



Into the Light

All things are possible with God!
May-June 2025

Sin Is Never Private

By Bob Van Domelen

"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

It has been 40 years almost to the day since I was arrested, my private choices made public, and my family and loved ones forced to acknowledge that I was not the man I made myself out to be. It has been 40 years since our phone was answered, "Who's calling please?" to keep the number of obscene or hate calls to a minimum. It didn't always work, but it helped.

A lot has happened since then. Prison happened. Reentry, probation/parole, and the registry happened. And slowly but steadily restoration happened, just as it continues to happen.

A week or so ago, I came across a tin that was filled with 40-year-old letters. Some were letters to my wife expressing a desire to help in some way or at least be as supportive as possible. Some were from long-standing family or church friends, but some from people I didn't really know. The intent, however, was the same. They were sorry for what was happening and wished it never had happened in the first place.

Most of the letters, however, were from students of mine at the time of my arrest. I know that I must have read them when they were given to me, but 40 years later they are much more personal, free of any defensiveness on my part, and I am open to the hearts behind the words.

I responded to several letters that came to me in the past week or so and mentioned finding the tin. I shared that I had never written on this topic before, but that it felt right to do so now. In each of those letters, however, I asked them to pray for this article – and I trust that they have.

"I don't know why you did what you did, but I hope it wasn't to hurt us."

"All this is so very hard to believe, and every time I think about it, I start bawling."

I was a high school band director at the time of my arrest, preparing a talented group of high schoolers for a competition in Nashville. That school year was an intense time of rehearsing and fundraising, a time of doing whatever we could to raise \$35,000. And we did.

The arrest pulled me out of that event and truthfully, for weeks afterward my mind focused mainly on "What's

going to happen to me?" I might have thought of my students but sadly, my deepest thoughts were still on me.

Even in my self-centered world at that time, I never considered what I did as a deliberate attempt to hurt them. I was saying "Yes" to what I wanted without really thinking of what they wanted and *needed*. I had hurt them, and I had hurt them deeply.

Most of the letters hoped that I would get help. A few claimed to understand something I doubt they could really understand, but none of them condemned me or wished eternal damnation for my soul. I can't undo what I did, but I can do and am doing everything in my power to change me.

In the early days after my arrest, I felt God's presence and His reminder that I was loved despite occasional thoughts I had of ending it all. Having grown up in a family of faith, I knew that such a decision would have only created more pain for those trying to support me. Still, that option hung around.

One morning, I saw myself in a deep well. No light. Only despair. Looking up, I felt God's hand extended toward me, and I took the open hand and felt it close firmly around mine. Things didn't immediately become cheery or even hopeful, but I knew God was still there.

One of my students wrote,

"Even though I may doubt God because of what happened, I still pray for you. I have hope, and I want for you to have it. Therefore, may God be with you."

Other letters shared a sentiment of faith learned in homes where faith was introduced and encouraged. In times when "the rubber hits the road," such as in the quote above, words stop being just words and become the strength to move forward.

"About ten years ago, my family and I went through a similar ordeal that you and your family are now feeling, so I know each painful day you are experiencing. My heart goes out to you."

Fortunately, there were people reaching out to my wife during that difficult time. Some, like the writer above, had experienced similar life-changing events and wanted her to know they understood and, I think, wanted her to know they survived. I can only guess just how difficult things were for my wife and children. What a blessing it was, though, for her to read messages like the one that follows:

"If you need strength, take ours; if you need peace, we offer ours; if you cry, we also cry; when you despair, take our hope. We offer all these things and more willingly."

Sin is never private, even when we want to believe that no one will see what wrongs we do, hear what negative things we say, or know what evil thoughts we think. And even when we truly think our secret choices are known only to us, something in us is broken, and future choices are made from that place of brokenness.

In past editions of this newsletter, I have used Luke 11:24-26 (The Return of the Unclean Spirit) as something we need to consider. If we refuse porn, keep our conversations wholesome, and white-knuckle our way through other issues without replacing what we remove with God-centered thinking, speech, and actions, we leave the door open for temptations that will, in time, overcome us.

