



Into the Light

All things are possible with God!
November-December 2025

All Are Welcome?

By Bob Van Domelen

I received a letter the other day suggesting a topic for this newsletter based on questions and concerns he had. In my response, I shared that I may have answered some of his questions in an earlier edition of *Into the Light* and if that was the case, I would reprint the article. It turns out that I had touched on some of the issues he raised. At the end of this reprint, I'll write more in response to his concerns.

We Are Reconciled Restoration Might Take Time July 2014

*"¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."
(2 Corinthians 5:19)*

One of my favorite places to be is with those who do prison or jail ministry because I never feel as though they look at me with eyes fixed on my past, a past that included time in prison for sexual assault. They are my encouragers, my occasional accountability team, and my reminder of God's mercy and forgiveness. I can say the same for you who are reading this newsletter because sharing with you involves trusting God to encourage me in what I write.

When I correspond with individuals in prison for sex-related offenses, I try to see them as I want them to see me—in the process of Christ-centered change. I don't like to refer to someone as a sex offender any more than I would identify my son as "The Liar" or my neighbor as "The Prostitute." We all sin, some more grievously than others, but God calls us by name, not by those failings. As I tell people, "God doesn't call me molester. He calls me Bob."

Despite how easily those words come, I daily read letters from individuals who cannot find a way to see themselves as anything other than a sex offender. Many write to share that they know God has forgiven them but that they cannot forgive themselves. More write that re-entry seems almost impossible given the rejection they fear facing them when they are released.

While we do need the support of others, the healing change we seek for our lives must center on us, on how we identify ourselves and how we believe God identifies us. In that sense, how the public responds is not important, though I would be less than honest if I didn't acknowledge how nice it is to feel accepted.

The bondage to the past can never really be broken until we take into the core of our being that Jesus took those

sins to the cross as atonement to the Heavenly Father. The verse says, "God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ." It doesn't say, "God took the death of His son on the cross under consideration and would get back to humanity as to whether or not we would be reconciled." It said we are reconciled because of Christ.

Not counting people's sins against them

Some believe that God forgets our sins (Psalm 103:12) because "as far as east is from west" implies forgetting. When God removes our transgressions from us, He chooses to love us without the filter of those past sins. He sees us all as He created us and calls us to be in His love. In a way, believing that God *could* hold my sins over my head like some tool of control but that He *chooses* not to do so is more of a sign of love than forgetting my sins.

For my part, I am a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) because the choices I make and the identity I claim are in Christ. The old me, which I chose not to reveal, lived in murky moral darkness. My eventual surrender felt in some ways like my slate had been wiped clean, like I was newly born into the world.

But I grew to realize that I still had to deal with temptation as well as with the consequences of my addictive behaviors. Having been blessed with the cleansing love of Christ, the option of re-offending was like an invitation to swim in a foul-smelling cesspool. Could I jump into that cesspool if I wanted? Sure. But knowing I could and choosing to do so are two different things.

Breaking the Bond

"Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)

Keeping sin a secret empowers that sin—helps keep it alive. Whatever one might say about SOT, no one who is sincere about change will complete the program without breaking the shame that binds. And I believe this happens because the choice is not made to satisfy a group facilitator but to face the darkness within that needs to be eliminated.

In Chapter 7 of Luke's gospel, we read the story of the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus when he dined at the home of a Pharisee. She knew what she had done. She believed Jesus could set her free by forgiving her. And she was willing to humble herself for this to happen. Simon the Pharisee was not able to accept the woman's actions because of her sinful past, because he could not release her from that identity.

Steps to Restoration

At a minimum, society wants to be assured that a

person in re-entry completed treatment and found a way to break the addictive behavior cycles so many have. Most of society doesn't really think this way, but those who are willing to be supportive of you and me do. They want to know we did something significant to bring about change.

A person who tells a pastor "I didn't need treatment—God healed me!" is not, in my opinion, a candidate for long-term successful re-entry. I am not suggesting that re-offending is inevitable, just that there are triggers still present that make it a possibility.

Dealing with Shame

One point I made at a Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association conference dealt with shame, specifically the shame we assign to temptation. We are afraid to tell anyone that we have temptations, especially temptations that fit our criminal past.

Perhaps we fear that the progress others think we have made will disappear as though it never existed. Perhaps they might think we are no different than we were when in the center of our addictive behaviors. Worse, they might just believe that we are manipulating them as we manipulated our victims. So, we keep still rather than risk losing their support and acceptance.

