



Restoring my Soul

HE RESTORES MY SOUL, HE LEADS ME IN PATHS

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FEBRUARY 2019

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A FIVE DAY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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Bruised for our iniquities

Following His arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was taken to the court of Caiaphas, the high priest. The crowd who had gathered there 'spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him'. **Mat 26:67**. This violent mistreatment, or 'buffeting', of Jesus' body was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, when he wrote, 'He was *bruised for our iniquities*'. **Isa 53:5**.

In the same way that 'bruising' refers to *underlying* wounds, 'iniquity' refers to the faults in our identity that lie *underneath* a veil of self righteousness. When Jesus was bruised for our iniquity, His very wounding reflected the nature of our fallen efforts to be a Christian. Iniquities are obstinate, perverted opinions through which we believe that we can love God and serve Him. They are the judgements and perspectives that we have because we sincerely trust in the ability of our flesh to know right from wrong. These views are invalid because they are self centred. Our fallen dilemma is that we are blind to our iniquity.

The apostle John wrote about Jesus, 'In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it'. **Joh 1:4 5**. This darkness is the blindness of iniquity, and refers to the condition of our fallen heart. We cannot live according to the word of God unless our iniquity is exposed and removed. The life that was the Light of men was in Jesus' blood. **Lev 17:11**. The second sprinkling of His blood caused the light of *illumination* to shine into, and reveal the nature of, our heart. Illumination breaches the veil of our self righteousness and lays bare our iniquity before us. To say this another way, when our fallen heart is sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, the light of life begins to revive our spiritual sight. We understand the thoughts and intents of our heart; whether they are motivated by faith or by iniquity and self righteousness.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: HEBREWS 10

The illumination of Peter

How do we join the fellowship of Christ's second wound and deal with our iniquity? The apostle Paul taught that the veil of our self righteousness can be removed, if we will turn and look upon the Lord. **2Co 3:16**. This is the meaning of repentance. When we respond to the word of the cross, turn and meet Jesus eye to eye, we behold the ugliness of our own heart reflected in His marred face. We understand that He was, literally, bruised for our iniquity. In repentance, we acknowledge that the integrity of our heart, which we thought was good, is in fact, self centred and evil. Our flesh is exposed as being inadequate to love God and to express His righteousness. This was the profound experience of the disciple Peter.

In the court of Caiaphas, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times. On the third occasion, he began to curse and swear. **Mat 26:69 75**. Peter was cursing because, in his flesh, he could not follow through on his zealous assertion that he would die with Jesus. The important lesson that we learn is that we cannot join the fellowship of Christ's offering through self righteous, good intentions. Like some kind of frustrating, malfunctioning machine, our self preserving flesh will resist the intent of our mind to die with Christ. **Rom 7:19**. Peter's other law, which was keeping him bound to the fear of death, caused the passion of sin to manifest as agitation and foul language.

As a rooster crowed, and Jesus was led away from the house of Caiaphas, Peter met Him eye to eye. He saw the ugliness of his iniquity reflected in the bruises on Christ's face. By illumination, he realised that the integrity of his fallen heart was, in fact, self righteousness. As Jesus' eyes pierced his heart, Peter understood the hopelessness of his own righteousness. This confession, that we are bankrupt in spirit, is the beginning of repentance.

Righteousness by faith

When Peter was illuminated by the eyes of Christ, he began to weep with godly sorrow because he was mourning the loss of his sonship. It is better for us to look upon Christ and see the horribleness of our iniquitous heart, than to live in the agitation of being unable to do the very thing that we desire as Christians; to abide in Christ.

Despite his self righteous zeal, Peter received the word of God and believed the message of sonship that Jesus proclaimed during His earthly ministry. **Joh 6:68**. He believed that, in Christ, sons of men could become the righteousness of God. **2Co 5:21**. At the last supper, Jesus commended Peter for receiving this word. He said, 'You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.' **Joh 13:13**. **Joh 15:3**. As the last supper concluded, Jesus proclaimed, 'Where I go, you cannot follow Me now [speaking of His impending offering and death]; but you will follow later.' **Joh 13:36**. Jesus was signalling that every disciple would need to join the fellowship of His offering. Zealously, Peter said to Him, 'Lord, why can I not follow You right now?' **Joh 13:37**. Peter did not understand that Jesus' death would open a new and living way of salvation.

The lesson that we learn from Peter's impulsive zeal is that iniquity in our heart will cause us to try to verify Jesus' words self righteously. However, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as we tarry in the offering of Christ. **Rom 1:17**. This is the context where our identity is progressively restored from the damage and corruption caused by iniquity. This process begins once a person is born again and joined to Christ's death and life by baptism and continues for the duration of their time on earth. **1Jn 3:2**. As the blood of Christ and the water of the word cleanse our heart, we cease from walking according to the flesh. Instead, our participation in Christ's offering equips us to live by faith and to walk by the Spirit.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: ROMANS 4

Chastened for our peace

The book of Hebrews helps to explain the *chastening* that we experience as Christians. We are encouraged that 'whom the Lord *loves* He chastens'. **Heb 12:6**. In fact, the writer to the Hebrews instructed us to view chastening as an entirely positive experience because it is the evidence that God is engaged in our life. When we view chastening in this way, we realise that it is not an unpleasant by-product of walking with the Lord; rather, we persevere with the Lord for chastening! **Heb 12:7**. Chastening, although unpleasant in the moment, yields 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness'. **Heb 12:11**. Jesus described this fruit as being our growth as sons of God. **Luk 8:14**.

