

# Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations

The Role of the Church in Healing, Forgiveness and Reconciliation

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Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations

(Formerly 'Healing the Wounds of Ethnic Conflict')

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Sixth Edition

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# Introduction

Wherever we look in our world today, we see conflict. Power struggles erupt between different groups, sometimes even resulting in attempts at genocide. Even countries like Kenya, which were thought to be stable, have suddenly erupted in terrible tribal violence.

Is there an answer to all this pain? Is there any hope for our sinful, hurting world? We believe that there is hope because God is the God of hope! It is part of His character – He cannot be otherwise. God has a strategy to use His church to be the agents of healing and reconciliation in the different nations. But first, the church must be healed.

This material first began to grow in Rwanda in the wake of the horrific genocide of 1994. On an initial visit, Christian leaders from different denominations and groups gathered to talk about the failure of the church and the resulting needs. A crucial question was asked: In a country where 85% of the population attends church, what role can the church play in the healing of the country? In looking for an answer to the question, they themselves encountered God's healing love and miracles of healing and reconciliation began taking place. From this, the vision was born to gather church leaders from every denomination to look at the role of the church in bringing healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. Because of the responsiveness of church leaders to those trial sessions and their enthusiasm for the teaching to be heard in every town in Rwanda, three-day seminars for church leaders began.

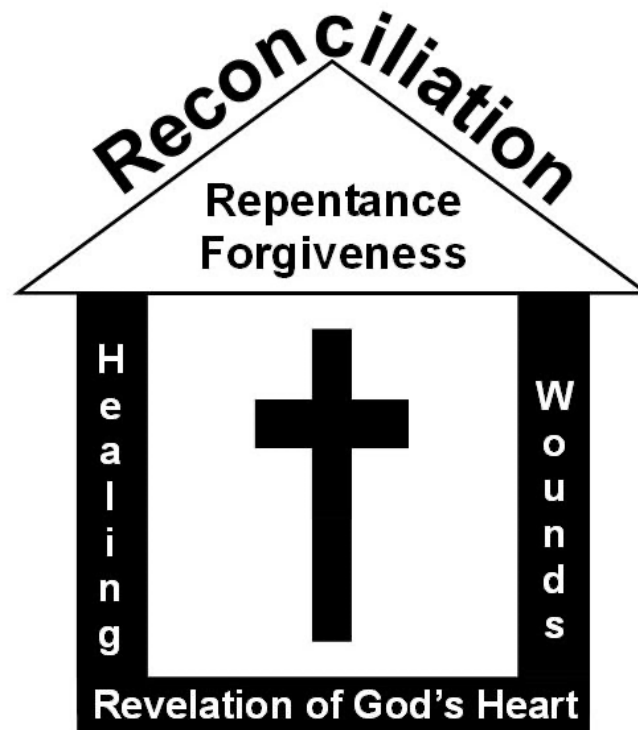
The material was further developed in South Africa for use between the various ethnic groups. While discussing the issue of race in South Africa, we concluded that race should not be an issue, because there is only one human race. We understand, however, that in some parts of the world, racism is believed to be the root of division and conflict. Therefore, we have attempted to make this material inclusive.

By now the ministry has also been established in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Ivory Coast, India and Ukraine, where national teams are now running these workshops. The same miracles of healing and reconciliation are happening there. "*Healing the Wounds of Ethnic Conflict*" workshops, now called "*Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations*", have also been held in several other countries, and work continues to spread.

Our prayer is that this material will be helpful in any situation of ethnic (or indeed any other) conflict. It is humbly offered to you for the purpose of promoting healing and reconciliation.

## Explaining the House Diagram

We have learnt over many years that the *Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations (HHTN)* Workshop is most effective when taught in the right sequence. We cannot rush into difficult subjects of forgiving the offender, repentance and reconciliation, before removing the obstacles and laying a proper foundation. We have found that the symbol of building a house is helpful in trying to achieve healing and reconciliation.



### ***Laying the Foundation***

We believe that the only foundation that leads to lasting healing is a deeper revelation of the heart of God. We need to discover what His original intentions were when He created us, and how these were distorted and lost. We need to rediscover His love and compassion in the midst of our suffering and begin to experience Him as a loving Father.

### ***Building the Walls***

Knowing our God and His character will prepare our hearts to be able to face our pain and bring it to Him for healing. The main source of our healing is the Cross of Christ.

### ***Putting on the Ceiling***

When the heart is still full of pain, it is very hard to forgive. When we discover Jesus as our Pain Bearer and pour our pain into His heart, we discover a new freedom to be able to forgive. Similarly, when we transfer our guilt to Him by faith, we find a new freedom to repent.

### ***Adding the Roof***

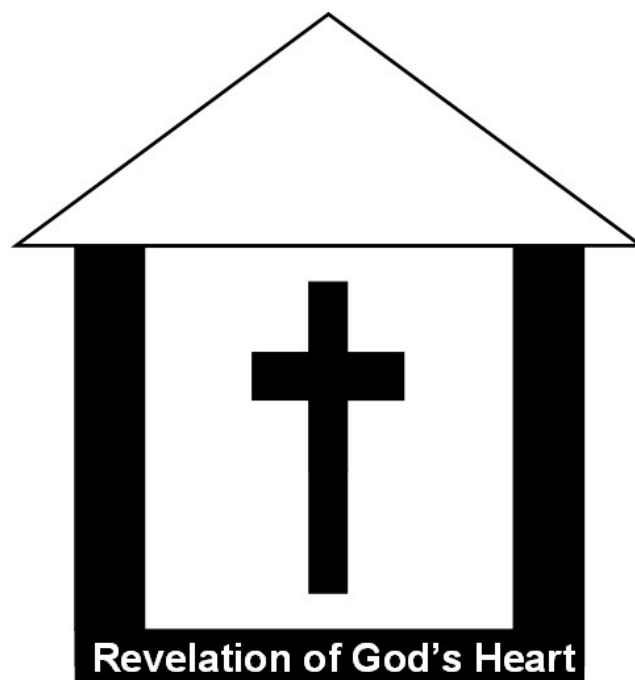
Wherever there is repentance and forgiveness, reconciliation can begin to flow.

# Section 1: Laying the Foundation

## Understanding and experiencing God's heart

All building work begins with laying a foundation. Unless we lay a proper foundation, we cannot build anything strong and lasting. Discovering God's heart is the foundation of all healing. We need to find out what His intentions are for human relationships, from the beginning of creation right up to the present day. We also need a revelation of His heart when everything goes wrong. He is the first One with whom we need to be reconciled. Even Christians need this, because going through unjust suffering can cause us to blame God for not intervening. If we see Him as the author of all our suffering, we will not want to come to Him for healing. It is therefore necessary to wrestle with tough questions about where God is in the midst of suffering and injustice, and to face any accusations against Him that we may be harbouring in our hearts. Christians often need to be given permission to voice their doubts, questions and anger against God, which can be the beginning of their healing.

It is also necessary to deal with childhood hurts that may have damaged our view of God as Father, as this can also hinder us from being able to approach Him confidently and freely. It is difficult to heal the wounds of conflict in isolation from healing childhood wounds; childhood wounds make all subsequent wounds worse. In addition, one cannot heal a country and prevent further conflict without first healing families. A damaged upbringing can mean we do not even know what reconciliation should look like. Those who have not experienced parental love are much more likely to pick up a weapon against a fellow human being, because it is in our families that our characters are formed.





# 1. God's Original Intention for Relationships

Understanding how God intended individuals and people groups to relate.

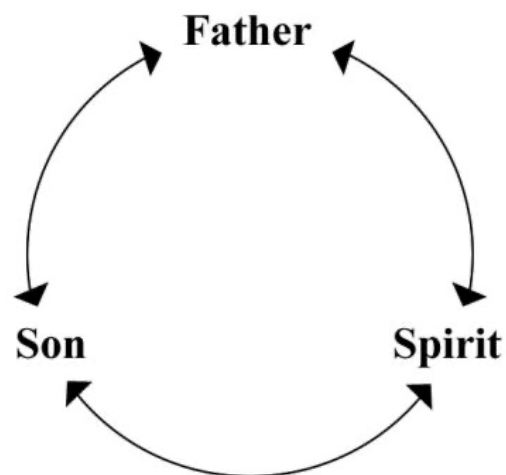
In every situation of conflict, there are broken relationships. People are wounded and angry and want to argue, debate, accuse or justify. Before we start looking at healing these broken relationships, it is important to discover what God wants. What is reconciliation? How will we know when we have achieved it? Let us go back to the very beginning, before any of us were created.

## 1) The Trinity – the perfect model of relationship

Before the world began, Father, Son and Holy Spirit were living eternally in an amazing circle of relationship.

Consider some of the characteristics of the way they relate to one another:

- love
- trust
- mutual respect
- affection
- enjoying and celebrating one another
- perfect unity
- supporting each other
- working together towards the same goals
- confidence in each other
- interest in each other
- team work – co-labourers
- open communication with each other
- honouring and esteeming one another
- always there for each other
- different in role but totally interdependent



What we see here is perfect love with each one complementing the other. Though they are one in substance, in their Person they are not identical. But being different was never a problem – it is what makes them Father, Son and Holy Spirit! What we see in its most perfect form is unity in diversity. It's also helpful to consider what is NOT present in their relationship. There is no competitiveness, no power struggle, no one threatened by anyone else, no one trying to dominate, no one jealous of anyone, no conflict of interest. Here is the model of perfect relationships, enjoying one another throughout eternity.

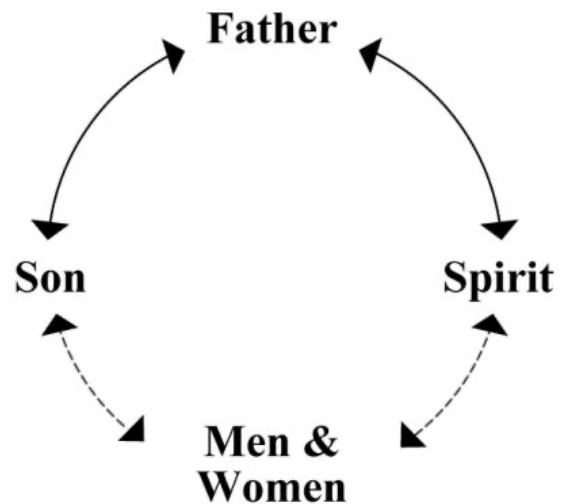
### ***If the Godhead's relationship together was so wonderful, why did They decide to create us?***

There is something about love that always wants to reproduce. There was a desire to share with others the wonderful quality of relationships They were already experiencing. It was too good to keep to Themselves. It is as if God said, 'Let Us open up the circle. Let Us create human beings in Our image, so that they can share in this wonderful relationship both with Us and with one another.' This is what Jesus later prayed for in John 17:21-22.

Take a moment to think about the wonder of this. We were born for glorious relationships!

**What, then, is the goal of reconciliation?** It is nothing less than to be restored to God's original purpose.

We know that the three members of the Godhead were all involved in our creation. **How did They feel when They were creating us?** We know from the first chapter of Genesis that They felt pleasure. Surely there was also a joyful, eager anticipation for relationship with the created ones. Because the Godhead is a relationship, we conclude that God's image is most clearly seen (or not seen) in the quality of our relationships. That includes every kind of relationship between people and people groups.



## 2) Different people groups – a blessing or a curse?

But what about different people groups, were they also God's plan? Most people who have suffered ethnic conflicts are quick to use Genesis 11 to suggest that different ethnic groups, different cultures are God's judgement as a result of rebellion. Yet **Acts 17:26** tells us that God made all people groups from one man<sup>1</sup>. Diversity was God's idea. In Ephesians 3:15, the word "family" can also mean people group, ethnicity, or race. This should not surprise us, because God obviously loves diversity. We only have to look at creation to see that (Romans 1:20). God's glory is so vast that no single people group could reveal it. In Genesis 1:28, God told the man and woman to "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." This would have inevitably led to diversity, simply because of being separated and developing our own cultures. Even our physical appearances would change. In His wisdom, God planned that some of our physical features would become modified (for example, skin colour; hair thickness) to be better adapted to the environment of the part of the world He had chosen for us.

### **Different but of equal value**

We are different, but we are of equal value in God's sight. When He created humanity, God had no favourites (**Acts 10:34-35**)<sup>1</sup>. God put a special treasure into every people group, intending that they develop their uniqueness. God's plan was that we would all love, appreciate, respect and enjoy one another, considering others as better than ourselves. **Philippians 2:3-4** is very challenging. He wants us to see each other as a source of enrichment and greater blessing for our lives. Go back to the list on the previous page. This is how God wanted the different people groups to relate to each other!

A diamond with its many facets (or faces) is so much more valuable than a pane of glass, which has only one face. The greater the number of facets, the more beautiful it is, as each facet reflects the light in a slightly different way. It is also much stronger. In the same way, God wanted each people group to be a facet of a huge, magnificent diamond, with each different group reflecting His glory in a unique way. **Revelation 21:24-26** tells us that God has put glory and splendour in every people group<sup>1</sup>, and He wants it all brought into the New Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> The word for nations in the New Testament is always *ethnos*, which means people groups, not countries as we know them today.

### 3) What went wrong?

Tragically, sin entered God's beautiful creation. Human beings became alienated from God, from one another and from creation. In Genesis 11, people had resisted God's command to move over the face of the earth and subdue it. Instead, they came together in rebellion to build a tower up to heaven (verse 4), and God had to forcibly scatter them, so that his original purpose could be realised.

Ever since then, instead of celebrating the distinctive attributes of our diversity and honouring people from different groups, we feel threatened by them. We reject the equal value that God gave each people group and get into conflicts with those we see as different. Some groups begin to consider themselves superior and desire to dominate others. All of this lays the groundwork for injustice in society and between peoples. Instead of being a source of enrichment and blessing, diversity becomes an object of wounding. This was never God's intention! It grieves the Holy Spirit who brooded over the creation. God hates all injustice, partiality, and prejudice.

In conclusion, we see that God's original plan for human relationships was that as different people groups, we relate as harmoniously as the Trinity, but humanity has fallen far short of His intentions. That is why God Himself had to enter our world in Jesus to reconcile us to Himself and to one another.

#### Key Ideas

- The Trinity is the model for perfect human relationships.
- People groups were designed by God to demonstrate different aspects of His glory.
- His plan was that there would be unity in diversity, as we honour and celebrate each people group's differences, but sin entered the human heart to destroy God's good plan.

#### Making it Personal

- What prevents me from believing a Master Craftsman designed me and that He was delighted with what He made?
- What prevents me from seeing my people group and other people groups as specially designed by God to be a blessing?
- What can help me and my people group to see people who are different from me as a potential blessing instead of a threat?

## 2. The Awful Power of Prejudice: Bitter Roots

### Helping people to understand the danger of prejudice and renounce their prejudices

When people are asked why there are so many conflicts in the world, most tend to talk about land issues, economic or social injustices, external causes, and so on, but almost no one thinks of the poison of prejudice. In the case of Rwanda, prejudice could be compared to a buried landmine waiting to be stepped on. Politicians skilfully used the element of fear to raise the “old demons” of hatred and mobilise thousands of the youth for evil purposes.

There are many roots which can be identified as causative factors in conflict between people groups – roots like bad governance, poverty, unresolved past conflict, inadequate discipleship in churches, the “divide and rule” policy of colonial powers, as well as the influence of idolatry<sup>2</sup>. But prejudice is a major factor. This teaching looks at ethnic and racial prejudice.

#### 1) Definition – what is prejudice?

We can define prejudice as a pre-conceived opinion likely to be harmful to another group or their rights. All conflict between people groups begins in our minds so we need to understand better how destructive prejudice is. It can have devastating consequences.

The awful thing about prejudice is that it **generalises**. We may notice some negative aspect in someone’s behaviour and we then proceed to say that the whole group the person represents are like that. The whole group is then condemned and judged. Prejudice is worsened when violence has occurred and then people find it hard to distinguish between what is a prejudicial belief and what is true about *all* those who belong to the “enemy group”. When one group gains power and can codify their prejudices in the systems of law, the injustices suffered by the others can go on for generations as was seen, for example, in apartheid South Africa.

Prejudice is as old as the Bible. Jesus Himself was the victim of prejudice. When Nathaniel heard He came from Nazareth, he asked, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (**John 1:46**). There was also considerable prejudice between the Jews and the Samaritans (**John 4:9**).

#### 2) Identifying and admitting the prejudices

If we are honest, we will all have to admit that we are prone to prejudice. It seems that in every country, people tend to think of certain group as being of less value than themselves. What comes to mind for you now, in your situation?

The jokes we tell about other groups are often evidence of prejudice. This, it seems, happens all over the world! We also get a clue from the names we give to a particular group (for example, the Hutu used to call Tutsi cockroaches and snakes during the 1994 Rwandan genocide).

In every country where we have worked, we have found much prejudice. Every group has something negative to say about the other groups! For example, in South Africa, they say that all Whites are racist oppressors, all Blacks are backward and violent, all Indians are dishonest, all Coloureds are drunkards....

In Rwanda, the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa are not true ethnic groups, but nevertheless can have strong prejudices against each other. The Hutu are considered to be stupid, only good for cultivating,

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in Rwanda, an idol called Rukarabankaba (whose name means ‘wash one’s hands with blood’) was worshipped.

they eat too much, they are ugly, they are killers. The Tutsi are perceived as arrogant, cunning, hypocritical, lazy – they let the Hutu do all the work. The Twa are considered to be dirty, beggars with no brains, even sub-human.

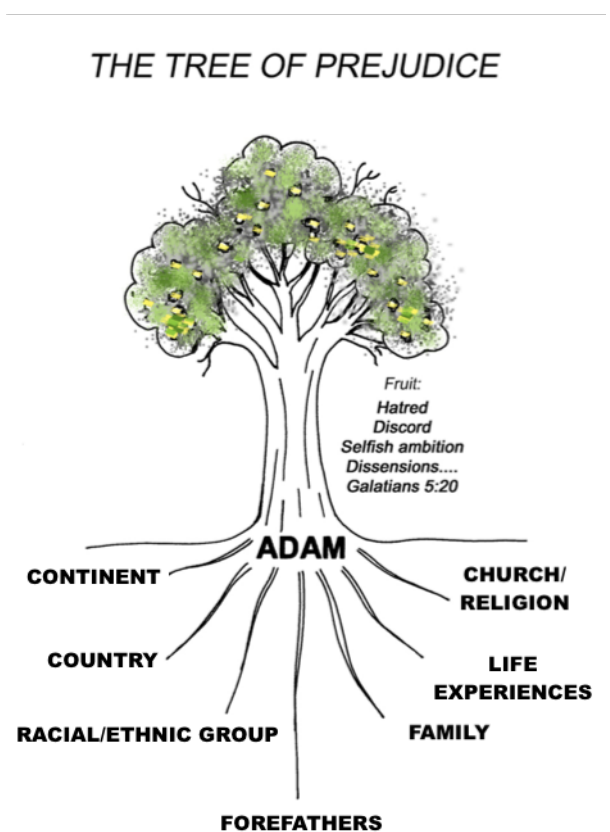
### 3) Where did we learn our prejudices and beliefs that lead to bad relationships?

Have you ever wondered what has made you the person you are, with your beliefs about life, your opinions and especially your prejudices?

#### *Consider the imagery of a tree to represent our lives*

The Bible often uses the imagery of a tree to describe our lives (Psalm 1:3, 92:12; Isaiah 61:3b; Jeremiah 11:16, 17:8). Let us use this imagery to understand more of the sources of our prejudices and what fruit prejudice is producing in our lives.

We all come from one man (Acts 17:26). We are all made in the image of God. We all have a



conscience, can exercise our will, can make choices, are able to love, and to have a relationship with God. We all inherited these good things from Adam. God intended us to be like trees that produce good fruit. As we have seen in the last chapter, He wanted us to enjoy, honour and celebrate the differences in the way we were created. But Adam sinned, and God's good purposes were ruined. All too often, instead of this good fruit, we notice that the fruit we are bearing is bitter and sour. We have a tendency towards prejudice, suspicion, even hatred.

Every fruit has its root, and in order to understand why we produce bitter fruit, we need to go back to the roots. God intended all these roots to be good, drawing in healthy nutrients from the soil. But because of Adam's sin, the Bible tells us we inherited Adam's tendency to sin (Romans 5:12-21). Through this Satan got access to every aspect of life and now all the places where these roots draw from are contaminated by sin.

Consider what prejudices exist between continents, countries, ethnic/racial groups, religious groups, and between men and women. Can you list any from your own experience? How are these passed down from our forefathers? What prejudices did you learn at home, where we probably learned most of our prejudices? What life experiences confirmed these prejudices for you? What about your experiences in churches? Are they free from prejudice?

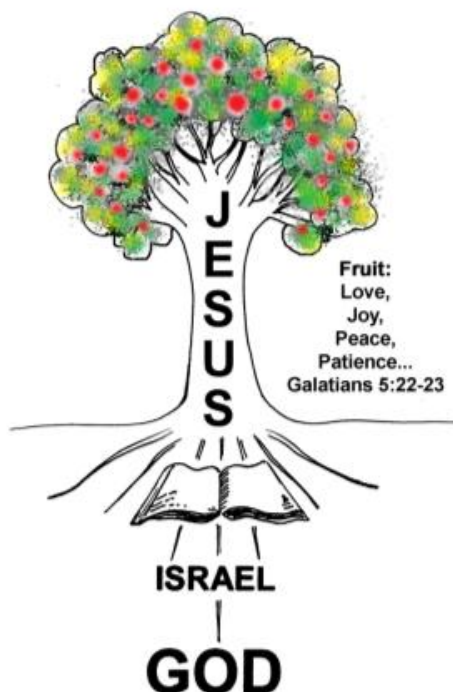
Prejudice will produce its fruit: hatred, discord, selfish ambition, dissensions and so on – the very opposite of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-23).

Deuteronomy 29:18 speaks of bitterness in our roots producing poisonous fruit. We find the same idea in **Hebrews 12:14-15**, which tells us that bitterness is contagious and defiles many people.

Prejudice is sin because it is a form of judgement. It is serious because it denies the image of God in others. It rejects God's plan of unity in diversity. It is dishonouring, belittles others, and is against the teaching of Scripture which tells us to consider others as better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). Prejudice condemns whole people groups that God loves and that Jesus died for. It disregards Jesus' commands to love one another (John 15:12) and to do to others as we would like them to do to us (Matthew 7:12).

#### 4) Jesus – someone who has no prejudice

##### *JESUS - ROOTED IN GOD*



Let us look at another tree – someone who has no prejudice and whose life produces the good fruit of love, joy, peace, patience and all the other fruit of the Spirit.

There is no prejudice or bitterness in Jesus because he is rooted in God who created us all with equal value and desires the best for everyone. In John 4 we see Jesus conversing and sharing deep truths with a woman from Samaria, demonstrating that He had no prejudice against Samaritans or against women, unlike His fellow Jews. In Luke 7 He willingly healed the servant of a Roman centurion, even though the Romans were the enemies of the Jews. Although at first sight the story of Jesus' interaction with the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7 seems to show prejudice, what Jesus was doing was drawing faith out of her. Once He had seen that she had faith to receive from Him, He took great pleasure in healing her daughter.

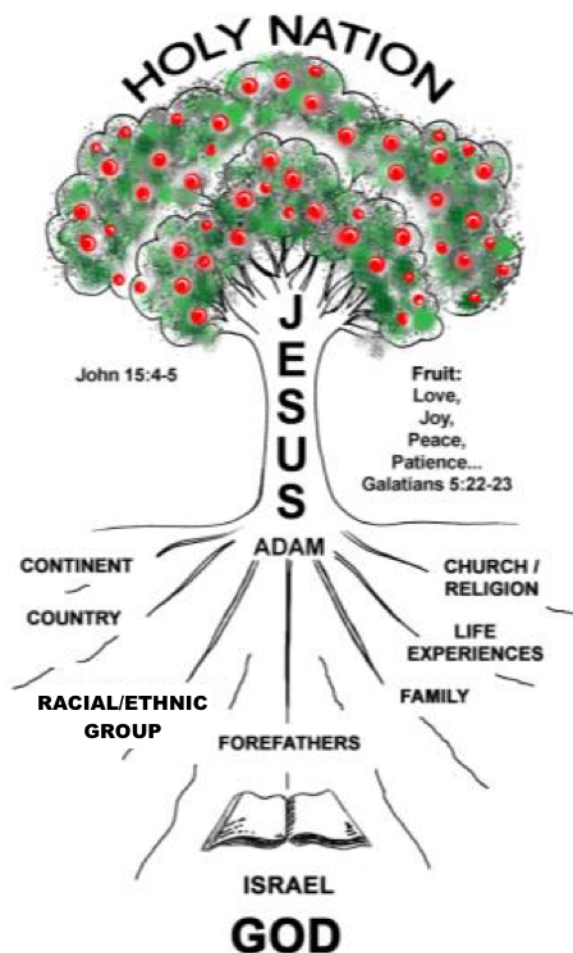
#### 5) Hope for change through living in Jesus

Even if we have bitterness in our roots, producing poisonous fruit, it does not need to stay that way. **Romans 12:2** tells us we need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We are not to be conformed to the society in which we live, but rather to have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5; 1 Corinthians 2:16). Our thoughts are very powerful. All behaviour begins in the mind.

