

CLERGY, CRUCIFIED WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST

– A Challenge to Pastoral Care

By T H Steyn

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Student Nr. 22256823

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Professor M. Masango

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this paper to my wife, Sonja.
She shared my pain while being “crucified” herself.

CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Glossary	vi
Introduction	1
Where did this all start for me?	4
My Story	6
“Crucified” a second time around	18
Chapter 1 CRUCIFY HIM, CRUCIFY HIM	20
Why did I choose to research this Topic?	21
The church’s response to this problem	24
What does the “Crucifixion of Believers” mean?	25
Aims and objectives of this thesis	27
The scope of this research study	28
Chapter 2 METHODOLOGY OF SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF OUR “CROSS”	32
Our “cross” in the light of God’s hope	33
Time dimensions of hope	35
Where can we find hope?	36
Hope is not found with people in despair	37
Hope through pastoral care	42
St Paul’s message of hope to the Church in Philippi	45
Chapter 3 WHO “CRUCIFIES” CLERGY?	49
Unbelievers sometimes persecute Christians	50
Christians persecute Christians	51
Fellow Christians “crucify” clergy	51
Clergy “crucify” fellow clergy	52
Chapter 4 WHAT HAS GONE WRONG IN THE BODY OF CHRIST?	56
Should congregations prosper within God’s will?	57
An identity crises in the Church	58
A power struggle	60
What does “clergy killers” look like?	61
Why did I struggle so much?	64
Suffering because of obedience	66
God’s response to our suffering	67

Chapter 5 BELIEVING IN CHRIST, YES; SERVING PEOPLE, NEVER AGAIN	68
What is wrong with this?	69
Where did this leave me?	71
The price we pay to serve and care for others	71
It all begins with me	73
How do we serve God's people?	74
Why do we serve people?	74
Chapter 6 JESUS ON THE CROSS	76
The price of change	77
Our pain, a shadow of the cross on Calvary	78
What happened to Jesus?	79
The trial	81
Why did it happen?	82
But first there was Gethsemane	84
Chapter 7 WHAT THEN SHOULD OUR RESPONSE TO OUR CROSS BE?	85
"Crucified" for Christ	86
How did Jesus react to the cross?	88
Purpose in our suffering	89
How do we respond to our "cross"?	91
Where is God when we are "crucified"?	92
Life after death on a "cross"	93
To conclude, the "resurrection"	93

Bibliography

PREFACE

A tree is known by its fruit (Matthew 7:16), and a person's priorities are known by reading his diary! We try so hard to be something we are not and often we succeed, ... but it is only for a short moment, or maybe two...

The words you and I speak become a mirror, reflecting our heart's content to whoever wants to listen. James asks this question; "*Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?*" (James 3:11 - NIV) How then, is it possible to speak peace and war from the same tongue? How could I bless and curse, all in one breath? How could I declare my love for my Lord, yet crucify him from the same heart? How could I love my neighbour with bloodstained hands?

How could we declare victory in the cross at Calvary, where our Saviour died? How could we claim to be victorious in Jesus, saying that we will reign with him forever, (Rev 22: 5) and yet, as Christians, we are crucified over and over again?

This is the true mystery in Christ; there is victory in defeat, there is strength in weakness, there is life after death.

(The Author)

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Most of all, thank you to my Lord for deeming me worthy of being “crucified”.

GLOSSARY

FULL-TIME MINISTRY

I use the term, “full-time ministry”, or “ministry”, in reference to the occupation of those who have made it a full-time task to serve in a Christian capacity.

PASTORS, MISSIONARIES, CLERGY

These are the people who have made it their profession to serve in full time ministry.

TOWNSHIPS

I have borrowed this terminology from the former South African regime to describe settlements and informal settlements used by the poorer communities, which mainly constitute the black and coloured population.

BEING CRUCIFIED

Jesus said that his disciples would have a cross to carry (Matthew 16:24). This cross could mean various things for various people, but it is always associated with pain and suffering. In this paper I used the cross, and the picture of being crucified, to describe the pain and suffering I have experienced at the hands of my own people. In chapter 1, I give an elaborated explanation of what I mean with being crucified.

REGIONAL OFFICE: CIRCUIT: DENOMINATIONAL LEADERS etc

I have used this neutral terminology to protect the identification of the denomination we served. However, I believe that this problem I am addressing in this paper, is not exclusive to this particular denomination. The fact of the matter is, three of the four people I have interviewed were from other denominations.

INTRODUCTION

Christians are often “crucified” by word and deed. Our “crucifixion” often becomes messy, as we are exposed in our nakedness to anyone who dares to look. Maybe for those who have never had such an experience, these reversed typologies of Christ’s suffering on the cross, pointing to us as his disciples, could easily sound very strange. It could even sound rather mellow-dramatic.

The general opinion is that Christians are victors in Christ, not victims of our circumstance. We read in the book of Deuteronomy; *“The LORD will make you the head, not the tail”* (Deuteronomy 28:13 - NIV). Being the head means that believers are the ones to dictate and lead within their circumstance. The *“head”* decides when and how the tail should wag, not the other way around! Christians should be the ones to act in order to bring about change within bad situations and circumstances, and not supposed to react because of what happens to them. As believers we should rise above our situations, bringing light into dark situations. As Christians, we are like a city build upon a hill for the world to see! (Matthew 5) It sounds so right; it sounds so Biblical; how could this then be any different from our ordinary daily life?

Paul wrote to the Romans saying; *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (8:31 - NIV) God is for us! That is why he gave us his only begotten Son, as a sacrifice, to die upon the cross in our place. What more is there for you and me to add to God’s perfect plan of redemption? Was it not Jesus who declared on the cross; *“it is done”*; it has been completed. There is nothing more

that can be done. Tetélestai! God has completely and perfectly restored that which the Evil one has destroyed in the Garden of Eden. ... *“God is for us, who can be against us?”*

Yet, we can hear the words of our Master echoing in our ears, ... *“No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also”* (John 15:20 - NIV). Jesus was charged, found guilty and crucified for wrongs he did not commit. Never in the history of humankind was there a trial more unjust than the trial of our Master, crucified on behalf of all of us.

But, we expect situations to be different for ourselves! Jesus warned his disciples about persecution, yet, when we face persecution, we become extremely vulnerable and are so deeply hurt by it. Leanne Payne wrote extensively about this topic and I quote from her book;

“We have had strange and distorted notions about what this suffering is. These notions carry with them heavy emotional and psychological baggage. Many of our beliefs and inner images about ‘bearing our cross’ are not thought through: they are irrational, confused, distorted. This cultural baggage, coming as it does out of various religious backgrounds, accounts for certain predictable strains of distortions. They have several things in common, however, the chief being the failure to understand the walk in the Spirit” (Payne 1989: 198).

Persecution in the form of extreme conflict left me doubting myself so completely, to the point where I doubted the very core of my personhood. I doubted God’s call upon my life. I doubted my ability to hear God’s voice. I doubted my ability to serve God’s people. ... I even doubted God’s goodness. For some time I begged God to give me wisdom to resolve the conflict between some members in our congregation and myself. I can remember crying out to God, “I only serve you because you are God. I cannot serve you

for your goodness, because I do not experience your goodness in my life"! How God-forsaken I felt! The words of Jesus milled over and over in my mind, *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27:46 - KJV). I became more and more convinced that God had left me to suffer alone.

At that time, I often dreamed about leaving the ministry in order to live a life of peace and quiet. How I longed just to experience God's joy in my life again! This life I was living was not worth living anymore. Suicide no longer sounded like such a bad option. There seemed to be no sense in continuing with my life because my spiritual life was diminished and I felt light years away from God. I had very little energy left and found it difficult to serve people at their normal expectancy level, within the ministry. Suffering became the main topic of our family discussions and our family devotions and prayers revolved around the pain we experienced. I kept on asking myself what could possibly be the sense in this suffering. Could this really be happening to us?

Even our closest friends did not understand, neither did they believe the things that were happening to us. We were asking many questions, as they also did. How could this be from God? They questioned the problem of the conflict we were experiencing. Someone even asked me what we had done, for God punished us in this way. "There must be sin in your life!" they said.

It was during this time that I found a real friend in Job.

WHERE DID THIS ALL START FOR ME?

At the time of our “crucifixion” I served as the pastor of a small congregation in a reformed denomination. This was our first pastorate, although we had previously served as missionaries in a foreign country. We lived in the manse, which was situated in a middle-class suburb in a small city. The Church building, however, was situated in the inner city, which was rapidly changing into a slum area. More and more “white businesses” moved out of the inner city into the safer, richer and whiter suburbs. Only the poorer white people who could not afford housing in the suburbs, continued to live in this once thriving inner city. Although this might sound as if this city is changing into a ghost town, the statistics have proved the opposite. The inner city is now more densely populated than when it was at the time of being a “white area” in the old apartheid days. Many black and coloured people have moved into these vacated residential areas.

As a result, people from other races occupy many previously “white-owned businesses” and premises in this area. Although people of the Islamic faith are by far the minority in this city, they now own more businesses in the inner city than any other group. These “Islam-Indian” owned businesses are thriving due to their need-orientated approach. The truth is that most white people living in the suburbs, now completely avoid going into the inner city because of the evident high crime rate. For them this inner city has become known as “down town” -a place to be avoided!

At a Church board meeting I suggested to our leadership that our congregation should be catering more for the felt needs of the “new” inner city people. These changes in the social structures around us, challenged our ministry, and change the role our congregation needs to fulfil. I pointed out that there were many homeless people and prostitutes right on our doorstep. Middle-class white people no longer occupied the inner city residential area. Instead, black, coloured and Indian people were now residing in these premises. I wanted to know who was caring for them. It did not make sense to me to continue trying to attract white middle class people from the suburbs to attend our services. The face of our habitat had changed. I passed the question, “Shouldn’t the face of our congregation change as well, to reflect what is happening around us?”

I maintained that if the leadership wanted to continue as a white English-speaking congregation, then the entire congregation should re-locating to a “white English-speaking suburb”. I sensed, however, that God had strategically placed this congregation in the inner city, in order to reach and care for the needy people at our doorstep. I knew that God had a very special purpose for our congregation and it was up to us to bring this purpose into fruition. This is the reality of the “new South Africa” and it is challenging the role of the Church in South Africa.

The majority of the leadership agreed that it was the right time to reconsider our position and purpose in our city. There was one member, however, (whom I shall refer to as Peter) who felt that we should be primarily reaching out to

the white middle-class members of our city. This would strengthen our financial position and enable us to fulfil our calling within the city. He said that we are to serve the poor through our resources. Peter felt that this could be achieved by strengthening our children's ministry, thereby reaching their parents. According to Peter, by running a strong youth group and putting more emphasis on our Sunday school program, the white people would be drawn back to our services.

The rest of the leadership were not completely convinced of the truth in this. After a lengthy discussion, the decision was made to concentrate more on ministry towards the inner city people, as we had a responsibility towards them. Our "mission field" had now come to us, yet at the same time we also had a responsibility towards our current members. Many of them were elderly people. We decided to continue inviting the people from the suburbs. We realised that this would be an enormous challenge, as we needed to structure our services in such a way to accommodate these extremes. Peter was deeply unhappy about these decisions and left the meeting in a hurry.

This is the background, which sets the stage for the unfolding drama, which I was about to experience.

MY STORY

Peter visited us at the manse, a week or two after the before mentioned meeting. He was a senior elder in our congregation, who had served on the board for more than ten years. Peter was also a very wealthy and influential

businessman and a prominent leader in our community and congregation. He is the kind of person we refer to as the pillar of the Church. You disturb him, and you have troubled the Church.

“Pastor, I have something for you which I hope you will be able to use” Peter said, as he handed me a black refuse bag filled with clothes. “Thank you very much”, I responded, not thinking twice about it. This is not the first time I was given second-hand clothes and it probably will not be the last either.