When Isaiah prophesied about Christ's offering and death, he wrote, 'The *chastisement* for our peace was on Him'. **Isa 53:5**. In this article, we will consider how the chastening that we experience from the hand of the Father is received through our participation in Christ's offering. This is how the Father deals with our immaturity and helps to direct us to the works that He has prepared for us. The chastening that Jesus received for our peace occurred in the court of Caiaphas and was the third wound that He experienced in His journey from Gethsemane to Calvary. **2Sa 7:12 14. Mat 26:67**.

If our fellowship in Christ's second wound exposes the iniquity of our fallen perspectives, then our fellowship in His third wound reveals the death associated with proceeding in the *way* of self righteousness. King Solomon described the way of self righteousness, when he wrote, 'There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death'. **Pro 14:12**. When our flesh engages and reacts to the world around us, our other law decides what is 'good and evil' from a self centred perspective. Even a considered and calculated decision made on this basis will cause us to proceed 'our own way', which is the way of sin, separation from God, and death.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: HEBREWS 12

Chastened while there is hope

Jesus Christ, who is 'the Prince of Peace', ministers the *peace of God* to us through the sprinkling of His blood. **Isa 9:6**. In other words, the peace of God is only available to us as we participate in Christ's offering. The peace of God becomes substantial for us when we appreciate that our life, with all of its successes and failures, and joy and adversity, is a fellowship in the offering of Christ. We will recognise the peace of God 'ruling in our hearts' when the objections of our flesh, concerning the difficulties we experience, are silenced. **Col 3:15**. Instead, we will find ourselves offering up a sacrifice of thanksgiving because we are participating in the sufferings of Christ! **Psa 50:23**. In this way, our Christian testimony becomes an expression of the righteousness of God.

'Chastening' can be understood as the 'training', 'educating' or 'instruction' which is applied, in particular, to a maturing child. As 'children' of God, *the Father chastens us to remove immaturity and to foster mature sonship*. **Heb 12:7**. We learn from the book of Proverbs that God 'chastens His sons while there is hope, because He does not desire their death'. **Pro 19:18**. The Father's chastening is the suffering that we experience when we conduct ourselves according to the unregenerate immaturity of our fallen flesh. These evil ways of behaving and relating do not bring forth the fruit of our sonship because they are self righteous projections motivated by iniquity.

The Father chastens us because 'foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child [an immature son of God]; the rod of discipline [chastisement] will remove it far from him'. **Pro 22:15**. The Father desires every son to bring forth fruit to maturity. **Joh 15:8**. He does not desire our life to be unfruitful, nor our end to be eternal death! **Rev 3:19**. It is for this reason that He chastens us. He is aligning our way to the hope of righteousness that He has set before us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: JOB 33

The peace of God

'The peace of God' does not refer to the absence of conflict in the world or our exemption from personal affliction. **Joh 14:27**. The apostle Paul described those dimensions of suffering as 'common to man', whether a person is saved or unsaved. **1Co 10:13**. Instead, when we talk about 'peace', we are talking about the absence of anything in our heart that conflicts with God's will and purpose for us. When we are self righteous, we cannot know the peace of God.

We can only abide within the lines of our sanctified predestination when there is no other law at work in our heart that is warring against the leading of the Spirit. For this reason, we can understand 'peace' simply as 'sanctification to one's name'. In other words, we will not come to peace while we live by our self centred other law and remain contrary to the will of God. **Rom 5:1**.

When we meet Jesus eye to eye and, by illumination, understand the nature of our own heart, we can receive the peace of God. Despite feeling confronted and exposed because of our iniquity, we find that abiding in Christ is the context where the peace of God can rule in our heart. The peace of God is the resolution that we find when we set our mind on the Spirit. It replaces the agitation that we inevitably experience when we try to fulfil God's will according to the initiatives of our self righteous flesh.

When the life of God is ministered to us in the third sprinkling of Jesus' blood, we learn 'the way of righteousness' that Christ pioneered for every son of God. Encouragingly, we read in the book of Proverbs, 'In the way of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death'. **Pro 12:28**. This is the key point; *chastening teaches us the discipline of walking in the way of our sonship*. And this is the way of peace; sanctified by the Holy Spirit. **Heb 12:11**.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: JOHN 16

The recovery of Peter

Having met Jesus in the fellowship of His second wound, Peter proceeded to join Christ in the fellowship of His third wound. As a result, the sprinkling of Jesus' blood began to minister the peace of God to Peter. By the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, after His resurrection, Jesus addressed the issues of Peter's immaturity. It was here that Jesus restored Peter, calling him to fulfil the works of his name, to walk in sanctification amongst his brethren, and to fellowship in His death. Jesus said to Peter, ' "When you were younger [immature], you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this He said, signifying by *what kind of death* he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" ' **Joh 21:18 19.**

Jesus used this conversation to highlight how Peter must proceed. He pointed out that, in Peter's self righteous immaturity ('when you were younger'), Peter's way was independent and self centred. But, should Peter receive the chastening of God and mature in his sonship ('when you grow old'), he could proceed in fellowship and faith obedience.

