
Before we move on to Chapter 5, I want to tie up some loose ends and address a question and an issue which I believe many of you have struggled with. The answer should help with moving forward in what we studied over the last few weeks in terms of 1) why we can trust ourselves to God and 2) how we are to trust ourselves to God.

The question/issue: If God is the one who is ultimately responsible for the wounds I incurred, how is He any different than those through whom the hurt was unleashed on my life and why should I trust Him anymore than I trust them? In my mind He is no safer than they are.

I want you to understand that there is a stark difference between what God did and what “they” did. They hurt you and wounded you out of selfishness and their pools of insecurity, fear, anger, wrath, greed, covetousness, malice, and all manner of evil that sits deep within their souls. They dealt with you out of the corruption of their *old self* and not from what was available to them in God. Even if they “meant well” and “did not mean to hurt you,” they did some serious damage. God, on the other hand, allowed you to be wounded and used their brokenness to accomplish His loving purposes in your life and every wound was intentional and quite personal.

Do you remember what I said last week—everything has to be understood in the context of relationship. God wounded you with a couple of very specific purposes in mind. First, He intends to heal you of your deadly disease so that you could be in a place to actually receive His love. You might be thinking, what deadly disease. I am talking about the deadly disease of self-reliance and pride both of which are wrapped up tightly in the deception provided by our physical reality.

Self-reliance and pride are the gateways to the *old sinful nature* and they guarantee death—always! By death (as it is used in **Romans 8:6**), I mean that your life will not produce the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self control); rather, it will produce the fruits of your *old self* which are always harmful, destructive, wrapped in self-interest and eventually damages even those you love the most. Remember, everything that derives from your *old self* (regardless of how spiritual or religious it may be) will not follow you to eternity, will not please God, and will just end up hurting others.

If we believe in God, then why do we let self-reliance and pride rule our lives instead of Him? I believe that largely we have been deceived because our minds are still so tied to this physical world and we have been reluctant to let God transform and renew our minds as we have not really given Him free access to the rooms within the corridor of our soul. As a result, too often we are not even connected with the spiritual but we live our daily life as physical beings doing physical things. And, since the spiritual world is kept so veiled from this physical world, we are not entirely convinced that we need help from God much less need everything to come from God. But that is simply not the case. We are first and foremost spiritual beings in desperate need for God and, whether we are aware of it or not, the veiled spiritual world is what controls this physical world.

Yes, God lets the world spin, but His hands are all over it. He is the one who holds everything together (**Colossians 1:17**) and He works all things after the counsel of His will (**Ephesians 1:11**). What He makes crooked no man can straighten (**Ecclesiastes 7:13**). Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him? Who could say to Him, 'What are You doing' (**Job 9:12**)? If he tears down, none

can rebuild; if he shuts a man in, none can open. If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land (**Job 12:14-15**). For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back (**Isaiah 14:27**)? He works and who can turn it back (**Isaiah 43:13**).

Isaiah 46:8-11

"Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

Daniel 4:35

For all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

The evidence is overwhelming. If God were to lift His finger away from your life just ever so much absolute chaos would ensure. If He were to press in on your life just ever so much, the pressure would be too great to bear. Thus, your pride and

self-reliance are nothing more than an empty facade, a visage of truth. We must be willing therefore to set this illusion aside and realize that this physical body is just a shell and this physical world is just temporary and it will not last (***Revelation 21:1; Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13***). And since we are spiritual beings, what we do now will echo through eternity.

Now the Bible makes it clear that those who are self-reliant and think they do not need God or think they can make it through life on their own (or mostly on their own) are beholden to the devil. Yes, Satan is the king over all the sons of pride (***Job 41:34***); which is obviously why God hates pride (***Proverbs 8:13***) and why He demands that we be in relationship with Him in the humility of our abject neediness (For God is opposed to the proud but He gives grace to the humble, ***James 4:6***).

And this is where our wounds us forces us to come face to face with the reality that despite our pride and self-reliance, we are not in control and we are broken beyond our understanding. Romans Chapters 1-3 makes the point of our utter wantonness and brokenness quite clearly (you need to go read those chapters). You see wounds or no wounds we are broken, completely depraved (it is the condition of all humanity) and there is nothing that we have and nothing we can do to please God or become right with God, because no one is good except God alone (***Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19; Romans 3:10-18***).

