



Into the Light

All things are possible with God!
September-October 2024

Who Do You Say You Are?

By Bob Van Domelen

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “**Who do people say the Son of Man is?**” ¹⁴ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ “But what about you?” he asked. “**Who do you say I am?**” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:13-16 NIV)

Sometimes I imagine myself following Jesus from town to town, listening to what he shared, astonished at the miracles he worked, yet perhaps a bit unsure of how I was supposed to feel about him.

In my mind, one day Jesus stopped, turned to those of us following and asked the question, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” A few of the others among us quickly shared what they had heard. Me? I still really wasn’t sure, yet I knew it was right for me to be with him.

Then Jesus asked, “Who do *you* say I am?” and it seemed as though he was looking directly at me. In that moment, I wanted to close my eyes, hoping he would turn his gaze from me to someone else. With a sigh of relief, I heard Peter’s answer, and it felt right. It felt like the truth.

The question, however, is real. It is meant to be answered. Most importantly, the question itself demands we say what we believe by committing our heart to the one who loves us. *You, Jesus, are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*

Thinking about what I have just written, I am struck with the idea that in altering the questions, you and I might face a similar challenge. Altered, the questions would now read “Who do people say **you** are,” and “Who do **you** say you are?” Let’s start with the first one.

“Who do people say **you** are?”

My first response was to consider those who probably didn’t know me but had heard about what I had done or that I had spent time in prison. ‘Pervert’ and ‘child molester’ might be two of the more common names they would assign to me.

In county jail, I heard two new descriptive terms: ‘tree jumper’ and ‘chomo’. Strangely, only a few had the courage to say those words to my face – but from the way they looked at me, I knew that they wanted to do so. Actions, as we know, speak louder than words, and we have only to look at the world in which we live to know that is true.

Residency restrictions tell me I am not wanted in certain neighborhoods or, in some cases, in most neighborhoods. Laws tell me that child-protected areas

are off limits, and some jobs are out of reach because of my past, because of how others see me. I recently learned that hiring someone on the registry might, according to OSHA, create an unsafe or unhealthy work environment for others which would justify firing the individual.

On a more personal level, the absence of invitations to family events tells me that even family and friends see me differently than they had before my arrest.

I am, however, fortunate to be allowed to attend church. There are restrictions implied and understood as conditions for my attendance, but I don’t attend church to prove something to others. I attend so that I can worship and give praise to the Lord and Master of my life. Still, I try to do nothing that would give others a reason to refuse my presence.

The list goes on and on but at some point, I have made the decision that I cannot change how or what others think of me.

“Who do **you** say you are?”

It is far easier to answer the first question, even if our answers are based on what we *think* rather than what we *know*, but this one is a very important question. I am who I am even if others have a different opinion.

Obviously, I can’t answer the question for you, so I will answer for myself to the extent I am able. Then I will offer some thoughts for you to consider.

Above all things, I know that I am a child of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and blessed with the presence of the Holy Spirit. That truth does not set me above anyone else. It is, however, at the core of who I am today and at the core of who I hope to be tomorrow.

I am a man whose past includes molesting boys, being arrested, and spending time in prison because of those actions. That is a part of my history I can never deny or cause to disappear, so if asked, I respond, “Yes, I did those things. It is a matter of public record for anyone to see.” Why lie?

Because of my past, I have been assigned the label ‘sex offender’ or in a less offensive way ‘registrant’. Of the two words, only registrant is currently accurate because I am required to register with the state.

The other term, ‘sex offender’, is not accurate because I have not reoffended in 39 years. In other words, what I did back then was what I did. It is not who I am today. I do register, and that makes me a registrant. I do not sexually assault anyone, so I am not a sex offender, but I should make something clear to avoid having you think I am not aware of the dangers of such thinking.

As example, I smoked two and a half packs of cigarettes a day from my early twenties to the age of 39 when I realized I had put my habit above the basic needs of my family. I didn't want to quit, but I quit.

Today, the smell of cigarette smoke is something I avoid, yet every now and then, the memory of having a cigarette after a good meal is not unappealing. My response to the invitation (or temptation) to have a smoke is a firm no. The temptation doesn't happen often, but it happens.

Maybe there will come a day when there are no temptations, but until that happens, I must remember that I have a choice. It's part of free will.