As Peter received this word, he received faith. Further to this, the Holy Spirit was pouring the love of God into his heart. **Rom 5:5.** His faith, now working by love, motivated Peter to join the fellowship of Christ's offering. **Gal 5:6.** This was the 'kind of death' that Jesus was revealing to Peter by illumination. It was the death of Christ through which the righteousness of God would be revealed in Peter's life! Peter was going to participate in the fellowship of Christ's death, by chastening, and reveal the life of God in his mortal body. As Jesus had foretold at the last supper, 'You will follow later', He was now instructing Peter to fellowship in His offering with the command, 'Follow Me!' **Joh 21:19. Joh 13:36.**

FOR FURTHER STUDY: JOHN 21

By His stripes we are healed

In His fourth wound, Jesus Christ encompassed the suffering of our common humanity. 'Our common humanity' is another way of saying, 'the ordinary shared aspects of being a human being, or a natural man'. The fourth wound was administered when Jesus was scourged with the cat o' nine tails whip on orders from Pontius Pilate. This whipping brought Jesus to the point of death as it tore flesh from His body and caused His blood to flow from multiple wounds. These whipping wounds are also called 'stripes'. The healing that this suffering ministers to us is healing to our spirit, or inner man. The prophet Isaiah declared, 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.' **Isa 53:5. 1Pe 2:24.**

The suffering of our common humanity comes upon all people, whether they are sons of God or not. The apostle Paul described it this way: 'No temptation [adversity] has overtaken you but such as is common to man'. **1Co 10:13.** For example, we all inherit genes from our parents, giving us physical abilities, weaknesses and personality types. This genetic heritage is natural - an aspect of the natural man - but it is subject to the Fall and, therefore, is affected by sin. It is imperfect. The shedding of Jesus' blood in His fourth wound was for the healing of these imperfections so that they should not impede us from doing the works of our sonship.

When we speak of 'healing' here, we are referring to the healing of our spirit. Our spirit is our identity - the essence of our being. In the fellowship of Christ's offering, we can be healed in our spirit, or 'inner man', and become fruitful sons of God. It is the will of God for each person to be regenerated in their inner man so that they can exercise their abilities, thereby being able to exercise the talents He has given. **Joh 15:16.**

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 1 PETER 2

Abilities and limits

We all have to accept that we were born with certain natural traits. We have abilities and we have limits. Our limits are not necessarily a dead end. A bed-ridden person can lead a life as productive as a person who is never sick. They may not find physical healing, but they can still come to the fullness of their fruitfulness as a son of God, because healing has come to their spirit. They can worship God in spirit and in truth, fully participating in the fellowship of Christ and their brethren, walking in the will of God. **Joh 4:24.**

To illustrate this point, you may remember that Jesus was asked a question about the man who was blind from birth: 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' **Joh 9:2.** The disciples were looking for the cause of the man's blindness, believing that some specific sin was to blame. But Jesus dispelled this idea: 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him'. **Joh 9:3.** We see the point that Jesus was making here. God's purpose for you and me is to reveal His works in us - even through, or in spite of, what we regard as awful defects.

As we continue to be healed and recovered in our spirit, we find growing clarity regarding the unique expression of Christ's life within us. God works with the raw material of how we are made - that is, our natural man. But He is also committed to dealing with the carnality in our old man. **Rom 6:5-6. Eph 4:22. Col 3:9.** He regenerates our natural man and circumcises from us our old man. This happens on the pathway of our individual participation in the offering of Christ, as we make straight paths for our feet. **Heb 12:13.**

FOR FURTHER STUDY: JOHN 9

You and your temperament

God is the Potter, and He made us a certain way; He shaped the clay of who we are. **Isa 64:8**. But there are flaws in the shape because sin is in the world. Jesus died for the deficiencies in our physical makeup and character. We can be healed when we stop arguing with Him about the way we are and accept the grace that He offers us through the various trials of life each day. **Isa 29:16**. When we embrace the package that He has given us, we can get on with the business of doing our works, finding healing as we do so.

For example, you may have been born with a temperament which makes you especially nervous or angry under certain pressures. Now, God does not want you to be either of these things - overly nervous or angry - but you don't need to obsess over them. Your preoccupation should be with the name God has written for you in heaven, not with your perceived defects. **Luk 10:20**.

We are able to understand that the suffering caused by our inherited flaws and imperfections is included in the sufferings of Christ. The temperament we inherited from our parents is part of the package of our life, but we do not have to be ruled by our temperament. We are not the victim of our genes. Our name is the truth about who we are.

If we are going to be able to join the fellowship of Christ's offering, it is really important that we recognise the sort of person we are; not in order to feel condemned, but so that the Lord can lay hold of us and heal us in the inner man! We have a name in the image of God, and the Holy Spirit is continually sanctifying us to that name. We don't, therefore, have to be resigned to the way we are. We can be regenerated and recovered to the hundredfold productivity which God predestined for us. **2Co 4:16-18**.