The early church struggled with this. It took them a long time to realise that in God's sight all believers are of equal value. In Acts 6:1 we read that the Jewish widows who had adopted the Greek language and culture were being overlooked in the distribution of food. There was obviously a prejudice against them which needed to be corrected.

Even Peter needed radical thought change. We read in Acts 10 that he needed a divine vision to change his mind. He still had not realised that the message of the kingdom of God was for everyone. He saw a sheet coming down from heaven filled with animals that Jews considered "unclean" and was told by a voice to kill and eat. "Surely not, Lord!" was his reply. But God told him not to call anything impure that God had cleansed. It was only after Cornelius, a Roman centurion, visited him immediately afterwards, seeking to know God, that he understood God's message. There was to be no prejudice against someone who was different.

TRANSFORMED  
BY BEING RENEWED IN CHRIST



this aspect of life in Christ is often neglected in the teaching of our churches. We will look at this in more detail in the next chapter. v

There is hope! Jesus invites us to come and live in Him and to let the Holy Spirit progressively transform us into His image. In the third diagram we see our little tree inside the big Jesus tree, representing our life in Jesus. When we truly understand that we are part of this good tree we will begin to produce good healthy fruit (John 15:4-5). Here all our roots can be cleansed, and we can develop new beliefs and attitudes.

Changing our old habits and patterns is never easy, and we will probably need to keep coming back to God in repentance. We also need to act out our repentance in practical ways by deliberately interacting and working with the "other" group(s), even if our own group doesn't like what we are doing.

Instead of living out of our prejudice, we now seek to bless and affirm those of the "other" group(s). Pronouncing blessings upon them displays a change of heart. We will learn more about this in chapter 14.

When we become Christians through repentance and faith in Jesus, we also become citizens of the Holy Nation (1 Peter 2:9). Sadly,

### Key Ideas

- Prejudice is a judgement passed against a whole group.
- We learn our prejudices from many different sources.
- Prejudice is very destructive and is the start of all wars and divisions.

### Making it Personal

Take time to consider your different roots and answer these questions:

- What prejudices do I have and against which groups?
- What practical steps will I take towards renewal and change?

### 3. The Holy Nation

#### Learning to live as citizens of the Holy Nation

In a country where there has been conflict or injustice, everyone's identity is affected, both oppressed and oppressor, and everyone needs a healed, restored identity. The focus of this session is on ethnic identity in the context of the Holy Nation, but the same principles will apply to all aspects of our identity.

Though all commend the African church for its growth in numbers, many are puzzled by its lack of effectiveness in the war against tribalism. What is wrong even in the so-called "Christianised" countries – and this is not confined to Africa? It is time for the church to receive a further revelation of God's plan. The church does not know what to do with ethnicity. When we become Christians, do we forget about our natural identities? This topic will help us find the right balance between our natural identity and our identity in Christ.

#### 1) Discrimination in the church

Although God created us in His image to experience unity in diversity, few have understood His intentions for us to honour and complement one another, even in the church. There are many mono-ethnic churches where people of other ethnic groups are not made to feel welcome. Even in churches where different ethnic groups co-exist, leaders and other office-bearers are often selected according to their ethnic group and not according to their gifting. Inter-marriage between different ethnic groups is often frowned upon, or even openly opposed. In times of conflict within the country, the church is often part of the problem instead of being part of the solution, with the same divisions and hatred existing within the church as in the community. And most people do not see anything wrong in this! Yet, as we have seen in chapter 1, this is totally against God's good plan.

God's answer to this is to form a new special group of His chosen people.

#### 2) The Holy Nation – God's chosen people

##### *In the Old Testament*

God's plan began with Abraham. He called him out of his country, his people and his father's house to be the start of a new nation. This nation was to be His very own people who would love Him, obey Him, and demonstrate the beauty of a holy life to the surrounding nations (**Genesis 12:1-3**) by the way they lived and related to one another. This was affirmed in **Exodus 19:5-6**, when the children of Israel returned from Egypt.

Many Scriptures make it clear that God's purpose was for the nation of Israel to be a blessing to the world. For example, Isaiah 51:1-4 ends with "Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: the law will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations." Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6, prophetic passages concerning both Israel and the Messiah, also confirm this.

##### *In the New Testament*

In **1 Peter 2:9** Peter refers to Exodus 19:5-6, but this time he applies it in a different way. He addresses the believers in many different nations (1 Peter 1:1) saying to them, "You are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a Holy Nation." All believers from whatever background are "the body of Christ," the Church, the Holy Nation, God's own family. By faith we are all Abraham's children now (**Galatians 3:28-29**; Romans 4:16), and in the spiritual sense, we are also commanded by God to "leave our country, our people and our father's house," to become citizens of the Holy Nation.



Through His death Jesus has broken down every dividing wall. In **Ephesians 2:14-22** we are told that, "His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two," and "in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross." In this way God is forming from believers, both Jew and Gentile, a special new people group, his Holy Nation, where, at last, his plan of unity in diversity can be experienced and demonstrated.

So, how has the church missed this vital truth? We saw in the last chapter that coming to faith in Jesus also means joining a new international, interethnic family where we all love and honour one another. The only way to show God that we love Him is by loving our brother, whatever his ethnicity (1 John 4:19-21). We no longer consider people from a human point of view (2 Corinthians 5:16-19). We become peacemakers, ambassadors of the Holy Nation, demonstrating Kingdom values in every aspect of life. Just as the descendants of Abraham were to display God's light to the nations, so also are we, as citizens of the Holy Nation, to do the same.

This is part of the outworking of salvation! When this is not taught Satan is robbing the church of a vital message.

### ***Every people group is included***

This Holy Nation is a very special nation because it is made up of people who love God from every ethnic group (Revelation 5:9-10). It is an international, inter-racial, inter-tribal nation. All the different cultures are represented, and each ethnic group brings its own splendour (Revelation 21:24-27). We do not lose our natural ethnic identity as we join in the Holy Nation, but our ethnic identity becomes part of the higher, far more glorious, identity of being a citizen of the Holy Nation. Our ethnic identity finds its rightful place within our primary identity as citizens of the Holy Nation. We now have a greater loyalty to fellow Christians than to our own ethnic group or country.

### ***Everyone is of equal value***

We saw in the first chapter that God created us all with equal value. The Holy Nation is where God's original intention for the relationships between the various groups can at last be put into practice. In the Holy Nation no one is superior to anyone else. No one is competing against anyone else. No one is threatened by anyone else. Here there is room for us all. Here all divisions disappear while distinctiveness is still honoured. We can accept one another and celebrate the diversity.

## **3) What is redeemed in the Holy Nation?**

There is so much we could say about redemption, but we will focus here on some aspects that are particular to the Holy Nation.

### ***Redeemed identity***

Having a healthy identity is one of the basic human needs. We all need to know who we are in relationship to the rest of the world, and that who we are is acceptable. We learn our identity from many different sources: family, community, religion and so on. It is not something fixed for life but can change according to our life experiences or what we do or do not do well. Whereas in the West our identity seems to be quite individualistic, in Africa one's identity is much more dependent on the group to which one belongs. Many of us struggle with our identity, especially if there is an element of shame tied to it, believing that our origins or lack of achievements are unacceptable.

In Christ all that can change. We can embrace our new identity as God's beloved sons and daughters, adopted into His family (Romans 8:14-17, 29; Galatians 4:6-7; Hebrews 2:11-12). We

can rejoice that Jesus carried all our shame as well as our sin on the cross. Instead of living out of an identity of shame and rejection, we can live out of a place of honour and acceptance because God totally accepts us through Jesus' atoning sacrifice. He also makes us acceptable in every way, so we can be confident in who we are in Him.

### ***Redeemed ethnicity***

Ethnicity forms a significant part of our identity. For many people living in a country where there is ethnic conflict, ethnic identity becomes a painful issue. We become identified with either an oppressor or a victim. Both identities are full of shame. We cannot enjoy being who God created us to be. We may feel we are inferior or superior. People of mixed race often suffer even more, feeling that they do not belong anywhere.

God wants believers to celebrate and live out of their new identity as citizens of the Holy Nation. Belonging to the Holy Nation, however, does not alienate us from our ethnic identity. This is the place where our ethnic identity is redeemed and restored. We can accept ourselves for who we are and can enter into the full destiny God intended for our ethnic group. This is where we can bless and complement one another. Revelation 22:2 tells us that "the leaves of the tree are for healing of the nations<sup>2</sup>." God's purpose is to heal the ethnic groups, not get rid of them. Each ethnic group has a purpose for existing, a unique way of being a blessing to the world and enhancing life on earth. Very often Satan corrupts what God intended for good and distorts our perception. We all need to receive God's cleansing and forgiveness, rediscover what gifts and calling God gave to our ethnic group and begin to have the confidence to live that out to His glory.

### ***Redeemed culture***

God's plan was that the Holy Nation would be rich and colourful and include all the different cultural expressions. Those of mixed ethnicity can bring the best from each culture they represent. In the past, we mistakenly thought that culture was evil (unless it was Western!) and had to be left behind when we became Christian. Churches felt that there was no room for cultural expressions within their doors. In these days, thankfully, we are realising that there is something precious in every culture which God intended to show His glory.

Nevertheless, as we live in a fallen world, Satan often perverts and hijacks what God intended to be good in our cultures. As we come into our true destiny in the Holy Nation, we can ask God to redeem our cultures and restore to us His original intention to make our cultures a blessing. In Jeremiah 12:15 God promises, "I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance." But we must also be discerning and sift the wheat from the chaff. Not everything in our cultures is in line with the Word of God. In the Holy Nation our ethnicity is refined and purified and contains only that special treasure that God has put into it. Anything associated with witchcraft or idolatry, and any cultural and moral values that are contrary to biblical values must be laid down at the cross (Revelation 21:26-27). Our citizenship in the Holy Nation and Kingdom culture must take priority.

## **4) A renewed purpose**

As citizens of the Holy Nation, we not only gain a new healed identity, but we also have our original purpose renewed in an exciting way. Just as the first Holy Nation (Israel) had a prophetic message for the world ("this is our God, and this is how we live as his people"), so the new Holy Nation has the same prophetic message to give, especially in a country in conflict. This is why the

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<sup>2</sup> literally ethnos

church must take the lead in demonstrating the wonderful unity that is possible between different groups. We can show the world what love is!

Let's remind ourselves of the intention of the Trinity in creating us – to share their wonderful love and unity. As we start living as citizens of the Holy Nation, this will impact the whole of society, and the intentions of the Trinity can begin to be realised. There is a lot of teaching in the Old Testament about how God wants communities to operate – with righteousness, justice, loving care for everyone, no poverty and so on. One example of this can be seen in Deuteronomy 15. Of course, Jesus clarified this even further especially in Matthew chapters 5-7. Living as citizens of the Holy Nation gives a visible demonstration to the world of life in the kingdom of God, life as God had always intended it to be.

What God did with the Israelites in the Old Testament, then, was a foreshadow of what He would do with His children (both Jews and Gentiles) in the New Testament. The Holy Nation in turn is a foreshadow of the New Jerusalem!

### **5) The tragedy of not understanding the truth of God's Holy Nation**

If we do not understand the bigger picture of God's plan for the Holy Nation, then we become very short-sighted. We focus on our own group/nation and that becomes an end in itself. The following things can happen:

- We continue to live out of our natural identity with its woundedness, pride, and so on, instead of living out of the new identity of royal citizens of God's Holy Nation where everyone is equally valued. Isaiah 54:2 speaks of the need to live out of a more spacious place, not a place of restriction.
- We become very proud of our group, and thinking it is the best, we want to impose our supposed superiority on others. We are blind to the cultures and qualities of other groups.
- We become blind to the weaknesses and shortcomings of our group and are not able to discern the distinctive attributes, whether good or bad, within our culture/group. We also cannot appreciate other cultures/ethnic groups/races or see them as equally valid and valuable.
- We give false meaning to Scripture to support our view and fall into heresy (as happened in apartheid in South Africa).
- If we have grown up in a people group that was oppressed and have experienced wounding and lack of acceptance, we tend to one of the following:
  - Develop a feeling of inferiority. This shows itself in a lack of confidence and ability to take initiative and results in a passive and resigned attitude towards our fate.
  - Compensate by making an idol of our own race/ethnicity/nation/culture. All our energy goes into promoting or gaining equality for our own group.
  - End up becoming the oppressor ourselves. This tends to happen whenever we have not availed ourselves of God's grace for healing and forgiveness.

### **6) Belonging to the Holy Nation brings a new freedom**

By now thousands of Christians have found a new freedom in accepting their citizenship of the Holy Nation. Together they have become strong prophetic voices in their country, demonstrating a higher way to live. Instead of prejudice, suspicion, mistrust, divisions, hatred and unjust inequalities, they live out a new unity where they honour one another and celebrate diversity just as God intended from the beginning.

### Key Ideas

- Our ethnic identity is often distorted and needs to be redeemed and restored.
- As citizens of a Holy Nation, we can discover our true identity.
- In Christ we are all of equal value, and can accept, embrace and complement one another, though we come from different backgrounds.

### Making it Personal

- What aspects of my culture can be redeemed and used to glorify God in the Holy Nation?
- What are the negative characteristics of my ethnicity/culture? (For example: pride, inferiority, making an idol of your ethnicity, and so on.)
- What difference would I see if all believers in my country would live as fellow citizens in the Holy Nation?
- What could I do to help this become a reality?

## 4. The Church as an Agent of Change

### Helping the church overcome its failure and accept its responsibility to be God's agent of change

As God has intended the church to be the "gatekeeper" for the country (1 Timothy 3:15), the blame often falls on the church when things go wrong. Sometimes the church reacts by shifting the blame to the government. We believe God's agent of healing in any country is the church – a healed and reconciled church that has rediscovered its mission as God's Holy Nation. Though the church has failed in many countries, it is still God's hope for every country.

#### 1) God's plan for the Church

From the beginning God intended for His Church to reveal to the world how to live. His desire was for different people, ethnic groups, and communities to relate to each other by living out of their identity as God's Holy Nation.

God's purpose remains to build all believers into a dwelling place where He will live (see Ephesians 2:21-22).

#### ***God's children are to be both salt and light in the community***

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12), but in **Matthew 5:14-16**, He also said, "You are the light of the world." When Jesus dwells in people, they become lights shining in their communities (Philippians 2:14-16). Light is radically different in character from darkness. They cannot co-exist, because light removes darkness.

To be different from the darkness, we must first be transformed by the renewing of our minds (**Romans 12:2**). Instead of being conformed to the society in which we live and having the same prejudices, mistrust, hatred, tolerance of injustice, and so on; we need the mind of Christ. We need to be thinking God's thoughts and seeing everything from His perspective. If our thoughts change, so will our behaviour. The remainder of this book is about how God cleanses, heals and transforms our thoughts and perspectives. Our transformed lives reflect the light of Christ in our communities, revealing God's intentions and where our societies fall short. (Isaiah 60:1-3)

Jesus also said that we are the *salt* of the earth (**Matthew 5:13**):

- We are to be the preservatives in our society, preserving God's values and standards.
- We are to have a purifying role in our communities, by demonstrating the way God wants us to live.
- We are to create a thirst for righteousness.
- We are to give taste and meaning to life, to make a difference.
- As Jesus intercedes for us, we are also to be intercessors for our communities.
- The church is to speak out prophetically whenever unrighteous policies appear, and to stand up against all evil.

#### ***The church as a prophetic voice***

In the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophets whenever He wanted to communicate a message to the king or His people (Hebrews 1:1). In Hebrews 1:2, however, we read that '... in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son' and in **Ephesians 3:10-11** that '...now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known... according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus.

Thus, in the New Covenant, God's plan is to speak through the church. The prophets, priests, believers, and sometimes kings, are now part of the church, and Jesus is the Head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). God's desire is to use the church to show the country how to live. The church should therefore *be a prophetic voice in every country*.

### ***The church as a peacemaker.***

Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.' (Matthew 5:9) Why? Because God is the greatest peacemaker ever! We will be like our Father, who loves his enemies, as Jesus exhorts us in **Matthew 5:43-48**. The church on both sides of a conflict should work together to help reduce prejudice, anger, tension, and violence. The church should speak out against any form of injustice. The church is God's chosen agent for change! If the church cannot model forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice, what hope is there for our communities?

In conclusion, God's plan for the church is for the church to live out of its redeemed identity and to fulfil its calling as the Holy Nation. Then the church will demonstrate unity in diversity and return to God's original intent of sharing in the love of the Trinity.

## **2) Satan's plan**

In most countries where there is conflict, the church has been weak in addressing the causes of division and injustice. The focus has instead been on heaven or denominational issues.

Satan wants to extinguish the church's light. His aim is to make sure there is no difference between the church and the surrounding community so that the church does not impact the community. He does this by sowing the same sins, the same prejudice, the same greed, power struggles, immorality, and so on, in the church as is in the surrounding community. When there is no visible difference, then the church has nothing to say.

He has different strategies in different countries, but the principle is the same. In countries where there has been serious conflict, the church has often not spoken out against the injustices and has even been involved in the conflict. In the West, the secularisation of society has often entered the church too, so that belief in the supernatural power of God is seriously weakened. The only way the church can be different from the community is to have the life of God Himself flowing through it.

A light bulb is a good illustration. The function of a light bulb is to be connected to the source of electricity and so produce light. On its own it cannot produce light. We may have light bulbs of many different sizes, shapes and colours, and even spend time polishing them, but if they are not plugged into a source of electricity, they are useless. The church is like a light bulb. Satan wants to disconnect us from the life of God so that we make no difference to the darkness.

## **3) God still has hope for His church**

To what kind of group did Jesus appear after His resurrection? Was it a victorious group? No, it was a discouraged, fearful group, painfully aware of their failure and who had lost all hope and vision for the future. When Jesus appeared inside the locked doors, He did not rebuke those gathered, saying, 'Oh, I am so disappointed in you! What failures you are! I invested three whole years of my life in you and look at the results!' What He said was, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you' (**John 20:21**). By this He was saying that God had not changed His plan. He still believed in His church and His people, and He breathed the Holy Spirit on them. This group of unlikely people then proceeded to change the world!

- God is a God of hope in every situation. Therefore, we also can have hope (**Romans 15:13**).
- Christ in you and your relationships together is the hope of God's glory being revealed in your community (**Colossians 1:27**)!
- Why does God have such hope for the church? The source of God's hope is Christ's finished work on the Cross. God knew that what Jesus accomplished on the Cross was sufficient to bring people back to His glorious purposes (Hebrews 2:10).
- God has promised final victory to the church (Matthew 16:18).

God always has a remnant (like Noah, or the 7,000 during Elijah's times) from whom He can build His standards and righteousness anew. We acknowledge and honour the heroes of faith in any situation of war and ethnic violence.

God is a God of encouragement, who never gives up on His church. He is confident that He can complete the work begun in us (Philippians 1:6). He rejoices over His church (Zephaniah 3:17). This is what He says to us:

- 'You are the light of the world!'
- 'You are the hope of your country!'
- 'I believe in you!'

Chapter 15 can give you practical ideas of how a healed church can impact the community, but first let us understand more about how God wants to heal the church.

### Key Ideas

- God's plan is for the church to be His agent in every country to bring healing and restore that country to His purposes.
- Satan opposes God's plan, but God still has hope for His church.
- Before the church can be an agent of healing, the church must first be healed of its own divisions and inner wounds.

### Making it Personal

- Take time to receive God's hope afresh for your situation.
- What are the signs that the church first needs to be healed before it can become an agent of healing in my locality?
- What am I going to do to help my church become an agent of change?

## 5. Suffering and a God of Love

### Finding trust in a just, loving God in a world full of suffering and injustice.<sup>3</sup>

Before people can come to God for healing, they need to know God is not responsible for their suffering. In most of African countries where fatalism is the underlying belief, many accuse God of negligence or carelessness. Sometimes God is blamed for all the evil. Others say that all suffering is part of carrying our cross.

This teaching has helped many to voice their doubt or anger, but then to realise that God was with them during their suffering. The revelation of that truth makes it easier for many to come and bring their pain to Him.

#### 1) The effects of suffering on our ability to trust God

When people are going through some kind of suffering, questions may arise in their hearts: 'Does God really love me? Then why does He let bad things happen to me?', 'Is He against our group?' We may sing songs about God being loving and good and kind, but we seem to be experiencing something different. Though our lips are singing, our hearts may be silent, or even angry. We are, however, afraid to express our doubts in case we are condemned, rebuked and told to repent.

Having unvoiced doubts in our heart often causes us to 'wear a mask' giving the impression that all is well while underneath there is a lot of pain and struggle that has no means of expression. This can make us feel very alone. Because these feelings are uncomfortable, we may even deny that this is what we really feel. Yet many godly people in the Bible struggled in the same way. Read Psalm 22:1; 74:1,10-11; **Habakkuk 1:2**.

Humanity has always struggled with trying to make sense of suffering, especially when God is supposed to be just and loving. We can have different reactions to this. We might become fatalistic, 'Oh well, you just have to accept things as they are. What else can you do?' We may try to be very spiritual and try to discover a purpose in everything, or we may quietly despair, losing all hope for the future. But often, as a result of going through suffering and injustice, our hearts can begin to accuse God, 'Did He plan all this? If He did not plan it, why did He not step in to intervene? Surely, if He loved us, He would have stopped it from happening.' We are confused and in pain. We believe that somehow it is God's job description to make life happy and fair, and now we feel betrayed and abandoned by Him. Deep in our hearts this can turn into an accusation that He does not care about our suffering.

Often, we do not voice this. We try to behave like very nice Christians, but deep in our hearts there can be a lot of accusations and a lot of pain. When God tells us in Jeremiah 31:3 that He has always loved us, we often respond in our hearts with, 'Do not ask me to believe that. I have too much evidence that suggests something very different!' Instead, we may see God as being the author of our problems and pain. The church needs to be a safe place where we can voice our struggles and doubts, even if we do not find all the answers. But we need to remember that we are not entitled to complete understanding this side of life.

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<sup>3</sup> **Note:** this is a very difficult and complex subject. For those who would like to go deeper, see Appendix A: More Thoughts on "Suffering and a God of Love".



## 2) Some hidden accusations that may be in our hearts

- a. *God is unjust and favours some groups over others.*
- b. *God is cruel. He is the author of our suffering. It must be His will. He is against us and enjoys watching us suffer.*
- c. *God is powerless and remote. He does not stop sinners, so Satan must be stronger than Him.*
- d. *God is uncaring, unconcerned when the innocent suffers.*

Have you struggled with such accusations? These accusations were usually born in pain and come out of wounded hearts, so we need more than theological answers. We need a revelation from the Holy Spirit about God's character. We need to voice our questions and doubts and pour our pain into God's heart. You will learn more about this later in this book. But seeking out truths from the Bible can also help.

## 3) These are some Biblical principles that can help us

(Each point below responds to its corresponding accusation above.)

### a. God is just and loves justice

The Scriptures are very clear on this. "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright, and just is he ..." (Deuteronomy 32:4).

"These are the things you are to do; Speak the truth to each other and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against your neighbour; and do not love to swear falsely: I hate all this,' declares the Lord." (Zechariah 8:16-17).

Therefore, He cannot be the author of any injustice. For people to say that any injustice in a country is the will of God is not in line with the character of God.

But why then is life so unjust? To understand how it can be that God is just while life is unjust, we first need to understand more about the will of God.

### b. God is good and kind. Everything that happens is NOT His will because:

***One of God's gifts to humanity was the ability to make moral choices.***

We have dignity and value through being able to freely choose. We are not robots. In our freedom God wants us to choose life (Deuteronomy 30:15-19). Why did God take the risk of giving us the freedom to choose?

Without freedom of choice there is no love. Robots cannot love. Freedom to choose equals freedom to love! God had to take the risk of giving us freedom of choice, even if it meant that we would then make the wrong choices. If we were robots there would be no loving relationship and no value to our lives.

***God hates sin (Proverbs 6:16-19)***

Sin is NOT God's will. To say that everything is the will of God makes God responsible for sin! James 1:13-17 makes it clear that each person is responsible for all his or her sinful choices and God only gives good gifts.

Choosing to disobey God has serious consequences. The Bible is full of warnings about suffering that result from refusing to listen to God. The Scripture in James says that in the end sin leads to death.

Note: We are NOT saying that suffering is always a result of our own wrong choices. We do not only suffer from our own wrong choices but can suffer terribly from the wrong choices of others. If leaders make wrong choices, many innocent people will suffer.

***God is hurt by our wrong choices (Genesis 6:5-6)***

His heart was filled with pain. All through Scripture we hear the cry of God's heart:

- Psalm 81:10-14 If only they would listen! Then they could experience blessing.
- Isaiah 48:17-18 If only you had paid attention! Then your peace would be like a river.

***God knowing something is going to happen and allowing it does not mean it is His will***

Jesus made it clear in Luke 13:34 and Luke 19:41-44 that His will was to love and protect His people, but they would not come to Him. He foretold the consequences of their choices but wept about it. It was not what He wanted to happen.

***In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught His disciples to pray***

'Let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (**Matthew 6:10**). There is no injustice, sin, pain or suffering in heaven. Clearly, His will is not being done on earth most of the time!