This is, however, a truth which our pride constantly fights against. We want to believe that we are the masters of our destiny, the rulers of our life, that we are somehow good and God should accept us; but all those notions are ridiculous. In our flesh we are slaves to our *old nature*, beholden to the devil, with hearts bent

on disobedience (***Ephesians 2:1-3***). This is why God does not try and remedy or redeem our *old nature* but has to give us a completely new nature—a new creation (***Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17***). That is why the Spirit says that all that really matters is whether or not a person has been changed into a new creation in Christ (***Galatians 6:15***).

Therefore, like it or not, the truth is that we are 100% dependent upon God in everything and for everything and God uses our wounds to get us to believe this truth and live in this truth. As we become aware of our wounds and how much we have been damaged we start to understand how messed up we are, how incapable we are, how out of control we truly are, and we finally start to look to God.

Coming to grips with our brokenness (not just theologically but practically) is how we begin to accept the truth that only God is good, only God is able, and best yet, God is willing. Our wounds lead us to the doorway of true humility where we seek His ways in all things—where we trust in the Lord with our whole heart and do not lean on our own understanding (***Proverbs 3:5***). This kind of humility is the starting place for a true relationship with God and if it was not for our wounds we would never venture through the doorway of humility for our pride and self-reliance would keep us far from it.

Second, last week I said that we have to understand all that God does in our life through the window of relationship: His desire that we come to know Him as intensely as we are known by Him. Remember, He already knows us through and through; therefore, all that He does is to bring us into a deeper understanding and experience with Him as a person.

Let me give you an example of how this works. A woman who has been abused often finds comfort and solace in a group with other women who have been abused. There is something powerful and securing about being in relationship with someone who has been through what you have been through, who knows how you feel, and who has to live each day with the wounds of the experience. The Father wants to bring us into this kind of relationship with His Son where we find strength, comfort, and intimacy in knowing the ways in which He has suffered at the hands of our fellow man. The Father wants us to feel what Jesus felt, to experience what He experienced so we can connect to Him and be bound to Him deep within our soul.

This actually brings us to our passage in ***Ephesians 5:1***: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.” In the same manner that Christ suffered we are privileged to follow in His footsteps and also suffer. In the manner in which Jesus learned obedience from the things He suffered (***Hebrews 5:8***), we also learn obedience from the things we have suffered. Our wounds have all been intentional and quite personal as God wants us to enter into the ***fellowship*** of His suffering so we can know Him in ways that others simply cannot.

Philippians 3:7-11

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law,

but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the **fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul understood that God wants us to enter into a partnership with His Son both in Jesus' suffering as well as in the power of His resurrection. As sons of God, we are to share these in common with Jesus. After all, we get to share in all of Jesus' glory (***Ephesians 1:6***) so it is necessary for us to share (or know Him) in His suffering. However, too many of us just want to know the power of His resurrection and we don't want to identify with Christ in His suffering. But both are necessary to really know Him and to be intimate with Him otherwise our relationship will be limited and shallow.

This brings me to a point I want to make which touches on the issue of the wantonness of our *old sinful nature*. No matter how much we don't want to admit it, most of us still are in a relationship with God based on what we want Him to do for us—which is why we have a lot of anger toward God. We do not like or approve of the ways He has allowed us to suffer and we have all these expectations for our life which God has not satisfied. But God is not and never will be our genie in a bottle. He has redeemed us from the futile way of life passed on to us by our forefathers because He wants us to know Him, to experience Him, to understand Him, to know how He feels, to think as He thinks, to act as He acts, and so on. He wants us to become one with Him (***John 17:22***). It is His desire and it is His passion!

Paul learned Christ through great suffering. He suffered the loss of all things and considered everything that He used to treasure and value as rubbish for the privilege (the surpassing value) of knowing Christ. Through suffering, Paul came to know Jesus in the most personal of ways and they had a very intimate relationship which is why Paul could boldly say:

1 Corinthians 2:16

For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM?
But we have the mind of Christ.

Sounds a bit audacious doesn't it? Nonetheless it was the truth. Paul followed God's example in suffering and as a result came to know Christ. He experienced the power of Christ in ways that so few of us have experienced. He confidently spoke the wisdom of God not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words for he had the mind of Christ (***1 Corinthians 2:6-16***).