Physical problems and abilities

There are many physical problems that may arise in the normal course of a person's life. A person born as an asthmatic, or with poor eyesight, does not have to regard themselves as a victim of their condition. Nor should they be engaged in a never-ending pursuit of some magical release from the way things are. A mature response to their situation will allow them to make straight paths for their feet - to do what is prudent without being anxious, to be proactive without becoming obsessed with their health. **Heb 12: 12-13.**

As the pathway of life narrows, it is tempting to kick against the goads of mortality. **Acts 26:14.** The fear of death can cause us to be discouraged or to embark on a quest to find a solution to our suffering - to 'trust in ourselves'. **Heb 2:14-15.** But true healing comes from eating from the tree of life! **Rev 22:2.** Once we know that we cannot die before our time, we are able to understand how God is able to sustain us - at times miraculously - in order that we may fulfil the works of our name. **Eph 2:10.** Even though we are sometimes under extreme pressure, we will not be crushed or destroyed.

The blood that was shed from Jesus' fourth wound is a wonderful provision. Not only are we healed in areas where we have been hurt, or where we have damaged ourselves; we are also sustained miraculously so that we can walk out our predestination. The trials and difficulties of our common humanity, difficult though they sometimes are, need never impede us from doing our sanctified works. This is wonderful news! Jesus encompassed all of these sufferings, and now they do not need to overwhelm or discourage us. We can get on with living in the new man with absolute confidence that the Lord will supply our every need. **Php 4:19.**

FOR FURTHER STUDY: PSALM 139

Healing the natural man

The healing that Jesus made available to us in the fourth wound is healing to our spirit. We are able to see things (including ourselves) as God sees them, and to respond to the issues of life as He desires us to respond. Our spirit is our identity, the essence of who we are. Thus, the healing to our spirit is a healing toward us becoming the particular member of the body of Christ that He wants us to be. This healing is for our participation in His body; our individual contribution to the life of the whole.

To that end, we are all given certain abilities which we are able to exercise, improve and apply ourselves to. These abilities can include areas such as music, intellectual capacity, hospitality, finance. We must remember, as well, that the Lord gives talents according to our several abilities. **Mat 25:15**. As we join the fellowship of Christ's fourth wound, He is recovering and regenerating our natural man so that we can fulfil the works of our name; not so that we can be 'better' Christians, but so that we can be entrusted with a portion of His divine nature (a talent), which we are then to use to multiply life by offering in the body of Christ. **2Pe 1:4**.

Giving proper application to the training of our areas of ability will ensure that we are not overcome by laziness and lack of fruitfulness. **Pro 13:4**. The healing that comes from the fourth wound of Christ's offering is towards our *psuche* so that we can achieve the fullness of our participation in the body of Christ. This will be seen in body ministry, where the fruit of Christ's life in us can be ministered to others according to the uniqueness of a person's name. **1Co 14:26**. We will then be able to join in close and easy *koinonia* (fellowship) with our brethren, as others bear witness to the life of God in us.

Abilities and talent

The talent that we receive from Christ is something which is 'not of ourselves' - it is of Christ. It is obtained only in the fellowship of His sufferings, where we discover 'the secret of the Lord'. Knowing this secret allows us to 'walk in the truth', not lying against the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. **3Jn 1:4. 2Co 4:2.** If we bring a projection on to the holy ground of offering, we will be profaning the Holy Spirit and will attract the judgement of God. **Act 5:3.**

It is important we realise that the talent is not measured by the training or skills of the natural man. God doesn't measure grace by what is natural. The most highly trained pianist is not necessarily the most graced musician. The most eloquent speaker is not necessarily the most graced preacher. The best tradesman is not necessarily going to be graced like Bezalel. **Exo 35: 30 33.** God chooses whom He wills. He gives grace gifts to the new man.

At the same time, our talents are not wholly disconnected from our natural abilities. So education, aptitude and skills training, or lack of them, will have some influence on the shape of our new man's talent; but only up to a point. In any event, we do not need to strive or worry about what our talent is. In an easy fellowship among our brethren, as we seek to reveal Christ in all that we do, such things become evident and confirmed in due course and at the right time.

We can be greatly encouraged as we apply ourselves to the areas in which God has graciously given us ability. As we apply ourselves in this way, across all the areas of our life, it will become evident where God has given us specific grace capacities, or where we have been called to be accountable. In this way, we will become increasingly clear regarding the priorities of our life, and how we can participate fruitfully in the administration of Christ.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: EXODUS 35

The pride of life

Satan deceived Eve with a lie. Concerning the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, he said to her, 'You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' **Gen 3:4 5**. When Eve listened to this lie, her perception of the fruit was distorted. It now appeared to her to be good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desirable to make her wise. **Gen 3:6**. Once she ate the fruit, these three desires became part of her identity. The apostle John described this third desire – namely, the pursuit and exercise of wisdom from the basis of a person's knowledge of good and evil – as 'the pride of life'. **1Jn 2:16**.

Shortly after Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the Lord God said to Adam, 'Cursed is the ground *because of you*; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.' **Gen 3:17**. This passage can equally be translated, 'Cursed is the ground for *your sake*; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.' Mercifully, God did not curse *Adam* (and thus mankind), as He did with the serpent. **Gen 3:14**. Rather, He cursed the ground for the sake of man. Specifically, God said to Adam that with much toil and sweat, the cursed ground would grow for him 'thorns and thistles'. **Gen 3:17 19**.

The '*ground*' speaks to us of the whole context of our life, with all of the unique relationships, circumstances, works and realities that are particular to each individual. Thorns and thistles, then, are the *frustrations and suffering events of life that God allows to occur in order to deal with our pride and projections*.