The owner had cleaned his house but had added nothing to help ward off evil. That's why the unclean spirit returned. That's why he brought with him seven others more evil than himself. He knew victory would be his.

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper

I will be the first to admit that the man I showed the world was unlike the man I hid from view. Even though I thought I was 'getting away' with this deception, friends later told me that there was something about me that made them nervous. One woman shared, "When you entered the room, I could feel evil around you, not *in* you, but *around* you." She was right.

This same woman followed the course of my court appearances, and in the early days sent me letters filled with anger over what I had done. But she also began sending me letters offering hope and encouragement and, most importantly, the knowledge that God still loved me.

Though I hated the exposure given my crimes, it was that exposure that removed the secrecy I had created to protect those choices. As strange as it might seem, the removal of the wall of secrecy told me I had a choice. I *could* be different. I didn't have to be in that world of darkness.

he who confesses and forsakes his transgressions will obtain mercy

I can almost feel the protests coming my direction at those words. "You call prison mercy? I have nothing left, no family, no home or job. Mercy? Doesn't feel like mercy to me." Maybe not, but I remember a moment when I felt the words, "Now the journey begins" as I looked at my cell.

I didn't know it at the time, but I had been placed in solitary confinement, apparently because there was not enough room in the intake area. What I felt in that moment, however, was a peace so profound that every part of me let go of whatever tension and anxiety I had. I didn't see it at the time as mercy, but it was. With time, other parts of my life experienced the same mercy.

Mercy is not a feeling that is always present. Sometimes I get in the way with my thinking and my choices, but God reminds me in desert moments that it is still there, waiting for me to see it and hold on to it.

"I know I probably will never see you again, and I wonder if that's for the better or the worse. But I know I am going to miss you."

Setting the letters aside, I am saddened because of what I put so many people through. I want to tell everyone how sorry I am and how much I wish it had never happened. But as much as I'd like that, it won't happen. What can I say or do after 40 years that will make things right?

No more secrets. No more thinking that what I do is without consequence or without potentially bringing harm to others. Not only does God call me to keep the mansion that is who I am clean, but also to fill spaces with good and with a hunger for the Lord's presence. If God is the focus of my daily life and He occupies my innermost being, what I share with the world is what I am called to share. It's what we are *all* called to share.

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 see the devastation left behind by their choices, that they trust God to repair what was broken and to bring joy to hearts needing it.
- For those who see only the past, that each morning they can feel God calling them, forgiving them, and loving them.
- For those who hunger for God's touch, that they surrender themselves to whatever God does.
- For the church, that they are open to a day when they can pray for both victims and offenders with words of hope and encouragement.
- For families, that they look for good in those they love and hang on to that.
- For chaplains, that they are able to serve God within the restrictions of prison regulations.
- 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 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.

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.

Coming into this world, God called me Steven. He called me His child. There I was, a young boy who knew about God. And even though God knew my evil deeds, He still chose to call me His redeemed son. He still loved me and called me by name, Steven. He also has a new name to give me when He returns.

How many times did Paul go to the Lord and say, "I messed up. I failed. I've come up short again. I simply can't get it right. I can't get around this again." only find a response of, "Paul, I love you." "But God. . ." "Paul, I love you." And with each attempt to discredit or minimize His love, it only magnified.

I am a son of God no matter what my address is.

I can't help anyone until I can help myself through Him. Why can't that be now when I am at my lowest? Must I sink even more? How dire do things have to get?

"7 But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. 8 Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me." (Micah 7:7-8)

I am blessed every day and am thankful for God's forgiveness as it is awful easy to stumble in my daily walk in this outside world.

God gives us the strength to overcome, to endure, and to start all over again. But it depends on us individually to work hard - working on our issues, values, goals, and dreams. We are also called to carry our cross and be willing to help bear the cross of others to the extent we are able.

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.



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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

Please spread the word about this resource!