Temptations coming from my past don't happen often. As a matter of fact, they are rare. I could tell you that I have no more temptation, but that would be pride speaking, not a man recognizing the need for vigilance.

I have learned that how I label myself makes a huge difference in how I respond to temptation. If I say, "I am a molester", the label itself hints that molesting is what I do, or worse, what I want to do. If I say, "I am a man who seeks Jesus and is being tempted," I am more likely than not to reject the temptation. The closer I am in relationship with Jesus, the stronger I am in times of temptation – any temptation.

***You, God, know my folly;
my guilt is not hidden from you.***

(Psalm 69.5)

Having already shared most of the first question responses you might face in my answer, the second question is really the one I cannot answer for you.

"*You know my folly*" is pretty much the truth of things, so if "Who do you say you are?" has a starting point, honesty is it, and honesty is critical. The psalmist David knew this as he opened his heart to the Lord. He knew there really wasn't anything he could hide.

***I praise you because I am fearfully
and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.*** (Psalm 139.14)

Self-assigned labels can either make or break a person, and it is often easier to accept what others might call us than to look deeply within.

I learned a lot about myself in treatment, about my weaknesses as well as my strengths. At one point, however, I could see how easy it would have been to accept a damning diagnosis because of what I had done. I could also see how 'what I did' could become 'who I was', and that bothered me.

If your answer to "Who do you say you are?" starts with believing that you were born in God's image and likeness, then everything in you that fails to reflect that image came about because of your actions, not God's design. God didn't create me to be a sex offender. Nor did He create you to be one either.

Who do you say you are? That's a question only you can answer, but God's love can be and will be reflected in your life. You just need to let that happen. It might take longer than you'd like, but it *will* happen. God bless you!

All things are possible with God!

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 at the beginning of the process and fearful of what's to come, that they trust God to place encouragers in their path to help them.
- For those who feel overwhelmed by temptation, seeing that as proof of being defined by those temptations, that they feel God's grace and mercy.
- For those whose lives are filled with the taunts of others, that they reject the labels as coming out of ignorance and a desire to point attention away from themselves.
- For the church, that they pray for an appropriate response to modern day lepers, a response that reflects God's love.
- For family members, that they find the strength to look beyond feelings of betrayal to find ways to encourage and support their loved ones.
- For chaplains, that they reinforce the labels that point to inmates as being heirs of the kingdom of God.
- 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.

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. Unused stamps are also very welcomed and a good way for those in confinement to be in partnership with this ministry. The bottom line is that we need YOU to help make these newsletters possible. So pray about becoming a partner with this ministry.

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.

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.

How do I know for sure when my ears can't seem to hear His still, small voice despite my best efforts to do so and my open invitation for Him to speak to me?

Can I claim to be in His will when I knowingly think as I do – contrary to His commandments? Even though I believe 'once saved, always saved', am I in danger of being as Jesus proclaimed, "I never knew you?" Am I an evildoer?

I am doing well, normal aches and pains, but I always know I am blessed daily, far beyond what I could ever imagine. I fall plenty short every day, but God never leaves me. This I know in my heart.

I just felt led to encourage you after reading the last newsletter. I use it in my office with clients – both offenders and survivors.

One thing I really enjoyed reading in the July-August newsletter was the letter from Tim which was printed in the "A Letter of Hope" section of the newsletter. I'd like to see similar letters in future newsletters if possible. (see "Another Letter of Hope" in the next column)

I don't think many comprehend the degree of certain online offenses, that they still cause harm. They think that because it's 'non-touch' then it's 'not as bad'.

I am happy, thankful, and grateful for the opportunity to admit that I can't do this on my own and to accept my past by forgiving myself and everyone that hurt me. As I do, God can start working His miracle, uplifting and restoring me from the inside out.

One thing I discovered in addiction recovery is that I've doubted God's willingness to remove my shortcomings. I've been trying to work on them myself. I've been stuck on Step 4 and haven't wanted to write an inventory because I don't want the guards to read it.

The other day I wasn't planning on working out, but I felt the need to do so and headed outside. An older man approached me after a while and, in broken English, asked me to pray for him because of pain he was having in his shoulder. He tells me, "You talk to God and God listens to you. I know this." He then told me he wasn't going to come outside, but God told him to because a white man would pray for him.