After Peter had left, I opened the bag to look at its content. The bag contained a few rather worn-out trousers. But I was dumbstruck by the six pairs of darned socks. Peter must have been one of the richest people in town! What enticed him to give me such a strange gift, or was it a gift at all? This was the first of many “strange gifts” to proceed from Peter. Some time later he bought his teenage daughter a new cell phone. He passed the old broken phone on to me, but it was so old it could not be repaired. A few weeks later I asked the leadership whether we shouldn’t invest in a telephone-answering machine for the manse. Peter promised to give us one and the members in the meeting thanked him for his generosity. The following day an old broken machine was delivered to our house. There were many more such “gifts” from Peter, but none of them were usable. These gifts left me an angry person. I could not understand how such a rich person could give such worthless gifts.

Because of the leadership’s decision to reach out to the inner city people we realised that we needed to reconsider and restructure our congregation. A

meeting was called to discuss this issue. Peter also attended this meeting, yet did not contribute much. About an hour after the meeting Peter phoned me, saying, “I need to talk to you. How dare you try to implement such radical changes in our congregation? I cannot tolerate this. As long as I am in this congregation, I will not allow it to happen!” Peter would not listen to me when I tried to explain to him that no changes were as yet implemented. This meeting had been called simply to discuss possibilities and to determine direction. I assured him that we would have many more of these types of meetings before decisions could be made. Peter hung-up with these words; “I don’t care what you say, but I will not allow you to continue with this!” This was the first of many extremely unpleasant telephone calls I have encountered from Peter.

Despite Peter’s disapproval concerning the direction in which we were moving, the congregation began to change from a predominately white congregation to more multi-cultural congregation in just a short period of time. More than fifty percent of our attendances were Black, Coloured and Indian people living in the inner city. We were surprised when people even came from the so-called “non-white” townships to attend our services. This is a reality of the change through democracy in South Africa, but for Peter and those die hard people, this was not within their paradigm of “their Church”.

One needs to realise that the inner-city population were not wealthy. For this reason, although the worship service attendance increased rapidly, the financial income did not increase in the same rate. In fact, there was even a time when we experienced a decrease in our income. I discovered much later

that Peter had withdrawn his financial contributions to the congregation, and at the same time convinced others to do likewise. Peter accused me of not teaching effectively about giving. He also accused the inner-city members of only “tipping” God with their small change. Peter suggested that more white people should be attracted to our congregation since this would bring greater financial stability and would ensure the survival of the congregation in the following year. Peter used his apparent financial influence, trying to persuade our leadership to return to the “good old days” of being a “white congregation”.

During one of our leadership meetings Peter strongly accused me, saying, “You have failed the Church. Under your leadership we have become a ‘Sunday only Church!’” At first I was uncertain of the meaning of these words. After some discussion, I learned that Peter felt that we were not impacting our community effectively. He maintained that it was the pastor’s task to force the people to participate in the life of the Church. “You are the one to crack the whip,” he said. I wrestled with this statement for a long time after this meeting. How could this be true? I had given so much of myself to see more people involved in reaching out to our community. At the same time, we as a congregation were also involved in outreaches to foreign countries. I thought we were quite an active little congregation. After all, didn’t Jesus say that we are to serve people and not rule over them? *“Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:26-28 - NIV). It was only much later that I realised that Peter never partook in any of the outreach programs in the city. Neither did he

allow his family to be part of these programs. He also discouraged some of the other members from being involved. Peter and his family only attended our Sunday services and a Wednesday cell group meeting.

One day Peter suggested that we should have a cell-group-leaders meeting. He suggested that we should discuss the direction in which these groups were going. Thinking that on this occasion Peter and I might find some common ground, ministering to God's people, I agreed to such a meeting. I hoped that this would provide an opportunity for us to agree to work together towards a more effective congregation. At this meeting Peter opened with prayer and then placed the responsibility for the meeting directly into my hands. I was completely taken aback, as it was not I, but Peter who had initiated this meeting. As a senior elder he wanted to discuss the way forward for our cell-groups. I tried to bring it to his attention that this meeting was his idea, and that he should therefore lead the meeting. I would contribute as much as I could, and thought to be wise. Peter jumped to his feet and started accusing me; "I don't know what you are doing in our congregation. You are never willing to lead. It would probably be better for you to find yourself another job!" I lost my temper that morning and asked Peter why he so often attacked me either in public or on the telephone. I accused him of being a coward as he refused to confront me face to face. Peter turned pale as he said, "No-one calls me a coward". Before I knew it I responded in anger, "I have just called you a coward, and I repeat, you are a coward". I now deeply regret my response as it completely destroyed the little that was left of our

relationship. This evil and negative spirit continued to rule our lives, and that of the congregation.

A week or two later Peter requested to bring forward a motion at our leadership meeting. He wanted our congregation to request a consultation from our regional office as he felt that we could no longer continue in this way. He maintained that we were facing a major leadership crisis, as he felt that the current leadership was inadequate. He also maintained that the congregation was in serious financial trouble and that service attendance was declining. What he actually meant was that the white membership was declining. To him the crisis loomed so large that the doors of this congregation would have to be closed within a few months. He urged the leadership to take drastic measures in order to overcome this predicament. I was surprised that our leadership was so easily convinced of the “enormous trouble” we were in, as the statistics proved the opposite. How did Peter convince these people to believe these lies? The situation was tense, and the negative atmosphere prevailed.

A consultation was requested by the leadership, and granted by our denomination’s regional meeting. The team elected by the circuit meeting to conduct the consultation with our congregation, consisted of two senior ministers and a probation minister/elder. After I had been called before this panel the leadership of our congregation were allowed to voice their grievances, without me being present. An open meeting with the rest of the congregation then followed. Finally I was to meet with them once again.

At the first meeting the convenor assured me that this was a friendly meeting and that they were looking for ways to help us as a congregation. This was not a punishment session and therefore there was no need for concern. Yet, I still was reticent and did not feel free to share all the details concerning my relationship, or lack of relationship with Peter. I informed them of my reluctance to hang out dirty washing. I felt that if I were to share some of my personal feelings, I would irretrievably wound my relationship with the congregation members. However, I did admit that we had problems and that I had a need to be able to share my concerns privately with someone who would understand. I am sure the commission realised the cover I made in order to protect Peter. With hindsight, I acknowledge that it is important not to protect evil, but to expose it for what it is. We can learn from the life of Jesus that he never gossiped about people, but he never protected the wrong and evil in their lives.

The atmosphere changed dramatically once the panel met with the leadership. The content of the meeting was, and still is, unknown to me, but one thing was clear, my family and I, now stood alone in this struggle. Apart from one junior member of the leadership, the once “loyal members” no longer seemed friendly; Perhaps not really antagonistic, but rather more apathetic. At the congregational meeting it became apparent that Peter would accept nothing less than a recommendation for my pastorate to be terminated. I did not expect a bouquet from Peter, nor did I expect special favours from the leadership, but I did believe that the truth would be spoken and that this truth would set us free. (John 8:32) How wrong I was!

The next morning the panel and I had our final meeting. This took place at an early hour, as we had our mid-week morning service directly afterwards. The antagonism of our visitors surprised me. The convenor of the meeting questioned the authenticity of my call into ministry. “No one was called to be a miserable Christian,” he said. “Don’t mix with losers, because this rubs off”. (I am still not sure who these losers are.) He wondered whether we were in God’s will. The elder gave me a lecture on “how to hear God’s voice”. I wondered what was happening to me. Milingo is right in saying:

“I feel as if I were being called upon to defend myself for a wrong I myself knew nothing of” (Milingo 1985: 18).

I have been accused of many wrongs, and real guilty person is getting away without a finger being pointed at him!

Due to the last meeting running overtime, I had to face a waiting congregation. The panel left in a hurry because they had other appointments. Because I was so disturbed by my previous confrontation I could not talk for a few minutes. Could this really happen in the Church or was this just a nightmare? I thought I could only echo the words of Milingo:

“I felt so ashamed of my Church I had nowhere to hide my head” (Milingo 1985: 20).

A few weeks later the consultation’s report was distributed in the denomination circuit. Some of the points mentioned on this report were never tested for truth, neither was I given the opportunity to speak in this report. The report mentioned that we were running at a deficit of R 39 000 for that year. The truth was, in spite of our declining income, our fixed deposit grew from R 230 000 to close to R 300 000 in less than eighteen months. This report also stated that our congregation had a:

"... vibrant outreach among the youth of the church, and the mission to prostitutes, alcoholics and drug addicts is commendable. Under the minister's direction, these have excelled and he (the minister) is also actively involved in the local fraternal and Inner City Ministry. Mission outreach is further extended to missions to Mozambique and Zambia."

Yet, only a few points later one reads these words...

"Apart from Sunday Services and the Cell Groups, there appears to be little or no provision for personal growth in the Spiritual/Social or Physical spheres. A need exists for such development".

After reading this report I began to see the development of negative attitudes, not only in our congregations, but also in our denomination leadership. I realised that I was not going to get any support from our head office. They were not willing to confront Peter. Neither were they willing to become involved in our struggle or to show any support to us as a family. The last point on the report stated that a follow-up visitation was planned, which never took place, and the evil prevailed.

After this consultation Peter took six months leave from our congregation's leadership. This surprised me, yet gave me the reprieve that I needed from the constant pressure he applied in my ministry. It was during this time that I felt that we should leave this pastorate and return to a mission's ministry. I gave warning to the leadership that we would resign this pastorate within six months. We felt this to be sufficient time for the congregation to find another minister in order to fill our position.

Two weeks before our last service we made a discovery that would have far reaching consequences for the congregation and ourselves. Fraudulent activities were evident within the congregation's bank account. After some

investigation, a paid staff member admitted falsifying these statements. (I will refer to this person as “A”). The usual procedure in handling the offerings were that two elders counted the offerings collected and recorded the amount in a book provided for this purpose. This money was then locked away in the safe until “A” could deposit it in our bank account. At some stage “A” faced personal financial difficulties and appropriated some of the cash offerings before banking the rest. To keep the figures in balance, “A” used the bank’s official letter head to print false statements, which were then given to the treasurer in order to keep the books. A third party, (whom I will refer to as “B”) sometimes did the banking. “B” realised that the figures recorded did not always corresponded with the amounts deposited.

Realising that the congregation was now in need of leadership, I offered to remain in the pastorate for a few months or until the congregation found another minister. The congregation would decide whether or not to accept my proposal by voting. Peter took this opportunity to encourage others to vote “against the Steyns”. He also organised proxy-votes against our staying in the congregation. The conflict grew bigger and the evil spirit continued to rule certain members of the congregation.

A minister from a neighbouring town convened this meeting. We were not allowed to attend the meeting and I was puzzled as to the reason why! I was later to learn that people that were not members of our congregation were allowed to vote against us staying. We were voted “out” because of the many proxy votes that were not in our favour. These votes were never checked for

genuineness and it later came to the light that many non-member names were used to vote against our staying in the congregation. Even names of people who no longer lived in South Africa were used. After the meeting I was informed that the votes had gone against me. No other information was forthcoming. To this day we are unclear as to what really took place as we have heard only snippets of what took place at this meeting.

I continued to walk in close relationship with the treasurer who informed me that “B” claimed to have informed Peter of the missing funds. When the treasurer confronted Peter, he claimed to have no knowledge of this.

Many unanswered questions remained after leaving the congregation. Questions like: Who helped “A” to print such “neat” statements, as “A” is not really computer literate? Why didn’t “B” contact me about the missing moneys? Did Peter know about this and if so, why didn’t he confront me, or bring this knowledge to the consultation’s attention, as this happened before the consultation took place? Why did Peter go through all this trouble to get rid of us?