The crown of thorns

What is the significance of the crown of thorns that was forcibly driven into the head of Christ by the soldiers in the Praetorium? **Mat 27:29.**

First, a crown designates the rulership and authority of a specific individual. The crown of thorns, however, was used to mock and humiliate Christ, rather than to honour Him. While Christ should have received the double crown of kingship and priesthood, reserved only for the Messiah, He instead endured the mocking of His authority at the hands of the soldiers. **Zec 6:11 14.** His authority was taken away from Him as He endured the opposition of God on our behalf. **Isa 53:8.** However, by this action, all 'rule and authority and power and dominion' was being taken away from those who had misappropriated it on earth and in heaven. **Eph 1:20-21.** It was being re-established in Yahweh.

Second, we would all realise that thorns can inflict an annoyingly painful and sharp incision into our skin, causing blood to flow from our wound. Let us pause and consider the imagery of the crown of thorns and its confronting proposition – namely, that all of mankind, including you and me, are guilty of forcibly imposing upon the head of Christ, in prideful arrogance, our own projection and self centred agenda for our life, demanding it be recognised and blessed by Him.

Third, we mock Christ's Lordship and sovereignty in our life when we cease from living by every word of our name, and instead live by the abilities and resources of our identity. **Mat 4:4.** Our own resources and abilities are clearly exhaustible and finite, and are unable to achieve the righteousness of God. **Rom 10:3.**

God faithfully calls us into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and offering as we recognise our culpability in these matters. **1Co 1:9.** However, unless we turn to look upon Him whom we have pierced, we will be unable to see the hurt and grief that we cause to God when, being stiff-necked, we stubbornly reject our predestined name. **Zec 12:10. 2Co 3:16. Act 7:51.**

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 2 CORINTHIANS 10

Cursed is the ground

In the first instance, the ground was cursed *because* of the fall of mankind. **Gen 3:17**. To understand this implication of the Fall, we note that the Son of God was the ‘firstborn over all creation’. **Col 1:15**. All things were created through Him and for Him. **Col 1:16**. Adam was given dominion over the natural creation. The natural creation was sustained and in harmony while man remained connected to the order of headship under Christ. **1Co 11:3**. When Adam sinned, through disobedience, he was cut off from Christ’s headship. As a consequence, creation was no longer sustained by the life of Yahweh. It was now subjected to futility. **Rom 8:20**. All living things were now competing for life and survival.

Through His offering, Christ was reversing the curse by reconnecting man and creation to Himself. Furthermore, He was disempowering the fallen mode of existence that claims the right to life through exercising might and power over others. This fallen way of living is commonly referred to as ‘the survival of the fittest’ and is the basis of all conflict. **Jas 4:1 2**.

Paul explained that Christ reconciled all things, on earth and in heaven, ‘having made peace through the blood of His cross’. **Col 1:20**. Peace in creation was established through the blood that was shed on account of the fifth wound – namely, the crown of thorns. In this regard, we note that Christ was still wearing the crown of thorns when He was being crucified on the cross.

It is equally true that God cursed the ground for *man’s sake*, promising Adam that ‘thorns and thistles’ would be an outcome of his toil and sweat. The purpose of this action by God was not *punitively condemn* Adam for his transgression in the garden. Rather, it was an act of mercy and loving discipline to *turn* Adam, and thus all of mankind, back to fellowship and connection with God.

Recovery is only in Christ

When we consider that God cursed the ground *for our sake*, we must first understand that the pathway of our recovery to God is *only* in and through Christ. **Joh 14:6**. He pioneered the pathway for us to follow as He came back from the death caused by sin through the shedding of His blood in six wounding events. **Heb 2:10**. We, too, are to join Him on this same pathway, whereby we are born from the death of sin in Gethsemane and born from above by the incorruptible word of God. **Heb 13:20. 1Pe 1:23**. It is through baptism that we are joined to Christ and the pathway of salvation that He pioneered through His offering and sufferings. Communion, then, is our ongoing participation in the fellowship of this pathway of recovery, and our continued commitment to be joined to His offering through our baptism and sufferings. **1Co 11:25 26. 1Pe 3:21**. Because we are joined to Christ, we are being sanctified and are receiving eternal life in the midst of our sufferings. **Rom 6:22. 2Co 4:17**.

It is evident that the ground is *cursed* when the work of our hands is frustrated, our plans are thwarted, and we eat the fruit of our labours with much toil and sorrow. Notably, in dealing with our pride, Christ is also dealing with all of its associated expectations, idealism, drive and ambition.

However, more than this, we must also recognise that the ground is cursed *for our sake*. The discipline of God is an act of His love toward us, and is the process by which we are recovered to our name. The Father, in Christ, is not punishing us when we are being disciplined. **Heb 12:6**. Rather, discipline, in and through our sufferings, is occurring for the good of our sonship so that we will trust in Him and not lean on our own understanding. **Rom 8:28. Pro 3:5. 2Co 1:9. Heb 12:10**.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: JOHN 10

Pride and projections

Thorns and thistles are the *frustrations and suffering events of life that God allows to occur in order to deal with our pride and projections*. They can be situations and circumstances that impede the achievement of our own self centred successful outcomes, which are nothing but the filthy rags of our self righteousness. **Isa 64:6**. It is the boastful pride of life that drives the ambitious, short-sighted pursuit of our own perceived success. **1Jn 2:16**.