As many times as I have failed, it has caused me how to 'fail forward', and that makes success even more sweet when finally achieved.

If we don't stand for something, we'll go for anything!



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.



Can I Tell You Something?

By
Bob Van Domelen

I hope that you don't get bored with my repeated efforts to get you to consider owning a copy of my book. I have been told by my editor that if I didn't promote it, copies of the book would eventually end up in cardboard boxes, taped, labeled, and eventually forgotten.

This book deserves to be read. If you are interested, write me and I will send you a copy. Make sure that the mailroom at your address will accept the book, because not all do. It can also be purchased on Amazon – a good thing as the copies I send free do not count on sales totals or qualify for royalties.

Another Letter of Hope

I received the following testimony and, though it has been reproduced in another ministry's newsletter, I wanted to share it with you. If you have a testimony to share, especially about reentry, please send it.

From the age of 19 until 42, I was incarcerated. God blessed a friend I met inside (a former sex offender, with a willingness to allow me to parole to his home. After serving most of my assigned parole inside, I was granted parole in August 2023 after almost 23 of the 25 years I had been sentenced.

I was blessed to be able to get a job within 30 days of being out working at a factory that makes elevator lifts. They are a second-chance company, so having a background was not a major issue, though I did tell them I was on parole.

I have had the chance to step up and learn so much which

has allowed me to become more self-confident. I have had the chance to go back home and see my family as well as host them at my friend's house.

I attend therapy weekly though I had attended and completed the program while inside. I have found that I am still learning a lot.

I am also relearning a lot of basic skills such as cooking, loading and running a dishwasher, mowing the lawn. I have also been blessed to make a few friends that work with me and know my situation, which has been an invaluable tool for staying on a healthy path.

I am blessed that my friend's ex-girlfriend knew how to file my taxes online, and that I had all the needed paperwork.

Probation and parole are not easy, but if you are honest and try to work with what you are given, you will succeed and live a healthy victim-free life. But if you fight against the system, you will make everything harder.

I have had good discussions with the lady who handles the sex offender registry here in town and have found her to be very respectful and open-minded, willing to go out of her way for me.

Friends have been a great blessing in helping me succeed by their prayers and encouragement. I have been willing to face my fears and have reconnected with former friends as well.

Don't give up hope, but by prayer and being honest, God will make a way! *Jeremiah*

A Poem from the Heart

By Cody

As I sit here in my cell and think about my life, I think about what's wrong and think about what's right. The decisions I've made, the roads I've traveled, the scars I wear, the invisible battles. The places I've been, the people I've met, the lives I've touched, the ones I've left.

Been alone for so long – at least that's how it seems – even in a room full of people who say they love me. I'm still learning how to figure this out. Life. Why do I run and always have doubt. My own beautiful mother couldn't hold me down. God, I miss that lady. Wish she was still around. So much has happened. I'm broken, wounded inside, heartbroken, destroyed by lies. But I'm not giving up. I'll never give in. I picked up the Bible and found a new best friend.

A Little Humor . . .

Just a few quick ones

"I once dated a girl who was a communist. Didn't work out. I should've seen the red flags."



The banker fell overboard from a friend's sailboat. The friend grabbed a life preserver, held it up, not knowing if the banker could swim, and shouted, "Can

you float alone?" "Obviously," the banker replied, "but this is quite a weird time to talk business."

I got a job at a paperless office. Everything was great until I needed to use the bathroom.

A devout old shepherd lost his favorite Bible while he was out looking for a wayward lamb. Three weeks later, a sheep walked up to him carrying the Bible in its mouth. The shepherd couldn't believe his eyes. He took the precious book out of the sheep's mouth, raised his eyes heavenward and exclaimed, "It's a miracle!"

"Not really," said the sheep. "Your name is written inside the cover."

Lord Jesus,

I ask you to give me peace
in my mind, body, soul and spirit.

I ask you to heal and remove
everything that is causing
stress, grief, and sorrow in my life.
Please guide my path through life
and make my enemies
be at peace with me.

Fear not,
for *I have*
REDEEMED
YOU

I have Called You
by name:

You are **MINE**

...you are Precious
and honored
in My Sight
...because

I LOVE YOU

Isaiah 43:10-4