Two months after we left the congregation, another consultation from our regional office visited the congregation. This time it was focussing its work against two elders who did not agree about the way we were “released” from the congregation. When I read the report from the consultation I was utterly shocked at the consultation’s apathy towards the congregation and I quote from their report;

"It was decided that although certain actions of the elders (Peter?) were questionable, their desire was in the Churches good interests at that time. The Visitation team could not make any judgement as this was impossible without a detailed study of the Session minutes as well as questioning the treasurer who could not attend the meeting. However it seemed to the Visitation team that the division was not unsolvable or irreparable, but just one of the ways God uses to bring about truth within the body and its functioning. The two opposing elders were urged to make peace, to unite with the other elders and seek unity within the Spirit for the sake of the Church. All the elders of... (Church's name) appeared willing to do this. ..."

... Unfortunately the following morning, ... (elder's name) tendered his resignation as an elder and member of the Church. At the session meeting held on Sunday 2nd March 03, there was unity between the elders present, and there appears to be a real desire to work together within the church."

What did the consultation mean by the statement:

"...just one of the ways God uses to bring about truth within the body and its functioning?"

Did they mean that God cleansed his Church from "un-truth" by getting rid of us as a family?

I was also stunned by the closing remark in the report. Did they really believe what was written in this report? The truth of the matter was that, after this consultation only six of the eleven elders remained in the congregation. Even the chairperson left, as this person resigned both from the congregation and denomination. Two more elders are still without a home base, and find it very hard to cope with their current situation. Two elders, still serving on this leadership gave the Church a last chance. They threatened, "If things don't change by the end of this year, we will be leaving too". Many more members have left the congregation, disillusioned with the Church. And Peter is still a member of the leadership. In fact, he now holds the position of chairperson of the board. This makes one wonder how long God will allow this to continue?

“CRUCIFIED”, A SECOND TIME AROUND

How could this happen within the Church? We were not sure what our next step would be. The best we could think of was to pick-up the pieces of our lives and work full out in the mission organisation where I was appointed as national director for the Southern Africa region.

Before we left the congregation I wrote a document stating clearly the direction I felt this mission organisation should move in. This document was accepted by all the directors and officially approved in a directors meeting.

About a month after we left the congregation the chairperson of our board called for an urgent meeting with all the directors. I was totally taken by surprise when our chairperson announced that he was in contact with our National President in Hong Kong and they had decided that I was not the right person for this job, and that I had to vacate this position with immediate effect. It seems that the effects of the conflict that was in our last congregation followed me.

Within a few weeks I was pushed out twice, which did not make sense to me. Why? Could this really be from God, or had I done something wrong? This left me at a place of deep disappointment with the things that happened to us. I could only echo the words Yancey wrote:

“A large measure of disappointment with God stems from disappointment with other Christians” (Yancey 1988: 164).

I was not too sure whom to blame though: Should I have blamed God, should I have blamed his Church, or should I have blamed myself?

CHAPTER 1

**CRUCIFY HIM,
CRUCIFY HIM**

WHY DID I CHOOSE TO RESEARCH THIS TOPIC?

After these above experiences we were left dumbfounded and numb. I questioned the reasons for these circumstances. Many questions went through my mind as I tried to make some sense of these events. I wondered if this really happened to us, and whether I had earned these wounds? I also wondered if we were the only ones who had ever encountered such experiences. Were there other clergy who has had similar experiences? I also wrestled with the question as to whether this was now the end of our journey in fulltime ministry? Could it be that God had abandoned us? If he did abandon us, surely there had to be a good reason for this! I could only repeatedly ask, “WHY?” I wrestled long and hard on these questions.

These questions lead me to research the problem I have experienced. As I started out researching, I have come to realise that what we had experienced is not as unique as I had initially thought. I have encountered some pastors and missionaries who also had “crucifying” experiences. In the United States of America alone, every six minutes a pastor is forced out of a congregation (Rediger 1977: 7). I was unable to obtain reliable figures on the situation in South Africa, yet I have come to the realization that many clergy in South Africa are also forced from their ministries. Some have relocated to new ministry positions, but many have left the ministry or even worse...

Could this possibly be true? How could people leave the ministry if they claim that it was God who called them into these ministries in the first place? How

could this happen in the Church? This compelled me to research my own experiences in this regard.

We were twenty-seven students in our first year of studying theology; all of us excited to serve the body of Christ in a fulltime capacity. Only thirteen of us managed to complete the initial three years of study. Even some of those who managed to complete their studies and started in fulltime ministries, have since left the ministry to find “greener pastures”. I discovered that only five years after our graduation, out of the twenty-seven students who started out, nine still served in fulltime ministry. Thus, only a third of the “called” people were still serving in ministry, a mere eight years down the road. These are shocking statistics, which set me wondering and wanting to discover why this is happening.

First, I have to acknowledge that there are many reasons, good or bad, for pastors and missionaries to leave ministry. Some have left for financial reasons, health reasons and, I presume, many other reasons. It is also a fact that not all clergy, who have been hurt by people within their ministry, have left that particular ministry. For the purpose of this study I have limited the area of my research to clergy who have felt pain because their fellow believers have “crucified” them. These fellow believers are the people that they, as clergy, have trusted and served within the Body of Christ. Rediger calls this;

“the killing of Clergy” (Rediger 1977: 7).

Edwards noted that a “crucifixion” could often destroy a pastor’s reputation. He went on to say that they;

“altering not only his life but forever limiting his ministry” (Edwards 1994: 14).

I spoke to a young man, who would not allow me an interview, because he still experienced so much pain. The only thing he told me was that he now serves as a religious chaplain in the armed forces because people had spread lies about him. He was a young pastor and the story was told that he sexually harassed some of the young girls in the congregation’s youth group. His life, passion and gifting is all for the pastorate, but he was denied this ministry as the church board forced him to leave the congregation. The head office of that particular denomination did nothing to investigate the truth of these allegations and he was forced to resign from the denomination as well. He is still serving in ministry, but is highly frustrated in his current service.

On my journey, while experiencing this pain inside me, I have learned that there are many others also suffering at the hands of their own people. I have chosen this topic for this thesis because I believe that many people, who are suffering because they have been “crucified”, can benefit from our experience. As believers we should not only cope with what life is throwing at us, we should have life and live it in abundance. If this thesis could help one person to find abundant life after “crucifixion”, it was worth all the effort.

God permitting, at a next opportunity, I would like to do some research on the spirit behind Christians who “crucify” other Christians. I have yet to study this topic in depth, but I have made some fascinating discoveries already. Could it

be that it is the same abusive spirit that entices people to abuse other people in prostitution? Could it be that prostitutes are “crucified” for money by people, including Christians?

THE CHURCH’S RESPONSE TO THIS PROBLEM

“Shattering is it not? Perhaps one of the greatest shocks a Christian will ever know is to discover that fellow Christians can be cruel. Nonetheless, though it seems to be a fact, it is not well known, nor easily accepted” (Edwards 1994: 11).

The “crucifixion” of our clergy is a real problem within the Body of Christ, but unfortunately, many believers deny that this problem exists at all. They think that is not possible. Rediger is right in saying;

“this should not happen in a Church” (Rediger 1977: 40).

Most practicing and Church going believers think that all is in order in the Church ranks, because it is business as usual, Sunday after Sunday. And when a pastor leaves a congregation, there is always another one to take up this position. People find it hard to believe that such evil will happen within the Church, even among clergy who have not experienced it.

I thought that the members of our congregations were with us during this conflict, but I was stunned when I realised that my family and I stood alone in our “crucifixion”. Some of the members in our congregation were sympathetic towards us, but they did nothing to come to our rescue, let alone dealing with the conflict. I even felt that our head office sided with our “crucifiers”. As Rediger writes;

“Denominational leaders fear offending powerful lay leaders, no matter how evil they are” (Rediger 1977: 15).

I could not believe that my fellow ministers just turned a blind eye towards that which happened to us. One day, during a conversation, a pastor responded to me in these words, “How could this be true. The Church is a place of much grace! There must be some misunderstanding.” The thought that Christians can wilfully destroy fellow believers, physically and spiritually, goes so much against our theology, that Christians often turn their eyes away from it. This truth is so shocking to many believers that they simply cannot comprehend it. It is easier for them to deny it!

I came to the conclusion that as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ, I could have one of two responses to this problem; I could both ignore it and pretend that God does not allow these things to happen in the Church, and with that I would live a lie. Or I could face the problem and do something about it. In agreement with Rediger I also believe that as Church leaders we;

“must not allow pastors to die one by one and imagine that this is not a warning signal” (Rediger 1977: 2).

There is a sickness in our Churches that needs to be addressed. And I pray that this thesis would not only benefit me, but that other clergy and lay people will also benefit from it as we journey together.

WHAT DOES THE “CRUCIFIXION OF BELIEVERS” MEAN?

Believers in Jesus Christ are not exempted from suffering. Jesus said that there would be a “cross” to be taken up for those following him! (Matthew 16:24). Payne wrote;

“There is most certainly the true, authentic, and specifically Christian suffering we undergo in the carrying of our cross. When we allow Christ to live in and through us, we find ourselves in the conflict of spiritual battle. His light in us collides with the

darkness in the world – the ignorance, hate, lies, and delusions within the souls of men and women, and therefore within the cultural, institutional, and governmental structures they create. When we, as carriers of the Kingdom of God, meet the lies and delusions of a darkened, fallen world, we know conflict. Every voluntary suffering we undergo as channels of his life constitutes the 'carrying of our cross' (Payne 1989: 201).

Christians are suffering in more ways than I could record. As part of our suffering in the Church we have to make mention of conflict between believers, yet I would like to make a distinction between conflict among believing people and the “crucifixion” of believing people.

“Crucifixion” is not mere conflict between believers. Rediger wrote;

“Normal conflict responds well to rational, competent and caring management methods. ...abnormal conflicts are distinguished by the elements of mental or personality disorder” (Rediger 1977: 64)

With “crucifixion”, Rediger explains;

“We are not talking about conflict anymore, we are talking about emotional and spiritual abuse of traumatic proportions” (Rediger 1977: 2).

The “crucifiers” are people that refuse to consider their victim’s feelings in any way. To them their cause is so much bigger than the person. Anything goes in the war they are fighting against this unwanted person. They justify their actions in the name of Christianity, because in their minds they are doing this merely for the good of the Church.

Being “crucified” in the Church always leaves the “crucified” person so absolutely broken and damaged that most of these people find it very difficult to come to a place of balance in their lives once again. There are many of these people who could find no meaning in their suffering and many years later still suffer the effects of their bad experience. Edwards believes that

being “crucified” can be more painful than the death of a loved one. He wrote this about being “crucified” in the Church;

“Few things, even the loss of a loved one, affect one’s life so profoundly or so painfully. The damage is quite often unfathomable. I would dare say that a truly vicious attack on the part of one believer to another leaves most Christian so hurt they never fully recover” (Edwards 1994: 12).

One of my interviewees now lives in the street as a homeless person. His “crucifixion” left him so damaged that he cannot believe that a “loving God can allow this to happen to one of his children”. But this is not only a modern day problem. History has taught us that ancient Israel also opposed and killed those who came with this message; “THUS SAY THE LORD, ...”.

“This is a prophetic warning, for it warns of ancient mistake - killing the prophets – that is a forerunner to tribal and national disaster. The record of human history shows that the tribe that kills its shaman loses its soul” (Rediger 1977: 2).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS THESIS

No person can be untouched after a true “crucifying” experience. This issue affects all, even the opposing party. The “crucifiers” might think that they are getting away with it, but the impact upon them is harder than what they realise. Edwards wrote:

“...being crucified by fellow Christians is one of the deepest pains a child of God will ever know. It can so profoundly affect you that it can mark the end of your life as a practicing Christian. There is no limit to the effect a crucifixion can have on your life. It could possibly leave you lame for the rest of you life, its destructive power following you throughout your life and on to your grave” (Edwards 1994: 13).

Because of my absolute surety of God's calling upon my life, I came to the conclusion that it would be an act of total disobedience to God if I dared to leave full-time ministry. This left me with the problem of knowing that I should continue in ministry, but the sense of not knowing how to cope with what

happened to us. How could I bring healing and hope to people when I myself, am broken and hopeless?