**c. God is all powerful, but:**

***He will not take away the freedom of choice He has given to people***

If He forcibly stopped us sinning (for example, by killing or paralysing killers or forcing them to think differently) we would no longer be free agents made in His image.

***He will not bring an end to all sinners right here and now***

2 Peter 3:7-13 teaches us that God is delaying His judgement. Many Scriptures in both Old and New Testaments tell us of God's judgement but at the same time declare that He is slow to anger and is patient and long-suffering towards sinners. Our God is a God who takes no pleasure in judging sinners, but rather longs for them to repent (Ezekiel 18:23). He delights in showing mercy to those who repent (Micah 7:18).

But there will be day of judgement. 'For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.' (2 Corinthians 5:10). Those who have repented will receive mercy and those who have not repented will be judged. Until then we live in the day of grace where in God's mercy there is opportunity for all to repent.

Of course, sin will always have its consequences. 'Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from that Spirit will reap eternal life.' Even if we have repented, and received God's eternal forgiveness, we will still have to face the consequences in this life of what we have done (Galatians 6:7-8).

***The unchanging God of justice, loving-kindness, grace and mercy has given the church the responsibility to represent Him in the world***

Although God does sometimes intervene miraculously in answer to prayer (see appendix), His priority is to work through His church. That way both the church and the community can be transformed. To those who love Him He gives the responsibility to:

- show how He wants us to live.
- intercede for our country.
- speak out against all injustice, even if it means risking our lives.

- love our neighbours as ourselves, whoever they are.
- defend the oppressed.
- do whatever love demands in every situation.
- be His agents of healing and reconciliation.

#### **d. God is love and is full of compassion. He cares deeply when the innocent suffers**

**God is concerned** when He sees His children suffer (Exodus 3:7) and seeks to send His servants to help on His behalf (Isaiah 6:8). Many times, in the Gospels, we are told that Jesus was 'moved with compassion' in the face of suffering. God is called the 'Father of compassion and the God of all comfort' who seeks to comfort His afflicted ones (**2 Corinthians 1:3-4**).

**God grieves** when there is no one to intervene on behalf of those who suffer injustice (Isaiah 59:15-16; Ezekiel 22:30).

**He shares our pain.** Far from being uncaring, He actually suffers with us (Isaiah 63:9; Isaiah 43:2; Psalm 139:7-8). Even when He does not intervene in the way we would like, it does not mean that He is uncaring.

**He desires to turn our loss into gain.** He is the God who can turn a curse into a blessing. (Deuteronomy 23:5). We will learn more about this later.

In conclusion, Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus is "the exact representation of [the Father's] being." Jesus himself told his disciples, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) So Jesus is the final and clearest revelation of God's character. Our understanding of who God is can never contradict with what we see and experience in Jesus.

#### **Key Ideas**

- Suffering often can affect our relationship to God and our ability to trust in God.
- God is good and just and is not the author of any injustice.
- God is full of love and compassion and suffers with us.

#### **Making it Personal**

- In what circumstances have I doubted the love God has for me?
- What accusations against God could be hidden in my heart?
- How has this topic helped me?

## 6. Knowing God as a Loving Father

Understanding how God wants to heal wounds we have experienced from our earthly parents, and make up for any lack

Although God intended everyone to grow up in a loving family that models His love, very few people actually experience this. Many are blinded to God's father-heart because of past experiences. This will block them from being able to come to God for healing of their other wounds.

The effects of this are enormous, not only affecting individual lives but that of families, even countries. Before countries can be healed, families must be healed. Reconciliation begins at home.

### 1) Jesus shows us the Father

Many Scriptures speak of God as Father. Some are in the Old Testament (Psalm 68:5; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 3:19) but most are in the New Testament, because more than anyone else, Jesus is the one who introduces us to the Father. **John 1:18** tells us that Jesus came from the 'bosom of the Father'. He lived constantly in the embrace, the hug of the Father. In **John 17:24**, Jesus says He wants us to be with Him where He is, which means He wants to take us into the Father's embrace. This is why He came to earth. He said that no one comes to the Father except through Him. Jesus is the Way, and the embrace of the Father is the destination. Jesus came to pay the price for our sin and open the way to the Father, and He reassured us that the Father was just like Him (John 14:9).

### 2) What hinders us from running into God's embrace?

Jesus wants us to experience a full, loving, intimate relationship with God as a loving Father. Yet, many of us cower in the distance, being afraid to approach Him, let alone run into His arms. There are reasons for this, such as

- a) a distorted theology which presents God as a harsh dictator
- b) or seeing Him as the author of life's hurts and injustices
- c) our negative experience with our earthly fathers

This happens in all cultures all over the world. In this chapter we are going to give our attention to the third hindrance – our negative experience with our earthly father. But first, let us consider what every human being needs.

### 3) Basic human needs

Every human being is born into the world with certain needs: physical (food, clothing, shelter, and so on), mental (education), and spiritual. God takes all these needs seriously and so should we. Everyone also has needs of the heart, which are just as important as other needs, but are often misunderstood or neglected. What are these needs?

#### **Security**

Every child needs to know the world into which they were born is a safe place to live. Children can often feel insecure because:

- there was a lack of love between their parents.
- they were abused by their parents in some way, or their parents made excessive demands on them.
- there was disease or death in the family.
- they experienced extreme poverty.
- there was conflict in the family or community.

Jehovah Shalom, The God of Peace, speaks peace in our life every day (Psalm 91, Isaiah 41:10).

### ***Significance, value and purpose***

Significance, value and purpose are the cry of every human heart. Every person needs to know that their life has a purpose. Every child needs to know they have something to contribute to the world and that the world is an enriched place because they are here; something would be missing if they were not here. This is especially true if the child is handicapped in some way. Our value is in who we are in God and not in what we do or do not do. God has a purpose for every life.

#### ***a. How do children receive value?***

They are valued through hearing appreciation, being acknowledged, being called by their name; being given a chance to choose, being asked an opinion....

#### ***b. How are they devalued?***

Through insults, being punished in public, being denied the right to play, experiencing a brother/sister being favoured above them, being forced to sit with visitors, not being allowed to eat at the table....

#### ***c. How does God give us value?***

By creating us in His image, giving us the right to choose, partnering with us (2 Corinthians 6:1), paying such a price for our redemption (1 Peter 1:18-19), calling us friends (John 15:15).

### ***Love***

Everyone needs to feel they are loved. The love God demonstrates to us is an unconditional love; it is not dependent upon us doing things or being a certain way. God spoke of his love (Isaiah 49:15; Jeremiah 31:3) and demonstrated it by sending His Son even before we were repentant (Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4). God's desire is that we learn unconditional love from our parents.

Usually when parents have not received love themselves, they are not only unable to give it, they also do not even realise they need to fill this basic need of their child. They often try to show it by meeting material needs, but this alone is not enough to communicate the love God wants us to learn. To be credible, love needs to be expressed in verbal and emotional ways, and then reinforced through provision of physical and mental needs.

There are different ways to communicate love.

#### ***a. Through words***

Children can know they are loved by hearing words of kindness, praise and appreciation. In many cultures, however, it is difficult for parents to say, 'I love you', 'I'm proud of you'. They either feel embarrassed or fear they will spoil their children if they expressed their love in such ways. The absence of sweet words can have just as negative an effect as bad words (Proverbs 12:18; 15:4; 18:21). God is never reluctant to say, 'I love you!' We are His treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:6).

### ***b. Through affection***

God also created us with a need to receive physical affection. Again, this can be difficult in some cultures except in the case of very young children either because of embarrassment or fear of it taking on sexual connotations. This is very sad because we all need hugs.

### ***c. Through meaningful time spent together***

A father or mother who takes time to listen to, play with, or just be with their child communicates, 'you are important to me', 'you are worthy of my time and attention.' Parents communicate a message of importance and worth to their child when they show interest in him. It is especially important for church leaders to show love to their children. Often the children are neglected because the people in church get their parents' attention. It is hard for the child to feel important when he feels, 'My father gives time to everyone but me.'

## **4) Unmet needs**

God's plan was that all children born into this world would have all these basic needs met through their parents. Sadly, most of us have experienced something far short of the glorious purposes of God for our families and indeed some of us have experienced the very opposite. For example:

- Some lost parents
- Some grew up in uncaring families
- Some parents were ignorant of the needs and how to respond
- Some parents had empty hearts (had not received love themselves)

Often, we do not realise there is anything wrong, thinking our upbringing was normal based on what we know from our own cultures. But God does not call it normal!

### ***Wounds received as we grow up***

It is easy for us to understand that harsh, brutal parenting can be very wounding. But we may not realise that a deficiency or 'lack' in one's upbringing can be as wounding as a trauma – even more so if it continues for a long period of time. Not receiving the love of a parent, for whatever reason, has a very deep effect on our lives. It seriously affects our self-esteem and confidence. When we have an area of wounding in our lives it gives an entry point for the enemy to come in with his lies: 'You are not lovable, you have no worth, you will never succeed' and so on. This then often affects our behaviour so that we end up wounding other people. It can also cripple us as adults from being able to give love to our own families.

### ***The wounding is often passed on to our children and families***

Unless we receive God's healing, we usually do not know how to give to our children the basic needs we lacked. We end up reproducing the same hurts in our own families, and the cycle of wounding is repeated from generation to generation.

### ***The effect on our country***

The family should be the place where we learn what it means to love and be loved, to honour and respect one another. When families are dysfunctional, it affects the life of our communities. If children have experienced a lack of love or actual violence in their homes, they are much more prone to pick up a weapon to become involved in violence. When there is conflict and injustice in our countries, unhealed wounds from childhood can greatly hinder our ability to recover from trauma and to forgive.

### ***The effect on our heart beliefs about God***

This is probably the most serious effect. Without realising it, we develop the same expectations of God as we experienced with our earthly father. If our father was harsh and domineering, we expect God to be a harsh dictator. If our earthly father never comforted us, it is hard for us to believe God when He says, 'I am He who comforts you' (Isaiah 51:12). It never even occurs to us to go to Him for comfort, because we are used to doing without, or trying to meet our need for comfort in other inappropriate ways. If we have never experienced feeling loved, we also can doubt that God really loves us.

Lacks we experience in our childhood often become areas of unbelief preventing us from going to the Heavenly Father to receive what we need. It is like a language we never learnt to speak. Our doctrines may be very correct, but deep inside we struggle to really believe and experience God's amazing love.

## **5) God longs to give us the love of a perfect Father**

### ***'I will be a Father to you' (2 Corinthians 6:18)***

God wants to make up to us anything that we lacked in our human experience. God says, 'I want to be your Father. Whatever you lacked, I want to make it up to you. If no-one ever said, "I love you, I'm proud of you", I want to tell you these things.' Discovering the wonderful heart of our perfect Heavenly Father heals our wounds. He is the best Father we can ever imagine. (You can find a list of some of His wonderful characteristics in the appendix.)

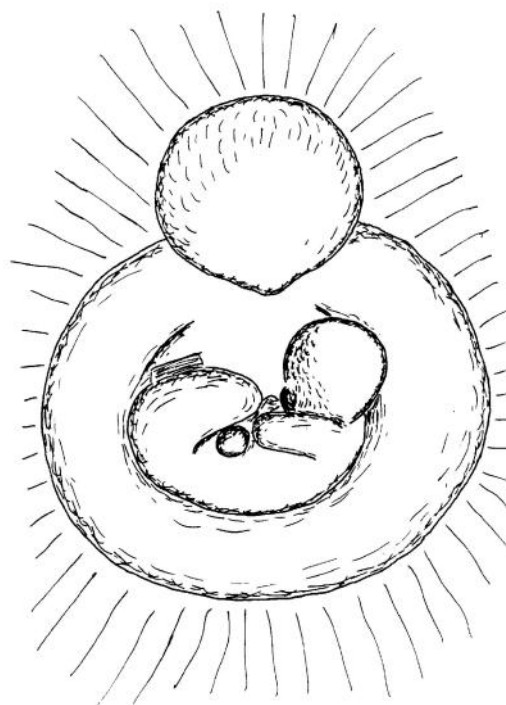
### ***He also gives us a mother's love***

(Isaiah 49:15-16; Isaiah 66:13)

No one needs to feel disadvantaged because of receiving imperfect parenting. We need to forgive our parents for every way they were unable to meet our needs, and then come to the only One who can! Our Heavenly Father can fill the empty hole inside. He can more than make up for all we lacked (**Psalm 27:10**).

### ***God's Love is everlasting and unconditional***

God is a God who loves us unconditionally. It seems too good to be true, but it is the clear message of the Bible. God tells us that He has loved us with an everlasting love (**Jeremiah 31:3**). There is nothing we can or cannot do to alter His love for us. This is the message of grace. We may have received very unbalanced teaching about God's character, stressing only His holiness, His anger against sin, His judgement, and so on, but all God's anger against sin was poured onto Jesus on the Cross.



On a cloudy, overcast day, the weather is often grey, rainy and miserable underneath the clouds. If this continues day after day, one might start to wonder if the sun has disappeared, but if you were to get into an airplane and fly above the clouds, you would find the sun is still there! The clouds cannot stop the sun from shining, but they can stop people on the ground from receiving its warmth and brightness. The clouds are like sin and unbelief in a person's life. The sun is like God's love, which never stops shining, but unconfessed sin and unbelief in our lives, like the cloud, blocks it from reaching us.

### ***Showing God's love to one another***

One of the ways that God expresses His love to us is through one another. As a church we have a wonderful opportunity to become father or mother figures for orphans, or for those who did not receive parental love for whatever reason. But first our own hearts must be filled with God's love or we will have little or nothing to give.

#### **Key Ideas**

- Restoration of a strife-torn country begins with restoration of the family.
- We were created with a need for parental love, modelling God's love for us, but as we live in a fallen creation, our parents are often unable to give us the love we need.
- This can cause us to distance ourselves from Father God, but God is the perfect father, who can meet all the needs of the heart.

#### **Making it Personal**

How to find healing:

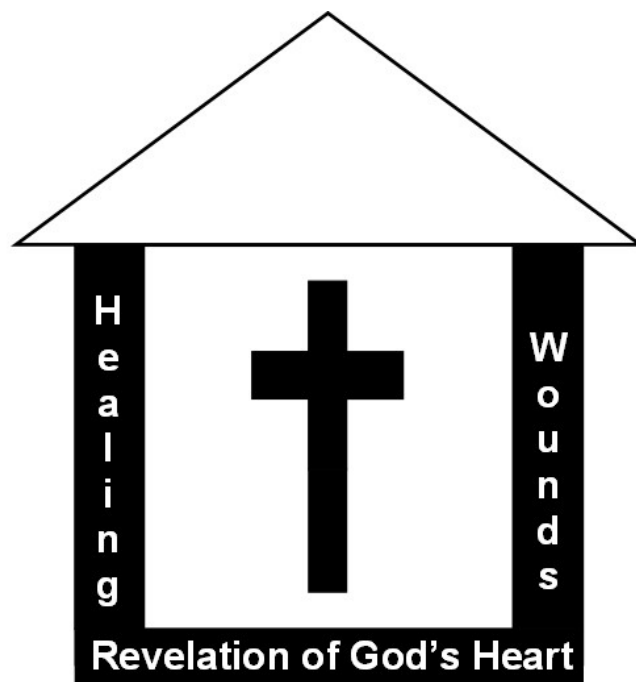
- What was my experience in my family like?
- What would I have liked to receive from my parents, but they were unable to provide it to me?
- How has this influenced my heart's view of who God is and my ability to relate to other people?
- Meditate on 2 Corinthians 6: 18; Psalm 103: 1-6, 13
- Invite God to be your Father and receive from Him love, peace and value.
- Forgive parents who failed you.
- Repent of all the damage you caused to others due to your own lacks.
- Is there anyone to whom I can show the father or mother love of God?



## Section 2: Building the Walls

It is important to take time to see what we have lost so that we can understand how wounded we are and that there is a universal enemy behind all our losses. We also need to consider that the Bible talks very seriously about woundedness. It is something God deeply cares about. Many believe that Jesus came to earth only to deal with our sin, but He also wants to heal our wounds. The Cross deals with both.

Before we can experience healing, we must first face our pain and express it, overcoming our resistance to do this. Hearing one another's painful experiences and praying for each other across ethnic divisions greatly helps us to heal. But the most effective thing of all is then to transfer our pain to Jesus, the Pain Bearer, and trust Him to redeem life's hurts.



## 7. The Thief

### Helping people understand and acknowledge their losses and gain hope of restoration

One Scripture passage that has come to mean a lot to us in the Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations workshops is **John 10:10**: 'The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy; I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.'

The Thief has robbed us both individually and as groups. In this chapter we will focus on our corporate losses. People involved in conflict often believe the losses of their group are the greatest or even that they are the only victims. It is important for us to hear each other's stories in order to better understand and have much more compassion for each other. This chapter shows that all lose in some way because there is a thief who seeks every opportunity to rob humanity of what God intended, especially the loving unity of the Holy Nation.

#### 1) The Thief robs humanity

As we look around our sinful, hurting world we can see that Satan, the thief, has indeed been very active. Having lost all of his privileges through pride and rebellion, he now seeks to rob us of all God intends us to have. Every human being has been robbed; every people group and country has been robbed; every continent has been robbed. The effect on our individual lives and that of our people group and country is enormous. Yet so many of us live in denial, trying to convince ourselves that we do not have a problem. We are also ignorant of the losses of others. Acknowledging our losses and the resulting lies we believe is an important step in our healing. It is also important that we begin to understand the losses of others.

In a culture of blaming, it is good to look beyond the offence and see that there was someone behind it all, someone who is intent on destroying the whole human race and preventing God's purposes from being fulfilled. It does not, of course, absolve anyone of his or her responsibility by putting the blame on Satan. God did not even allow Adam and Eve to do that.

#### 2) Facing and accepting our losses

We would like to suggest different practical ways in which a group can process the losses they have experienced:

##### ***a. Focus on different levels of losses***

We could begin with the continent, trying to identify the losses experienced. Then proceed to the country, ethnic groups and the church. We have already considered the family.

##### ***b. Making a table of the losses and consequences***

- Material losses during conflict. These are easy to identify.
- Inner losses, for example, love; trust; peace; and so on
- The consequences, especially of the inner losses

##### ***c. Facing and accepting the losses of our groups***

It can be very effective if every group considers what they were robbed of and makes their own list. It could also be helpful to divide the list into historical sections, for example: during colonial times; before, during and after apartheid; during major tensions and so on. At the bottom of the list, it is good to identify any false inner beliefs about God, and about themselves that the group adopted. (For example, in South Africa one false belief is that God is unjust, favouring the whites,

while the other ethnic groups are the cursed ones.) At the end, it is really helpful to make a list of the losses common to every group (for example, truth; security; harmonious relationships; and so on). This shows that from God's perspective there are no winners.

### **3) Some of the common losses and their consequences experienced during conflict**

#### ***Truth***

The main thing we have been robbed of is truth, which is why Jesus called the thief the 'father of lies' (John 8:44). We have already identified the awful power of prejudice in conflict. We end up believing many lies that influence every aspect of life. Satan even seeks to snatch the Word of God away from our hearts (Matthew 13:19). He seeks to place people in bondage and to imprison their minds but did not succeed with Jesus (John 14:30).

#### ***Trust***

Where there is no trust there are no meaningful relationships. We become suspicious, fearful, or defensive. Even fellowship between us as children of God breaks down, and communication becomes superficial. When we become too afraid to share what is on our heart, we become lonely and isolated even if there are plenty of people around.

#### ***Love***

Where there is no love there is selfishness. We become absorbed with our own interests and stop caring about the needs of others. Negative feelings toward others can even develop into hatred. This opens the door to all kinds of sin and wickedness.

#### ***Peace & security***

A lack of outer and inner peace creates restlessness; fear; anxiety and inability to relax, feel safe or sleep well.

#### ***Hope***

Losing hope takes away our vision for God's plan and purpose in our lives. The future looks gloomy and depressing. We have no interest in anything, no motivation, no energy to work for change, no will to keep going. It is like a light going out inside us.

#### ***Dignity***

Both the oppressed and the oppressor lose the true humanity God intended for them, thus they lose their dignity. Satan always wants to devalue human beings. He hates the destiny that God wants for us; instead, he wants to drag us down to his level.

#### ***Righteousness***

When we lose God's moral standards for our society, this opens the door to every form of wickedness. Our conscience is 'seared as with a hot iron' (1 Timothy 4:2) so that we are unable to distinguish between right and wrong. Others lose the courage to resist evil. We give in to fear, hatred and pride.

#### ***Justice***

Injustice creates anger and the sense of indignation in our hearts. God also hates every form of injustice. Chronic injustice is a serious sin against any country or individual and erodes away our humanity. Mounting anger often explodes into violence.

#### ***Faith***

The most precious thing we have is our faith. It is more precious than gold (1 Peter 1:7). For Christians, faith is the key to everything – it is the key to salvation, to the love of God, to hope for

the future. Faith is what Satan wants to take away from everyone. If we have lost faith in a loving God, we have lost everything.

All of the above results in a wound to our heart, both individually, and as a country. But the worst result is the loss of faith in a loving God because this is the foundation to all healing. If Satan has robbed us of the hope and belief that God is a good God who loves us, then we are cut off from the source of healing and restoration.

#### **4) Hope of restoration**

We can praise God for the second part of John 10:10, 'I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.' The thief does not have the last word! Jesus is saying, 'I can restore to you what the thief has stolen from you and give you even more than you had in the first place! I can give you life in all its fullness.'

We need to clarify that not everything can be restored. Our loved ones who have died cannot be restored to us in this life, but God can still restore meaningful, loving relationships to us. We may also find that our material things are not restored. But if we look again at what we have all been robbed of (truth, relationships, and so on), we see that these are things that God longs to restore to us all. These are the treasures of the heart; the things that really matter.

Matthew 12:29 speaks of binding the 'strong man', entering his house and plundering his goods. On the Cross, Jesus bound the 'strong man'. It is now up to His church to retrieve what the thief has taken from us.

**Matthew 16:18** says that Jesus will build His church 'and the gates of hell will not overcome it.' Many believe this means that when hell attacks the church, it will not succeed. But when did gates ever attack anyone? Does it not mean that when the church comes against the gates of hell to retrieve the plundered goods, those gates cannot remain shut? This is our challenge as God's children.

In **1 Samuel 30:1-8, 18-19**, we have the story of David and his men returning home from battle, only to find that it had been destroyed by fire; their wives, and children taken captive, and their possessions looted. They wept aloud until they could weep no more. Then to David's horror, his men turned on him and wanted to stone him! Then we read these amazing words: 'But David found strength in the Lord'. He prayed for God's guidance, and suggested they go and retrieve all that had been taken from them. Later in the chapter we see that everything was retrieved. We can learn a lot from this story. We can sit and grieve our losses forever. We can start blaming our leaders. Or we can rise up and, in the light of the victory of the Cross, be determined to retrieve those important things that the thief stole from us.

### **Key Ideas**

- The biggest thing Satan, the thief, has robbed us of is the truth about God, about others and about ourselves.
- Satan has also robbed us of harmonious relationships with each other, and with God.
- Jesus came to restore what the thief has taken from us and to restore it abundantly.

### **Making it Personal**

- In the history of my country, what has been robbed from my group?
- What effect have these losses had on my heart (emotional) beliefs about God, myself, and others?
- What does Jesus want to restore to me and to my people?

## 8. The Wounded Heart

### Understanding woundedness, its causes and its consequences

In the last chapter we saw that the Thief has been very active. As a result, we have all fallen far short of the glorious living that God intended for us, both personally and as people groups. Sinfulness is not our only problem as human beings. Wherever there is sin, people get wounded. We are wounded by our own sins and by the sins of our groups, as well as when we are sinned against. We are also wounded by what we have lacked in our lives. The result is that we are very wounded people, and in our woundedness we often wound others.

#### 1) Understanding woundedness

When we understand God's original good plan for his world, we can better understand how wounded we are. God had good plans for families, societies, and creation as a whole. (Find more about God's good plan and more detailed teaching on woundedness in the appendix.)

#### ***But humanity rebelled and God's good plan was destroyed***

Sin seriously disrupted family, society and creation, and so mankind began to experience woundedness in all three areas. Not only individuals but whole people groups can be wounded. Even creation was affected (Hosea 4:1-3). Since we all live in a sinful world, we have all been wounded to some degree. There are many different types of wounding, including abandonment, broken trust, disappointment, and any kind of lack.

Wounding not only happens when we directly experience injustice or harm. We can also be deeply wounded by what we have seen or heard about being done to others. Even the wound received in previous generations can be passed down to us. We also wound ourselves when we sin against others. The wounds of unconfessed sins can also be passed down from generation to generation.

Wherever there is a history of conflict or injustice *a whole people group can have a wounded spirit*. Let's consider some of the symptoms of the wounded spirit of a people group, especially if that group is oppressed. Some of the typical symptoms seen across a people group are:

- Low self-esteem
- A victim identity
- Lack of the motivation for creative initiatives
- A tendency to substance abuse and gambling
- Inability to compete on an equal basis within the country
- A felt need to constantly prove their value in different ways

On the other hand, a dominant people group can demonstrate:

- Arrogance
- Ignorance of, or indifference towards, the conditions and feelings of other people group(s)
- A reluctance to address historical or current injustices
- The enjoyment of social and political privilege in their country, but are typically unaware of it and of how it affects other people groups

As a result, *all* are wounded from God's perspective, because they fail to experience the loving unity of the Holy Nation, as modelled by the Trinity.