Can you imagine! Jesus wants us to share His mind, know His thoughts and let His life fill us such that there is little difference between His life and our life. This is what the Father wants for you and for me but the gateway to this level of intimacy is the fellowship of His sufferings.

Now some of you might still be struggling thinking that it is still not entirely fair for although Jesus suffered in a lot of ways He did not have to endure some of the things you have endured, especially if you are a woman and have been a victim of

sexual violence or sexual abuse. I want to address this issue in two ways.

First of all, Jesus suffered in so many ways that we cannot even begin to understand. Just the fact that He became sin on our behalf (**2 Corinthians 5:21**) and experienced complete separation from the Father (**Mark 15:34**) must have been beyond imagination. But consider what that actually means. Every murder, every act of violence, every rape, every act of sexual violation, every suicide, every act of malice and wrath, and every kind of sin that you could ever list was thrown on Him and He experienced it all.

Moreover, He not only became sin but He was judged for that sin. The wrath of God was poured out on His life so that you and I might live free from both the bondage of sin and the damage, or the effect, of sin in our lives. So given what He did for us, I am hard pressed to conclude that He does not know what you feel. I believe He knows the depth of every aspect of human experience. In fact, I think He knows it better than you do for He did not shut down in order to avoid the pain. He let it all happen and then He was judged for all of it—both the offense and the reaction to having been victimized.

Second, I want you to think about this issue in terms of generational sin or what we have called the futile way of life passed on to us by our forefathers (**1 Peter 1:18**). Who you are today is actually a mix of things that have been passed down to you for centuries. Think about it. What happened to your great, great grandparents was passed on to your grandparents in terms of how they were raised and the dysfunctions they had to deal with; and this was passed on to your parents and then to you. It's like a big snowball of sin and dysfunction. This explains a lot doesn't it.

In a lot of ways the pain and the wounds of your ancestors are very much alive in your body; it's something you share. There is a connection between you and them of which you might not be aware. However, their experiences have had an undeniable impact on your life; and, in some strange way, you know them.

Guess what? Jesus was no different except that culturally He was probably more aware of the connection than we are. Have you ever noticed that Jews of Jesus' day identified so intensely with the suffering of their forefathers? They talked as if the exodus experience had just happened. It was very real to them and they carried within their soul both the suffering in Egypt and the joy of release.

In this regard, we find something very interesting and odd in Jesus' genealogy. Normally, a Jewish genealogy of the first century would include only male names (as we find with the genealogy detailed in the gospel of Luke). But in **Matthew 1**, which is probably the most Jewish of the gospels, we find the inclusion of 4 women: **Tamar** (the daughter in law of Judah); **Rahab** (the mother of Boaz); **Ruth** (the wife of Boaz); and **Bathsheba** (the widow of Uriah and the mother of Solomon). It is very odd but very purposeful and communicates a powerful message about the dysfunctional legacy passed on to Jesus. What do we know about these women?

Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah. She married Judah's son but he was evil so the Lord took him. Culturally, it was the responsibility of the brother of the deceased to have sex with Tamar, in the name of the other brother, so she can bring forth a child to carry on the deceased brother's line. But the brother just wanted to have sex with her and right before he finished he pulled out and spilled his seed on the ground because he did not want to have a child. So he essentially

just raped her and used her for sex.

God was mad at him and took his life as well. Judah had one more son but he was afraid that he might also die so he told Tamar to remain a widow and he withheld his son. Tamar would not have it; she wanted a child—it was her right. So she ended up disguising herself as a prostitute and actually had sex with Judah—her Father-in-law—(who had no idea what was going on) and she conceived and bore twins to carry on her husband’s lineage. How messed up is all of that.

Rahab was a full-on prostitute and an idol worshipping gentile at that. She was the woman who lived in Jericho and protected the Jewish spy’s right before the destruction of the city. You can imagine that she has some serious self-image and worth issues. You have to wonder what damage and destruction was passed down to her that she ended up making a living by giving herself to men. Now Rahab ultimately married an Israelite and became the mother of Boaz who in the book of **Ruth** was an Old Testament “type” of Christ in that he is portrayed as the kinsmen redeemer—the one who redeemed Ruth from her life of nothingness.