In my search for answers I discovered that there can and should be life after a “crucifixion”. By the grace of God I learned that the words of Edwards are true;

“it can affect you positively – so positively that when you re-emerge, you are almost a totally different person”. (Edwards 1994: 13).

I have discovered that there is life and hope after a “crucifixion” and through this thesis I aim to find complete healing for myself first. In so doing, I will also attempt to put our experience in such perspective that others, who are in pain, will also find meaning in their “crucifixion”.

THE SCOPE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

MY PERSONAL BIAS

Because I so often felt the pain of those whom I interviewed, I continually had to remind myself to remain objective, and to try to see the two sides of these stories. I have found it very difficult to think about the “crucified” people and this topic in an academic way. Many of these stories I had to write and rewrite again, in order to use them as a way of solving the problem of our cross.

INTERVIEWS WITH FOUR PASTORS

Apart from my own experience I interviewed four other clergy who have experienced a “crucifixion”. They were from different denominations, age and racial groups.

The first pastor whom I interviewed no longer practices Christianity. He is a black man in his early thirties, and was from a Charismatic Pentecostal background. My involvement in his life continues as he now lives on the streets of the city we are living in. Due to the fact that he has completely lost hope in Christ, we often find him intoxicated, sniffing glue, abusing alcohol or any other drug he can appropriate. The experience has destroyed him to such extent that he does not trust any person.

Another of the pastors whom I interviewed has left his congregation and the ministry, but continues to attend Sunday services in a different denomination. It took him four years to recover before he started participating again in the life of a congregation. He is a white man in his late thirties, and is from a Reformed background.

The third pastor, a white man in his late twenties, remained in the ministry, though he has changed from a pastoral type of ministry into a missionary type of ministry. He still serves within a Pentecostal background.

The fourth, an elderly pastor, still serves in a missionary ministry, although, he had to move his field of ministry to a different mission organisation. This was the second occasion that he had experienced a “crucifixion”. On the first occasion he left the congregation he had served and went into a mission ministry. He believes that being “crucified” does not get easier, but God does make us “street wise”. Because of his previous experience, and the fact that he has found healing, he could cope with his “crucifixion” more effectively the

second time around. This pastor is a white man from a Reformed background.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE I USED

I have used this questionnaire as a way of gathering information from the above-mentioned people. This questionnaire helped me to structure these interviews and kept us focused on the task of solving the problem of being “crucified”.

NAME DATE

QUALIFICATIONS.....

DENOMINATION WHERE YOU WERE ORDAINED

TELL ME YOUR STORY.....

WHY DO YOU THINK THEY DID THIS TO YOU?

HOW WAS YOUR FAMILY AFFECTED BY THIS EXPERIENCE?

HAVE YOU FORGIVEN THOSE WHO “CRUCIFIED” YOU?

HOW OFTEN DO YOU HAVE CONTACT WITH THEM?

Jesus was crucified naked in public; He lost his life; His ministry was destroyed; He was deserted by those whom he trusted most, even by God his Father; His enemies mocked him and humiliated him... CAN YOU IDENTIFY WITH THIS?

Jesus did not want to go through with his crucifixion! “*Father, take this cup from me, he asked!*” Yet there was a cross. HOW DOES THIS MAKE YOU FEEL?

WHAT IS YOUR THEOLOGY CONCERNING SUFFERING, EVEN WHEN WE ARE IN GOD’S WILL?

DURING YOUR SUFFERING, HAVE YOU DOUBTED YOUR CALLING?

PRESENTLY, HOW SURE ARE YOU OF YOUR CALLING?

Mediocre people do not make a difference; radical people are “crucified”. This is particularly true for people that want to live according to God’s word. Once we become radical about God

and what his word tells us to do, people become very uncomfortable with us. These people will often oppose us in various ways, because this takes them out of their comfort zones.

IS THIS TRUE FOR YOU?

HAVE YOU LEARNED SOMETHING FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE?

In preparation Jesus first went into Gethsemane. *"Not my will, but let your will be done"*. For most of us Gethsemane only comes after crucifixion.

HAVE YOU BEEN TO "GETHSEMANE" YET?

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN THREE YEARS FROM NOW?

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY OF SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF OUR “CROSS”

OUR “CROSS” IN THE LIGHT OF GOD’S HOPE

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently” (Romans 8: 18-25 - NIV).

An Asian proverb captures the concept of a journey. This proverb goes something like this; “It matters very little where you come from, it matters more where you are right now, but it is most important where are you going to from here” (an Asian folk saying, freely translated). Could life be as simplistic as that? Not quite, yet, there is so much truth and simplicity in this saying. It surely made an impacted upon my philosophy concerning life. It is through our past that we are the people we are right now, but it is the future that determines our current behaviour. We do the things we do because of our perception of what the future will hold. Whether this perception is true or false is debatable.

A good example about the above is when Andrew Lester did a study on people diagnosed with cancer. These persons were not worried about their past or even greatly worried about their present suffering. Their biggest concern was their future. What would the future hold for them and their families? (Lester 1995: 1) Lester’s theory on hope helped me to understand why we suffered so much when we were “crucified”. Not only was our past clouded because our present had been destroyed through lies and false

accusations, the “crucifiers” had also killed our future stories. Lester believes that people without hope are people in despair. And he went on and explained that :

“Since despair is so painful and debilitating and because hope is so basic to living joyfully, I am convinced that we need to be more explicit about our commitment to a God who is out in front of us calling us into an open ended future” (Lester 1995: 2).

To me it seems that Lester is saying that we find little hope outside of our commitment towards a God who has called us into a brighter future. Could this hope in a bright future with God, then, be the reason why Paul and Silas praised God in prison? (Acts 16: 25). Surely, their current circumstances were no inspiration to praise! Yes, it was because of their praises to God that their chains were loosened, but these praises were motivated in their future hope in God.

It is only after people have accepted Christ as part of their lives, and have shared in his experiences, because of their hope in God, that they start to walk in the power of his Spirit. It is in the realisation of God’s love towards us, that our despairing thoughts are put into perspective. Through the words of this song we learn that, in the light of the hope we have in God, our stories of despair change, as they become mere shadows:

*When I look into your holiness
When I gaze into your loveliness
When all things that surround me
Becomes shadows in the light of you*

*When I’ve found the joy of reaching your heart
When my will becomes enthroned in your love
When all things that surround me
Becomes shadows in the light of you*

*I worship you; I worship you
The reason I live is to worship you*
(When I look into your holiness; Wayne and Cathy Perrin – Hosanna Music)

In spite of the beautiful words in this song, we do have trouble; we cannot hide the fact that we are suffering. The pain we are experiencing is immense, but *"our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"* (Romans 8: 18). The hope we have for a future with God is so much brighter than the shadow of our suffering. We also need to go further by facing the challenges presented to us through a "crucifixion". Having gone through the experience, we will be able to participate in the hope for the future.

TIME DIMENSIONS OF HOPE

"The past and present are foundational, of course, and we have learned many helpful concepts about the contributions of these two time dimensions to the human predicament. I will argue, however, that equal time for the future dimension is necessary for a more holistic psychological and theological understanding of what Anton Boisen called 'the living human document'. The phrase 'human document' is Boisen's way of reminding us that any human being is a unique text that must be read (heard) and interpreted (the hermeneutical task)" (Lester 1995: 4).

THE PAST

"This emphasis on personal history is necessary, given the fact that past stories are so foundational for our sense of self. The self comes into existence only to the extent that it can be recollected out of the past" (Lester 1995: 33).

Our perception of self and of our future will not come into existence in a vacuum. These perceptions are rooted in our past experiences of life. It is our past stories, held in our memories, that determine who we are and the present as well as the future we will participate in.

THE PRESENT

"The past ... is important insofar as it is part of one's current existence and has contributed to one's current mode of facing one's ultimate concerns; but it is ... not the most rewarding area for therapeutic exploration. The future-becoming-present is the primary tense of existential therapy" (Lester quote Irvin Yalom 1995: 18).

A person of hope is on a journey into a better future. A hope filled future story prompts us to ask the question;

"What happens next" (Lester 1995: 35)

,... but we cannot get into the future unless we journey through the present.

THE FUTURE

"We will find that hope, although rooted in the past and acted out in the present, receives its energy from the future" (Lester 1995: 15).

As we participate in the past and present we created a future for us to live in. Lester believes that our future already exist in our present moment, because we spend so much time preparing for the future.

"We are not only a self, we are becoming a self, and we give shape to the not- yet-conscious self through the future stories we create" (Lester 1995: 36).

WHERE CAN WE FIND HOPE?

"Hope is stronger than memory. Salvation is stronger than sin. Forgiveness is stronger than bitterness. Reconciliation is stronger than hatred. Resurrection is stronger than crucifixion. Light is stronger than darkness... Hope is stronger than memory" (Callahan 1983: XX)

Hope-seekers need to learn that people's past and present will determine where they are now, but it is the prospects of their future that determines their behaviour (Lester 1995: 17). It is very easy to be distracted by frustrations and despair, and then to give in to the prevailing powers.

Dr. Poser believes;

“Lack of hope is the most paralysing factor which prevents the full participation of people in popular organisations or in the search for new dreams or national liberation”
(Poser 1987: 25)

People without hope are people without dreams, going through the motions of life without really living life to its full potential and often experience the feelings of failure. It is the hope for a better tomorrow that will enable us to carry our “crosses” today.

Struggling with these elements, Paul wrote to the Church Colossians;

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints--the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth”
(Colossians 1:3-6 - NIV).

It seems to me that Paul suggested that the love these people had for their fellow believers, was born out of their faith and the hope they had in God. This hope is cultivated through that which they “heard about in the Word of truth...” To me it seems that Paul is saying that the love these people had for one-another, was the fruit of the hope they had in God. God is love. Could it be wrong then to believe that God is hope? With this hope in mind, we can share our experience with those in despair.

HOPE IS NOT FOUND WITH PEOPLE IN DESPAIR

Lester's understanding of despair is an;

“ultimate or boundary situation” (Lester 1995: 72)

,... which marks out the limit to which extend we are willing to live life. People in despair cannot go beyond this point in their life because they have reached the point of hopelessness. According to Lester;

"hopelessness is like an infection that invades a person's being and causes a sickness of the spirit" (Lester 1995: 72).

When we are hopeless and in despair we become separated from God in our *"sickness of spirit"*. This separation from God disrupts our very being and nature and we find it almost impossible to communicate with God because our spirit is not whole and well. Hiltner explained it this way;

"Man does not have spirit. He is spirit. His spiritual nature is his whole nature, and it carries two equally important corollaries; first that spirit means man in his true unity and integrity; and second, that his wholeness and integrity are derived from God as Spirit" (Dortzbach quote Hiltner 2002: 44).

Most often, despairing people who experience separation between their spirit and God's Spirit, respond to their hopelessness by choosing an idol as a substitute for God's hope and purpose in their lives. This idolatry then not only substitutes God's hope and purpose in their lives, but eventually substitutes God as a person. Peter, the elder in our congregation, did exactly the above. He used his financial wealth and power to replace God in his life. He substituted Christian-Spiritual-Values for negative, evil and destructive forces.

Lester defined idolatry in these words;

"Addiction is a primary example of idolatry. When we choose a substance (like drugs, alcohol, money, or food), or a relationship (with a spouse, parent, or child), or a function (like sex, religion, or work) to put in the centre of life, this 'thing' is given the place of a god in life. It becomes the centre of attention (worship). It consumes our time, and we count on it to give us fulfilment. The pursuit of it dominates our time and energy. We are its servants. We are guilty of inappropriate bonding and identification. The 'thing' becomes the ground of hope, which guarantees that we are set up for despair when this 'thing' cannot deliver" (Lester 1995: 81).

Peter's idolatry destroyed the fellowship within our congregation as power and money substituted worship among God's people. As a result of this, many people lost hope in the future and became despaired.

Lester believes that there are eight major reasons why people lose hope and become despondent. I will have a short discussion under each heading.