### ***Ethnic or racial rejection***

It seems that the greatest wound any human being can receive is rejection. Rejection is so painful because it carries a 'message' – that we are worthless, unlovable, that there is no place for us. Any racial or ethnic conflict is a form of rejection in one way or another.

Our race and ethnicity play a significant part in forming our identity, so any attack on them is an attack on our core being. If a person is spurned or rejected because of his behaviour, he can try to change it, but if he is persecuted because of his ethnicity, what can he do? If she is rejected because of her race, what can she do? It can lead to a sense of despair. The wound to our spirit coming from ethnic rejection goes very deep. Every injustice, every put-down is a form of rejection.

## **2) Woundedness is a Biblical Concept**

Sadly, the topic of woundedness is rarely taught in churches. Yet woundedness is a thoroughly Biblical concept. God takes our woundedness just as seriously as our sinfulness, and sent Jesus to deal with both, as we will see in the next topic. Many find it difficult to own their woundedness and prefer to deny it, wanting to appear strong and in control, especially men!

There are several Scriptures that acknowledge the seriousness of our wounding. **Proverbs 18:14** says: 'A man's spirit sustains him in sickness, but a wounded spirit who can bear?' This means that when we are wounded, it's much harder for us to cope with life's challenges. For more Scriptures on this important topic, see the Appendix.

## **3) How wounds affect us**

### ***Trauma***

We may become traumatized. Trauma is the word used to describe the physical, mental and emotional effects on a person who has gone through very tragic circumstances. When entire people groups experience very tragic events, the entire group can also experience collective trauma. The effects of trauma can make it difficult to cope with everyday life. There are specific signs of this condition that are internationally recognised. These are described in appendix D on page 73.

### ***Our beliefs***

One way to measure the extent of our woundedness is to look at how it has affected our deep inner beliefs and the beliefs of our group. Very often in a place of wounding, and especially through rejection, we receive a 'message' about ourselves, about our group, about others, about life and especially about God, which then determines what we believe deep inside. Satan is called the father of lies, and his strongest weapon is to induce us to start believing lies deep inside.

We know of people who have gone through great tragedies but have come out of them with their foundational beliefs unharmed. They know they are loved by a just, loving God who values them and is able to redeem their suffering. They will, of course, experience the pain of loss, but will be able to carry on living in a healthy relationship with God, others and themselves. We can conclude they are not so severely wounded.

There are others who may have gone through very similar experiences, but they have come out of them feeling utterly worthless. There is no place where they feel safe and they have lost their trust in a loving God. We conclude that they are deeply wounded people.

### ***We respond sinfully***

Although He was severely sinned against, Jesus never responded sinfully (1 Peter 2:22-23). Out of our woundedness, however, we usually respond sinfully, instead of entrusting ourselves to God as Jesus did.

#### ***a. We pass judgements***

This means we pronounce a verdict against someone in our hearts, we condemn them, we have no hope for their future. The Bible takes judging very seriously and says that we will receive back any judgement we pass on others (Matthew 7:1-5).

#### ***b. We take strong inner decisions, though we may not even realise it***

These inner decisions will influence our whole outlook on life. For example:

- I'll never trust anyone again!
- I'll never allow myself to be vulnerable or weak.
- I'll never expect anything good again, then I will not be disappointed.

#### ***c. We harbour distorted inner beliefs, which are usually based on judgements***

A belief is very powerful. It motivates our feelings and behaviour. Some of the distorted inner beliefs we may have are:

- I/my people group will always be a victim.
- No one really cares about me.
- No one can be trusted.
- I am on my own.

Prejudices are also examples of distorted beliefs.

#### ***d. We withdraw to our own group***

In our woundedness we cut ourselves off from the other group(s), choosing not to trust or even relate to anyone except our own group.

Galatians 6:7 says that we will reap what we sow. This is also true in the area of our inner beliefs. Jesus said, "According to your faith [belief] will it be done to you" (Matthew 9:29). Just as belief in God opens the door for God to act, so negative beliefs have the power to become reality (Job 3:25) and will affect our whole lives.

## **4) The seriousness of unhealed wounds**

We all know what happens to unhealed wounds – they become infected. If not cared for, the poison from the infected wound can spread through the whole body and can sometimes even prove fatal. Open infected wounds also attract flies. One of the names of Satan in the Bible is Beelzebub, which means 'The Lord of the Flies' (Matthew 10:25, 12:24-27). Just as infected physical wounds attract flies, so can unhealed inner wounds over time become an open door to demonic activity in an individual or in a country.

In every country where we have worked, we can identify a similar pattern of unhealed wounds and unresolved conflict, often going back several generations. It is not surprising that the Lord grieves in **Jeremiah 6:14** and 8:11 saying, 'They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace.'

It is comforting to know that God takes our woundedness just as seriously as our sinfulness. He understands the wounded heart and is full of compassion. He knows that heart wounds can affect our whole lives and He wants to heal us. In Jeremiah 30:12-13 we read that humanly speaking,



healing deeply wounded hearts is impossible, but we can rejoice that just a few verses later (**Jeremiah 30:17**), God promises to restore us to health and heal our wounds. We will look at this in more detail in chapter 9.

## 5) Healing begins with admitting our wounds

It is widely accepted that, to help the healing process, people need to be able to express their pain, anger and sadness. But for many of us this is a very hard thing to do.

### ***What makes it hard for us to express pain?***

- Pride. We may prefer to deny our pain, suppress it and appear strong.
- Inability to trust anyone.
- The belief that talking about pain only makes it worse.
- Fear of being vulnerable, in case people:
  - do not care, possibly even laugh
  - take advantage of our vulnerability
  - judge or condemn us
- Fear of becoming insane. 'If I start crying, I may never stop!'
- Cultural beliefs (For example, British beliefs: stiff upper lip; do not wear your heart on your sleeve; big boys do not cry.)
- In some cases, it is politically unsafe to express our pain, especially if our views are not considered to be 'politically correct' and the wrong has never been openly acknowledged.
- False understanding of what it means to be spiritual. Some churches teach that we should always be victorious, and sadly this can lead to people feeling the need to 'wear a mask' and hide their real selves.

Before wounded people can be healed, they must first face and express their



Yet it is a very dangerous thing to suppress pain. Sometimes hidden pain can be expressed as anger or bitterness. People who hide pain, anger or bitterness in their hearts are more prone to physical and mental illness. People are unable to move forward in their lives and walk the journey towards healing. It also means that conflicts are not resolved, which can have serious consequences in the history of our countries.

### ***How do we overcome our resistance?***

Different cultures teach different things. How can we evaluate which culture is right? We need to go back to Scripture. All cultures can learn from the Bible – it is higher than all cultures. What does the Bible teach about showing emotion? Note the many examples of emotion being expressed in Scripture. For example:

- Hannah expresses pain because of her childlessness and the way she was mocked because of this (1 Samuel 1:10,15-16).
- David expresses pain in many Psalms because he is the victim of injustice (Psalm 5, 7, 10, 12, 13, 22, 31, 69, and so on).
- Jeremiah mourns for the condition of his people (Jeremiah 8:18-9:1).

Jesus was the perfect man, yet He was free to express all emotions appropriately (**John 11:35**, Luke 19:41, Hebrews 5:7). He wore no mask! His heart was transparent. He had no pride or fear of other people's opinions. If Jesus was free to express His emotions, we also can be free. He understands us perfectly. Weary and heavy-laden, we can come to Jesus at the Cross and lay

down our burden of pain. We will discover there that God is waiting to comfort us. The church needs to be a safe place where people can face and accept their wounds and find healing.

In cases where there is still no justice, Christians can help people to find God as the Just Judge by entrusting everything into His hands like Jesus did on the Cross (1 Peter 2:23). Christians can also take their priestly role and practice "identificational confession" on behalf of the offenders. Identificational confession is very powerful way to help others find healing, even for wounds that have been suppressed for many years. We will look at this in more detail in chapter 13.

In the left picture below, we see someone going through all kinds of traumatic experiences but still giving the impression that they are 'fine' (as if they were wearing a mask). In the right picture, it shows that person taking the risk of removing the mask and being honest about the way they are suffering, but we also see that God's hand upholds them, making them feel safe.



### Key Ideas

- Woundedness is a consequence of sin entering the world and ethnic or racial rejection is a deep wound.
- When we are wounded, we start to believe Satan's lies about ourselves, others and God, and this affects our behaviour.
- God takes our woundedness as seriously as our sinfulness and wants us to face and accept our wounds so that we can be healed.

### Making it Personal

- What symptoms of a wounded heart do I detect in my life and in my people group?
- What wrong beliefs do I and my people group hold dear in our wounded hearts?
- What is stopping me from expressing my pain?

## 9. God's Response to Human Suffering

### Understanding that Jesus is both Sin and Pain Bearer

What was God's response to all the evil, all the injustice, all the suffering in the world? He came into the world in Jesus to become the greatest sufferer, to take the responsibility for everything even though He was not guilty, and to experience the greatest injustice ever. (This, of course, does not take away our responsibility to admit our guilt, take the blame and repent). He came to take it all onto Himself on the Cross, bear the guilt and punishment for all of it and make atonement for it. In doing this, He became both sin bearer and pain bearer.

#### 1) Jesus takes our pain as well as our sin

John the Baptist made the first public statement about Jesus at the beginning of His ministry, 'Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (**John 1:29**). The first public statement Jesus made about His ministry was when He took the scroll in the synagogue at Nazareth (**Luke 4:14-21**) and read from Isaiah 61. He said, 'He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted'. If we only teach about Jesus coming into the world to take away our sin, we only teach half a gospel. Sinfulness is not our only problem. We are wounded not only by our own sins but also by the sins of others. If Jesus came only for sin, what would we do with our pain?

The glorious news of the gospel is that Jesus dealt with both sin and pain on the Cross. **Isaiah 53:4** says, 'Surely He has borne our grief and carried our sorrows.' The Hebrew words used here mean pain and anguish. Jesus not only carried our sin on the Cross, he also carried all the consequence of sin being in the world. On the Cross, Jesus is saying, 'Count Me guilty. Give Me all the world's sin and sorrows. I will suffer in your place.'

#### *Jesus understands suffering*

Jesus experienced many sorrows throughout His earthly life. It was prophesied that He would be 'a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering' and would be 'despised and rejected' (Isaiah 53:3). When He came into the world there was no place for Him to be born and His parents had to receive Him in a filthy, stinking cowshed. When He was very young, He and his family had to flee as refugees to Egypt. The people in His home town of Nazareth considered Him to be illegitimate, and He grew up in poverty, doing menial work. During His earthly ministry, He was misunderstood by His own family, and was ridiculed and rejected by government and religious leaders.

It is clear, therefore, that Jesus understands suffering! Despite His love for His Son, God did not shelter Him from suffering. Hebrews 2:10 tells us that 'it was fitting that God ... should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.'

#### *Some of the sufferings Jesus went through:*

- He was betrayed by a friend
- He was rejected by his own people
- He was beaten, mocked, spat upon
- He was stripped naked
- He carried a heavy cross
- He was crucified
- He was abandoned by his heavenly Father

Some still ask, 'How can Jesus possibly understand my suffering? He never lost His whole family in a genocide! He does not know what it feels like to be a raped woman!' It is true that in spite of

all He went through, in His earthly life Jesus did not experience in a literal sense every form of human suffering, even on His journey to the Cross. But Jesus did something far greater on the Cross than identifying with human experience!

## **2) For Jesus, the Cross is a place of transfer**

On the cross, all the sin of the world and its consequences were transferred to Jesus. What happened on the cross was more amazing than we can ever imagine. The sacrifice of Jesus was enough to deal with all the sin and pain of the world – not only our personal sin, but every war, every conflict, every massacre, every injustice, every tragedy.

In **2 Corinthians 5:21**, we are told that Jesus, although perfect without committing a single sin, was 'made to be sin for us.' In a way that we will never understand, *all* the sin of the world was transferred to Him on the cross and He experienced the full horror of human sinfulness. In the same way, *all* our pain was transferred to Him too. The whole tragic human condition was there! As Jesus was hanging on the cross, He carried the sin of the rapist, and at the same time He also carried the pain of the rape victim. Second Corinthians 5:21 is even stronger stating that he *became* both the rapist and the rape victim! He became both killer and victim. He became the thief and the one who was robbed. It was *all* transferred to him. He felt it *all*! He even refused the gall that would numb the pain.

Our faith is founded on the fact that Jesus' death was NOT the end of the story. He rose again from the dead, offering new life to all who will believe. 1 Corinthians 15:14 & 17 tell us that Jesus' resurrection is the proof that humanity's tragic condition has been successfully dealt with on the cross.

## **3) How to get rid of our pain**

We know how to help people with their sin – we tell them to confess it and take it to the Cross of Jesus. We do not say, 'Just forget about it and think of something else,' because we know they need to confess it to be rid of it. The same is true of pain, but we tend to tell people to just forget about the pain. But we'll never be healed this way. By bearing our grief and sorrow, Jesus is saying, "Let me do the hurting instead of you." If we hide our pain and wounding in our hearts, we cannot take it to Jesus to heal it.

Consider the story of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, who died and was placed in a tomb (John 11:1-44). Upon His arrival, Jesus asked for the stone to be removed from the tomb. Martha responded in protest, "But Lazarus has been there for four days. It is going to stink if we remove the stone!" Nevertheless, Jesus insisted the stone be removed, and then He called Lazarus to come out of the tomb. Jesus knew there would be a stench behind the stone, but He could not call Lazarus forth unless the stone was removed. In the same way, Jesus knows the pain we have buried in our hearts and the "stench" that is caused by the festering, unhealed wounds. He wants to heal our hearts, but unless we give Him access to the wounds and invite Jesus to come into the pain, He cannot heal us.

On the Cross, Jesus paid for our sins and our pain in full with His blood. He gave His life so we can be free of them. Isaiah 53:3 says that we despised Jesus and did not esteem Him. If I hold on to my pain and am unwilling to give it to Jesus, I am still not esteeming Him. He will have died in vain where this is concerned. It is as if I'm saying to Jesus, "I do not need your sacrifice. I can carry my pain myself." The way I can esteem Him is by giving Him what rightfully belongs to Him now – my sin and my pain.

### ***Pouring out our hearts to God is scriptural***

The only way we can be healed of life's hurts is to bring all our pain to the Lamb of God and let Him carry it all in our place. The Psalms encourage us to pour out our hearts to God:

- Psalm 142:1-2 David was very honest, he did not hide things in his heart.
- Psalm 62:8 All people are to pour out their hearts to God.
- Psalm 56:8 If we pour out our pain, the Lord receives our tears. Our suffering is precious to Him (Psalm 72:14; 116:15). He records all our tears and pain.

**Lamentations 2:19** says, "Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord."



As Christians, we can be eternally grateful that God provided a place where we can take our pain. For unbelievers, talking about it is the only thing they can do. Yet, while this will help, the more they talk about their pain the more they may dig themselves into a pit of self-pity. One Christian leader put it this way: it is possible to make an idol of our pain and worship at the altar of our own sufferings. For some, being a victim can even become part of their identity.

As believers, we have the privilege of knowing that Jesus is our pain bearer. We can be relieved of the heavy weight of the pain that we have been carrying. When we bring sin to the Cross, we need to repent, but there is no need to repent for being wounded. We may need to repent of bitterness or the desire for revenge, but there is no need to repent of feeling pain. God's heart is full of pain (Genesis 6:6), and there is enough room in the heart of God for all the pain of our country! Leaving our pain at the cross, we can identify and renounce the lies we have believed as a result of our

wounding. We are then free to move forward and start to live again.

But there is even more good news!

### **4) How can suffering end up being for our gain instead of our loss?**

#### ***We can encounter God's compassion***

There is an aspect of God's heart of compassion that we can experience in the midst of suffering that we would never otherwise know. Suffering can therefore equip us as Christians to minister to suffering people in the community. If God were to protect Christians so that they never suffered, how would we have any credibility with those who suffer? They would feel we do not understand. But, as we encounter God's compassion in the midst of our suffering and receive His comfort, this becomes a treasure in our hands that we can offer to others.

#### ***Our faith is tested and strengthened***

Suffering also tests the genuineness of our faith and strengthens our determination to follow God, whatever the cost, so that no one can accuse us of being "fair weather" believers. It teaches us to endure and persevere. If Christians were guaranteed never to suffer, people would seek to become converts for all the wrong reasons. It would be because we love ourselves and want an easy life, not because we love God.

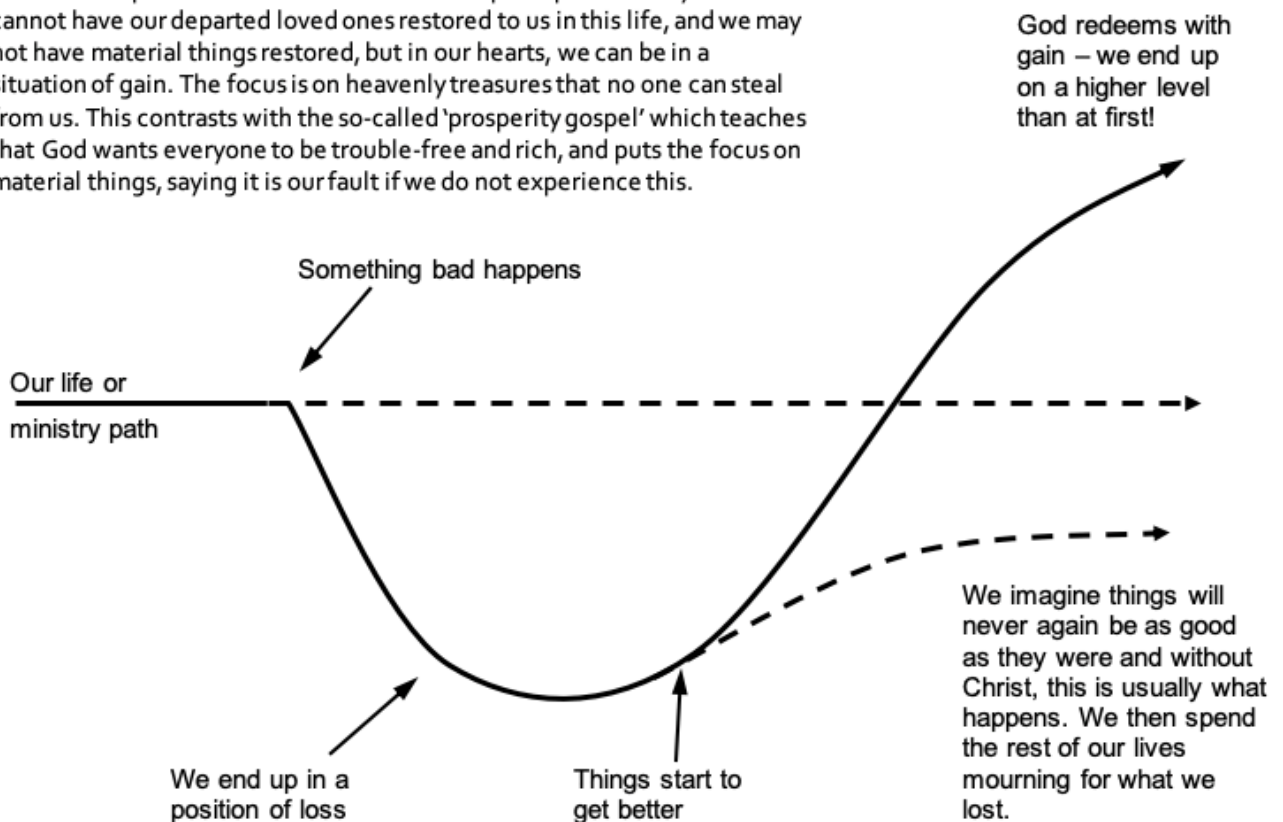
Through suffering, we can have the opportunity to learn to depend on God and trust Him. It helps our faith to grow. It can help us to deal with weaknesses in our character. Sadly, it often takes desperation to cast us onto God and make us serious about seeking Him and pleasing Him.

This does not mean that we should idolise suffering or simply resign ourselves to it. God wants us to do all we can to alleviate suffering and fight against injustice. But if suffering is unavoidable, it can be redeemed, and Jesus can give us victory in it, as He promised in John 16:33.

### ***God can redeem our suffering***

The word 'redeem' means to 'buy back'. By His death and resurrection, Jesus paid the full price to buy back what Satan had robbed from us. As we look at Scripture, we find that there is a wonderful pattern in all God's dealings with humanity. Although Satan robs humanity of so much of what God intended, God is able to restore us so that the final state is even better than the original one. The physical creation was good, but then death came in. The new creation will be a spiritual one that is much better than the first. Joseph is an excellent example of someone who suffered great injustice but ended up in a situation of gain, not only for himself but for his family and countrymen. In the book of Ruth, Naomi goes to Moab and there loses her husband and two sons. Later she returns to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law and gains Boaz, and a grandson who was a forefather of Christ Himself. There are many more examples of God's redemption of human suffering!

**Note:** It is important for us to understand this principle correctly. We cannot have our departed loved ones restored to us in this life, and we may not have material things restored, but in our hearts, we can be in a situation of gain. The focus is on heavenly treasures that no one can steal from us. This contrasts with the so-called 'prosperity gospel' which teaches that God wants everyone to be trouble-free and rich, and puts the focus on material things, saying it is our fault if we do not experience this.



God can redeem all of life's tragedies. Look at **the second part of John 10:10**. While the Thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy, Jesus comes to give us life, and in *abundance*. Instead of suffering on-going loss, we can emerge from life's suffering having gained something very precious and of eternal significance! Nothing is too bad for God to be able to use for the greater good. This is wonderful news! No wonder we can be "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

What used to be our weakest spot, or our point of wounding, God can turn around and it can become our strong point, our testimony, God's weapon in our hands. That starts happening from the moment we invite Him into our suffering and He starts activating Romans 8:28.

### **5) The Cross is also a place of exchange**

We do not simply leave our pain, anger, shame and so on at the Cross. Jesus paid the full price so that He could give us something in exchange. Instead of our sin, He gives us His righteousness; instead of our pain, He gives us His joy; instead of our rejection, He gives us His acceptance; instead of our fears He gives us His peace; instead of our despair He gives us hope; instead of our anger He gives us the power to forgive; and so on. All this is possible through Jesus' victory over sin and death by His own death and resurrection.

#### **Key Ideas**

- Jesus is our pain bearer as well as our sin bearer.
- Transferring our pain to Jesus by faith relieves our hearts and sets us free.
- Jesus made it possible for our suffering to be redeemed.

#### **Making it Personal**

- Is there any pain, anger, or bitterness I have been carrying in my heart that I want to give to Jesus?
- Can I offer Him my pain and suffering so that He can redeem it?
- What do I think Jesus wants to give me in exchange?



## 10. The Cross Workshop

### Giving people the opportunity to take their pain to the Cross in a very tangible way

It is one thing to receive teaching on Jesus being both our sin and pain bearer. It is another thing to put this truth into practice and actually give Jesus all our sin and pain. It often helps to see a spiritual principle at work in our lives if we act out the principle. It is interesting that Jesus sometimes asked people to do something practical so that they could really grasp some truth. He put mud on the eyes of one blind man and told him to go to wash it off in the pool of Siloam (John 9:1-7). There was nothing special about the mud or the pool. But Jesus knew that for this man, acting something out like this would help his faith to grow to the point where he could receive his healing. Naaman was also told to go to wash seven times in the river Jordan (2 Kings 5:10). Let us consider a practical action that can help us receive healing for our wounded hearts.

Writing down our worst sufferings and losses can help us admit our woundedness. Sharing this suffering and loss with someone else, (especially if they are from the tribe who caused our suffering) can be very healing, if we experience compassion from the 'other side'. Pouring out our pain to Jesus, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is another powerful step towards healing, if we truly believe that Jesus is waiting to lift it off us and carry it instead of us. Nailing the paper on which we have written our suffering and loss to a simple cross helps to make the truth of what Jesus did for us even more real. It also helps us to let go of it, entrusting it all into His compassionate care (See Colossians 2:14). Removing the papers from the cross and burning them seals this further in our hearts.

Having done this, all that remains is a pile of ashes. We have already seen how God can redeem our suffering and we have also referred to Isaiah 61, where it is prophetically announced in verse 3 that Jesus wants to bring us beauty instead of ashes. In some parts of the world, there are flowers that only grow after a fire. The seed can remain underground for years, but during a bush fire, the heat of the flame causes the seed to crack open, and then a red flower grows. They call them 'Fire-lilies'. This is a beautiful picture of what God can do in our lives. He can bring beauty out of the ashes of our tragedies, if we give them into His hands.

The above has been practiced with groups of people in many countries and continents and has become known as The Cross Workshop. It is a means of acting out our belief that Jesus carried our pain on the Cross. Very often this becomes a step of faith to really trust Jesus to carry the pain, and consequently it helps the healing process to begin. It is also an opportunity for people to listen to the hearts and suffering of others, so that compassion can flow between people who were previously regarded as "enemies". Finally, it can bring new hope that God can bring something beautiful out of all that we have suffered.