In their pride, Adam and Eve sought to make a name for themselves by eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. **Gen 3:6**. Similarly, the citizens of Babel desired to construct a city and a tower, and to *make a name for themselves lest they be scattered*. **Gen 11:4**. We can, therefore, see that the underlying agenda for making a name for ourselves is to cover the shame of our nakedness with a projection.

A projection is a self defined, idolatrous image of ourselves to which we attribute worth. We then enthusiastically oblige others to worship it with us. We project this image because of the shame of our nakedness – our nakedness being the disconnection from our God-defined name and, thus, the absence of the clothing of His righteousness, which is His will being done. **Psa 132:9**.

In pursuit of this self defined name, men and women will regularly use, abuse and accrue any resource to achieve their goal, often at the expense of others. This futile ‘striving after wind’ occurs in the pursuit of all manner of wealth, knowledge, beauty, relationships, worldly successes and achievements. **Ecc 2:17**. Solomon remarked that ‘all the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the *soul is not satisfied*’. **Ecc 6:7**. The person who seeks to find their life by making a name for themselves is always left with a compounding sense of anxiety and depression. This is because their false ‘hope’ of finding themselves through gradual accrual is being constantly deferred and their heart is becoming sick. **Mat 10:39. Pro 13:12**.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 2 CORINTHIANS 12

Receiving the word of God

In considering 'pride', and how it is dealt with in Christ's fifth wound, we must also see that Christ is circumcising from our hearts the fallen way in which we receive His word. In this season, the Lord has taken issue with how we receive His word. He has particularly addressed the common tendency to *agree* with the word, rather than to respond to the word with godly repentance. **2Co 7:10-11**. This position is one of arrogant pride.

When we *merely agree* with the word, we have assumed the position of a *judge*. Herein lies the danger of our pride: we wrongly convince ourselves that we have the ability in ourselves to do and be what was said. In this regard, we believe that there is no need for drastic changes in our life, other than minor adjustments to our behaviour. We can even presume to instruct others regarding 'prudent' adjustments they should make to *their* lives. The error in living this way is that we *continually live by a righteousness of our own*. Instead, we must receive in humility the implanted word, which carries with it the faith to be the son whom God's word is calling us to be. **Jas 1:21. Rom 10:17. 1Th 2:13.**

If our mode is to live by our self righteousness, then the frustration of our hands in the suffering events of life will drive us to a variety of unbelieving attitudes, *instead of provoking us to turn to Christ*. We will become even more impatient, angry, frustrated, agitated, determined, stoic, depressed, anxious and self centred. These are the hallmarks of someone living by the flesh. If we do not participate in Christ's sufferings, these frustrating circumstances will *destroy us*, rather than *turn us* to Christ and reconnect us to the word of our name. In this regard, we note the words of the wise man, 'Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, but humility goes before honour'. **Pro 18:12.**

FOR FURTHER STUDY: PSALM 25

The issue of comparing

If we remain unwilling to join Christ's sufferings, we will eventually begin to compare ourselves with others, particularly when we perceive our unique circumstances as being unjust and unfair. This attitude is exemplified in the Bible by Esau, who wrongly believed himself to be a victim of his own circumstances. **Gen 27:41. Heb 12:15 17.**

We can easily look upon the perceived successes of others and start to express jealousy, envy, dissensions (or divisions) and outbursts of anger. These attitudes are the deeds of the flesh. **Gal 5:19 20.** This can motivate us even more to pursue, with a determined resolve, the idol in our heart – that is, our own righteousness. The apostle John exhorts us to guard ourselves against such idolatry. **1Jn 5:21.** If we constantly sow to these fleshly responses, we must realise that we will reap only division, distrust and discord, which all inevitably lead to relational death within the body of Christ. **Gal 5:15. Gal 6:8. 1Co 11:18 19.**

One of the outcomes of pride and projections being circumcised from our heart, and our deliverance from the propensity to compare ourselves, is that we no longer see ourselves as a victim of our circumstances. Rather, just as the apostle Paul testified, we, too, are able to testify that God is causing *all* things to work together for the good of our sonship. **Rom 8:28. Heb 12:10.**

Both James and Peter tell us that God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. **1Pe 5:5. Jas 4:6.** When our heart is lifted up in pride, God is strongly opposing us. However, if we humble ourselves in the frustrating circumstances of life, trembling at His word, then God's grace enables us to walk our sanctified path every day as a son of God. **Isa 66:2. Heb 4:16.** Instead of proudly pursuing the success of our own hands and our own self defined name, we can simply know and live according to the name that the Father has given to us.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: GALATIANS 5

Paul's testimony

Speaking to Timothy, the apostle Paul testified, 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an *example* for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.' **1Ti 1:15-16**. As we read the testimony of Paul's life in the Scriptures, including the many difficult and frustrating circumstances that he endured, we see both the mercy of God and the perfect patience of Christ towards Paul. **1Ti 1:16**. Evidently, it was through many tribulations that he entered the kingdom of God. **Act 14:21-22**.

We will remember that the fifth wounding of Christ, which primarily comprised the crown of thorns, is dealing with our pride and projections. Thorns and thistles, which are the fruit of the ground being cursed by God, are the frustrations and suffering events of life that God allows to occur in our lives, in order to deal with our pride and projections as we are joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering.

The apostle Paul endured many frustrating and difficult circumstances throughout his life. He testified that he was 'always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested'. **2Co 4:10**. Paul learned, in the suffering events, to boast in his weakness. **2Co 11:30**. Rather than trusting in himself, and in all of his abilities, he learned to trust God who raises the dead. **2Co 1:9**.