1. Loss of future story

A major change in a person's circumstance often alters that person's future story. This change could be the death of a loved one, or the loss of a job, or anything that added to the value of that person's life. Their future is now changed because of the loss they have suffered. Finally, they relate differently to other people, sometimes, even unaware of the negative impact they have on others.

2. Reaching the end of a future story

People who have reached the end of an era in their lives often feel the loss because there is nothing to aim for in the future. In our country lots of black people became despondent when the era of apartheid ended. The struggle was over and many felt left in mid-air; what would the future hold without this battle that needed to be struggled. They had to face the problem of the unknown future. Apartheid gave them a purpose to fight for a better future.

3. Not willing to be one self

"Despair ..., is being 'not willing to be one's self' and has two forms: 'despair of possibility' and 'despair of necessity'. 'Despair of possibility' results when the self is

unable, or unwilling to recognize the limitations of actuality. The self fantasizes, dreams, and wishes itself into the future in ways that are too removed from the givens of life to be realistic ... when that happens 'self runs away from itself'."

"... the 'despair of necessity' is the loss of possibility, the blindness to the open-endedness of the future. This despair results when a person is buried in the givens of life, feels bound by what already exists, and has lost the willingness and freedom to imagine other alternatives" (Lester 1995: 77).

4. Failure to claim our past and future

Lester claims that hope is built upon three time dimensions, our past, our present and our future. It is upon our past that our self-identity is built which is then projected into the present, which leads to our future.

5. Being present bound

"Hopelessness for some people is being trapped by the present with no anticipation of tomorrow, or at least not a tomorrow that can bring relief" (Lester 1995: 78).

These people are often struck by boredom because they fail to believe that this life could bring forth something new and exciting. As a result, they relate with others from their past experiences. If these past experiences were negative, they will affect others from that viewpoint.

6. Enmeshment in a finite future story

"Finite hopes ... are not enough. When separated from transfinite hope, they leave us short of the fullness of our humanity" (Lester 1995: 79).

Our hope can only become transfinite once we connect our ultimate hope in the character of God into an open-ended future with God. Lester goes on to say;

"... in theological language the content of that false hope (Hope connected to things other than God) is placed in the centre of one's hoping process, thereby becoming an idol" (Lester 1995: 80).

7. Facing the void

All people in life are confronted with tough questions about loneliness, meaninglessness and death. This absence of meaning in these times, is called;

“facing the void” (Lester 1995: 80).

Many people see this void filled with nothingness and it becomes meaningless, as they have failed to believe that a loving God could be present in this void. I have experienced this void during my “crucifixion” in the Church. I have asked many questions as a way to try and find answers, but found hopelessness instead.

There is a strong relationship between meaninglessness and hopelessness.

Through his experience, Lester explains it this way;

“When people claim that their life is meaningless, they often mean that their life narrative has become unintelligible. This can be perceived not simply as a loss of past roots or as isolation in the present but as a loss of future story that makes sense” (Lester 1995: 81).

For many of these people their future story is aiming at nothingness. Because this void holds a major threat for their personhood, these people then try to create a god in order to fill this void. I believe that Peter (our elder) also experienced this void. This void has leaded him to destroy us, as well as the congregation, because he thought that he had lost his power to control the congregation.

8. Negative God-images

Our view and beliefs concerning God’s character will determine whether our faith in this God will cultivate within us hope or despair. A God-image who

keeps count of all our wrongs, can hardly cultivate hope for an open-ended future with that God of wrath. A loving God who will in the near future take away all our pains and struggles will make our current suffering so much easier to cope with.

HOPE THROUGH PASTORAL CARE

We are created in God's image and because God cares for humans and has held them in his memory, humans are now able to care for each other. John Patton wrote that the term "pastoral" implies a;

"relationship both in the sense of responsibility and of attitude" (Patton 1993: 27).

Not only do we have the responsibility to care, we should do it with the right attitude. Lester believes that it is the carer's responsibility and privilege to;

"nurture hope and confront despair" (Lester 1995: 1).

Patton based his understanding of pastoral care on his theological conviction that humans are able to care in a pastoral way;

"because we are held in God's memory" (Patton 1993: 15).

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15 - NIV). Because God has not forgotten us we are able to remember the people around us. As we live through negative experiences, we may think that God has forgotten us, but to the contrary. God lives our life experiences within in us. He is called Immanuel, - God with us. As we seek to do pastoral care we must be mindful of that.

Jackson said that the source for pastoral care;

"...is to be found in the pastor's own personal experiences of the gospel and in the actual exercise of the pastor's own pastoral gifts" (Jackson 1985: 129).

Pastoral care goes deeper than just our actions. It becomes the very person I am. *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are" (I John 3:1 - NIV)*. As children of God we become people of authority. And it is from this position of God-given authority that we can now, care for the un-cared, that we can love the un-loved, that we can bring hope to the hopeless, and in so doing, relate differently to people.

God called us to love and we are capable of loving others, and in so doing, we bring hope to the hopeless. But this love and hope can never be sourced from within us. *"We love because he first loved us" (I John 4:19 - NIV)*. God has blessed us with hope through the cross and we need to share this hope we have, but our sharing is, as Poser puts it, through;

"empty hands" (Poser 1987: 22).

Everything that we are and all that we have or do not have was put on the altar of Jesus Christ. We receive from God those gifts we require for the furtherance of his Kingdom. Thus, we cannot care unless we are cared for by God, we cannot give love unless we have received love from God, we cannot bring hope unless God has given us hope. The pastoral ministry of hope is centred around our positive way of relating to people, even those who persecute us.

From Campbell we learn that we become companions on the same journey, this journey that we are making ourselves (Campbell 1981: 82). As travelling

companions we will gain authority to become friends and comrades on this journey. Wise puts it this way;

"The meaning of pastoral care is that we must be able to enter into and suffer with those whom we seek to help. If our concern to help ends with those who require little cost on our part, then we will not help many" (Wise 1989: 4).

For the believer, a consequence of the cross is to carry one another's burden. In ecumenism we see solidarity as we belong to one supportive family, not recognizing human barriers of ideological debate, racial struggles or injustices in economical orders. As a caregiver I cannot choose whom I will care for! I will care for those held in God's memory.

Our pastoral care is not aimed to help people to handle their problems better. To care for people means to bring them to a place where they can enter into communion with God (Solomon 1992: 137). Our Christian caring is based on Jesus Christ being "*I AM*". Not only did he speak the word of God, he is the Word of God, he is the Truth, he is the Way and the Life. (Pieterse 1987: 5). It is in Christ and through Christ that true pastoral care will take place. This is the only place where hope can be found and given.

I have been very challenged by the above books. They have helped my to reshape my thinking about ministry and caring for people. I have also realised that I have made many mistakes in the conflict situation with Peter. These books has challenged my to respond differently to other conflict situations in our lives.

ST PAUL'S MESSAGE OF HOPE TO THE CHURCH IN PHILIPPI

"Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!" (Philippians 3:1 - NIV). St Paul repeats this message in chapter 4:4: *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"* (NIV). Prison chains bound the apostle Paul as he wrote these wise words to the Church in Philippi. Despite his suffering and opposition, which he experienced through his fellow workers, this letter radiates joy and hope; Christ was proclaimed. There was joy in the fellowship with the Church in Philippi. There was joy in Christ Jesus himself! How could Paul rejoice in the midst of carrying this "cross"? Paul could rejoice, because he focused on positive relationships centred around Christ. Through these relationships he was caring for those who were broken and hurt by life's awful experiences.

Could it be that Paul denied the reality of his suffering? Did he live in a dream world where he wished away all these difficulties in his life? Certainly not! It is only once we draw the parallel between St Paul's epistle and Lester's theory of hope that we realize how much the apostle was in touch with the reality of the suffering he experienced. From this letter we learn that Paul was in touch with his past, as he understood his own true identity. Paul was fully aware of his current suffering, but that did not stop him from striving towards a better future with Christ. Reflecting upon my own experience; I participated in the negative attitude with Peter, challenging him to face the truth in a harsh way (Introduction). This has led to tension, which strengthened the conflict within our congregation.

THE APOSTLE ACKNOWLEDGED HIS PAST (Philippians 3:4-6)

"If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (NIV).

The author was secure in his identity. It was his past that formed him into the person he was and nobody could take away the fact that he was *"a Hebrew of Hebrews"*! The apostle did not allow his suffering to alienate him from being Paul, the apostle, the person God had called for this specific task.

I have realised the Peter (the elder) was a hurt person. His past affected how he related to me. The hurt he carried with him, touched my own hurt he inflicted upon me, and we both strengthened these negative attitudes. The past affected our present relationship, which affected our future relationship.

THE APOSTLE ACKNOWLEDGED THE PRESENT (Philippians 3:8)

"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ..." (NIV).

Although the apostle had lost everything he owned, he counted these things as rubbish in comparison to what he had found in Christ. This loss has caused him to feel pain. But Paul not only acknowledged his loss, he weighed it in the light of knowing Christ Jesus, and it could not begin to compare! The above challenge those who are being "crucified", or who are "crucifying" others, to examine their past, which will help them to related to the present reality.

Peter might believe that he has won the battle in the present, but his conduct not only affected me. It also affected many people in our congregation, as well as his own life. Not only did Peter influence the lives of the people around him, his own view of the future will be different. His future relationship with these people could never be the same.

THE APOSTLE'S DREAM FOR A BETTER FUTURE (Philippians 3:12-14)

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus" (NIV).

Paul acknowledges his failure as he recognizes within himself room for improvement. He claims, "I am not there yet, I am not perfect yet, but watch me, for I am on my way there. I am on my way to a better place"; *"I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."* The author is on a journey to accomplish God's purposes in his life. Yes, the past has shaped him to be the person he is. The present pain is felt deeply in the loss of everything he owned. Yet, these are not able to slow him down. Paul is on a journey to a brighter future in Christ Jesus, his Lord.

To me, it seems that Paul is of the impression that there is one very important condition, which must be adhered to, before we can strive towards that which God has called us to. -*"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead"* Did the author say that our history is bad, that only negative things live in our past? No, not at all! There are many good things in our past, just as there are many bad things in our past. Paul said, don't allow the past

to hold you back. Leave it behind! Very often, even the good things in our past, as well as in the present, can and will hold us back from moving forward, if we allow them too.

I came to realise that it does not matter too much if our dreams and visions for the future do not come to fruition in this lifetime. If we only discover how our relationships, impacted by our past, affected our present realities, then we are on a journey to correct the past in order to share light to the present.

But how sad it would be if we never dream dreams, because of our fear that these dreams will not come to pass, due to hurtful past and present experiences. It is neither our failures nor our sacrifices that count before God. It is our hope that we have in Christ Jesus. It is this hope we have that will enable us to continue when our physical and spiritual strength has reached its limit. If we do not dream positive dreams in the midst of our persecution and suffering, we will always remain in a state of mourning because persecution and suffering is a reality that we, as Christians, cannot escape.

CHAPTER 3

WHO “CRUCIFIES” CLERGY?

UNBELIEVERS SOMETIMES PERSECUTE CHRISTIANS

Many Christians are persecuted at the hands of unbelievers. These are the people that are opposing everything Christians stand for and believe in. This however, very seldom causes Christians to fall away from their faith. Actually the opposite is mostly true. In the book of Acts we read about the early Church being persecuted and how this persecution actually had the opposite effect to that which was intended:

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:1&4 - NIV).

Instead of silencing the Christians, these early persecutors only managed to scatter the Church beyond Jerusalem. These persecuted people acted as carriers of the gospel because they *“preached the word wherever they went” (8:4)!*

Persecution still happens in our modern day. In many countries all over the world, Christians are persecuted for their faith and are martyred on a daily basis because of their faith in Christ Jesus. It is difficult to explain the reasons for this. I, myself, believe there are multiple reasons. However, some of the fastest growing Christian communities are those who are persecuted for their faith. For instance, it is claimed by some Para-Church organisations that the Church in China grows at a rate of twenty-five thousand new believers per day. Whether this is true or not would be very difficult to prove, but from this we can learn that Christianity is rapidly growing in this country.