I get the feeling that some SOT facilitators consider temptation as proof that nothing has changed. "Unless we can eliminate those fantasies," they say, "we have not succeeded in protecting society." Or they might suggest that the person is not giving the program 100% effort.

Every person without exception deals with temptation. This particular temptation just carries greater consequences. When temptation does occur, however, it seems to me that being able to effectively say no IS a sign of change.

Maybe I am being a little unrealistic. After all, can we really trust others knowing our weaknesses, our darker sides? Never mind that we don't act on the temptation because the temptation is enough by itself in their eyes and maybe in our own as well. I rather wish, by the way, that the verse in James also said, "and don't forget to confess your temptations, for in confessing them, you take away their power."

The Timetable

There is nothing anyone can say that will cause me to deny the reconciliation God has brought into my life. I *am* different, considerably so since my arrest in 1985.

But restoration—at least restoration in a way that you and I might imagine it—is still a work in progress. They say that the pendulum continues to swing to the right in how the world deals with this issue. We are feared, despised, and rejected more than we are loved, respected, and welcomed. Whenever I start to have a pity party, I am reminded of a friend who points to where I have been and what I have become in the past many years. He then closes with "Don't let anyone stop what God has been doing." And he's right.

The Letter

As a kid, I remember the occasional whispered comment "He's an ex-con. I hope he doesn't think he can go to church here" or words to that effect. Today, people define this attitude as NIMBY – Not in my back yard.

Registrants are sometimes called modern-day lepers, and this seems a good description. Communities work to restrict where registrants can live; churches try to minister under the umbrella of insurance company policies; and if some could have their way, registrants would be required to call out "Unclean, unclean" when they entered a building.

My writer friend offered the belief that the Christian community considers us irredeemable, incurable, and almost guaranteed to reoffend. He added "a real Christian would be forgiving. They would give us a second chance."

To support his concerns, he shared scriptures reminding us not to judge lest we be judged; to deal with the plank in our own eyes before being concerned about the speck in another's eye; and reminding us of the sincerity of the tax collector's prayer asking forgiveness compared to that of the arrogant Pharisee who thanked God he was not like the 'rest of these.'

I agree with his concerns, but I also understand the communities where registrants hope to live, work, and attend faith communities. For many, what they know of child molesters is born of the anger of personal experiences as victims or knowing someone close to them who was abused. Anger seems appropriate.

What information they have is often found in media offerings where explanations begin with "Studies show" without naming the study used to prove the point made.

I have been redeemed. So have you. Nothing my neighbor can say will change that. I have been forgiven and my sins atoned by the blood of Christ. The same is true for you.

I live each day knowing that I have it in me to be the man God calls me to be. So do you. But I cannot live with the kind of arrogant thinking that says reoffending is impossible. It is always possible for all of us, but doing what it takes to walk the narrow path requires recognizing our potential for weakness and failure. It is in the humility of this way of living, this way of seeing ourselves as humans that keeps us from repeating our past offenses.

We can't change our past, nor can we change the way society thinks or how it responds to us. If you end each day knowing you did your best, the world might not welcome you, but God is taking great joy in you. And in me. We *are* welcome!

All things are possible with God!

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.

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 feel unable to see a future, that as they grow in the healing process, their future will reflect that presence of God.
- For those who see nothing but shame, that they come to seek God's design in their lives, a design focused on what can be rather than what was.
- For those who have no one supporting them, that they remain open to support that will come from unexpected places.
- For the church, that they rejoice in the truth of God's healing love, the atonement of all sins through Jesus, and the ongoing miracle of the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- For families, that they nourish their loved ones with support and encouragement.
- For chaplains, that they find others who support them in the stress-filled work that they do.
- 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.

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.

I have finally stopped trying to become a minister for I can see no hope of getting out of prison.

Honestly, I do look forward to the judgement day. I am not scared for I am doing the best I can

I have been sharing my copy of your book, Can I Tell You Something, with others, trying to help spread your message. Got great feedback from them. Your book is going home with me.

I miss my mother very much. She was the only one by my side no matter what occurred. If I did wrong, she would definitely let me know. But unlike everyone I ever knew, she was the one and only person by my side, and I treasure each moment I remember her.