Furthermore, as the love of God was poured into his heart by the Holy Spirit, it was in Paul's weakness that others were being strengthened and made complete. **Rom 5:5**. **2Co 13:9**. What was Paul's mode of ministry? It was, undoubtedly, one of boasting in his weakness so that the power of God could be directed towards his hearers. **2Co 11:30**. **2Co 12:5,9**.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 2 CORINTHIANS 13

Weakness – Paul's mode

The Corinthian church desired a charismatic leader, lamenting that Paul's presence was 'unimpressive and his speech contemptible'. **2Co 10:10**. They were looking for a 'guru' teacher to 'tickle' their ears through a sophisticated, charismatic ministry model. **2Ti 4:3. 2Co 11:4**. However, Paul did not come with 'superiority of speech or of wisdom' but, instead, came to the Corinthians in 'weakness and in fear and in much trembling'. **1Co 2:1,3**. He determined to know nothing among them 'except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified'. **1Co 2:2**.

Just as Christ was crucified in weakness, offering Himself through the power of Eternal Spirit, the apostle Paul, likewise, testified that he was weak in Him. **Heb 9:14. 2Co 13:4**. Paul was crucified *with* Christ and lived completely *for* Christ, who died and rose again on his behalf. **Gal 2:20. 2Co 5:14 15**. Paul did not trust in himself, but in God who raises the dead. **2Co 1:9**. Evidently, Paul was made an example to all believers of the very gospel he preached.

Although, at times, he could not see many steps ahead, Paul knew by the Holy Spirit that bonds and afflictions awaited him. **Act 20:23**. This was his portion as a minister of the gospel. However, it was through weakness in his sufferings that Paul could effectively preach the gospel of the grace of God from the basis of testimony. **Act 20:24**.

This is a critical point for us to understand. God does not want us to endure the sufferings of our life, and all of its frustrations, only to trust in ourselves. Rather, in and through the sufferings of life, the gospel of His grace is being made real and effective in our lives as we trust God. God desires that the gospel be made true in us, as it was in Paul. Indeed, we are to be a living epistle, 'known and read by all men'. **2Co 3:2**.

Power perfected in weakness

Throughout the course of his ministry, Paul endured many trials and frustrations that appeared to thwart his work in proclaiming the gospel. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul recounted that he had experienced ‘far more labours, far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labour and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.’ **2Co 11:23-27**.

We could read Paul’s testimony and mistakenly conclude that, given the number of things that seemed to go wrong, Paul’s ministry was not overly successful. Our rational mind could also wrongly conclude that the trials, frustrations, and afflictions that Paul often faced hindered and thwarted his work in proclaiming the gospel. However, the opposite was true. It was *through* the trials and frustrations that the gospel was effectively being proclaimed. This was because, in Paul’s weakness, the power of Christ was able to be expressed in and through him. **2Co 12:9**. In weakness, Paul did not trust in the abilities of his identity; rather, he trusted in God who strengthened him. **Php 4:13**. **Isa 40:29-31**.

Similarly, we can often view the frustrating circumstances of our own life as an annoying hindrance to our work as a son of God. We can often believe that when our sufferings end, our life will return to a semblance of normality. Rather, when we are in Christ, the Father is using the sufferings and the frustrations throughout our life to deal with our pride, which presumes that we can achieve His righteousness through our own abilities. **Rom 8:28**. **Jer 24:5-7**.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 2 CORINTHIANS 6

A thorn in the flesh

The apostle Paul testified that he had received a thorn in his flesh - a messenger from Satan. **2Co 12:7**. The thorn in his flesh that Paul was referring to was *the persecuting spirit* that followed him for a large portion of his ministry journey. This was the same envious and murderous spirit that Paul, previously Saul, had been energised by in persecuting the early church with all his self righteous zeal. **Act 22:3 4**. It is clear from Paul's testimony that the reason for the thorn in his flesh was to deal with his pride, due to the abundance of his revelations. **2Co 12:7**.

The sufferings and circumstances that Paul endured became to him a uniquely tailored participation in Christ's suffering. Christ had already experienced the suffering of death for Paul. **Heb 2:9**. We remember that, in His one offering, Christ dealt with the sin of pride, as well as the curse of death because of our transgression. **Gal 3:13. Rom 6:23**.

Through the abuse that Christ suffered at the hands of the Roman soldiers, Christ experienced the opposition of God to the sinful pride of humanity. **1Pe 5:5**. He humbled Himself and endured this abuse as the Lamb of God. **Isa 53:7**. By His humility, Christ overcame the pride of humanity, including Paul's pride which had been laid on Him. Through this wound, the sin of pride was being destroyed and removed from the heart of Paul. The Holy Spirit joined Paul to this aspect of Christ's sufferings when Paul suffered what he called his 'thorn in the flesh'.