It is also true that Christians are persecuted in so-called free countries. In South Africa, not many years ago, some Church leaders were persecuted for

their viewpoints, which opposed the opinion of the government of that day. These leaders were serving long jail sentences because they dared to verbalise their Christian conviction on human rights.

In Biblical times Christians withstood persecution and their faith was strengthened through their suffering. This still holds true today. Christians continually find the strength to stand against the onslaught of those from other faith convictions.

CHRISTIANS PERSECUTE CHRISTIANS

But there seems to be another kind of persecution that has the ability to destroy even the very mature believer in Christ Jesus. And it is this kind of persecution that causes Christians so much more pain. Edwards wrote that these persecuted people could be:

"mistreated, abused – so severely that it amounts to a crucifixion. Sometimes even a public crucifixion" (Edwards 1994: 12).

Many "crucified" Christians have fallen by the wayside. Some, who have fallen into the hands of their own people, have become passive members of their congregations. Many others have left the Church, hanging onto their faith by the skin of their teeth. A few have even left the faith, completely abandoning the God who allowed this terrible pain in their lives.

FELLOW CHRISTIANS "CRUCIFY" CLERGY

Firstly, I acknowledge that not only clergy are vulnerable to this kind of persecution, as many lay believers have experienced just as much pain.

During this time of research I have come upon many Christians who have experienced abuse from their fellow believers. Some have been abused by other lay members, yet others by people in leadership in their congregations, while others have experienced abuse from their own pastors. I also acknowledge that the persecution, which lay Christians experience, is no less painful or serious than that of clergy. This would be a good topic for a further study, as this paper could not exhaust this topic due to the vastness and intensity of this problem.

It is also not uncommon for secretaries, organists, or those who support the pastor, to become a target (Rediger 1977: 7). Some of the elders who supported us, as a family, during our persecution also experienced a terrible onslaught on their personhood. However, for the purpose of this paper I want to make special reference to the persecuted clergy, purely because of my own experience. Rediger calls these persecutors “CLERGY KILLERS” (Rediger 1977: 7), because they have the ability to destroy clergy and their families.

Jesus also experienced this kind of suffering as he was put on trial and found guilty for a crime he did not commit. His own people killed him. The Roman soldiers were mere pawns used by the Pharisees to do their dirty work.

CLERGY “CRUCIFY” FELLOW CLERGY

One of the people whom I interviewed for this research paper was a lecturer at a Bible seminary. He was forced out of this position and had to leave the

campus after a dispute with the principal. Here follows a shortened account of our conversation:

Me -

You have had a bad experience. Do you mind telling me about it?

Lecturer -

On the last day of the second term this year, the principal gave me a letter informing me that my services were terminated with the seminary. I was also asked to immediately vacate the house in which we were living in. The reason given for this dismissal was that I was rebellious and refused to submit to the leadership of our institution.

This all started when I was given a contract to sign. On this contract there was a clause stating that I would submit to any instruction given to me by the leadership. I have asked that this clause should be changed to read that I would submit to any reasonable instruction given to me.

M-

Have you forgiven the leadership for what they have done to you?

L-

Yes, I did personally and publicly forgive them. And I found freedom and relief in doing so. The principal even asked forgiveness because he had hurt us.

M-

Truth is, there is a difference in asking for forgiveness and repentance. When you have forgiven someone it does not mean that the wrongs done to you have now become acceptable. Forgiveness is one thing, whilst repentance is something entirely different. Do you think the principal has repented?

L-

No, I don't think so. As a matter of fact, he has not stopped spreading lies about me. Even in chapel he announced lies concerning things we have or have not done.

M-

This must be very painful. How often do you still have contact with them?

L-

The principal is still on our clinic's board. We have asked him to resign, but he refused to do so, saying that he should still have some input in what happens in our clinic.

M-

Jesus was crucified naked in public. He lost his life. His ministry was destroyed. He was deserted by those whom he trusted most, even God his Father. His enemies mocked him and humiliated him... can you identify with this?

L-

The principal has gossiped about us with some of the other lecturers. They now think that we are rebellious people, refusing to submit to his leadership.

When I heard that ... (person's name) has spend hours with us in our home getting us "in line" (report from denomination head office) I became so angry. This is a blatant lie. ... (person's name) never set foot in our house. I even get anxiety attacks ... I can't believe that ... (Principal's name) did it!

Two of my students went to speak to ... (the principal) about this. He and ... (another member of the leadership team) told the students that this was done only for the good of ... (seminary's name). They told the students that they could not talk about the things that had happened. They also asked the students to trust them on this regard.

M-

How do you feel about this?

L-

I felt very sad and disillusioned because I did not think that the leadership would do the things they did. One would expect them to tell the truth, ... at least ...

After a lengthy discussion with this lecturer, I have learned that there was much more to this story than initially mentioned. This lecturer is well qualified and has a vast experience in his field of lecturing. His wife, a medical doctor, started a clinic for aids victims in a rural area. This has become a roaring success story and the South African government uses this clinic as a training base for other similar clinics.

On the other hand, the principal of this seminary has never been involved in any other ministry outside of this specific seminary. The seminary's clinic (in another area) is struggling to keep its doors open. The principal is ill equipped for the task and struggling in his own ministry, and he must have found the lecturer to be a major threat to his ministry. Foster explained it this way:

"To be in a position of authority and not know that your roots are not deep enough into the divine life to command spiritual authority, almost desperate, quagmire. I know the frantic feeling that makes a person strut and puff and devise clever gimmicks to manipulate people into obedience" (*Foster 1989: 154*).

Although the principal is in a position of authority, his roots in God are not deep enough to allow his subordinates to excel towards excellence in their ministries. He cannot live with the thought that people who are supposed to be his “subordinates” can excel beyond the level of the ministry in which he finds himself. This must leave him in a state of extreme vulnerability and nakedness before people. Foster believes that many Christian leaders have experienced this, and he has done so himself. He wrote:

“To this I shall add another reason of my own why we should submit to persons in positions of authority who do not know spiritual authority. We should do so out of common courtesy and out of compassion for the person in that difficult predicament. I have a deep empathy for people in that plight for I have been there myself more than once” (Foster 1989: 154).

Could this be a legitimate reason for Christians to “crucify” other Christians? It is at the hands of our own people that we will experience un-bearable pain in persecution.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT HAS GONE WRONG IN THE BODY OF CHRIST?

SHOULD CONGREGATIONS PROSPER WITHIN GOD'S WILL?

There is a perception amongst many believers that all congregations should and will grow into the milieu of mega: i.e. -mega members, mega finances, mega ministry... They believe that this should also happen in the shortest possible time, because God's hand is upon his Church. The congregation is judged to have failed if this does not take place. In this case, it is obvious that somebody is outside of God's will, which causes a witch-hunt to be conducted in order to find the guilty party. Very often it is the pastor who is blamed for the congregation's inability to function as a mega Church (Rediger 1977: 23).

The theology behind this thinking is that we should prosper when we are functioning within God's will for our lives. This theology is saying, "I believed and trusted God (thus I kept my side of the bargain). God should be showing himself to be the gentleman he is, and keep his side of this agreement we have". This theological thinking is often referred to as the prosperity theology. We already find traces of this theology in the Old Testament as we read in Genesis 28:18 of the event in which Jacob entered into a treaty with God. This treaty included the concept that if God cared for him he would serve God in return. One wonders what would have happened if God had not cared for Jacob in the manner in which he had anticipated God's caring!

Too often to the consternation of these believers, God has proved that his ways are not our ways. The prophet reminds us of this truth:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8 - NIV).

Often it is these “higher ways” of God that will shake our faith to its very core. David wrote in the twenty-third Psalm: *“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters...”* Could these be the words of a man who had it made within his faith walk with God? One needs to turn back just one page and the same author cries out to God; *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent”* (Psalm 22:1-2 - NIV).

God cannot and will not be restricted by our theology because *‘he who scattered Israel will (also will) gather them’* (Jeremiah 31:10 – NIV – the brackets are my own). God’s love and care for his people cannot be measured by our well-being. When Jesus was in the centre of his Father’s will, he died on the cross for something he did not do.

AN IDENTITY CRISES IN THE CHURCH

“Identity confusion contributes to ineffectiveness when pastors try to lead a changing institution in a changing society. We have already mentioned the loss of authority associated with the clergy role, and the expectation of the pastor’s function as CEO’s. But the primary role confusion occurs for pastors when they do what they were trained to do, but find this unacceptable to powerful parishioners and unsupported by denominational offices” (Rediger 1977: 22).

I came to know the truth in the above quote as I pondered upon these words, “You are the one to crack the whip”. With these words Peter (See introduction) encapsulated an entirely different theology, which contradicted God’s picture of the shepherd caring for his flock. For me, this obscured the image of the role of a shepherd, changing it into a ranger. The flock is no

longer lead, but are driven towards the goal. It is sad, but many top-level denominational leaders share Peter's view of "cracking the whip" upon Church members. Rediger believes that this is a result of these leaders achieving their offices through a political process (Rediger 1977: 41).

As an inexperienced pastor this "cracking of the whip" and the theology it represented, caused much confusion in my mind. How could I force people into God's Kingdom? Jesus never forced himself upon people! In fact, Jesus made it very clear that his disciples could choose whether or not they wanted to follow him.

To me, the narrative in Mark's gospel, (chapter ten) became the pivotal point of many of my thoughts concerning this subject. The Rich Young Man fell on his knees before Jesus; "*what must I do to inherit eternal life*"? Jesus looked at him and he loved him (verse 21). Then Jesus demanded, "keep within the law, go sell your earthly possessions, come, follow me". He never forced the young man to do what was required of him. Neither did Jesus lower the required standards in order for the young man to inherit God's promise. Jesus loved him and knew what the best choice would be, but the young man had to make this choice himself. When he did not choose wisely, Jesus allowed this young man to make the wrong choice. Most disturbing to me, is Jesus' reaction to the young man's wrong choice; "*Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*" (Mark 10:24-25 - NIV). God loves us. He gave us his Son to die for our sin, yet, he allows us to make wrong choices.

A POWER STRUGGLE

Peter used the giving of old worthless items as a means of oppression, with the intention of revealing his financial superiority towards us as a family. I can clearly recall a day when, after yet another disagreement, he threatened to withdraw his financial contribution to our congregation if I continued to oppose his viewpoint. I informed him that I was not for sale. I refused to be bullied into doing what I believed was against God's will, even if it meant sinking financially. He grabbed me by the collar and exclaimed, "You are the most stubborn person I have ever met!" Peter's anger stemmed from the fact that he could not manipulate me by his, seeming, financial superiority. He made no secret of his dislike about this situation.

Much later, I realised that my attitude was wrong in this. Yes, I could never allow Peter's money, nor his hunger for control, to change our ministry into something different from what God willed it to be. Yet, my right words, and even my right actions, with wrong motives are nullified before God. It was only afterwards that I realised that my refusal to submit to Peter was not wrong as such, yet, I stubbornly refused to submit because I have been drawn into this battle for control. This refusal did not come from a servant heart, but a rebellious attitude. Getz wrote that we are free to serve and submit to one another. This harmony that comes through serving will bring freedom in Christ. He wrote:

"This does not mean we lose our individual personalities in some corporate entity. This does not mean we lose our self-identity. Rather, we are free to become all that God created us to become. Our self-identity is established. We are set free from ourselves – free to reach out, to give, to share – in short, we are free to serve God and another. We truly lose our lives to find them again" (Getz 1986: 26).

I now realise I was so scared to lose my freedom in Christ; I became a slave of this conflict. This conflict became all consuming as it robbed me from time, energy, joy, peace; even my personal relationship with God was consumed in this battle. In my battle I lost just that what was too precious to me; my freedom in Christ.