The relief and new freedom experienced through it has been amazing. It has enabled many to be able to forgive the offender for the first time, and this will be explored further in the next chapter.

Although the main focus of the Cross Workshop is on Jesus as pain bearer, many have found forgiveness for their sins for the first time, as they had not previously understood that Jesus was their sin bearer. It becomes a means of their salvation. Many have also experienced physical healing as they poured all their burdens into the heart of God.

## Key Ideas

- Sharing our painful experiences and being compassionately listened to by the group that caused our pain is a great source of healing.
- Transferring our pain to Jesus is the most important part of the Cross Workshop experience and symbolic acts can help our healing.
- Seeing how God can bring good out of suffering gives hope for the future.

## Making it Personal

- If you read the above and don't put it into practice yourself, you will be missing out on one of the most important purposes of this book.
- Firstly consider whether you want to do it on your own, with your family, or with one or two close friends.
- We would recommend that you deal with your own pain first, before seeking to help anyone else. You will need paper, a pen, a small rough cross (2 small branches will suffice), a hammer or a big stone, one or two nails, and a box of matches.
- When you have gathered everything that you need, begin by asking the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind everything He wants to touch at this point. Under His guidance, write down on a piece of paper any pain or wound that is in your heart, or any way that the Thief has robbed you personally. Writing down the headings will suffice - you don't have to write down the whole story.
- If you are doing this alone, tell Jesus all about it and don't restrain any emotions that may surface. If with others, take time first to share with one another and briefly pray for each other.
- Having poured out your pain into God's heart, bring your piece of paper and nail it to the cross. Also bring the pain of your group to the cross. Carry the cross outside and remove and burn the papers.
- Take time to thank God for His sacrifice for you.
- Finally, ask God what He would like to give you in exchange for your pain. Then take some time to record any good things God has been doing either in the midst of the suffering or in spite of it, and praise Him for His victory in it all.
- You may wish to place a flower in the ashes as a symbol of your hope that God can redeem all you wrote there and bring something beautiful out of it.

## Section 3: Putting on the Ceiling

### Understanding what it means to forgive others

Forgiving the offender is a huge stumbling block for many, especially if they mistake forgiving for excusing the wrong done to them, saying it no longer matters. For this reason, we must have a right understanding of what forgiving is and what it is not. Removing the various misunderstandings about forgiveness is very helpful.

### Helping people to find healing makes it easier for them to forgive

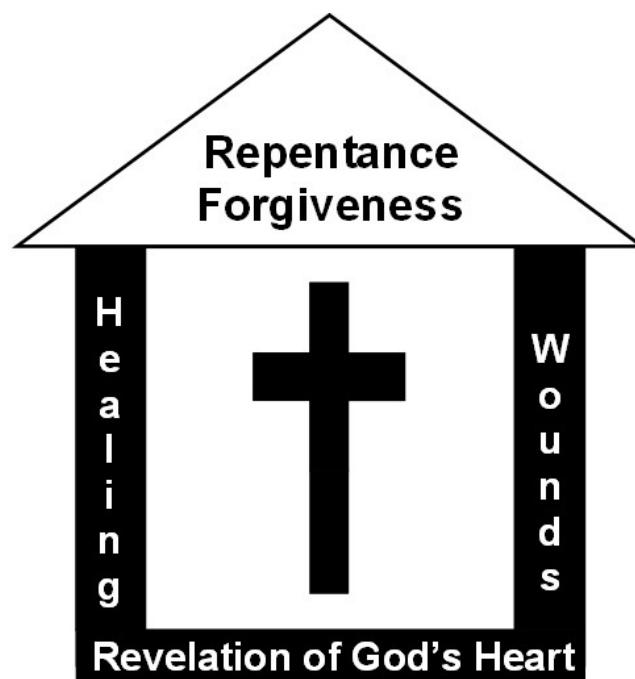
We have discovered that the most helpful thing is taking our pain to the Cross. This frees our hearts to be able to forgive, because it is very difficult to forgive while the heart is still full of pain. We believe it is better first to help people be healed of their inner wounds. The Cross shows us that forgiving is extremely costly, but it is also important to understand that not forgiving will cost us more in the end.

### Repentance

The Cross also leads us to repentance, which is God's precious gift to bring us into freedom and joy. Repentance is a change of mind and heart that leads to transformed behaviour. Both personal and corporate repentance are important biblical principles.

### Identificational Confession

Practicing Identificational confession to confess the sins of our tribe/group and ask for forgiveness is one of the most powerful elements in helping wounded people find healing and in promoting reconciliation. This must be accompanied by a change of lifestyle where we display the fruit of our confession in how we live.



## **11. Forgiving the Offender**

### **Understanding true biblical forgiveness and the consequences of not forgiving**

While the subject of forgiving others is widely taught in churches, it is probably one of the most controversial and most misunderstood topics, both within the church and outside. The human heart does not find forgiving others easy. We try to forgive but find the same pain returning time and again.

Although outwardly agreeing with the teaching, in our hearts we often struggle, secretly feeling that it is uncaring, unjust, even cruel of God to ask us to forgive. Is it not bad enough that we have been so wounded? To ask us to forgive seems to wound us even further. We often think of forgiving the offender as taking something from us and working against us. Yet true biblical forgiveness works for our benefit.

We have to know that as well as being compassionate and merciful God is also just. Asking us to forgive is not unjust on God's part. It is crucial that we have a right understanding of what God is asking us to do when He tells us to forgive.

#### **1) To understand forgiving others, we must first see what it is not**

##### ***Forgiving is not saying it does not matter, or agreeing with sin***

We can easily feel that by asking us to forgive, God is not taking our pain and loss seriously. We may feel He is even agreeing with what was done to us. But this is not true! Sin is extremely serious, and being totally against God's nature, it destroys all relationships and wrecks creation itself. All sin matters to God because it is so destructive. God will never say that something that was wrong is now right. If it was wrong when it happened, it is still wrong today and will still be wrong in a thousand years. There will never be a time when sin is no longer sin, so there will never be a time when God says that the wrong done to us no longer matters. Forgiving does not make it right.

There is only one place where we can learn what forgiveness really is. The only reliable model is how God forgave us. God did not excuse our sin when He forgave us. He did not look down at a sinful world and say, "It is alright. We will simply forget it all and cover it over. It does not really matter anymore. Let's be friends."

Someone has to pay a price for forgiveness. Someone needs to take responsibility for all the sin and its consequences. This is exactly what Jesus did on the Cross. He made atonement there for the sin of the whole world. Without the Cross, it was impossible for God to forgive us. That tells us that forgiveness is the costliest thing in the universe. It also tells us how seriously God takes sin, whether it is our personal sin, or the crimes committed against us. God sees them all as serious enough for His Son to have to die for them. He is not asking us to simply let the matter drop, put it out of our mind, and act as if nothing happened. Instead He asks us to take it to the Cross, and that is very different.

##### ***Forgiving is not denying our feelings of anger, sadness, and so on***

In order to forgive we must admit our pain. Forgiving a wrongdoing must include acknowledging the wrong that had been done and its consequences.

### ***Forgiving is not forgetting, or being unable to recall it***

How can we possibly forget when a severe injustice has been committed against us, especially if our relatives were killed? If we forgive, although we may still remember, we do so in a *different way* – we remember that we have given it all to Jesus and He is now carrying it instead of us.

### ***Forgiving does not mean refusing to co-operate with the country's justice system***

Some think forgiveness and justice cannot go together, but the Bible teaches both (Romans 12:17-13:5, there were no chapter divisions in the original letter as Paul wrote it). It was God's idea for there to be a just judicial system in every country to protect the society. We need to uphold the justice system and cooperate with it, but we also need to pray that the justice system will be just. Repentance before God and victim does not mean that the crime is no longer punishable by law. What God says to us is, 'Where you are concerned, do not take justice into your own hands by seeking revenge, but instead seek to bless them' (Romans 12:19-21).

### ***Forgiving does not mean avoiding working things out***

In the church setting, we are urged to seek out someone who offended us and work things out with them if the broken relationship is still unresolved. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus says, 'If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault.' Jesus does not say 'simply forgive him' because He wants us to try to win our brother over. Jesus places a very high value on the quality of relationships within the church. He wants us to go to our brother with a merciful spirit to bring restoration to the relationship.

Reconciliation is very important to Jesus. Forgiveness can be one-sided, but reconciliation always takes two sides. If the offender does not repent, there is further action that needs to be taken if it is within a church setting. For the sake of the purity of the church, sin that is not repented of must not be tolerated, because "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough" (1 Corinthians 5:6). Those who persist in serious sin are to be expelled (1 Corinthians 5:12-13) in order that they can repent and then be restored (2 Corinthians 2:6-8; Galatians 6:1). Church discipline is very important.

Working things out is also an issue of wisdom. For violent or sexual offenses, the victim should never try to work things out on their own.

## **2) What then is biblical forgiveness?**

### ***Giving an undeserved gift to the offender***

Real forgiveness is giving the offender a gift he/she does not deserve. Think of the amazing gift God gave us in forgiving us all our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness!

### ***Laying down our right to take revenge***

Under the Old Covenant, limited revenge was allowed, but Jesus showed us a better way (Matthew 5:38-48).

### ***Choosing mercy instead of judgment***

We choose to identify ourselves with Jesus, who did not come to condemn the world but to save it, instead of identifying ourselves with Satan, the accuser, who always demands revenge.

### ***Something very costly, but not forgiving costs us more in the end***

Forgiving the offender is indeed extremely costly, but if we do not forgive this will work against us. We will end up paying a far greater price.

### 3) The seriousness of not forgiving

***Why does God ask us to forgive the offender? What is the problem of NOT forgiving?***

***a. Not forgiving blocks our own ability to receive forgiveness***

Our bitterness and hatred bind us so that we are unable to receive God's forgiveness. Does **Matthew 6:15**, then, show us a vindictive God? No! Ever since Jesus paid for sin by shedding his blood on the Cross, a sinful world has been offered the free gift of forgiveness. The problem is not on His side. Our ability to receive His forgiveness depends on our repentance, including repentance from the sin of hatred and not forgiving.

***b. Not forgiving blocks our ability to receive healing and live in freedom***

We will be forever bound to the person we hate. It will be like living life pulling a great weight behind us. We will never be able to reach our potential and fulfil our destiny. Not forgiving can even affect us physically.

'Until there is forgiveness, we are locked in a painful relationship with the person who has wronged us. Our living hatred and resentment of the person keeps him present even though it may be years since we have seen him. He may be completely removed from us and still continue to ruin our lives if we are bound to him by the cords of hatred. We are, after all, slaves to the persons we hate. When we forgive, we are released from this destructive bonding.'<sup>4</sup>

***c. Not forgiving shows that we have never fully understood what God did for us at Calvary***

Jesus died to forgive us our sins, even the worst sins imaginable. All human beings are actually guilty of causing His death, because He was dying to suffer the penalty for all our sin. If we see how much it cost Jesus to forgive us, we cannot hesitate to forgive anyone; otherwise we have never fully understood the Gospel.

***d. Not forgiving gives Satan a foothold in our lives (Ephesians 4:26-27, 2 Corinthians 2:7,11)***

We become liable to making judgements and therefore, being judged ourselves (Matthew 7:1-2).

***e. Not forgiving prevents us from ever experiencing the love and unity in the Holy Nation as God originally intended.***

### 4) So how do we find the grace to forgive the offender?

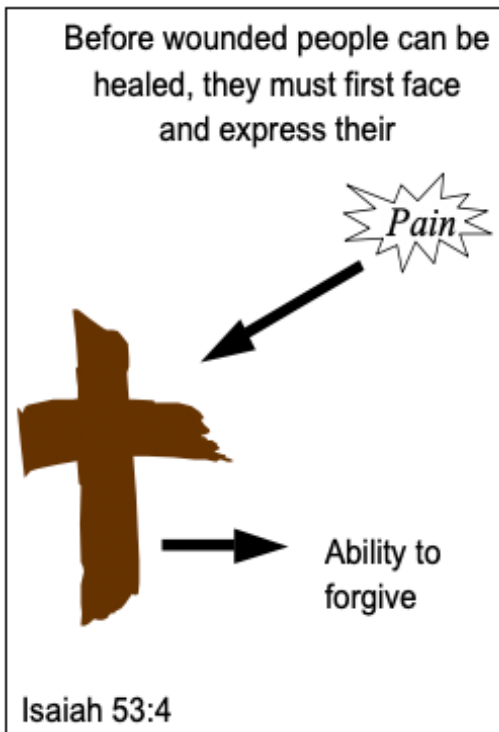
***Facing and expressing our pain, pouring it into God's heart, and letting Jesus take all the responsibility***

We have seen in Chapter 9 that Jesus is our pain bearer as well as our sin bearer. It is very hard to forgive while the heart is still full of pain and anger. We may try to forgive with our will because we know it is what God requires of us, and we may even make some progress, but every reminder of the event brings back the pain and anger, and we do not feel like forgiving at all!

We now come to the third phase of our diagram, which shows what needs to happen before we are free to forgive. Jesus came into the world to say, "Count *Me* guilty instead of the offender. I came to take the blame for everything on the Cross." We need to give Him the sin that was committed against us, as well as our own sin, and let Him take the responsibility for all of it.

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<sup>4</sup> Hancock, M. & Mains, K.B., *Child Sexual Abuse: a Hope for Healing*, Highland Books, 1987, P68-69



In **Matthew 18:35**, Jesus tells us to forgive *from the heart*, but we cannot do this while our hearts are still full of pain. However, as we receive the truth that Jesus really has carried our burden of pain on the Cross and can heal our wounds, we can then give Him our pain and find that we are free to forgive. We even want to forgive, as a result of the miracle that has taken place in our hearts.

### ***Entrusting ourselves and the offender into the hands of the Just Judge***

Hearing someone apologise makes it easier to forgive if we see that the repentance is genuine. But what if there is no one to say sorry? What if the person who committed the crime is not at all repentant and may even be boasting of what he did? The only way we can forgive in such circumstances is to commit it all into the hands of the Just Judge in heaven (1 Peter 2:23). This is what enabled Jesus to say, "Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34), while they were nailing Him to the Cross. He refused to let bitterness

enter his heart and decided to trust God instead. This is what Jesus did instead of retaliating. We can trust this Judge. If the offender repents he will be forgiven, but if he does not repent he will be judged, if not in this life then certainly in the next.

Another very effective way to help those who have never heard anyone confess and repent of their sin is "identificational confession". We will cover this in chapter 13. We will know we have truly forgiven, when we are able to bless the person or group that offended us.

### ***Realising how much we ourselves need God's forgiveness***

Receiving the revelation of how sinful we are and how much it cost God to forgive us makes it easier for us to forgive. Reading Matthew 18:21-35 will help us see things from God's perspective.

In conclusion, we can say that forgiveness works for us, not against us. God is not being unkind by asking us to forgive. Rather, it shows how much He loves us.

### **Key Ideas**

- God forgiving us on the Cross is the model of forgiveness.
- Forgiving requires facing and expressing the pain and transferring the pain to Jesus.
- We learn from Jesus' example by entrusting our case to the just Judge.
- Forgiving is very costly, but not forgiving costs us more in the end.

### **Making it Personal**

- Is there anyone I have not forgiven?
- What obstacles in my life and in my community prevent me or my people from forgiving?
- What anger and bitterness do I need to repent of?

## 12. The Transforming Power of Asking for Forgiveness

### Understanding the role of repentance in reconciliation

We have already said that there can be no reconciliation without repentance. A new start becomes possible when sin is repented of and taken to the cross. Where there is repentance, God's grace is immediately available. Repentance is a huge subject, but the focus of this chapter is on the act of asking forgiveness in the context of conflict and injustice.

#### 1) Everyone needs to repent.

Repentance is obviously required if we have unlawfully taken the life of another human being. But we also need to repent even if we have simply had wrong attitudes, thoughts, or actions. As we have seen in Chapter 2, these are the roots of conflict. If we have harboured hatred, resentment, prejudice, or judgement against someone from another religious, ethnic, racial or any other group, we need to repent. Jesus said our thoughts and attitudes are as serious as our deeds (Matthew 5:21-22).

#### 2) Characteristics of true repentance:

##### ***a. True repentance is a change of mind and heart.***

Biblical repentance is something deep and very wonderful. The word in both the Old and New Testaments means a deep regret, a change of mind accompanied by a change of heart and behaviour. It means a complete turn-around. It recognises that our sin is primarily against God, who created us in His image and designed us for glorious living. When seen in that light, we realise how very serious all sin is, and how far we have fallen short of this glorious living.

We have noted previously the crucial role of our beliefs in determining our actions. Repentance is changing our beliefs in a way that changes the way we live. It is a precious gift of God to humanity that makes it possible to begin life anew. It is much deeper than feeling bad, which is based in self-pity. This is shown clearly in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10.

##### ***b. True repentance seeks to restore the relationship.***

It is not enough to repent privately. True repentance needs to be before both God and man and includes asking for forgiveness (**Matthew 5:23-24**). Reconciliation may not always be possible. We can never *insist or demand* to be forgiven. We can only ask in humility knowing it can never be deserved. Having done our part, we have to leave the outcome in God's hands.

##### ***c. True repentance is taking full responsibility.***

So often we try to justify our own positions or actions or blame them all on someone else. Many people try to run away from taking full responsibility for the wrong they did, by putting the blame on other people. But true repentance does not do this. In the story of the prodigal son, he faces up to what he had done and confesses it without trying to make any excuses for himself (Luke 15:18-19).

##### ***d. True repentance is facing the consequences.***

Repentance before God and the victim, or even before the church, does not stop someone from facing the consequences of their actions, especially when there is grave violation of the law. A pastor should encourage a repentant person to report himself, even if that means years of imprisonment.

Biblical repentance is radical, recognising the devastating, far-reaching power of sin. **Exodus 34:7** speaks of the sins of the fathers having an effect even on future generations. In the original



Hebrew, it says that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children. God watches this effect with great concern. There will be consequences to our sins that will remain, and repentance accepts this. Repentance, however, can break the vicious cycle of sin. Our only hope is that God can redeem even the things that we desperately regret but cannot change. In **Luke 3:8**, John the Baptist says that we need to produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

***e. True repentance is making restitution.***

Repentance not only means experiencing profound grief for what we have done, but also includes a desire to make restitution, in whatever way possible, while recognising that we can never fully pay back. We see in the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19) that after his encounter with Jesus, he spontaneously offered to make restitution for the way he had wronged many people. He did not do this because Jesus insisted on it, but it was the fruit of his repentant heart. While we understand that making restitution may not be possible in every situation, looted goods should always be returned. When a life has been taken, nothing can bring it back, but God can show us ways to express our deep regret in practical ways.

### **3) God's response to repentance**

Throughout the Scriptures we see God calling human beings to repentance. In Isaiah 1:18, God invites the sinner: "Come now, let us reason together", says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." Although we may not have sinned in very obvious public ways, we are all sinners and are not living the glorious life that God intended. Sin is so serious that it will destroy us all. It even affects creation itself (Hosea 4:1-3).

Because of His great love for us, God planned, even before the foundation of the world, to send His Son. Jesus came to bear all the sin and grief of the world on the Cross and make atonement for all of it. If we repent and believe in Jesus, we can receive new hearts. This is what God wants. He does not want anyone to perish. Hell is a terrible reality, but God created hell for the devil and his demons, not for men and women made in His image. He does not want us to go there – that is why He went so far as to send Jesus to die for us.

He is a God who loves to show mercy, but if we refuse to repent, we cut ourselves off from that mercy. God convicts us because He loves us and values us more than we can ever imagine; He wants us to repent so that we can be reconciled with Him. All the angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner repents (Luke 15:10).

It is grace, not the law, that changes our hearts. It is worth noting here that conviction of sin and condemnation of sin are very different in nature. Condemnation offers no hope of mercy and is one of Satan's chief weapons to keep us away from God – we are damned and there is no way out. Conviction, on the other hand, is the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, bringing us to repentance so that we can find peace with God and be restored. This is where we find new life.

***The benefits of repentance – it:***

- a. brings peace and reconciliation with God
- b. lifts the weight of guilt (Proverbs 28:13)
- c. brings victory over sin
- d. brings freedom and removes fear
- e. promotes health – spiritually, mentally, and even physically (Psalm 32:1-5)
- f. helps to recover confidence
- g. may lead to reconciliation with the victim (but cannot be demanded). There can be no reconciliation without repentance

- h. helps victims to forgive
- i. contributes to justice
- j. may reduce punishment through the judicial system
- k. helps the community to rebuild relationships
- l. brings more security to victims
- m. helps heal trauma
- n. regains people's trust
- o. becomes a strong testimony of God's mercy
- p. leads to eternal life in heaven!

So, we see that not only individuals benefit from repentance, but also whole communities can benefit. Even creation will benefit from our changed attitudes (Romans 8:19-21).

#### **4) What happens when there is no repentance?**

Lack of repentance is, therefore, a slow death. Some seek escape in alcohol or the use of drugs or develop other self-destructive life patterns. Some come to a point of extreme self-condemnation and decide to take their own lives. Others become even more hardened in their hearts and go on to commit further crimes.

##### ***Hindrances to repentance***

Many cannot understand what prevents offenders from repenting for the wrong that they did, but there are many factors making it difficult for them:

- sinful human nature resisting the Holy Spirit
- no conviction of sin – even glorying in what we have done
- fear of the consequences – of punishment, of how others will respond, of losing reputation or employment
- they also are traumatised by what they have done
- and so on....

#### **5) Repentance and asking for forgiveness**

##### ***Of whom should we ask forgiveness?***

- God first and foremost. He is the main One whom we have sinned against. If our sin is only in our thoughts and the other person is unaware of it, then we should only speak to God, asking His forgiveness.
- The victim. If we have openly sinned against someone it is not enough to only ask God's forgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24).
- The church and the public if the sin was committed in public.
- For sins like murder and rape, it may be wise to seek people God has anointed with a healing or deliverance ministry to be a witness to your repentance and to pray with you to break any curse that may have resulted.

##### ***Practical notes on how to seek forgiveness from another***

- We need to take full responsibility for our actions and clearly state our sin.
- It is more effective to ask for forgiveness than to simply say "I'm sorry!"
- We should never say "If I hurt you..." as this suggests that we are not convinced that we did anything wrong.
- We should not accuse the one who was offended or point out *their* faults.
- We should not deal with it lightly or superficially.

- We should not preach at the same time.
- We should not excuse the wrong, although sometimes an explanation can help bring clarity to the sin.
- We should ask forgiveness as soon as possible (face to face is best, unless the sin was of a sexual nature, in which case a carefully worded letter would be more appropriate).
- We should seek to make restitution where possible. The Bible teaches the principle of restitution in Exodus 22:3, Leviticus 6:4, Numbers 5:6-7, Proverbs 6:31, Ezekiel 33:15.
- Luke 3:8 and Acts 26:20 suggest that repentance needs to have practical fruit.

In conclusion, true repentance is a gift from God. God takes sin seriously, and unless we repent, there are serious consequences in this life and the next. God wants us to repent fully because He is a God who loves to show mercy (Micah 7:18) and takes no pleasure in punishing anyone (Lamentations 3:33). True repentance means more than words. It will change our whole life.

### **Key Ideas**

- Repentance is the only way to freedom from the torment of a guilty conscience.
- Repentance needs to be before God and people, with a willingness to accept the consequences.
- Repentance can give offenders hope for the future and help the victims to be healed, making reconciliation possible.

### **Making it Personal**

- What do I need to repent of?
- Make a list of those you may have offended, even without intending to do so.
- What should I do about my list?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to see everything from His perspective.

## 13. Identificational Confession

Creating bridges through asking forgiveness for the sin of our group



**In the above picture we see someone representing one group kneeling in tears before another group and reaching towards them. All this is done in the shadow of a cross where something has been nailed to it.**

As we can see from genocides, the holocaust, civil wars, and other such events in history and even today, it is very difficult to resolve offenses perpetrated by systems, corporate groups, governments, etc. These conflicts tend to be based on identity, not on ideology. We see this clearly in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Ukraine, and South Sudan where the conflicts show the strong interconnectedness between ethnicity/race and political affiliation. Unless there is repentance at a grassroots level, the probability of mediation being successful is minimal. We can see this from the endless efforts of the United Nations or government groups in South Sudan, Ethiopia, etc. Communities end up in protracted conflict and continuous cycles of violence. We believe that identificational confession is a gift God has given to the church. From our experience in many countries over many years, we have seen how God is using this in powerful ways to build bridges between divided communities.

When people have been offended, their resentment is not only towards the individual who hurt them; often they also hate those people's relatives, their ethnic or racial group, their gender, their

country, and so on. For example, in the case of the Rwandan genocide, often the Tutsi victims not only hated the individual Hutu who killed their families but would end up hating the entire Hutu group. The practice in Rwanda of Christians confessing the sin of their group has been a powerful tool to overcome the hatred and bring deep healing and reconciliation. If these wounds are not healed, they tend to be passed down from generation to generation. For this reason, we need to understand our priestly role as believers to confess the sin of our groups, and how it can help heal the wounds caused by conflict.