This brings us to Ruth. Like Rahab she was also a gentile, a Moabite. Ruth had married the son of a man from Bethlehem who had fled to Moab to escape a famine in Israel. Now you have to understand that a marriage between a Jew and a gentile was a blatant violation of the law so there must have been some unhealthy tensions in this relationship. Nevertheless, they stayed married for about ten years and then her husband died.

Ruth had to deal with the grief and the pain of losing her husband, especially since she had not borne any children which was huge in that day and age. A woman’s value and her self-image were largely tied to her ability to bear children.

But she had none.

The famine had lightened up in Israel and Ruth decided to follow her mother-in-law Naomi back to Bethlehem (Naomi had also lost her husband in Moab). In Bethlehem Ruth was essentially an unwanted unclean gentile beggar with no means to provide for herself. She literally had to go to the grain fields and pick up the remnants of grain which the harvesters had left—that is how she lived. Her loss of love, her pain, her rejection, her loneliness, and her having to scrape a living was an intense form of suffering for this woman.

And this leaves us with Bathsheba. She had an adulterous affair with the king and ended up becoming pregnant—oops! In order to hide the evil, the king decided to murder her husband. Can you imagine what she had to go through: the guilt, the fear, the anger, the loss, the separation, and the humiliation? Then to add salt to the wound, Bathsheba lost the child at birth.

This was the recorded legacy that was passed down to Jesus. So in a strange way, through His ancestry, Jesus completely identified with the unique kind of wounds that only women experience and He wanted every woman to know that He knows how you feel and He understands what too many of you have sadly endured. Does this make sense to you? Jesus understands. Jesus knows. He knows you in actual experience (by having become sin) and through the kind of messed up and totally dysfunctional ancestral experience that we have all had to face. **Now He wants you to know him and to know what He has endured. He wants you to enter into the fellowship of His suffering.**

Philippians 2:5-8

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus knew that men could not become righteous and could not become like God (it was not something easily grasped). Thus, He knew that He would have to provide the way for us to know God and experience God. Therefore, He was willing to completely empty Himself, He took on the form of a slave, and being made in our likeness, being found in the appearance of a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.

Now He wants us to empty ourselves of our *old sinful nature*, humble ourselves by becoming obedient through our suffering so we can know Him as He knows us. It is all about relationship. It is all about you getting the opportunity to know Him as intensely as He knows you. That is what good relationships are all about. That is why the wounds we have incurred from His hands are a form of love beyond anything we can really fathom.

I hope this gives you a different perspective on the intentional and personal nature of the wounds God has given you and the ones that are yet to come. So this area of our wounding, our suffering, is one of the major ways that we are to follow God's example in everything.

The Greek word that we have translated as “imitate” (in **5:1**) is the word “*mimeetai*” from which we get our word “mimic.” In other words, as His beloved children, we are to mimic His ways in all our actions, words, inclinations, tone, attitude, spirit, and so on. After all, it is natural for children to imitate their parents; that is how we all learned (for better or for worse). In the same way, we need to know Him so intimately that we know how He thinks, what He feels, how He acts, and we are to emulate Him in all things.

Jesus gave us this example when He walked on the earth. He said over and over that He only did what He saw His Father doing and only said what His father told Him to say. He imitated His Father setting an example for how we are to mimic Him. This is where the Word of God has such a powerful place in our lives. As I have talked to you on many occasions, the Word of God is not just a book of religious history, rules, laws, commands, and predictions but it is a detailed account of how God interacts with all of humanity: how He deals with His sons and how He deals with those who have rejected Him.

The Bible reveals to us the extent of His mercy, compassion, justice, righteousness, holiness, faithfulness, long suffering, patience, and love. It shows us how nothing happens without His hand being all over it. It shows us how He thinks, how He feels, how He expresses Himself and how marvelous and gracious He is to everyone.

If you bathe yourself in the Word of God and are able to read and understand the narrative from this perspective, you will be amazed at how much you will learn about your Father, His Son and the Holy Spirit. The Bible is in essence His personal journal which He shares with us. So I encourage you to read it, digest it,

and understand it with the aim of getting to know everything you can about your God.