WHAT DOES “CLERGY KILLERS” LOOK LIKE?

Rediger calls these people masters of disguise, as they are;

“only doing this for the good of the Church” (Rediger 1977: 10).

“Clergy killers” are not specific in their choice of attack and will attack any pastor or person that threatens their domain in the Church. Their attacks do not really stem from “personal issues”, as they claim that their actions are motivated by their “deep-rooted concern” for the church (Rediger 1977: 5). Whether their motives really are as pure as they claim could be debated. When the consultation team investigated matters in our congregation, they concluded: *“It was decided that although certain actions of the elders (Peter?) were questionable, their desire was in the Churches good interests at that time”*. I strongly questioned as to how it could be possible that this lying, gossiping, cheating, verbal abuse etc. could be in the best interest of the Church. Could it be that these denominational leaders believe that the end result justified the means? Are they saying that these “killers” intended good, and that is why we should excuse their barbaric actions! What happened to the ethical issues at stake here?

The principal of the seminary where the lecturer was “crucified” (Chapter 3), also “crucified” a young missionary lady. She visited that seminary as a guest lecturer and he accused her falsely of being involved in a lesbian relationship with another missionary. The principal asked her to leave the campus immediately. Many other gossip stories originated and were spread from this seminary concerning these young ladies while they were still in South Africa. Some of their supporting congregations contacted them to hear what was going on. They even lost of their support because of the stories that were spread. This missionary left South Africa to return to her field of service, but she was devastated. Once again I ask the question, “How could this happen in the body of Christ?”

The principal realised his “mistake” and spent two days on an aeroplane so that he could fly to the other side of the world in order to beg her to forgive him, just to “crucify” the lecturer one month later. It sounds so bizarre! I wonder if any person in its right mind could justify such actions. This also made me wonder how pure his motives were when he begged for forgiveness. Repentance should lead to a changed heart. Guthrie believes that there are two kinds of remorse:

“In Matthew’s record, the remorse of Judas follows almost immediately after the bitter weeping of Peter. The two events present a remarkable contrast: for Peter, remorse led to restoration; for Judas, to hopeless self-destruction. The difference lay in the relationship of the two men to Jesus. Peter’s denial was in the context of his genuine devotion to Jesus, whereas Judas’ heart never glowed with the warmth of loyalty. He was completely out of alignment with the mission of Jesus, and yet he is said to have repented. What is meant by this? Matthew states that when Judas saw that the Jewish council had condemned Jesus, he ‘repented’ –suggesting some change of mind when the matter became a fait accompli. Many men set on some evil course have tasted the gall of remorse when the grim consequences of their designs became visible, however much the consequences had been foreseen and in some sense desired” (Guthrie 1972: 333)

The principal's remorse did not lead to a change of heart. Thus I have to come to the conclusion that his remorse is more related to Judas' kind. This poor man did not know the true repentance of a Peter. This makes one tremble and wonder if the principal's remorse will also lead "*to hopeless self-destruction*"?

"Clergy killers" will do almost anything in their power to get their way. They will even intimidate peace-loving members by letting it be known that they are prepared to fight dirty in order to get their own way (Rediger 1977: 10). It was only after our "crucifixion" that we realised that Peter had financially intimidated and manipulated some of the congregation members so that they would stand against our pastorate. We also learned that not everybody in our congregation wanted to get rid of us. Actually, only a few members desired our departure. As Rediger wrote;

"The majority of Church members are forced to let the pastor go by a small faction of instigators" (Rediger 1977: 13).

It still confuses me as to how these loving and believing Christians could be so influenced to act in such a manner, against their own will, and dare I say conscience?

In the course of time we have also learned that for most members it is more important to have peace in the congregation than to have justice! Because people do not want trouble in the Church, they will turn their eyes away from the reality of what is happening in their presence. Even our denominational

officers would not interfere, thus allowing us to be “crucified”. Rediger believe that members and Church leaders, instead of confronting “clergy killers”, they;

“tend to deny, excuse or pamper them in the Church” (Rediger 1977: 13).

Worse even, in the consultation report Peter was made out to be a hero. He only acted against us because his intentions were for the congregation’s best interest.

WHY DID I STRUGGLE SO MUCH?

Our struggle with Peter became all-consuming in our lives and I found it more and more difficult to meet the needs of our congregation. Everything I wanted to implement, every statement I made, every sermon I preached was continuously criticised by Peter and the few people who by now had become openly antagonistic towards us. I knew and believed that God could do something about our suffering. Nothing is impossible with God. But why didn’t God do something about our pain? After all, he is able to change our suffering!

I wrestled with many more such questions during this time. Did God really want us to remain in ministry? Where did we sin? Why was God so quiet about our pain? Could it be that God had become our enemy? These questions pushed my faith right to the edge, as Yancey wrote:

“Can a person believe even when God appears to him as an enemy? Or is faith one more product of environment and circumstance?” (Yancey 1988: 199).

During this time I came under the conviction that Yancey is right in saying:

“...It struck me forcefully there that our common impressions of God may be very different from the God the Bible actually portrays” (Yancey 1988: 48).

As a caregiver, pastor, and preacher I often proclaimed that God’s love is free. We can do nothing to earn it. We can do nothing to forfeit it. Yet, I worked so hard, and I expected God to treat me better than he had done, because of my great effort. Only with hindsight I realised that this view contained hidden elements of the prosperity theology. Why did God not intervene on our behalf when I tried to do my best for him?

Through the words in Isaiah 53:10 God showed me that he sometimes wants us to suffer: *“Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering...”* Could it be that God wanted us to suffer? This thought went against everything I wanted to believe about God, and I found myself in foreign territory with God.

As I started pondering this newly found wisdom I reached a point where I realised that I could not fathom God’s ways. I had to trust him even when the things around me did not make any sense to me. Through the words of Yancey I learned that:

“God doesn’t care so much about being analysed. Mainly, he wants to be loved ... (Yancey 1988: 50).

Jesus said that the biggest command of all is to love the Lord with all our heart and strength (Luke 10: 27). God wants to be loved, more than anything else. He wants to be our personal God: Yancey again;

The people who related to God best – Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah – treated him with startling familiarity. They talked to God as if he were sitting in a chair beside them, as one might talk to a counsellor, a boss, a parent, or a lover. They treated him like a person” (Yancey 1988: 49).

SUFFERING BECAUSE OF OBEDIENCE

These events also had huge financial implications for my family. We had no ministry to support us financially, which caused our day-to-day living to become a real survival struggle. We were left with no ministry, no home and no money. Yes, the possibility is there that we were “crucified” and crushed because God willed it to be! Yet, I still did not make any sense in what happened to us neither did this knowledge make it easier to accept.

It is through the words of Foster that I came to a deeper insight into God’s love for us:

“Christ’s love is free but it could never be cheap... The life that pleases God is not set in religious duties, it is to hear His voice and to obey His word” (Foster 1989: 37).

We could never please God through our suffering. Neither could we please God by any other actions. The only way to please God is to hear his voice and obey his commands, and if that includes suffering, then God will be pleased through our suffering! Not because we are suffering, but because we are obedient. Although this insight never took away our pain, it brought relief in the sense that I realised that God is present in our suffering. He also feels our pain.

After our “crucifixion” we left the congregation and the mission organisation. We felt God’s guidance to remain in ministry, but personally I experienced a time of extreme spiritual dryness. I just could not motivate myself to minister to people. I struggled to pray to God, and opportunities to preach were very limited. When I did get the opportunity it was a real battle to speak with conviction. I really wanted time out from ministry, but with strong conviction I

knew that God had called me and I would be walking in complete disobedience if I quit the ministry. I did my best to remain obedient to God, but often felt that this was just a show, as we were not really ministering into people's lives. We were obedient to what we believed God wanted us to do, but this obedience was a huge sacrifice.

GOD'S RESPONSE TO OUR SUFFERING

Guthrie said:

"Jesus never expected his mission to be popular" (Guthrie 1972: 315).

The "crucifying" of believers is not a new phenomenon as Jesus already warned his disciples that they will weep when the world rejoices.

"It would seem to them that they were on the losing side, but Jesus knew that just as surely as his own sorrow would be turned into joy – so would theirs" (Guthrie 1972 p316).

The gospel of our Lord is a gospel of love, but it is also a gospel of conflict because nobody can be apathetic towards God's love. One either loves and accepts it, or utterly rejects it. Jesus said, *"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters"* (Matthew 12:30 - NIV). Being in God's will often means that we need to go against what people expect of us and often that is the catalyse for conflict.

Mediocre people do not make a difference. Radical people are "crucified". This is the choice you and I have to make in serving God.

CHAPTER 5

**BELIEVING IN CHRIST,
YES;
SERVING PEOPLE,
NEVER AGAIN**

WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS?

I seriously had to wrestle with the fundamental question of whether it is possible to believe in Christ, having him as one's personal Saviour, but not serving people. Is it possible to say, I will serve God but I will not serve the people created in God's image? Is it possible to walk past the homeless or the prostitute, without caring what he or she will eat or where they will sleep tonight, and still say, I believe in Jesus Christ?

Jesus told a story of sheep and goats (Matthew 25) being separated, not because of their faith or lack of faith. They were separated on account of their service or lack of service to humankind. To the one was said:

"... I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:35-36 - NIV).

Come, stand on my right. To the other the king said:

"... I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me" (Matthew 25:42-43 - NIV).

You may stand on my left! The sheep and the goats were separated on the basis of their service to humankind. Yet, it was Jesus himself who said: *"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent"* (John 6:29 - NIV) because: *"without faith it is impossible to please God"* (Hebrews 11:6 - NIV).

How can it be that we find such contradicting statements in God's Word? Faith or service, which one will it be? James also wrestled with this same question and came to this conclusion: *"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to*

have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? (James 2:14 - NIV). True faith in Jesus is manifested through our service to the neighbours God has given to us! Through serving people we are also serving God. Could the flip side of what James was saying then be, “if I will not serve people, I cannot serve God?”

From James we have learned that our faith in God is manifested in our service to people. Foster wrote that our service should not be motivated through a guilty conscience as our;

“service cannot be done in absentia. It necessitates our personal involvement” (Foster 1989 p174).

Our motive for serving should be birthed through our love, firstly, towards God, and secondly, towards our neighbours (Matthew 23: 37-39). That is what God's law requires from believers.

Not only should we serve people, we also belong to each other. As Watson wrote:

“The overwhelming emphasis is on our corporate life together in Christ. We belong to one another; we are to serve one another; we are to strengthen and encourage one another” (Watson 1930: 61).

To love your neighbour does not mean to live in peace with one another, as this peace is merely tolerance of one another. Paul said that the Church is the body of Christ and each believer has a specific part to play within this body (1 Corinthians 12: 12-30). Christ is the head of this body, which consists of the believers. But we as members are so interconnected that none of us can claim Christ to be our head, unless we belong and are totally committed to the rest of this body. Thus, in our total commitment towards God, we should be

equally committed towards each other, because we are part of this one body of Christ!

WHERE DID THIS LEAVE ME?

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18 - NIV). Emilio Castro said:

“The cross of Jesus Christ is the only overcoming of all human pretensions and the removal of all obstacles created by our own shortcomings” (Poser 1987: 21).

I personally believe that it is not only the overcoming of pretensions, but as a Christian, the cross of Jesus Christ is the only point of reference relating to the world we are living in. This cross enables Christians to see the suffering of the powerless and marginalized. It is the same cross that allows us to see the hope we have in Jesus Christ as God’s redemption to this world.

It is through the influence of the cross on our lives that we are able to reflect this hope to the people around us. What does my faith mean to my neighbour? Yes I need to serve people, and the cross is the overcoming of all pretensions, but the question I wrestled with, “How can I serve people, bringing healing to them, when I myself, am bleeding. How can I as a ‘wounded’ person lead others, who were also struggling in their Christian walk?”