As He did for Paul, Christ simply invites us to join the fellowship of His sufferings. **Php 3:10**. As we are joined in weakness to Christ in His offering through baptism, we become the expression of the righteousness of God. **2Co 5:21**. Paul confessed that he implored the Lord three times to take away the thorn in his flesh. The Lord responded to Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' **2Co 12:9**.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 2 CORINTHIANS 4

Well content with weakness

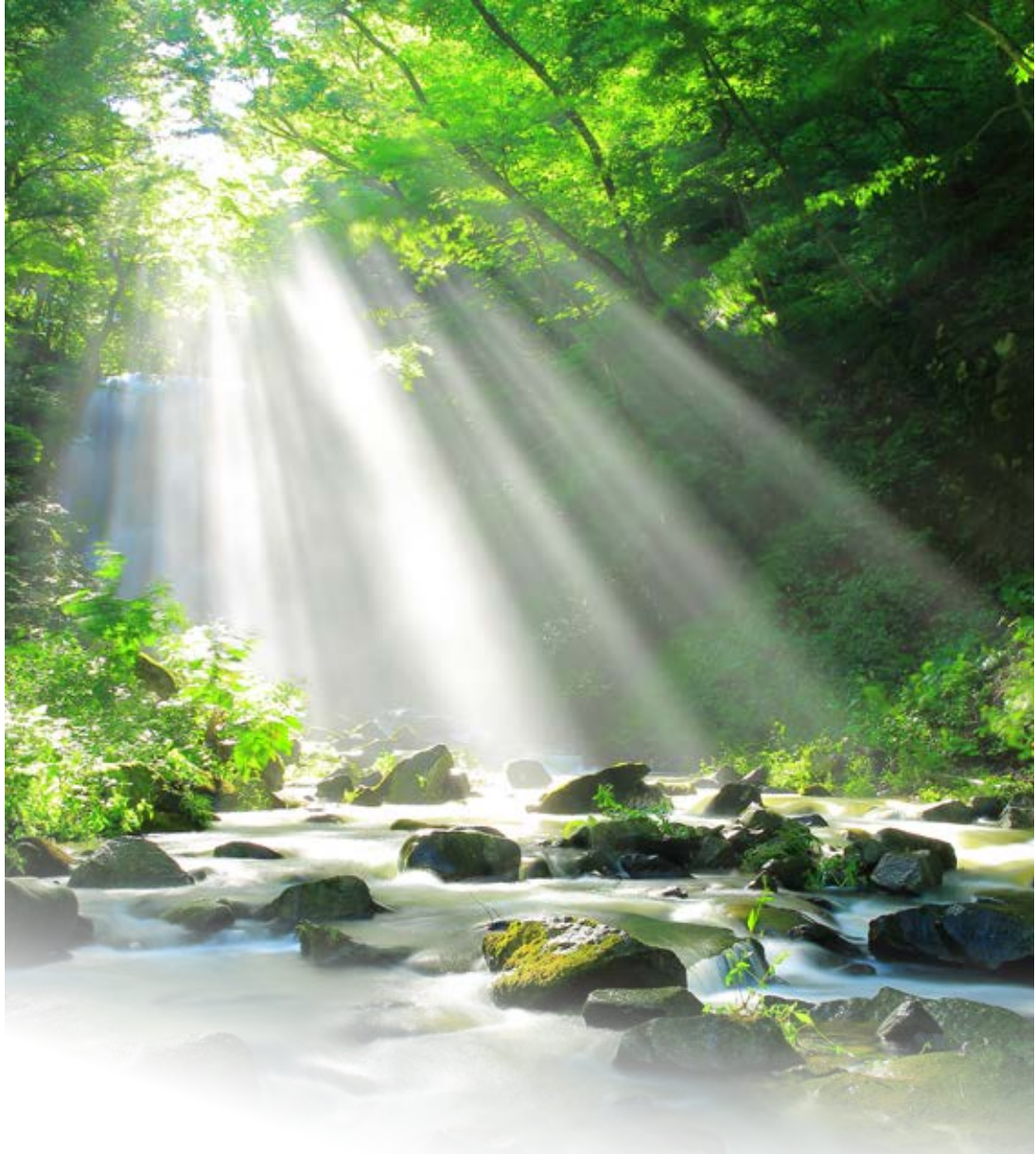
Paul had no ability to deliver himself from the sufferings that accompanied his ministry. He had to trust in God and not in himself. **2Co 1:9**. This was his *weakness*. As Paul joined the Lord in the secret place of prayer, he had access through faith to the grace of God that enabled him to walk the sanctified path that God had predestined for him, however humiliating, frustrating and difficult this was. **Rom 5:2. Heb 4:16**.

As the love of God was poured into his heart by the Holy Spirit, Paul learned to rejoice and boast in his weakness. This was because he recognised that the thorn in the flesh that he experienced was dealing with his pride. More than this, he further recognised that the fruit of his suffering was that others were being strengthened and made complete. **2Co 13:9**.

The important point to note is that the frustrating circumstances that God allows in our life are not *solely* to circumscribe our pride and projections from our heart. Paul recognised that the *fruit* of his sufferings was that the body of Christ was being built up in love, and that others were finding comfort and salvation in his afflictions. **Eph 4:16. 2Co 1:6**. The Lord desires to lift our eyes from the difficulty of our circumstances to see how we are to serve one another in love, and to be a fully participating body member who is able to build another up. **Gal 5:13. 2Co 12:15**.

Paul declared that *'I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong'*. **2Co 12:10**. It is clear from Paul's testimony that we too are to know *contentment and settledness* in our weakness and abasement, for only then will we be strong in Christ. **Php 4:11 13. 2Co 12:10**.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: PHILIPPIANS 4



Restoring
my Soul