### 1) Major objections

We do, however, often experience objections, especially in Western cultures:

Theological: 'Repentance is personal, this concept is not applicable in the New Testament....'

Other:

- a. Surely, I can't be held responsible for any wrong I have not committed?
- b. This is a cover up to absolve the real criminal!
- c. You have no official mandate to ask forgiveness on behalf of the group!
- d. Are you willing to pay for the damage caused by the offence?
- e. Is this going to stop the wrong committed by your group?

### 2) What we mean by identificational confession

There can be misunderstandings about what we are doing in identificational confession, and it can raise theological doubts for some people. Further clarification is therefore necessary:

#### ***Identificational confession does not mean:***

- absolving the guilty of their responsibility.
- that criminals can avoid punishment so that justice is averted.
- that we are representing our group in some official capacity but are identifying with our group as part of our priestly, intercessory responsibility before God.

#### ***Identificational confession means that:***

- I accept that what we did was wrong.
- I accept that the other group was wounded.
- I deeply regret what took place and cry out to God for mercy.
- Not all of us are of the same spirit, and we do not agree with what was done. But we do not come in pride because we accept that we are also capable of the same sin.
- I commit myself to living out of a different spirit.

### 3) Collective repentance

We have looked in the last chapter at personal guilt and personal repentance. The Bible also speaks of collective or corporate guilt and the need for corporate repentance. Old Testament prophets, especially Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel, understood this idea. They were righteous people who chose to be identified with sinners in order to confess the sins of their people. Usually this was before God, but occasionally before people, as when Abigail confessed Nabal's sin (1 Samuel 25: 23-24), and when David asked forgiveness to the Gibeonites (2 Samuel 21). They were modelling what believers in the New Covenant could do as part of the royal priesthood. In the New Testament, Jesus teaches the disciples to pray, "Forgive *us our sins*" (Matthew 6:12 italics added).

## Worldview and Cultures: Communal vs individualistic

- The concept of identificational confession is already embedded in communal cultures.
- The Bible was written in a more communal culture and thus is close to the understanding of corporate responsibility for sin.
- Western culture finds it hard to integrate this concept in the body of biblical truth and to apply it in the ministry of reconciliation and peace building.

### 4) Why identificational confession is needed

- Unresolved offence will always keep the community, nation divided.
- Those who committed sin might be dead or live in denial, but the consequences will be passed on to generations (Lamentation 5:9).
- The confession and repentance of someone who has sinned against us makes it easier for us to forgive.

The greatest wounding against mankind is the result of sins committed by a corporate body – governments, cultures, ethnic groups, institutions, churches, and so on – not by individuals. The problem is that, even though we are part of the corporate body, we tend to excuse ourselves from taking personal responsibility. The corporate sins are then never accepted or confessed, resulting in unhealed wounds and unresolved conflicts. We have already shown how serious festering wounds are in causing conflict.

The Bible shows us how to deal with sin that has not been confessed. Someone in the role of a priestly intercessor can practice identificational confession before God and before others on behalf of those who transgressed (Exodus 32:32; Ezekiel 22:30). We are told in **Leviticus 26:40** to confess our sins and the sins of our forefathers. Intercessors need to be very clear about the wrong done, having researched the facts well, and must be willing to confess it clearly. They should be deeply grieved in their spirit about what took place.

As well as being individuals, we all represent some group whether we like it or not. Identifying ourselves with the sins of our group does not mean those who have committed sinful deeds are automatically cleared of their sin. They must repent before God on their own behalf. It does mean, however, that the people who hear our confession are able to let go of their judgements and bitterness and find grace to forgive. Our confession does not change the past, but it does help to change the present and the future.

Believers are God's hope for healing. Identificational confession is not a formula, or words simply spoken from the mouth. It must come from the depths of our heart. Identifying with the sins of our forefathers and with our group must lead to different actions. Confession, repentance, and reconciliation must become a way of life. It is God's plan that His church and His people should adopt this way of life and become priestly reconcilers to hurting people (2 Chronicles 7:14).

### 5) *Our calling as believers*

***'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation' 1 Peter 2:9***

These words were not spoken to people with a special ministry but to all believers. As we study the work of priests in the Old Testament, it can give us understanding of what God expects of all of us now under the New Covenant.

The most important role of the priest was to be a go-between. He was the one who would bear the sins of the people before God, representing them as sinful people. The greatest priest of all

was Jesus, who chose to be 'numbered with the transgressors' (**Isaiah 53:12**). He not only identified with sinful humanity, but also became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) so that He could be the one and only atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world.

Jesus told us to take up our cross and follow Him. We believe that part of the meaning of taking up our cross is being willing, like Him, to be 'numbered with the transgressors' (Isaiah 53:12), identifying with the sins of our people. If someone asks, "Who gave you the authority to speak on our behalf?", we can confidently say that the Word of God gives us the authority, and God expects us to take up this role.

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, we are told that as believers we do not use conventional weapons. As members of the royal priesthood, we have the privilege of using the "weapon" of identificational confession, which is a very powerful weapon to disarm the offended heart. When we sincerely confess the sins of our groups, something significant takes place in the heavenly realm. We are told in Ephesians 6:12 that our warfare is not against flesh and blood. We are dealing with a heavenly court, not an earthly one, and casting ourselves upon God's mercy, believing for change to take place (Ezekiel 22:30). It is not something legal, but something divine, which gives an opportunity for grace and mercy to flow and triumph over judgment (James 2:13).

## **6) The benefits of identificational confession**

- It brings further healing to the wounded heart.
- It cleanses the contaminated mind.
- It can change the present and future (bringing peace and harmony).
- It enables people to renounce the prejudice and judgments that state, 'They're all the same!'
- It breaks down the dividing walls between people in conflict.

## **7) Practical considerations**

### ***The person(s) who confess on behalf of their group should be***

- Someone who is convicted by the Holy Spirit that they need to do this.
- Someone who desires to see the victims restored.
- Someone who is willing to be specific and take full responsibility for what was done.
- Someone who is dependent on God to give them a fresh gift of repentance for each occasion.<sup>5</sup>
- Someone who has a passion to see reconciliation taking place.

Note: in some public settings where there are political sensitivities, we need to ask God for wisdom as to the best way to express our confession, without compromising or distorting the truth and thus diluting the seriousness of the offence. That would do more harm than good.

### ***Responsibilities that come with identificational confession***

It should be backed by a change in attitude, practical actions, and a commitment to:

- appreciate or value the victims.
- work towards their rehabilitation.
- live with a different spirit from that associated with one's own group.<sup>6</sup>
- take every opportunity to change the mind-set and attitudes of our group.

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<sup>5</sup> Confession and repentance should never become 'mechanical'.

<sup>6</sup> We must identify with our group, but must seek to distance ourselves from the sin.

### ***How long must one keep practicing identificational confession?***

As long as we meet wounded people who have never had the opportunity to hear someone from our group confess our sin and ask for forgiveness, we must be prepared to practice identificational confession. We can either regard it as a burden or as a privilege to help bring healing to someone who has been wounded.

### ***The cost of practicing identificational confession***

Identificational confession can be costly. If we are doing this from the heart, then there is an emotional cost. Although there will usually be a positive outcome, we cannot expect it to be the case every time. Identificational confession is walking the way of the Cross. It is being 'numbered with the transgressors' (Isaiah 53:12), so we should not be surprised if we face opposition or are rejected.

Practicing identificational confession can lead to rejection by our own group, especially if they do not acknowledge the wrong done. People can misunderstand us, accusing us of having wrong motives, and of globalising the wrong. Some can raise theological objections.

Though walking the way of the Cross is foolishness to some and a stumbling block to others (1 Corinthians 1:23-24), it is very powerful for those who will receive the confession and allow their hearts to be changed.

#### **Key Ideas**

- Biblical repentance is both a personal and a corporate act.
- Believers can practice identificational confession to confess the wrongs of their group.
- Hearing someone confess and apologise helps to bring healing to wounded people and is a powerful tool to bring reconciliation.
- We must live out our confession to make it credible.

#### **Making it Personal**

- With what groups can I identify myself (ethnic, racial, country, gender, denomination, profession, and so on)?
- What sinful attitudes or actions has my group been guilty of?
- What opportunities can I take to practice identificational confession on behalf of my group?

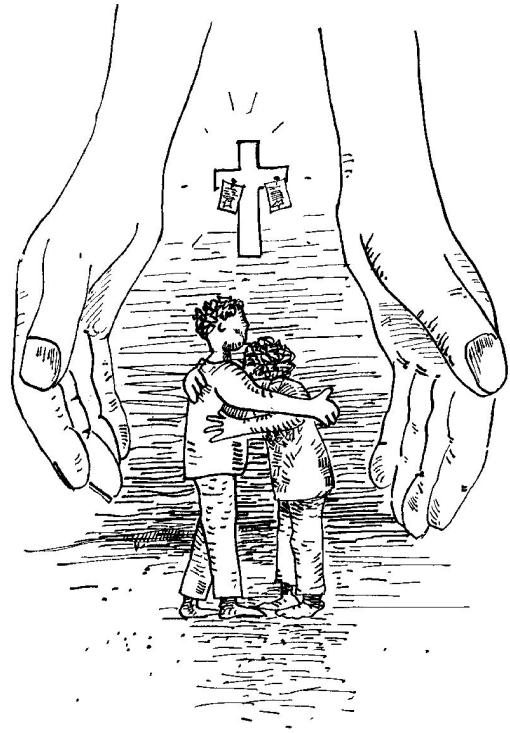


## Section 4: Now for the Roof!

When forgiveness and repentance are flowing, reconciliation has already started taking place. We discover that our hearts are open to one another and we are ready to begin to celebrate our restored identity as citizens of the Holy Nation.

We end by returning to the biblical idea of the Holy Nation and celebrating our unity and our diversity. Here we are all of equal value and have a right to exist for who we are.

Once the church is healed, she can rediscover her role as an agent of healing and reconciliation in the community.



## 14. Pronouncing Blessings

### Learning to affirm and bless other groups

In the midst or the aftermath of conflict, it is very powerful to take time to affirm one another as different groups and pronounce blessings over each other. Prejudice can then be replaced by affirmation and blessing. This is coming in the opposite spirit, which is the most effective form of spiritual warfare.

We have been looking at identificational confession as one aspect of belonging to the royal priesthood. Another aspect is found in **Deuteronomy 10:8**. Priests were to pronounce blessings in the Name of the Lord. It is therefore very important that we learn how to bless one another as part of our priestly function.

#### 1) The Power of blessing

We have already looked at the awful power of prejudice and the seriousness of judging others. Wherever there is division or conflict judgements abound, and Satan uses these to perpetuate the conflict. The Bible tells us that the power of life and death is in the tongue (**Proverbs 18:21**). It can bring healing or pierce the heart (Proverbs 12:18). It can be a tree of life or it can crush the spirit (Proverbs 15:4). God is calling His people to be those who pronounce blessings, not judgments which lead to curses.

In the Hebrew culture, blessing was taken very seriously. Words of blessing carried great power, and withholding a blessing was a tragedy (See Genesis 27). We have much to learn about giving and receiving blessing from Jewish culture and traditions. Today, many of us like Esau are crying out in our hearts, "Is there no blessing left for me?" (Genesis 27:36). Whole groups cry out, "Do you only have one blessing, my Father? Bless me too, my Father!" (Genesis 27:38).

#### 2) Blessing often features in Scripture

Fathers blessed their children, leaders blessed their countries, kings blessed their subjects, and priests blessed their people both as a group and as individuals. Jesus took it further and told us to even bless our enemies (Luke 6:28)! Paul also teaches this in Romans 12:14.

Some biblical examples of blessing are found in Genesis 49; Deuteronomy 33; Numbers 6:24-26; Psalm 115:14 -15; 134:3; 129:8 (b only).

#### ***"The Gift of the Blessing"***

In their excellent book, *The Gift of the Blessing*, Gary Smalley and John Trent examine the components of the Hebrew custom of blessing the children. They describe five major elements:

- Meaningful touch
- A spoken message
- Attaching high value to the one being blessed
- Picturing a special future for the one being blessed
- An active commitment to fulfil the blessing

#### 3) Pronouncing blessing on those from other groups

We are called to honour and respect one another. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves" is what we are told in Romans 12:10. In the Bible, "to honour" means to esteem highly, to prize, to value. Philippians 2:3 commands us "...in humility

consider others better than yourselves." 1 Peter 2:17 also tells us to "Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers".

How healing it will be if we, as members of God's Holy Nation, would embrace our role as the Royal Priesthood and pronounce blessing on those from other groups! We can affirm each other, speaking out what we see of value in the other groups. We can pray the blessing of God on each other, and speak out prophetic words of destiny over one another, as the Holy Spirit inspires. Moreover, we can commit ourselves to help to bring about that destiny.

#### **4) How to do this in practice**

- We can tell people of other groups how much we appreciate them, and how we would like God to bless them, even in every day conversations.
- We can take time in special meetings/church services to encourage people to speak out what they appreciate about other groups, and how they would like to see them being blessed.
- We can defend other groups and say good things about them, especially when we hear them being judged by our own group.

#### **Key Ideas**

- The tongue is very powerful, bringing life or death.
- As members of the royal priesthood, we are to pronounce blessings in God's name.
- When different groups honour and affirm one another, reconciliation is experienced.

#### **Making it Personal**

- What are some good things I can say about other groups.
- What blessings would I like to pronounce/pray over them?

# 15. How a healed church can impact our community

## Living as agents of healing and reconciliation in our communities

This book has been about God healing His church so that His people can be agents of healing and reconciliation in their country. The teaching has been the preparation. Now it is time for the action! Let us now summarise and re-affirm God's desire for His church. Let us explore some of the practical ways in which the church could contribute to the healing of a community, and even a whole country, torn apart by division and conflict.

### 1) What is God's desire for the church?

As you read this, consider if God's desire for His church is being realised in your situation. What could you do to change things?

- a. God's people must first be healed. We cannot give anyone else what we have not received ourselves (Acts 3:6). When we have received God's comfort ourselves, then we can give it to others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
- b. Jesus is the best doctor! He knows how to heal broken hearts (Isaiah 61:1-3). He came to earth to be our sin-bearer and our pain-bearer on the Cross (Isaiah 53:4-5; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19; 1 Peter 2:24). We must bring our pain to Him as well as our sin, and receive His comfort (Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7).
- c. God wants to make us people who are different from the society in which we live (John 17:16), because we think differently (Romans 12:1-2). He wants to transform our lives by renewing our minds (Philippians 2:5; 2 Corinthians 10:5).
- d. God wants to break down every dividing wall that separates His people from one another (Ephesians 2:14-18). He calls us to be citizens of His Holy Nation (1 Peter 2:9) and to demonstrate a quality of relationships that transcends every natural barrier.
- e. Where necessary, the church must repent of any way it has failed to be the light of the world and has been no different from the world around it. Each person must repent of his/her own weaknesses, failures and sins. But there is also a place for a public act of repentance where there is a priestly identification with the sin of the church as a whole, even those who are Christians in name only.
- f. God wants the church to be a community of love (John 13:34-35; Romans 12:9-21; Colossians 3:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Peter 1:22). Love is the most healing force in the universe!
- g. God wants His church to be a family! This is especially important in a community where many people have lost their relatives or have been betrayed by them. Relationships in the church can provide the roles that are missing in people's lives (fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, and

#### ***What is this Hope?***

- Hope of heaven. This is not the only life there is. God has prepared for His children a place that is more glorious than we could ever imagine (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)! This gives us an eternal perspective on our lives and on suffering and enables us even to rejoice in the midst of great difficulties.
- Hope for change now. God wants the church to strive to bring the His kingdom (God's rule and reign) so that righteousness can be experienced on earth now (Matthew 6:10). Too often the church has been thinking only about heaven, and neglecting to bring in the reign of God, now, on earth.

so on. Psalm 68:6; Matthew 12:50; John 19:27; Ephesians 2:19; 3:15; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Hebrews 2:11).

- h. The church is to be a source of hope because God is a God of hope (Romans 15:13). As countries turn to Him, He gives them hope (Matthew 12:21), because His plans for His children are always good (Jeremiah 29:11).
- i. The church is to be a prophetic voice to the community and to the country. This means it will speak out against every form of injustice and declare God's message and God's heart.
- j. The church is to demonstrate a different kind of leadership from what is seen in the world. It is to demonstrate servant leadership (Matthew 20:25-28; John 13:12-17; Philippians 2:3-8) and have nothing to do with selfish ambition (James 3:13-18).

## **2) Practical ways in which the church can be an agent of healing and reconciliation**

As you read the suggestions below, make a note of any that your church is not yet doing. Note the obstacles and the possibilities.

- What could you do to motivate them into action?
- What other suggestions can you come up with?

### ***Healing***

- Visit the lonely, bereaved, traumatised, discouraged and those struggling in their faith.
- Encourage people to talk about their problems (their inner pain, doubts, questions, terrible memories that keep returning) by listening in a caring, sympathetic way.
- Pray for those who are hurting and help them to bring their pain to Jesus.
- Train pastoral workers (men and women) who have an obvious gift of compassion, so that they can help care for the flock.
- Hold special workshops on healing inner wounds.
- Encourage people in prayer cells to care for one another, listen to one another, and bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).
- Form support groups for those who have suffered in similar ways, to encourage mutual care and encouragement.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Preach about***

- God's heart of compassion towards those who suffer.
- Jesus the Saviour, healer and bearer of our sin and pain.
- The need to bring all our grief, sorrows and troubles to the Cross.
- True biblical forgiveness.
- God's way of reconciliation.
- The restored identity of God's people as citizens of His Holy Nation.
- Loving relationships as members of His Body that transcend all divisions.

### ***Give assistance to the poor and needy in the community by***

- Giving material help in crisis situations.
- Leading programmes whereby the community takes charge of its own development.

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<sup>7</sup> These should always be led by trained pastoral workers.

### ***Reconciliation***

- Teach about God's intention for unity in diversity within the Holy Nation.
- Intercede for the country and motivate others to do so.
- Confess and repent of past sins and seek to do away with all prejudice.
- Encourage church members to practice hospitality to people in other groups and make friends with them.
- Find ways to do kind deeds for someone in need in another group.
- Speak out against all unrighteousness and injustice in society and demonstrate God's righteous lifestyle.
- Demonstrate unity and reconciliation by living it out in your congregation and community.
- Defend the other group(s) whenever you hear them being maligned or judged.
- Defend and support inter-ethnic/inter-racial marriages.
- In situation of ethnic conflict or division, try to learn some of the language of the other group(s) and learn some of their worship songs.

### **3) The church must shine!**

It is time for the church to arise, shine and fulfil its commission to be the light and hope of the world! Others will then be drawn to its light (Isaiah 60:1-3)! They will see that God is indeed living in His church and that His way leads to life (Zechariah 8:23)!

#### **Key Ideas**

- The healed, restored church is the hope of the country.
- As the church recovers her mission, the community will also be healed and restored.
- Every member can play a part in this.

#### **Making it Personal**

- What hope do I now have that the church can become an agent of healing and reconciliation in my country?
- What part can I play in this?

## APPENDICES

### **A. More Thoughts on “Suffering and a God of Love”**

The aim of this section is to look further into the Scriptures to gain more understanding of the relationship between man’s free will and God’s sovereignty. We will also look at some of the common objections to this teaching and what the Bible says about them.

#### **Is everything that happens in this world the will of God?**

In Genesis 1 and 2, we see that man was created in God’s image with the dignity to make his own choices. God did not force man to do His will, but rather appealed to His relationship with him.

Psalm 115:16 says, “The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth He has given to man.” God gave us the responsibility for taking care of this world, subduing it and ruling over creation. His plan was that we would live in obedience to Him and carry out His purposes on the earth. But man rebelled and chose to live independently of God. Read Genesis 3 to see the disastrous consequence and meditate on how God must have felt.

God hates all forms of injustice; therefore, He can never be the author of injustice (Proverbs 6:16-19; Zechariah 8:16-17; Psalm 5:6; 50:16-21). He takes no pleasure in any kind of death (Ezekiel 18:32; Ezekiel 33:11). He hates evil and will never tempt anyone to commit evil (James 1:13). It is our own sinful desires that lead us into evil, and eventually to death (James 1:14-15).

We are not to be deceived. God only wants to give us good and perfect gifts (James 1:16-17). He does not change from one day to the next. We can trust His will. God is holy, there is no darkness in Him (1 John 1:5; 2:16).

Meditate on Jeremiah 29:11-13<sup>8</sup>. What is God saying to you? To your family? To your group? To your country?

#### **Commonly raised objections**

There can still be some objections and questions in our hearts.

#### ***God knew what was going to happen and therefore it was His will***

People often say this, but the fact that God knows everything does not mean it is His will. Often prophecies were given as a warning, to urge people to repent (see Jeremiah 18:7-10). Nineveh would be a good example of this after Jonah preached there.

In Rwanda today, some Christian leaders recognize that they did not respond in the right way when God gave people dreams and visions of “rivers of blood” and much suffering. They accepted this in a fatalistic way, as if it was inevitable because God said so. Now they recognise that God was warning them and wanting them to intercede and rise up against the evil intentions of the country’s leaders.

We see the heart of God most clearly in Jesus. In Luke 13:34, Jesus was looking over the city saying, “How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” Clearly, God’s will was to love and protect them.

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<sup>8</sup> This was not spoken to perfect people who had done everything right, but to a rebellious people in exile. If God could say this to them, He is surely saying it to us.

Jesus, weeping, said, "If you, even you, had known what would bring you peace, but it is hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:42).

Who hides things from our eyes? 2 Corinthians 4:4, tells us it is Satan, the god of this world. Jesus told them what would bring them peace – to love their enemies and bless those who persecute them. But they rejected this message and prepared for war. Jesus knew that their choices would have tragic consequences and is obviously grieving. Even though Jesus could predict what would happen, the way He spoke clearly showed that it was not what He wanted.

In the year 70 AD there was an insurrection against Rome. The Jews tried to fight their enemy (Rome) but lost. Jerusalem was utterly destroyed; there was great suffering and innocent children were slaughtered. And God wept. Whenever leaders in a country do not listen to the voice of God, many innocent people suffer. This is not the will of God – it breaks His heart to see suffering because of unrighteous leadership. Leaders of a country have an awesome responsibility to protect their citizens.

### ***What about Job?***

Many people refer to Job to confirm that what happened to him was God's will. Take another look at what is really happening in this Scripture. It was Satan's idea, not God's, for Job to suffer. God was boasting about Job, but Satan said Job was following God only because he was being blessed. "I will prove to you that he will no longer serve you, if the blessings are taken away." What if God had then said, "No, that must not be done"? Satan would respond, "You are afraid that I am right because you know what I am saying is true. You know no one will follow you without a guarantee of blessings."

Even though it hurt God, He chose to allow Job to be tested, trusting that Job would pass the test and not deny Him. No one on earth knew about this accusation. Job's friends said Job must have sinned even though Job protested, saying he was a righteous man. His friends did not know what was happening in the heavenly realm.

In the end God did appear to Job, but even then, God did not explain everything to him. God could not say "Satan is tempting you so stand strong!" It had to be Job's choice, without receiving any explanation, to trust God. All God could say was, "Job, I'm God, the One who created everything. Will you trust Me?" Job proved he loved God for God's own sake and Satan was silenced because of Job's victory.

### ***What about Pharaoh?***

People often refer to Pharaoh as another example of God being responsible for man's choices. "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart" (Exodus 7:3-4). However, subsequent verses stress Pharaoh's responsibility in his decisions (Exodus 7:14; 8:32). As we go through the story of the plagues, the first instance of God hardening Pharaoh's heart in Exodus 9:12 comes after Pharaoh had repeatedly hardened his own heart and refused to comply with God's request. Psalm 95:8 (repeated in Hebrews 3:8; 4:7) shows us the seriousness of hardened hearts shutting us out from grace. Maybe the best way to understand Pharaoh's situation is that God finally confirms him in his own choices and uses the situation to show His sovereign power over all the gods of Egypt.

### ***How can we understand Scriptures like Isaiah 45:7?***

Isaiah 45:7 says, "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things." This appears to confirm the fatalistic approach to life which some hold. They believe God can send good or evil and who can understand Him? This belief absolves man of all responsibility for his own actions.



Let us look more closely at this verse; is it saying that God is the author of our sin? But we have seen that our sin is rebellion against His will. Consider Adam's rebellion in Genesis 2:16-17, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for when you eat of it you will surely die." The light and dark are clearly divided, but Adam chose the darkness and disaster followed.

How can darkness be created in a room? We can block out the light but cannot create darkness while the light is still there. The only way to create darkness is by removing light. Darkness is an absence of light. God sent His light to the world, but men loved the darkness more than the light (John 3:19). When men do not want the light, God withdraws it, and darkness remains. Similarly, He shows us the way to peace and blessing. But if we reject it, God withdraws His blessing and that results in disaster. The worst judgement we can experience is when God removes His hand of protection from our lives. We see this repeatedly in Romans 1: "God gave them over..." to experience the full horror of their sinful choices. Sin has terrible consequences, as "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

As we see in the story of the Prodigal Son, God may allow the opposite of what He desires for us, so that we will see the consequences of our wrong choices and return to Him.

### ***Why does God intervene in some cases and not others?***

Prayer is significant. When we pray we are giving God an invitation to come into the situation. When God's people pray, God can intervene (2 Chronicles 7:14).