Some time back, I noticed that letters I received from Don offered God-centered advice about reentry issues (successes and failures), so I asked him to do a column that for now will be called "There is Life after Prison." Your feedback is welcome and will shape the direction of future offerings. [Bob]

There is Life after Prison

Don

There is, indeed, but you have to want it and be willing to work for it. I found this out even though I felt I had a well-planned exit after 25 years of lockup. I had even considered voluntarily living a proper life in a transition facility. Where I was to live, however, was only the first problem I ran into against my neatly arranged checklist. More problems were yet to come.

Finding a transition home that accepted registrants was difficult and made more so by an 80-page sex offender reentry law that was developed in the 90s for my state. In the time since, little has changed in what is a very strict Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA). Because of this law, very few if any facilities or transition homes want to deal with us, and most states convince their populations that we are both 'modern day lepers' and dangerous.

I had secured a position at one home, but the approval was withdrawn two weeks before my end-of-sentence date. The facility was concerned about media publicity that might expose the home's location. Only by God's grace was this averted as a caring DOC counselor found me a home that was even better, a place that had no problem with me being there. It turned out that this was the ideal place for me to be.

Finding a home was the start of learning in real time that God *does* work in mysterious ways for those who depend on Him. God *does* watch over the least of us!

That fact became clear to me as I considered the years leading up to my 25-sentence and my eventual release from the 'purgatory' of prison. No matter what part of my life I chose, no matter what terrible things I had done, God was always with me. Sometimes, I chose to do wrong, thinking that He wasn't watching or worse, that He didn't care. But He was always there. He *did* care.

After so much time in prison, nothing could have prepared me for reentry or the changes I would see outside of prison walls. I also had not realized how much of its own sub-culture prison was until I left it. Looking back over all those years, I found that no matter how hard I worked, how many classes I took, how much rehabilitation I felt I had, or how good my reentry plans seemed, nothing could have completely prepared me for reentry. But I will tell you that added together, they were a great help.

I found it was truly up to me to work at things with God's guidance and help. These efforts were not something I could do by myself, no matter how much I planned. The same was true for others I lived with when I first got out, and it still is reality for those I assist in their reentry.

Reentry is more than a check list. It is an ever-fluctuating process not always in black and white situations but in all shades of gray. Given how different things can be from one day to the next, I am adjusting my 'plan' almost daily. Just like life really is, though I had forgotten this while living in prison's structured environment all those years.

Reentry takes more than just days, weeks, or even months of paying attention to the world in which I live. Despite making healthy decisions, SORNA is not going to go away, and because the rules won't disappear, I have to find a way to live and succeed despite those rules and maybe because of them.

It's best not to attempt to do things alone and, to my surprise, I found I didn't have to. The professionals I have been dealing with since my release are very understanding and helpful. As I work the process, I find God not only guiding me but putting folks in my path who were willing to help me.

Since my release, I found my life and friends. It's not the same as it was before prison, though. Even family are no longer the same. However, life is here, and I am here with it. God has a place for all of us in the free world. Find it!

A Little Humor . . .

Don't blame me – I didn't write them – I just copied them out for you.



"Why does a chicken coop only have 2 doors? If it had 4, it'd be a chicken sedan."

"Why do seagulls fly over the sea? If they flew over the bay, they'd be bagels"

"A duck walks into a pharmacy and walks up to the counter. "I'd like some Chapstick", he tells the pharmacist. "How are you going to pay for that?" the pharmacist asks. The duck replies "Just put it on my bill."

"Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the dumb guy's house."

"Knock, knock. Who's there? The chicken."

"Did you hear about the pirate that bought himself a pair of earrings for \$2? That's not bad for a buccaneer!"

"What do you call an alligator in a vest?
An investigator."

"What do you call a fish with no eyes?" "fsh "

"You know Canada Geese always fly in a V formation, but do you know why one end of the V is always longer?" "Because that side has more birds in it."

"Why did the worm cross the street? It was stuck to the chicken's foot!"

"What's big, green, and fuzzy and will kill you if it jumps out of a tree and lands on you? A pool table"

When things are difficult, remember this:

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

(Isaiah 41:10)