Ephesians 5:2

...and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

The fruit of knowing God and imitating Him is that your life will express His agape love. This is the ultimate litmus test of whether you know Jesus. A lot of people say they know God, a lot of people are quite learned in the scriptures even, but if their lives do not produce His agape love then it is all for naught. The proof is in the fruit.

To say that we are to “walk” in love means that agape love is to define our life and permeate all our relationships and all that we do. We see this in ***Galatians 5:5*** which says that the only thing that matters is faith expressing itself in agape love. Now, for those of you who like to create exceptions for yourself, there is clearly no room in this statement for a “but” or any kind of personal exception (unless you want to say that you don’t have to express agape love when you are standing in place or lying down—just walking). Seriously, imitating the Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit is to be our life; therefore, we are to walk in His love.

But as we know, agape love is divine love; therefore, the only way we can obey this command is if Jesus fills us with His love. This is why we have put so much work into understanding how we are to let Jesus into the rooms within the

corridor of our soul so that He can establish His home in our heart. For where Jesus is there will be agape love. And to the extent that we let Him have full control of our heart, He will pour forth His agape love from our lives like a fountain of living water bringing refreshment to everyone with whom we are in relationship.

Notice it says that we are to walk in love “as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” This description helps us understand what agape love looks like. It is not selfish and it does not seek its own way; but it is innately sacrificial. The Spirit chose two different types of sacrifice for us to understand. The first one, the “offering” is an offering without blood and comes from the Greek word “*prosforan*.” We see the Hebrew equivalent “*minchah*” used in **Leviticus 2:1-3**. This offering is one of thanksgiving for the blessings, however temporal, that God bestows upon us. This offering was of fine flour, oil, and frankincense. This is referred to as a most holy offering unto the Lord and a soothing aroma that rises before Him (**Leviticus 2:3**).

With this as our word picture, our lives are to be lived with an attitude of thanksgiving unto God for His blessings in our life. Could you imagine always being thankful? The Spirit says: “through Him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name (**Hebrews 13:15**). Through Christ in us we can continually offer up the praise of our lips that give thanks to His name (again, this implies that Jesus occupies the rooms in our heart so that He can inspire this form of worship).

Now thanking God is a sacrifice because everything in us wants to complain and moan for we always seem to be fixated on what we don’t have or what we think

we want and think we need. And when God does provide, we take it and instantly want more; we are like spoiled brats. Could you imagine how soothing we would be to others if our countenance reflected an attitude of continual thankfulness? I believe we would not only be soothing to the Lord but we would bring perspective, peace and balance in to the lives of others. We would be their blessing and through us they would experience Jesus.

We have so many reasons to be thankful even in our suffering. In everything God always communicates His love for us and His passionate desire for us to know Him and intimately experience Him. How cool is that!

The second sacrifice "*thusian*" is one that requires blood and refers to a sin offering of that which is dead. The picture this paints for us is that we are to continually walk in a manner that indicates to everyone that our *old self* is dead; that our old sinful nature has been crucified with Christ and we are no longer slaves to the devil, but have been set free able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus (***Romans 6:3-11***).

And since it is "through Christ Jesus" we cannot do this on our own. As we studied last week, Jesus is the one who will "*put off*" our old sinful nature if we just let Him into the rooms within our heart and have the discussion with Him as to why we can trust ourselves to Him and how we are to trust ourselves to Him. He will explain it all to us and He will "*put off*" everything that we let Him get His hands on.

Romans 6:13 says: "do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness to be used for sinning. Instead give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is

right for the glory of God.” This passage captures the essence of what it means to walk in love as a sacrifice of death—we are to give ourselves completely to God for Him to do His work in us so we can walk in the new life we have been given.

This second offering (of that which is dead) is also a sweet smelling aroma before the Lord. It is an offering that is perfectly in alignment with His desires. And because He always accepts this offering, it shows that those who offer it are accepted in Him. The fragrant aroma refers to the fumes which ascended from the fire, from the burnt offering, into the presence of the Lord. That is what our lives can be to the Father: a fragrant aroma of His prescription, of His desire, of His liking, and His pleasure. Did you notice that being a fragrant aroma stands in stark contrast to grieving the Spirit? Yes, instead of grieving, we can be an instrument of His joy. What a thought; what a privilege!

2 Corinthians 2:14-16

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a **fragrance of Christ** to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.

Let's Pray