In Genesis 1:28, He told us to subdue and have dominion over the world. "The earth He has given to man" (Psalm 115:16). God chooses not to force Himself into a situation, but He longs to be invited in through our prayers. He does not want to work independently of us, but with us. Prayer is our opportunity to learn how to rule with God. Most miracles in the gospels happened when people had faith and approached Jesus.

**But** there were many times when people prayed and there was no miraculous intervention. This is hard to understand, but even in Scripture not everyone was delivered. In Acts 12:2-11, James is killed in prison, but Peter is miraculously delivered. Some say that it depends on how much faith we have, but Hebrews 11 does not support this. Although most of Hebrews 11 speaks of miraculous deliverance by faith, from verse 35b onwards we read of people who suffered terribly with no miraculous intervention. We cannot say they had less faith because verse 39 says, "These were all commended for their faith." Revelation makes it clear that there will be martyrs. There is still much mystery and many unanswered questions this side of heaven. God does not give us all the answers but asks us to trust His character.

There is one thing we can be very sure of, that God did not love those who survived any more than those who did not survive. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the blood of His saints" (Psalm 72:14; 116:15). God will never let their deaths be wasted (John 12:24-26).

## B. Discovering Your Amazing Heavenly Father

Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 8:19; 14:7, 9). He is the exact representation of the Father (Hebrews 1:3). God the Father is exactly like Jesus!

A study of the following verses will help you to discover the perfect Father.

- He loves us – Jeremiah 31:3; John 13:1; 16:27; Ephesians 5:1; 1 John 3:1
- He has compassion on us – Psalm 103:13; Matthew 9:36; 14:14; Luke 15:20; 2 Corinthians 1:3
- He delights in us – Psalm 147:11; 149:4; Proverbs 8:30-31; Zephaniah 3:17
- He loves us unconditionally – Romans 9:16; 11:6; Titus 3:4-7
- He loved us enough to die for us – John 15:13; Romans 5:8
- He cares for us – Deuteronomy 32:10-11; 1 Peter 5:7
- He calls us His beloved friends – Deuteronomy 33:12; John 15:13-15; James 2:23
- He relates intimately to us and calls us by name – Job 29:4; Isaiah 43:1-2; John 10:14, 27
- He gives us constant attention – Deuteronomy 31:8; Psalm 34:15; 139:16; Matthew 28:20
- He nurtures us – Psalm 27:10; Hosea 11:1-4
- He comforts us when we are troubled – Psalm 23:4; 71:21; 94:19; Isaiah 51:12; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5
- He encourages and affirms us – Isaiah 41:8-13; Luke 12:32
- He is patient and gentle with us – Psalm 103:8; Matthew 11:29; 2 Corinthians 10:1; 1 Timothy 1:16; 2 Peter 3:9
- He understands our need for physical affection – Deuteronomy 33:12; Isaiah 40:11; Mark 10:16
- He instructs and guides us – Psalm 32:8; Isaiah 48:17; John 8:12; 14:26
- He provides for us – Psalm 23:1; 34:9-10; Philippians 4:19; 1 Timothy 6:17
- He enjoys giving us good gifts – Jeremiah 32:40; Luke 11:13; James 1:17
- He is kind and forgiving – Psalm 86:5; Jeremiah 9:24; Micah 7:18-20; Ephesians 2:7
- He disciplines us in a good way because He loves us – Jeremiah 46:28; Hebrews 12:5-11
- He also gives us a mother's love – Isaiah 49:15-16; 66:13; Psalm 27:10

Surely everyone longs for this kind of parent!

## C. More thoughts about woundedness

### 1) To understand better how wounded we are, let us consider God's original good plan for his world.

*God's original good plan for:*

#### *a. The family we grew up in*

God's ideal plan for wholesome human development was:

- Parenthood exactly representing God's character.
- Children knowing they are loved, cared for and provided for in every way, therefore feeling completely secure in:
  - who they are (identity)
  - who they will become (destiny)
  - their relationships (belonging)

#### *b. The society in which we live*

- Relationships characterised by love, unselfishness, mutual respect, and appreciation of one another. No greed; no one abusing anyone else.
- A strong sense of community where people care for one another and look out for each other's interests.
- Government motivated by a desire to demonstrate righteous leadership and genuinely care for all their people. No power struggles, no self-interest, no injustice, no corruption.

#### *c. Creation in general*

- Everything working together in harmony under God's Lordship.
- No natural disasters, no disease.

### 2) Woundedness is a Biblical Concept

A wounded heart has serious consequences on our ability to cope with life. "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). Dried up bones/joints are very painful; they are stiff and inflexible, and they are brittle, breaking easily. This is a graphic picture of how our lives can be if we have a wounded heart. God understands this and has let us know in His word that He is especially close to those who have wounded hearts. "The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

Describing the ministry of Jesus, Isaiah 42:3 says, "A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick He will not quench" (snuff out). Both these images also give us a vivid picture of the wounded heart. The bruised reed no longer stands upright but is bent over. This is how we can be inside – no longer standing straight with our heads up but bowed down and bent over. We can also picture the human spirit as a flame burning within us. "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts" (Proverbs 20:27). Life's hurts can cause the flame within us to burn more and more dimly. It can be reduced to a smouldering wick.

Jesus will never break the bruised reed. Rather, "the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down" (Psalm 145:14; 146:8). "You bestow glory on me and lift up my head" (Psalm 3:3). "I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high" (Leviticus 26:13). He will never snuff

out the smouldering wick but breathes new life into our fainting spirits. "He revives the spirit of the lowly" (Isaiah 57:15).

(It is worth noting that the context of Isaiah 42:3 is all about justice. Jesus, God's Servant, "will bring justice to the nations..., in faithfulness He will bring forth justice; He will not falter or be discouraged till He establishes justice on the earth.")

### **3) Dealing with Rejection and low self-esteem**

Sadly, this is a very common problem. We should not be surprised as Satan is so jealous of our relationship with God. God values us so much that He sent Jesus to die for us and has planned a destiny for us that is beyond our wildest dreams. So, Satan will take every opportunity to devalue us. Jesus called him the 'father of lies' and this is his strongest weapon. He takes advantage of life's injustices and sorrows to lie to us, seeking to convince us that we are worthless. While it is true that we are totally unworthy of God's love and salvation, we are not worthless! He calls us His treasured possession, the apple of His eye.

It seems that the greatest wound any human being can receive is rejection. Rejection is so painful because it carries a 'message' – that we are worthless, unlovable, that there is no place for us,.... The greatest wounding comes from those from whom we expected the most – especially parents, siblings, teachers, authority figures, friends, partners.

#### ***Behaviours resulting from these wounds***

We often try to compensate for our feelings of low-esteem and rejection. These are some of the behaviours we may exhibit, depending on our personality.

- "Please love me! I'll do anything as long as you'll love me!" We become people pleasers, afraid to be our real selves, always looking for approval and acceptance.
- "I don't care!" We become tough and hard-hearted, trying to show that nothing has hurt us (but it isn't true!)
- "I'll prove to you that I have value! Anything you can do, I can do better!" We become very competitive striving to be the best at everything. Our lives become driven by the need to succeed and to win. We try to combat a feeling of inferiority by becoming superior.
- "I know you'll reject me, so I'll reject you first!" We protect our hearts from further hurts by being on the defensive. We expect attack, so we attack first (in our attitude, if not physically or verbally).
- "I'm angry with the world, and I'm going to punish it!" We become angry people, hitting out at society in general, aggressive, and destructive, but especially wanting to punish those we feel represent those who rejected us the most.
- "My culture/ethnicity/nationality/language is the best!"
- "Let me find a place where I can belong". We need a group identity where we can feel valued even if it is a crime gang.

- "I was controlled (used) so now I'm going to control (use) others." So often we end up reproducing in our own lives the behaviour which wounded us.
- "I can't do anything about the situation - nothing will ever change." We become passive and resigned. We have no confidence in our ability to change anything, and we are unable to take any initiative, or to plan a better future.
- "I can't cope - I'm too wounded. Let me escape from reality!" We try to drown our pain in alcohol or drugs. (Every oppressed people group has a high alcoholism rate.) The extreme of this is suicide.

There are other responses that are common to us all, that may not be so easy to see. But which are poisoning our hearts.

### ***How do we find healing?***

Jesus said, 'You shall know the truth and truth will set you free'. John 8: It all depends on what we believe. Beliefs are very powerful – we live what we believe. Therefore, the only way to wholeness is to change our beliefs. I don't think we can simply do that by sheer force of our own will. It's only possible to get rid of old beliefs if we replace them with better ones, and Jesus said He was sending the Spirit to lead us into all truth. The most powerful way to change beliefs is to hear the Holy Spirit tell us something different, something that ministers to the deepest part of us, something that answers the cry of the heart and brings healing.

## D. Understanding Trauma and Bereavement

### Signs, symptoms and what the experts say about trauma

Our knowledge of the signs, symptoms, and reactions to trauma is the result of research done all over the world. It has been discovered that all people react the same way when experiencing a trauma, whatever its nature. It is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

#### *Immediate symptoms of traumatic experiences*

##### *a. Physical*

- Rapid heart beat
- Stomach churning (vomiting and diarrhoea)
- Nervous shaking
- Sweating
- Feeling tired

##### *b. Mental*

- Thoughts racing
- Repetitive thoughts like, 'What will become of me?'
- Inability to think clearly, possibly with a desire to escape into sleep

##### *c. Emotional*

- Fear, anxiety
- Sadness, grief
- Anger
- Despair

#### *Long term effects of being traumatised*

- Intrusive recollections of the event
- Sleep disturbance and nightmares
- Over alertness or exaggerated startled responses
- Re-experiencing the trauma (triggered by anything that is a reminder of the trauma)
- Trying to avoid anything that is a reminder of the trauma
- No energy and no interest in anything
- Feelings of guilt for having survived when others died
- Feeling as if nothing can ever make one happy again

The presence of any one of the above symptoms is an indication that a person might be traumatised.

#### *The degree of trauma is indicated by*

- How many of the above symptoms are present
- How frequently the above symptoms are experienced
- How much disruption these symptoms are causing to everyday life (for example, are they able to take care of themselves and the needs of the family, go to work, and so on?)

#### *What is collective trauma?*

Collective trauma describes a situation where a whole group of people, a community or a society can become traumatized. This can be through a shared traumatic event like a genocide or years of chronic injustice and oppression. This trauma is then a shared memory which changes their sense of identity and can even change the way a society works. This memory is passed down from generation to generation and continues to influence the way each new generation lives.

Healing collective trauma is no easy task. The only source of deep and lasting healing is the cross of Christ. As we have said, the church is God's chosen agent to heal a wounded nation. We believe that the concept of 'identificational confession' in chapter 13 plays a significant part in that healing.

## **Factors that determine how traumatised a person will be**

### ***External Factors***

- How much exposure was there to severely stressful situations?
- How much support was there from family, companions or outside agencies during and immediately after the events?

### ***Internal Factors***

- Basic inner stability (which is dependent on how many of our emotional needs were met as we were growing up)
- Personality (some people are much more sensitive than others)
- Faith in God
- Previous experiences of trauma and how much they affected the person
- Family history of tendency towards mental illness

## **How to help the traumatised person**

Traumatised people need to talk about the pain in their hearts, but in order for them to talk, they need someone who will listen!

### ***Listening Tips***

- Encourage them to tell their whole story in detail, not only the facts, but also how they felt and what it did to them.
- Give them plenty of time and give them your full attention.
- Give eye contact and let your eyes be full of sympathy and concern.
- Be very gentle.
- Ask questions to clarify their story – otherwise remain silent!
- Allow them to express doubts or anger without correcting them.
- Allow them to shed tears without you becoming embarrassed.
- Do not look at your watch, yawn or look through the window.
- Do not give advice unless it is asked for.
- When they have finished telling their story, comfort them and give them hope.
- Encourage them to give their pain to Jesus.

## **Bereavement and the grieving process**

As with trauma, there are recognised responses to bereavement that all will experience to varying degrees. The intensity of the grief reaction depends on:

- How sudden or unexpected the death was
- Mode of death, especially if violence or intense suffering was involved
- Nature of the relationship (for example, very dependent or unresolved conflict)
- Whether there have been other significant losses, especially in childhood
- How stressful the rest of life has been
- Whether there has been a loss of practical support
- Whether a funeral service was possible
- Number of relatives and friends who died

## **Recognised responses to grief**

### ***Shock, Denial and Numbness***

This response is experienced when death is very sudden and unexpected.

- Cannot believe it really happened
- Unreality, feeling like one is waiting to wake up from a bad dream
- Maybe a sense of the presence of the deceased (because the mind cannot accept what has happened)

### ***Realisation***

- Intense feelings of loss and longing
- Treasuring objects belonging to the deceased
- Deep sadness (this may last for years)

### ***Anger***

- Against those who caused the death, if it was a killing
- Against doctors and nurses who did not do more
- Against God for allowing it to happen
- Against the deceased for leaving them, though they know it is irrational
- Against self, feelings of guilt

### ***Guilt and Remorse***

If only I had ...

- done more
- reacted more quickly
- been there when it happened
- been a better partner, son, daughter, parent, friend, and so on
- been able to say 'goodbye' properly
- not survived – 'Why should I still be alive, and they are not?'

### ***Anxiety***

- How will I cope emotionally without the deceased?
- How will I cope materially without the deceased?
- Fear of reprisal from the spirit of the deceased (animistic religions)

### ***Physical Reactions***

- Fatigue/exhaustion – no energy for anything
- Poor concentration and difficulty with memory
- Sickness (because of lower resistance to disease while grieving)

### ***Apathy and Hopelessness***

- Future looks bleak, without hope – 'What is the point of anything?'
- No motivation

### ***Acceptance and Readjustment***

Eventually we come to terms with our loss. We begin to pick up the threads of life once again and adjust where necessary.

In our grieving we may not experience these responses in this order, often we may have more than one at the same time. We may find ourselves moving back and forth between these responses until we are able to accept our loss and readjust our lives.



## **What the grieving person needs**

- To be able to cry and express their sadness, pain, anger and remorse. (Some cultures are better than others in this.)
- To talk about what happened, to go over the details of the circumstances surrounding the death over and over again.
- To be able to let the deceased go, say “goodbye” emotionally and transfer them into God’s care. Children, especially, need to know their relatives are being taken care of well by Jesus.
- To be helped to give their guilt and regret to Jesus and receive His forgiveness.
- To understand that their reactions are normal and that they are not going crazy. Things will improve with time.
- Reassurances of support in the future, and practical help where needed.
- It may be a good idea to have a memorial service if no funeral service was possible. Even a very short ceremony with flowers being laid on a small pile of earth or stones can be very helpful.

### ***The worst situation to cope with***

When there is no certainty the person is alive or dead, we do not know whether to grieve or to hope. We are unable to respond emotionally. The only way to cope is to entrust the missing person into God’s hands, whether dead or alive. People in this situation need special care and support from the church.

## E. Healing Inner Wounds

God cares about the broken-hearted and wants to heal their wounds (Psalm 34:18; 147:2-3; Isaiah 61:1-4; Luke 4:18). When He heals, He does not just give good advice. He comes Himself, takes us into His arms and speaks words of life to us. He does not usually do this in isolation. He uses His body, the church – ‘pray for each other, so that you may be healed’ (James 5:16).

### *How can I be healed of painful memories?*

- Face the pain. In the Psalms, David is very honest about his feelings. Tell Jesus all about your pain (Psalm 42:3-4; 62:8).
- Let Jesus carry the pain and do the hurting instead of you (Isaiah 53:4). Cry your tears into the heart of God (Psalm 56:8). He understands and feels our pain.
- Listen to God's voice (John 10:27). Find Him in the middle of your pain (Isaiah 43:1-2; 63:9). Experience His heart of compassion (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Receive the word of life – the truth that will set you free (John 8:32).
- Repent of sinful responses to life's hurts – vows, judgements, bitterness, desire to retaliate, wrong beliefs. Pray against any bondage (Psalm 51:6; Romans 6:16; 14:10-13; Hebrews 12:15).
- Reach out to God for grace to forgive. Unforgiveness will be like chains around your heart. As you forgive, you will be set free (Matthew 5:43-48; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:27-37; Romans 12:14, 17-21; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).
- Keep receiving God's love on a daily basis. Let His word renew your mind (Jeremiah 31:3; Zephaniah 3:17; John 14:21; 2 Corinthians 4:16).
- Reach out to bless others and help them find healing (Job 42:10; Philippians 2:4; James 5:16).
- Like Joseph, God can make you “fruitful in the place of suffering” (Genesis 41:52).
- Like Job, you too can “come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). Praise the Lord!

### **Dealing with Shame**

Although people may have given their guilt and pain to Jesus, they may still be left with a sense of shame, which is something different. It is important therefore for us to see what God has to say about dealing with shame.

It is significant to note that “They felt no shame” was the last statement made about man and woman before the fall (Gen 2:25). Nakedness does not only refer to physical nakedness; it also refers to openness, transparency, communication and fellowship.

Shame can come from sin or from being sinned against. It is not the same as guilt. Guilt means ‘I have done something wrong.’ Shame means ‘There's something wrong with me.’ I feel deficient as a human being.

Guilt is to do with activity; shame is to do with identity. Shame is linked with knowledge – a deep inner heart knowledge. There are some things God never intended us to know. That is why He did not want us to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

### **Healthy and unhealthy shame**

There is a healthy shame when we have sinned against God. He was surprised that His people felt no shame for the things they had done (Jeremiah 8:12). But there is also an unhealthy shame which was usually put upon us by someone else's sin.

### **Sources of shame**

- Physical features (stature, shape, distinguishing marks)
- Social origins or status (city, country, ethnicity, race, economic background, poverty)
- National history (loss of sovereignty, repression or oppression of others)
- Abuse (rejection, rape, sexually abused child)
- Secret knowledge (being made the keeper of secrets, especially premature sexual knowledge, illegitimacy, past criminal conviction, family shame)

### **The effects of shame and our attempts to compensate**

Let us look at the ways in which Adam and Eve attempted to deal with their shame.

1. Covering – a futile attempt to cover themselves with leaves (Genesis 3:7).
2. Hiding in the bushes – God asks, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:8-9) – a question which invites self-disclosure. He asked it not because He did not know but because they did not know. Mankind has been hiding in the bushes ever since! We cannot relate to God or look one another straight in the face.
3. Fear of exposure – “I was afraid...” (Genesis 3:10).
4. Blame shifting – “It was not me, it was her...”
5. Wrong self-knowledge – “Who told you?” God had not told them! Lies about self were received from wrong messages.
6. Condemnation and alienation (because of the sense of being unfit for community).

A sense of shame is usually perpetuated down the generations. It may also become attached to our group.

### **Constructing a false self**

One of things we do to cope with a sense of shame is to seek to construct a false self because we cannot look at ourselves without pain.

False self <i>Super-human</i>	Puts others down Exalts self
False self <i>Sub-human</i>	Puts self down Exalts others (N.B. This is NOT humility!)
Authentic self <i>Truly human</i>	Accepts self and others

Both the super-human and sub-human are forms of pride and idolatry! They misrepresent who God created us to be. The result is that we worship that image.

### **Consider Jesus**

Did He know shame? He had every right to do so! He was assumed to be illegitimate, was a refugee, from a despised ethnic group, grew up poor, and so on. Yet He never allowed shame to attach to His person. He was eternally secure in His identity and what He had come to do (John 13:1-5).

On the cross, He was not only our sin bearer and pain bearer, He was also our shame bearer. It was shameful to be crucified and be hung naked in public, but He did not allow the shame of crucifixion to stop Him going through with it (Hebrews 12:2). For the joy of seeing us come to freedom, He endured the Cross, which included bearing *our* shame. In His atoning death He carried all the consequences of sin in the world. Psalm 69:7, one of the prophetic passages foretelling the sufferings of the Cross, tells us that shame covered His face. This was so that our faces need never be covered with shame (Psalm 34:5).

### ***How do we deal with shame?***

1. Admit the problem or struggle we have with a sense of shame.
2. Recognise it for what it is – a denial of the truth of who God created us to be.
3. Identify the roots of the shame, asking the Holy Spirits help in this.
4. Express the pain to God, take it to the cross and place it on Jesus.
5. Receive God's covering (Isaiah 61:10).
6. Let God restore us (Isaiah 54:4; Joel 2:26, 27).
7. ***Receive the double portion of joy and blessing that God wants to give us in its place (Isaiah 61:7).***

## **Dealing with Anger**

Anger is a normal God-given emotion which is not necessarily sinful. God is angry at sin and injustice. If we are not angry in the face of major injustice, there is something wrong with us! Look up the following Scriptures.

### ***God's Holy Anger***

Numbers 32:10 -13; Deuteronomy 29:27; Isaiah 63:3; Zephaniah 2:3; Zechariah 10:3; Romans 1:18; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:5-6

### ***God, however, is slow to anger and His anger is short lived***

Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 30:5; 78:38; 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Isaiah 54:8; Jeremiah 3:12; Hosea 14:4; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:9; Micah 7:18; Nahum 1:3

### ***Righteous anger at injustice and sin***

Nehemiah 5:6; Jeremiah 6:11; Matthew 21:12-13; 23:13-36; Mark 3:5; 10:14; Luke 11:39-52; 13:15-16; John 2:13 -16; Acts 5:3,4,9; 8:20 -23; 13: 9 -11; Galatians 2:11,14

Anger at injustice and when we are sinned against is normal. It is possible to be angry and not to sin (Ephesians 4:26 -27). We can take a lesson from Jesus. As we saw in the above verses, He was angry when He saw people being victims of injustice. When He Himself was the victim of injustice, however, He remained calm, entrusting Himself to the Just Judge (1Pe 2:23).

Anger can be harmful if not dealt with according to Biblical principles. When we hold onto anger, it turns into bitterness and resentment in our hearts, and this leads us to sin. Chronic anger is a terrible disease.

### ***Warnings about anger***

Psalm 37:8; Proverbs 29:11, 22; 30:33; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Matthew 5:22; Ephesians 4:26-27, 31; Colossians 3:8; 1Timothy 2:8; James 1:19-20 (There are also many warnings in Proverbs about being quick-tempered – Proverbs 14:17, 29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:19.)

### ***Common ways of handling our anger***

- **Withdrawal** physically – walking away  
mentally – work, TV, alcohol, drugs
- **Masking it** we may be smiling outwardly but are boiling with rage inwardly
- **Denial** this can lead to physical illness, depression, tension, bitterness, resentment, quickly becoming angry about trivial matters
- **Brooding** going over and over the events in one's mind and fantasising about revenge
- **Substitution** taking out anger on someone unrelated (e.g. Wife or children)
- **Blowing up** uncontrollable anger
- **Refusing to talk**, but silence can be violence!

God does not want us to do any of the above. He does not want us to deny our anger or react sinfully, but to face it with Him.

### ***The Anger Shield – a tool to practically understand our own anger***

Anger is always an emotion that hides other emotions or pain. I may be using my anger as a shield. This tool will help you to discern what is really going on inside of you, and what you can give to Jesus.

Think about the last episode(s) of anger you had and ask yourself the following questions:

- How did it affect me physically? What did I feel in my body? (Example: I felt a fire in my belly; I felt a tension and pain in my back; I had a knot in my stomach...)
- What other emotions did I feel? (Example: I felt ashamed of my reaction towards my children...)
- What thoughts did I have? (Example: I will never trust him again!)
- What was the effect on my relationship with God? (Example: I believed that God did not care about what I was going through! I could not pray anymore!)
- What were the effects on my relationships with others? (Example: It was impossible to communicate; I had a sense of being disconnected; my wife was afraid of me; I could not relate to this person again...)

Anger is often a demand for something. It is helpful to identify what you were demanding. (Example: the need to be listened to; the need to be treated fairly; to know the truth about a situation; justice in the situation...)

### ***How to deal with anger***

1. Ask God to help you identify:
  - the source of your anger.
  - what pain or other emotion is underneath your anger?
  - what has the Thief robbed you of?
  - what do you really want in this situation?
2. Tell God exactly how you feel about all the above and pour all your pain and anger into His heart, believing that Jesus carried it all for you on the Cross.
3. Ask God to reveal His heart to you, and to tell you how He wants to restore you.
4. Ask God for the grace to be able to forgive all that have sinned against you, and to speak a blessing over them.
5. If someone else is a victim of injustice, ask Him if there is any righteous action He would like you to take on their behalf.

Some people may find it hard to exactly pinpoint why they are angry. It may be that they have experienced so much injustice that they are actually angry at life in general. It would help them to make a list of all the ways they have been robbed by the Thief – all the losses and injustices that they have experienced. This then needs to be poured into God's heart, daring to believe that all this was included in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. Finally, in the light of the second part of John 10:10, they need to ask Jesus what He wants to restore to them from all that was robbed from them, and how He now wants them to experience life in all its fullness. This brings healing and freedom.

## **Dealing with Fear**

### ***Normal fear***

Feeling fear when facing danger is a normal, even a healthy reaction. The fear alerts us of danger, so we can protect ourselves. For example, suppose I am going back home through the forest and a lion jumps out of the bushes in front of me! It is normal to be afraid; I go into survival mode and I want to save my life! Fear activates my muscles and I am ready to run (and beat the world record!!). But the lion turns and continues to walk the other way, ignoring me. When the danger is over, fear disappears, and I start calming down..., after a while, of course!

