to share this with you. Tim.

A Little Humor . . .

Just a few quick ones

There was a king once who was 12 inches tall. Terrible king, great ruler.

It's not the best ceiling I've ever seen, but it's up there.

A female dog gave birth at the side of the road. A short time later a police officer stopped by and gave her a ticket for littering.

Why do scuba divers fall backwards into the water? If they fell forwards, they'd fall into the boat.

A skeleton walks into a bar, orders a beer and a mop.

Two penguins walk into a bar, which is funny, because the second one should have seen it.

Loving Father, I don't understand how this can be, but praise Your wonderful name that You are with me every step of the way, every moment of my day. I thank You, in Jesus' name, AMEN.

GOOD THOUGHTS:

- To the world you might be one person, but to one person you might be the world.
- Going to church does not make you a Christian any more than going to McDonald's makes you a hamburger.
- Real friends are those who, when you feel you've made a fool of yourself, don't feel you've done a permanent job.
- A coincidence is when God performs a miracle, and decides to remain anonymous.
- Sometimes the majority only means that all the fools are on the same side.
- I don't have to attend every argument I'm invited to.
- Lead your life so you won't be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.
- Life is 10% of what happens to you, and 90% of how you respond to it.
- Did it ever occur to you that nothing occurs to God?
- Life is like an onion; you peel off one layer at a time and sometimes you weep.
- Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself.
- There are two things I've learned: There is a God. And, I'm not Him.
- Following the path of least resistance is what makes rivers and men crooked.
- Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace.
- When it comes time to die...make sure all you have to do is die.
- God answers knee mail.