I have such a hard time giving and receiving love because of my past life experiences, and I know that has led to my addictions, arrest, and two failed marriages. I worry much of the time about how to guide, lead, and pastor when I've spent so much of my life emotionally damaged. I know God has given me a new heart – one of flesh and not of stone. I know He is renewing my mind daily so that I can take every thought captive.

I've been to church, was in the choir for a couple of years, actively involved in Bible study even to this day, but I don't know God and feel He doesn't know me.

The chaplain at the facility where I am currently incarcerated is of no real help. I am not ashamed to admit that I had lost my path to God as I always knew who He was and that He was always there. But I will say prison has helped me rediscover Christ's love and forgiveness for me.

I've noticed that talking about my offense sometimes helps, but it's hard to trust people and then I'm wondering whether it's worth it, because after a while, they become judgmental.



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.

There is Life after Prison

"Life Chapters"

by Don

During my meditation time, I often find myself looking back over my entire life. Thoughts come out in segments and segments become chapters as I relive it all in my mind. Some good, some bad but many just everyday occurrences. I continue to be amazed how much has been compressed into it like a book with many chapters as well as in many volumes. And even more amazing is how many daily events at the time didn't register as important but just ho-hum daily life. Now I see segments all becoming chapters in my own "Book of Life." A life we live every day not noticing any importance until days, months, or years later.

What we lived through, what we survived, and most of all how we lived not only affected us but also those around us and those that depended on us. That last part is not always pleasant to remember, so we tend to ignore it, rearrange it, or flatly deny it.

But no matter how many times we try to rearrange or change it, the facts in that chapter do not change for the rest of our lives. As counselors have taught me, visit there but do not stay there. It's important we know how we lived in the past, so we know what to change in the future and not repeat our past mistakes in future chapters.

It is amazing what you can learn about yourself and others with a counselor and group therapy. Alcoholics and drug addicts know this through AA and NA. Even though we 'lepers' are not offered the same opportunities because we "can't be cured." What's not said is, "Neither can they."

Alcohol and drug addicts are taught to control their choices. And their problems are in the same part of the brain as ours. In short, our problems are no different from theirs and can be controlled. In all these cases, it's noticing the triggers and controlling the thought process. And this process is an ongoing one that never goes away whether you are locked up or free out there.

Fortunately, a mental health counselor, that I just happened to know from college, invited me to his SAP classes. It was there we noticed what I had learned in sex therapy on the outside was very similar to what he was teaching. As a result, he got himself certified as a Sex Therapy Counselor, and we started our own therapy group in his office. This group remained top secret and helped others who met the 'invitation only requirements' for almost three years until he moved on.

Our group was condoned by the State after they lost federal funding for their programs - but under the guise that our program didn't work. I can guarantee it does. Years later we had another counselor who got certified. Several groups of fifteen to twenty met secretly in the Law Library, but this time she found a way to get it certified in our records. We lepers can make things happen both inside and outside. We can change things for the future.

Even now you are writing another chapter in your life whether you realize it or not. What's it looking like? Are you looking at the big picture of your life or still pounding your head against a brick wall and not finding a way around it. Are you still enjoying the same life that got you inside?

If you look back you will find many coincidences of things that "just happened" and helped you, but at the time you didn't see them or you ignored them. With God in your life, you can begin to see that He's always been there trying to help. Being human, we forge on doing it our way until it's too late.

Believe it and you will see there are many chapters He tried to help you write. He's there and HE cares, so let Him. There are many more chapters to write that can and will make a difference in your life. Help Him as He helps you.

A Little Humor . . .

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



- Just got attacked by 6 dwarves. Not Happy.
- A sandwich walks into a bar, the barman says, "Sorry, we don't serve food in here."
- Why do space rocks taste better than Earth rocks? They're a little meteor.
- Larry was an old piece of lasso who steps into a bar one day for a drink. The bartender looks at him suspiciously and says, "Hey, Pal, we don't serve ropes here."
- Larry steps outside, ties himself into a clove hitch and unravels one of his ends into a feathery mess. He goes back inside and in a low voice says, "Beer, please." Bartender says, "Hey, aren't you that rope who was just in here?" Larry replies, "No, I'm a frayed knot."
- What does a thesaurus eat for breakfast? A synonym roll.

Heavenly Father, I come before
you seeking acceptance in my life.
Help me to embrace who I am and
to find peace in your love.