In very intense moments, it is God's grace that allows us to overcome our fear. There are times when we experience supernatural strength, peace and wisdom in a very dangerous situation. We also need God's grace to overcome fear when living daily in insecure and dangerous situations. His grace can be like a shield around us (Psalm 5:12).

### ***Abnormal fear***

If we still feel fear when out of the dangerous situation, then fear works against us not for us. The fear may also become generalised, so that we feel fearful all the time, or we feel constantly anxious. It does not depend on the circumstances outside anymore, but it is an inner condition of our hearts. Our emotional, mental and spiritual energies are used up by the fear or anxiety. We can be afraid of the future, how we are going to live, of death, or for our children and family. We might be afraid of failure or of being rejected or judged by God or others. All of this is very destructive and affects our whole life: physically, emotionally and mentally. It can also affect those around us, making them feel fearful as well.

### ***God's remedy***

'Do not be afraid'. This command is probably quoted more frequently than any other in the Bible. God does not want us to be full of fear! 'God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind' (2 Timothy 1:7). Jesus told His disciples many times not to be afraid.

Mankind's fall into sin (Genesis 3:7-9) had an impact on our emotions. Fear always tempts us to hide and to build up walls of protection (even unconsciously). It also brings a separation in our relationship with God. But Jesus wants us to invite Him into the dark places of our fear so that He can bring light. We can go with Him into these scary places. On the cross, Jesus experienced the ultimate darkness and triumphed over it so that today fear cannot bind us anymore.

It is important to meet God in our fears and rediscover His love and His faithfulness towards His children. The more we receive revelation of His character, the more our trust in Him grows. Matthew 6:25-34 speaks of how valuable we are to God, and it is in this context that Jesus tells us not to worry about our lives. He even knows how many hairs are on our heads (Matthew 10:30)!

It is also important to grasp more and more why we are here on earth and what God wants to do through us. We are ambassadors of His presence on earth. As we live more fully in the identity and purposes of God we grow in confidence of who God is and His strength working through us.

Faith and fear cannot co-exist. But fear is a strong emotion and cannot be removed by using reason alone. The root of the fear needs to be identified and the wound behind the fear needs to be healed. If we are not clear what our wound is, we can ask the Holy Spirit to reveal it to us. We can then pour out our hearts to God and bring all the pain and emotions to the Cross.

### ***How to deal with fear***

We are like farmers working on the soil of our hearts. We can find freedom from fear by cleaning the soil of our hearts from the "weeds" before we can plant new seeds. Here are some steps to freedom from fear:

1. Discover what is growing and identify the fruits. A good tree bears good fruit; a bad tree bears bad fruit (Matthew 7:17).
2. Ask God for a revelation of the roots of the tree.
3. Bring the fear and its roots to God (for example, from a traumatic experience, I develop wrong beliefs about God, myself or others, which results in fear. I need to bring the pain from the wound and the false beliefs to God).
4. Ask for healing.
5. Ask God for a verse, an image or a word from Him, to take the place of fear.

### ***Breaking the bondage***

We also need to renounce Satan, the tormentor who wants to keep us in bondage and who takes advantage of our vulnerabilities in order to gain footholds in our lives. Jesus said in Luke 10:19 that He had given us authority over him. We can use this authority to drive him away from our lives. Before doing this, it is important to receive God's healing and forgive anyone who caused us to fear, because unforgiveness gives Satan a foothold in our lives (Ephesians 4:26-27)

### ***Ask for a new perspective***

Going through terrible tragedies can make it very hard to trust God to protect us in the future. It can also be very hard to trust that our enemies have really repented when they say they have. These are normal reactions, but they can still paralyse us and stop us from having hope to face the future. After receiving healing from the wounds, we need to ask God to help us see life from His perspective. There is a story in 2 Kings 6: 8-17 that speaks of Elisha's servant being very frightened when he saw that they were surrounded by enemy forces. Elisha asked God to open his spiritual eyes, and suddenly he was able to see all the hosts of heaven protecting them, and there were far more numerous than the enemy.

There are many other examples in the Bible of God protecting His people. Psalm 34:7 says that 'The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and he delivers them.' Psalm 91 gives wonderful promises of deliverance and protection from evil. When cast into the fiery furnace, the three men were miraculously protected from the flames (Daniel 3:19-30). God sent angels to shut the lions' mouths when Daniel was thrown in the lions' den (Daniel 6:16-22). These are just a few of the many verses and stories that speak of God's faithfulness to protect his people as they face danger.

However, as we said in *More Thoughts on Suffering and a God of Love* in the appendix, we are not given all the answers as to why some people still have to suffer. We can only commit ourselves into God's loving hands and trust our lives into His care and purposes. He sees the bigger picture, and the ultimate victory is always His. We also have to trust Him regarding our enemies, believing

that He is able to change their hearts. We have to ask Him for wisdom and discernment in each situation. In John 16:33 Jesus promises to give us peace even in the midst of troublesome times.

***And finally...***

'Perfect love casts out fear' (1John 4:18). Trusting God's perfect love for us is the only remedy to fear. The only thing that can displace fear from our lives is an increased awareness of God's perfect love for us. Nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:35-39)! We need to pray that we will be able to experience this as a revelation deep in our spirit, not just a doctrine.



## F. Ministering to People with Specific Needs

### Women who have been raped

Tragically many women are raped during conflict, and they need the special love and support of the church. Women who have been raped often feel:

- Devalued, worthless
- Dirty, contaminated by someone else's dirt
- Guilty, although they have done nothing wrong – it is a *false* guilt
- Wounded and full of pain
- Fearful in case they contracted some disease, especially AIDS
- Angry at the way they were abused
- A deep sense of shame because of what happened to them

In John 10:10 Jesus says, "The thief comes only to kill, steal and destroy." Women who have been raped have been robbed by Satan of many things: peace, joy, purity, innocence, virginity, value, dignity, the right to make good decisions about their own bodies, hope for a happy marriage, health, and so on. But Jesus goes on to say, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Praise God that Jesus has come to restore all that the thief has stolen from us! There are many Scriptures about God's desire to restore us.

- Jeremiah 30:17 "But I will restore health to you and heal your wounds."
- Joel 2:25 "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten."
- Psalm 23:3 "He restores my soul."

See also Psalm 71:20-21; Isaiah 51:3; 57:18-19; Ezekiel 36:34-36; Nahum 2:2; Zephaniah 3:20; Zechariah 10:6; 1 Peter 5:10.

#### ***When praying for a woman who has been raped, it is important to pray***

- For cleansing, not from their own dirt, but from the dirt put on them by another's sin. They do not need to repent! We can pray for God to send the Living Water of His Spirit to cleanse their bodies, their minds, their emotions and their spirit. Scriptures like Ezekiel 36:25 can be useful but omitting "...and from all your idols..." as this is not relevant to them.
- For them to be released from any false guilt that they are carrying, stressing that it is not *their* guilt.
- To remove their shame. They need to know that Jesus carried their shame on the Cross. His face was covered with shame (Psalm 69:7,19) so that they could be free of theirs (Psalm 34:5). Other comforting Scriptures can be found in Isaiah 54:4-5, 61:7; and Joel 2:27.

Having prayed for these negative things to be taken away, we can then pray for the restoration of all that was stolen from them by Satan. It is important to name all the things God wants to restore to them and pray specifically for each aspect to be restored. They need to know that we also value, respect and honour them.

Deuteronomy 10:8 tells us that one of the roles of a priest is to pronounce blessings in God's name. In the New Covenant, all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:9-10), so we can have the privilege of pronouncing blessings over wounded people. Women who have been raped need to have their sexuality blessed and sanctified once again. We can speak blessing over their

whole lives with Scriptures like Numbers 6:24-26; Psalm 129:8 (but not the first part! – that only applies to those who hate Zion!); Psalm 115:15; 134:3.

It is good to end by affirming them and building up their self-esteem (for example, Song of Songs 4:7, as a message from their Heavenly Lover). See Scripture compilation, "*How valuable we are to God*" for many useful verses.

Hopefully, as a result of receiving such ministry, the women will find themselves able to forgive, which will further increase their healing.

### ***Who should counsel and pray with women who have been raped?***

Ideally it should be another woman, as they may find it very hard to trust a man. If a male church leader were asked to help, then it would be wise to ask a lady to join them. It would be a good thing to call together a group of godly women in the church who have a heart to care for others, and train them in how to help women who have been raped.

What about those women who are so traumatised by what was done to them that they would never tell anyone? Is there any way to help women who carry terrible secrets in their hearts? For their sakes, it is important for church leaders to address these things in a general way in their sermons. When preaching about God healing our inner wounds, the preacher can include the wounds that result from being raped. He can show that he understands that they are suffering, and express concern and compassion for them. He can outline the way to healing, so that any woman listening who has been raped can have hope once more.

It can be very effective if godly men practice identificational confession, expressing deep sorrow for what was done to these women, stating that it was wrong and grieved God's heart. They can also ask forgiveness as men for all the ways that men have abused and devalued women. This can help the women to renounce any judgement they may have made against men as a result of the rape.

### ***What about those who conceived as a result of the rape?***

They are likely to find it very hard to accept and love this child. Because of this rejection, the child may feel like a terrible mistake – someone who should never have been born. The church can help in these situations by loving and welcoming these children, because God values and loves them! He does not hold the circumstances of their conception against them. He knows that they were not to blame for that. He has always had a special love for the fatherless, the forsaken and the despised (Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalm 68:5-6; 27:10; Isaiah 49:15; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29). Jesus knew what it was to be despised and rejected by men (Isaiah 53:3). Though He was rejected by men, He was chosen by God; He was precious to God and became the chief stone (1 Peter 2:4, 7). God can redeem these tragedies and can bring great blessing through these "unwanted" children. As His church, we are called to show special love to these children and their mothers.

### **Those with terrible memories associated with specific locations.**

There are people who cannot bear to visit certain places because of the terrible memories associated with those places. How can they be helped?

Healing always comes by facing things with God, not by trying to avoid them. As Christian leaders, we can offer to accompany people to revisit these places of pain. When we arrive there, we can assure them of our love and care, and we can pray with them right there in that most painful location. Ask them to pour out their hearts to God, telling Him what happened to them in that place. (You can put this into words on their behalf if they are unable to do this.) Encourage

them to give all their pain to Jesus. We can assure them that God was there with them when they were suffering (Psalm 139:7-8; Isaiah 63:9), and that He grieved about what was happening. We can then pray for a revelation of God's love and compassion for them at the time of their suffering. Pray that they will be able to experience God's love as they stand there (Romans 5:5). This will be balm to their wounds. End by declaring Jesus as Lord, even of that location, and have a time of praise for Jesus' eternal victory over Satan.

What if it is not possible to visit the place because it is too far, destroyed, or out of bounds? We can still visit the place in prayer, in our imagination. Ask them to picture the scene in their minds, and then pray with them as above.

### **Those with recurring bad memories or dreams of certain events.**

These also need to be faced in God's loving presence. Trying to push them out of their minds will never succeed. They need to bring these specific memories before the Lord and tell Him all about it. They should tell Him not only the facts, but also how they were feeling, and what it did to them inside. They must give Him all the pain, and then ask Him to speak to them. We can ask God to show them where He was at the time, and what He was feeling. Often, after we have prayed in this way, the wounded person can see in their mind's eye Jesus in the middle of the scene. God can speak to them in many ways – through Scripture, through visions, through His inner voice in their hearts, through the love of their fellow Christians. Jesus said, 'You shall know the truth (for example, about God's compassion) and the truth shall set you free' (John 8:32).

# G. Scripture Compilations

## God's Character

### *God is compassionate*

Exodus 34:6	Deuteronomy 30:3	Judges 2:18	Nehemiah 9:17,19
Nehemiah 9:27	Psalms 86:15	Psalms 103:4, 8	Psalms 103:13
Psalms 111:4	Psalms 116:5	Psalms 119:156	Psalms 135:14
Psalms 145:8	Isaiah 30:18	Isaiah 49:10, 13	Isaiah 49:15
Isaiah 51:3	Isaiah 54:7,10	Isaiah 63:7	Jeremiah 31:20
Lamentations 3:22,32	Ezekiel 39:25	Hosea 2:19	Hosea 11:8
Joel 2:13	Micah 7:19	Zechariah 10:6	Malachi 3:17
Matthew 9:36	Matthew 14:14	Matthew 20:34	Mark 1:41
Luke 7:13	Luke 15:20	2 Corinthians 1:3	James 5:11

### *God is merciful*

Exodus 33:19	Deuteronomy 4:31	1 Chronicles 21:13	Nehemiah 9:31
Psalms 5:7	Psalms 6:9	Psalms 25:6	Psalms 28:6
Psalms 31:22	Psalms 78:38	Psalms 116:1	Psalms 142:1
Proverbs 28:13	Isaiah 55:7	Isaiah 63:9	Jeremiah 3:12
Daniel 9:9,18	Hosea 6:6	Micah 6:8	Micah 7:18
Habakkuk 3:2	Zechariah 1:16	Zechariah 7:9	Matthew 5:7
Matthew 9:13	Matthew 18:33	Matthew 23:23	Mark 5:19
Luke 1:50	Luke 1:78-79	Luke 6:36	Luke 10:36-37
Romans 9:16	Romans 11:32	2 Corinthians 4:1	Ephesians 2:4
1 Timothy 1:2	1 Timothy 1:13,16	Titus 3:5	Hebrews 2:17
Hebrews 4:16	James 2:13	James 3:17	James 5:11
1 Peter 1:3	1 Peter 2:10	2 John 1:3	Jude 21-23

### *God is kind*

Genesis 24:27	Genesis 39:21	2 Samuel 9:3	Ezra 9:9
Job 10:12	Proverbs 14:21, 31	Proverbs 19:17	Isaiah 54:8
Jeremiah 9:24	Jeremiah 31:3	Hosea 11:4	Luke 6:35
Acts 14:17	Romans 2:4	Romans 11:22	1 Corinthians 13:4
Galatians 5:22	Ephesians 2:7	Colossians 3:12	Titus 3:4

### *God's love is unfailing*

Exodus 15:13	Psalms 13:5	Psalms 21:7	Psalms 32:10
Psalms 33:5,18	Psalms 36:7	Psalms 48:9	Psalms 52:8
Psalms 107:8	Psalms 147:11	Isaiah 54:10	Lamentations 3:32
Hosea 10:12			

### *The God who comforts*

Psalms 10:17	Psalms 23:4	Psalms 71:21	Psalms 86:17
Psalms 94:19	Psalms 119:50	Psalms 119:52	Psalms 119:76
Isaiah 25:8	Isaiah 40:1	Isaiah 49:13	Isaiah 51:3
Isaiah 51:2-3	Isaiah 52:9	Isaiah 57:18	Isaiah 61:2
Isaiah 66:13	Jeremiah 31:13	Zechariah 1:17	Matthew 5:4
John 14:18	2 Corinthians 1:3-7	Philippians 1:2	2 Thessalonians 2:16-17
Revelation 7:17	Revelation 21:4		

### ***The God of justice***

Deuteronomy 32:4	2 Chronicles 19:7	Job 37:23	Psalm 9:8
Psalm 9:16	Psalm 11:7	Psalm 33:5	Psalm 36:6
Psalm 45:6	Psalm 89:14	Psalm 97:2	Psalm 99:4
Psalm 101:1	Psalm 103:6	Psalm 111:7	Psalm 140:12
Proverbs 29:26	Isaiah 5:16	Isaiah 28:17	Isaiah 30:18
Isaiah 33:5	Isaiah 42:1	Isaiah 51:4	Isaiah 61:8
Jeremiah 9:24	Ezekiel 18:25	Ezekiel 33:17	Ezekiel 34:16
Daniel 4:37	Hosea 2:19	Zephaniah 3:5	Matthew 12:18
Luke 18:7	John 5:30	Romans 2:2	Romans 3:25
2 Thessalonians 1:6	Revelation 15:3	Revelation 16:5	Revelation 19:2

### ***God hates injustice***

Exodus 23:2, 6	Deuteronomy 24:17	Deuteronomy 27:19	Isaiah 5:7
Isaiah 29:21	Isaiah 58:6	Isaiah 59:15	Jeremiah 22:13
Lamentations 3:34-36	Ezekiel 9:9	Ezekiel 22:29	Amos 5:24
Amos 6:12	Micah 3:1	Zechariah 7:9	Zechariah 8:16
Malachi 3:5	Matthew 23:23		

### ***What God feels about partiality and prejudice***

Leviticus 19:15	Deuteronomy 16:19	2 Chronicles 19:7	Job 13:10
Job 34:19	Malachi 2:9-10	Matthew 5:45	Acts 10:28
Acts 10:34-35	Acts 15:7-9	Romans 2:11	Romans 10:12
1 Timothy 5:21	James 2:1,9	Mark 6:2-3	John 1:46

### ***God cares about widows, orphans and the oppressed***

Deuteronomy 10:18	Deuteronomy 24:19	Deuteronomy 26:12	Deuteronomy 27:19
Psalm 9:9	Psalm 10:14	Psalm 10:18	Psalm 68:5
Psalm 82:3-4	Psalm 103:6	Psalm 146:7, 9	Isaiah 1:17
Isaiah 1:23	Isaiah 58:6,10	Jeremiah 5:28	Jeremiah 22:3
Jeremiah 49:11	Hosea 14:3	Zephaniah 3:19	Zechariah 7:10
Mark 12:40	Luke 20:47	John 14:18	1 Timothy 5:3
1 Timothy 5:16	James 1:27		

### ***God is a husband to widows***

Isaiah 54:5	Isaiah 62:4-5	Hosea 2:16-20
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## **How valuable we are to God**

### ***He delights in us***

Psalm 147:11	Psalm 149:4	Isaiah 62:2-4	Zephaniah 3:17
Jeremiah 31:20	Psalm 35:27	Psalm 37:23-24	Proverbs 8:30-31

### ***We are His treasured possession***

Exodus 19:5-6	Deuteronomy 7:6	Deuteronomy 14:2	Deuteronomy 26:18
Psalm 135:4	Malachi 3:17		

### ***We are the apple of His eye***

Deuteronomy 32:10	Psalm 17:8	Zechariah 2:8
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***We are precious to Him***

Isaiah 43:4                      Lamentations 4:2                      Psalm 27:14                      Psalm 116:15

***His bride is beautiful to Him***

Song of Songs 4:7-10    Ezekiel 16:14                      Zechariah 9:16-17                      Revelation 21:2  
Revelation 21:9-11

***We are dearly loved by Him***

Deuteronomy 33:12    Jeremiah 31:3                      Ephesians 1:7-8                      Ephesians 5:1-2  
Ephesians 5:25-27    1 John 3:1

***He enjoys blessing us***

Deuteronomy 23:5    Psalm 24:5                      Jeremiah 32:40-41                      Luke 11:13  
Luke 12:32                      Romans 10:12

**God's people – people with a different perspective**

***They do not give up hope when evil appears to win***

Psalm 37:1                      Psalm 37:7-13                      Psalm 73:1-28

***They have spiritual vision, and this gives them strength***

Hebrews 11:27                      John 14:19                      2 Corinthians 4:18                      2 Kings 6:17

***They are not conformed to this world***

Romans 12:2                      John 17:14-17                      1 John 2:15

***They obey God rather than people***

Acts 4:19                      John 12:42-43

***They understand that the fear of people is a snare***

Proverbs 29:25                      John 7:13                      Galatians 2:12

***They would rather suffer for Christ than obey evil people***

Acts 5:41                      Romans 8:17                      Hebrews 11:25                      James 5:10  
1 Peter 2:20                      Romans 8:18                      2 Corinthians 4:17                      1 Peter 5:10

***They know that His Kingdom always takes priority***

Luke 14:26-27                      Matthew 6:33

***They have greater loyalty to fellow Christians than to their own group or country***

Ephesians 2:19                      Galatians 6:10                      John 13:34-35                      John 15:12-13  
John 15:17                      Ephesians 1:15,16                      Colossians 1:4                      1 Thessalonians 4:9-10  
Hebrews 6:10                      1 Peter 2:17                      1 John 2:9-11                      Galatians 3:28  
Colossians 3:11

***The Christian's attitude to his enemies***

Exodus 23:4                      Proverbs 24:17                      Proverbs 25:21                      Matthew 5:44  
Luke 6:27                      Luke 6:35                      Acts 7:60                      Romans 12:20  
1 Thessalonians 5:15

## What the Bible says about

### *Hope*

Psalm 9:18	Psalm 25:5,21	Psalm 31:24	Psalm 33:18,20
Psalm 33:22	Psalm 37:9	Psalm 42:5,11	Psalm 62:5
Psalm 71:14	Psalm 119:114	Psalm 130:5,7	Psalm 146:5
Psalm 147:11	Isaiah 40:31	Isaiah 49:23	Jeremiah 29:11
Lamentations 3:25	Micah 7:7	Matthew 12:21	Romans 4:18
Romans 5:2,5	Romans 8:24-25	Romans 12:12	Romans 15:4,13
1 Corinthians 15:19	2 Corinthians 1:10	2 Corinthians 3:12	Galatians 5:5
Ephesians 1:18	Ephesians 4:4	Colossians 1:27	1 Thessalonians 1:3
1 Thessalonians 4:13	1 Thessalonians 5:8	1 Timothy 6:17	2 Thessalonians 2:16-17
Titus 2:13	Titus 3:7	Hebrews 3:6	Hebrews 6:11
Hebrews 6:18-19	Hebrews 10:23	Hebrews 11:1	1 Peter 1:3,13
1 Peter 1:21	1 Peter 3:15	1 John 3:3	

### *Grief and mourning*

Genesis 23:2	Genesis 37:34	Genesis 50:10	Numbers 20:29
Deuteronomy 34:8	1 Samuel 30:4	2 Samuel 18:33	2 Samuel 19:2
1 Chronicles 7:22	Ezra 9:4	Psalm 10:14	Psalm 31:9
Psalm 35:14	Psalm 38:6	Psalm 56:8	Psalm 88:9
Ecclesiastes 3:4	Isaiah 33:7	Isaiah 61:2	Jeremiah 9:1
Lamentations 1:16	Matthew 2:18	Matthew 5:4	Luke 6:21
John 11:33	John 16:20	John 16:22	1 Thessalonians 4:13
Revelation 21:4			

### *Retaliation forbidden – Let God do it*

Leviticus 19:18	Deuteronomy 32:35	Psalm 94:1	Proverbs 20:22
Proverbs 24:29	Ezekiel 25:17	Micah 5:15	Nahum 1:2
Matthew 5:38-48	Luke 6:27-36	Romans 12:17-19	1 Corinthians 4:12-13
1 Peter 2:23	1 Peter 3:9	2 Thessalonians 1:5-10	

# Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations

"This has been a journey from despair towards hope. God has birthed hope in me again." (South Africa)

"My heart was healed, especially by nailing my pain to the cross. Before the Seminar my group was very important to me. I didn't pick up a machete, but in my heart, I was still a killer. After nailing things to the cross, my heart was relieved, and I was changed. I no longer put my group before everything else." (Rwanda)



"My home was totally burnt and now I'm living in a camp for displaced people. I had decided not to talk to anyone from the Kalenjin tribe. I even felt God hated me. I just wanted to die. I was so angry I was afraid to come to this workshop in case I could kill someone. Yesterday I could tell a Kalenjin what I really felt. It was a miracle! I can now forgive and never carry a burden again. I'm going home to visit Kalenjins!" (Kenya)

"I thank God we were together as different groups at the cross yesterday. This has reunited us as brothers. I thank God because yesterday I recovered my love. Satan had stolen this from us. I have never felt such great joy as I feel since I put everything on the cross." (Democratic Republic of Congo)

"Having done this workshop, we cannot but use the material to reach others. It wasn't just information – it touched our hearts. It went right to the core of who we are. It is like you lit a fire in us. Now we have such a drive to go out there and tell others." (Zimbabwe)

"I was Tamil Tiger, and thought we were the only ones who suffered injustices. Now I want to learn Sinhala so that I can comfort the other side." (Sri Lanka.)

**Dr. Rhiannon Lloyd**, a former Doctor of Medicine and Psychiatry, has been in full time Christian work since 1985 ministering extensively in cross-cultural situations. She spent many years teaching courses for Christian workers and ministering to people with deep emotional wounds. Since 1994, she has pioneered a reconciliation ministry in Rwanda, working initially with African Enterprise. She has spoken to thousands of church leaders leading them to a place of healing at the cross and facilitating reconciliation between the ethnic groups. Healing and reconciliation teams have now been formed in many other countries. She lives in Wales, and her ministry is called "Healing the Nations". For more information see [www.healingthenations.co.uk](http://www.healingthenations.co.uk)

**Pastor Joseph Nyamutera**, a former English high-school teacher, and an honorary pastor in the Pentecostal church of Rwanda, joined this ministry in 1997. Though based in Rwanda, he now has a world-wide ministry. He is specially gifted as a trainer and consultant. He has set up his own local ministry called Rabagirana Ministries, working in partnership with Mercy Ministries International. For more information see [www.rabagirana.org](http://www.rabagirana.org)