THE PRICE WE PAY TO SERVE AND CARE FOR OTHERS

Jesus’ care for our world has cost him his life, why then should our care for the world cost us less? Solomon wrote that most Christians do not believe that:

"success comes out of failure, gain out of loss, victory through defeat and life out of death" (Solomon 1992: 96).

All Christians believe that Christ was crucified and died, was resurrected and ascended into Heaven, but not all believers understand that they share in Christ's suffering.

Truly loving care for people will cause many wounds to be inflicted upon us. It will leave us scarred for life. Campbell wrote:

"As we seek more deeply for those resources of help and guidance which we have to offer others in pastoral care we find them in a surprising place – in our vulnerability" (Campbell 1981: 37).

But we can never say that the price is too high. We cannot say that we do not want to care, because, according to wise, for Christ's disciples:

"Pastoral care is not adjunct to the ministry; it is the very core" (Wise 1989: 12).

We cannot opt to care, because we have to care!

Through our service we share the hope that God gave us, and in sharing this hope in a hopeless situation, we become *"the light of the world"* (Matthew 5:14 – NIV). What better care can we offer people than giving them hope, love and acceptance through a victorious life in Christ?

In Genesis chapter twelve God's call to Abraham included a covenant (Verse 2-3):

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (NIV).

Verse 2 ends with these words, *"and you will be a blessing"*. And again God said at the end of verse 3, *"and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"*. God called

Abraham and blessed him. Yet, God's blessing was never meant exclusively for Abraham, nor was it meant for Abraham's descendants only. God's intention was to use Abraham to be a blessing to the nations around him as he said, *"all peoples on earth will be blessed through you!"*

As Christians we so easily claim that Jesus' love for us has cost him his life... and surely one of the most quoted verses in the Bible confirms this, *"for God so loved the world..."* Yes, Jesus died for us, but you and I can never diminish this act of real love by claiming it for ourselves alone. Jesus died for you and for me, but let us not forget, he died for the rest of the world as well. This is the good news of the gospel! (1 John 3:16). If we truly use the cross as our point of reference, we cannot escape from the world we are living in, as we are called to live out the same love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross.

IT ALL BEGINS WITH ME

"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36 - NIV).

Pastoral care begins with me as the caregiver. If I want to use the cross of Jesus as my point of reference I need to know what my position is in relation to the cross. Paul claims to be an ambassador for Christ. Ambassadors speak out on behalf of the countries they represent. However, an ambassador cannot represent a country unless he or she is a citizen of that country. Before I can claim to be an ambassador for Christ, I have to be sure that I am a citizen of God's kingdom. I need to ask myself, what is my position when I look at the cross?

HOW DO WE SERVE GOD’S PEOPLE?

As human beings, our greatest spiritual need is the need to belong. To care for and serve people means to remember, or rather, to “re-member”. To make someone a member of a community by allowing people to become part of our lives. This will make them a member of the society we live in, or is it rather us becoming a member of their society! (Patton 1993: 28). From Campbell we learn that we become companions on the same journey, this journey that we are making ourselves. As travelling companions we will gain authority to become friends and comrades on this journey (Campbell 1981: 82).

I believe that as carers we become evangelists, taking the good news of Jesus Christ to care-seekers, but the task of the evangelist is not to try to prove the existence of God in propositional terms, but rather to share one’s experiences of satisfied needs. I need to communicate what God did for me as caregiver, in times of difficulty and suffering.

WHY DO WE SERVE PEOPLE?

It would be arrogant to say that only Christians can care. People of other religions have proved that they are capable of caring and serving the people around them. Often their care excels the care that we find within Christian communities. I believe the biggest difference in care between Christians and people of other religions is born out of the motive for the care offered. Why then do we care? This might prove to be a very difficult question to answer honestly.

Jesus cared for people, calling himself the good shepherd. He is the one who lay down his life for the sheep. Paul urges us to do likewise (1 Corinthians 11:1). Following the example of Christ will prove to be very difficult if we do not share Christ's motive in doing this. Our motive for caring is founded upon Christ's care for us. We care because we dare not give up on humanity. God never gave up on people as he gave his only begotten Son as a sacrifice on the cross.

True pastoral care is to give your life to your neighbour in need, as Oates wrote:

"... to heal sometimes, to remedy often, to comfort always" (Oates 1974: 7).

Through the cross we as caregivers are inseparable from each other as we belong to the same body with the same task. We are all called to be ministers of reconciliation.

Our care for people will often be free of charge, but it will never be cheap to the caregiver. Jesus gave us eternal life, free of charge, but it has cost him his life. God sent us his Son to seek and save the lost and to bring healing to the sick. Jesus in turn delegated this task to his disciples, yet, never excluding suffering and pain (John 20:21).

CHAPTER 6

JESUS ON THE CROSS

THE PRICE OF CHANGE

Our change from being sinners, to be called children of God, has cost Jesus his life. De Bruijne understand that change will always be costly, and he wrote this about change:

“For every change someone, somewhere, must have paid a price” (De Bruijne 1990: 7).

It is a fact that change, which is inevitable during our life here on earth, will cause us pain. Whether this pain will affect our lives positive or negative, will be determined by the most difficult choices we will ever make. We could never choose to avoid pain, but we can choose to forgive, to love, to reconfirm those who inflicted this pain upon us. The price of these choices, however, will be extremely high, no matter what we choose. The price to forgive is high, and often causes more pain, but the price not to forgive will prove to be even higher.

This choice is not whether we will change or not, since change is inevitable, but how will we respond to this change. It is these choices that will determine the outcome of our pain. Pain can bring about positive fruit in our lives, leaving us to be more like Jesus. Yet, if we choose to run away, or fight this pain, the evidence of that pain will become more severe, because God has chosen to use pain as his agent of change. The wrong choices around pain will leave us embittered, and will eventually destroy our lives.

Herhold believe that there are three components needed for change, so that we could become more like the person God wants us to be. These

components are: love, encouragement and pain. Yet, it is the component of pain that will strip us from all the unimportant factors of life (Herhold 1979: 17). Through pain we learn about the true values in life, e.g. money could never replace our spiritual need of love and encouragement.

It does not matter how we look at it, pain is part of our process of change, and change is the one thing God wants most from us.

OUR PAIN, A SHADOW OF THE CROSS ON CALVARY

As servants of the Most High God, you and I should seek our answers for life's most pressing questions from God's Word. We need to ask ourselves how does Jesus' suffering and pain apply to my relationship to God's people. It was the writer of the book of Hebrews, who suggests that our sanctuary and law is a shadow of what God has install for us in heaven (Hebrews 8:5 & 10:1). Could it be too far fetched then, to suggest that our suffering is a shadow of what happened to Christ at the hands of his own people? In this chapter I will try to draw a parallel between Jesus' crucifixion on Calvary and our "crucifixion" on earth.

Before I continue, I want to clarify that our "crucifixion" can only be a shadow of the suffering and pain Christ experienced on Calvary. What is a shadow? A shadow has no substance, as it is merely the absence of light. Shadows cannot exist unless something prevents light from shining upon a surface, thus it cannot exist on its own. We also know that a shadow takes on the shape of the outline of the object from which it is formed. With this in mind, I

repeat, our suffering is only a shadow of the suffering of Christ, a rather mild reflection of Christ's suffering. Foster wrote;

"Our Lord's unique service of redemption through the cross is unrepeatable. However we are called to serve through the many little deaths of going beyond self. And as we live out our lives for the good of others, amazingly we find ourselves, we discover our sense of place" (Foster 1989: 173).

Can I blame people for my "crucifixion", or must I seek God's hand in this?

Could it be that God willed it for us to suffer? I can only echo Guthrie as he wrote that:

"Jesus was not sacrificed for his own sake, but for the sake of others" (Guthrie 1972: 318).

I believe that we could never claim the same for our "crucifixion", yet, it is true that many people could benefit from our experiences. Payne wrote that this pain could have redemptive consequences:

"This suffering is redemptive in the sense that we literally carry his love and forgiveness into the lives of others" (Payne 1989: 201).

However, I also have the choice to allow this experience to have negative consequences in my sphere of influence.

WHAT HAPPENED TO JESUS?

Jesus' enemies mocked him and humiliated him. They physically abused him to the point where; *"his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness"* (Isaiah 52:14 - NIV). The twelve people he poured his life into, ran away when the trouble started. One of his closest companions disowned him. When this man was confronted; *"He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, 'I don't know this man you're talking about'"* (Mark 14:71 - NIV). Jesus was left to suffer alone. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are

one, yet the Son experienced so much loneliness on the cross that he had to cry out: "*Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani?*" (Matthew 27:46 NIV). Those whom he trusted most deserted him to die alone in public, naked!

During this time of my suffering I was exposed to the very core of my being. The reports from our leadership and from the consultation were distributed in an open meeting of our synod. Every time I saw these lies written in these reports I felt like screaming it out; "Is there no justice in this court?"

We remained in the same city and many people from other congregations were asking questions about what happened to us. We very seldom gave them any detail because I felt that it would be disloyal to the friends we still had in the congregation.

Months later a lady friend of ours called us with an urgent request to see us. We were surprised because she had avoided us after our "crucifixion", as did many other people. When we walked into her home she very apologetically asked us for forgiveness and said; "For a long time I have believed a lie about you. I don't know why, but I have actually believed all the gossip stories about you." This lady came to the truth, months later, but how many other still believe this gossip?

One of the people I have interviewed has left the Church, and in fact, he has left the faith. An elder in his congregation spread lies about him being involved in black magic and African ancestral worship. These stories destroyed this

young man's ministry and also the dreams he had for his congregation. He now lives on the streets of our city.

THE TRIAL

"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7 - NIV).

Guthrie explained this about Jesus' choice to remain silent before his accusers:

"The chief priests and scribes became increasingly vociferous in accusing Jesus. The longer He kept silent the more they spoke. Yet His silence spoke louder than their words. The prosecution's behaviour furnished a cue for Herod's soldiers to pour contempt and mockery on the silent prisoner. The king himself joined in the mockery. He draped over Jesus a gorgeous robe, but Jesus made no protest. This may seem to indicate weakness. Whose approach, however, has history shown to be more powerful – Herod's, or the Messiah's? Herod had met his match. Doing nothing to resolve the case, he could only send Jesus back to the governor" (Guthrie 1972: 337).

Jesus said nothing to defend himself. However, it does not mean that he approved what these people were doing. Actually, through his silence he made a very strong statement. His accusers already decided what they wanted to do and nothing that Jesus could have said would have changed the situation.

We see the same kind of passive resistance from Ghandi. He said something to the effect of, "When they kill me, they will have my dead body; they will never have my obedience".

During the time of our 'trial' we had to learn to remain quiet. Even when Peter falsely accused us before our denominational leaders we did not break the

silence. Many people could not understand why we opted to do it this way. To be honest, I did not really understand it myself. I just knew that God did not want us to respond to these lies. Only much later did I understand that if these officers really wanted to know the truth they could have investigated and they would have found the truth. These officers chose to believe Peter and his followers because it was convenient to do so. They were not really interested in justice. They just wanted to avoid trouble ... and the sacrifice to have “peace” was my family and I.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

“The trial was over, but it was a travesty of justice. In the mystery of God’s plan of redemption, it had to be so. The just was about to die for the unjust. It was imperative that His innocence should be verified by the judgement of the highest judiciary in Palestine. In a local sense, Jesus was the substitute for the revolutionary Barabbas, who thus became a type of all other unjust men in whose place the Messiah died, as Christians later came to recognize. He was delivered to the Roman soldiers who would carry out the sentence that Pilate had never wanted to give” (Guthrie 1972 p342).

“Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand” (Isaiah 53:10 - NIV). It is through Jesus’ suffering that we have received a guilt offering as there can be no forgiveness without blood (Hebrews 9:22). Jesus also said that a seed must first die before it can bring forth fruit (John 12:24), and the fruit we see from Jesus’ death is our salvation. Eternal life in Christ cannot be separated from the death of Christ Jesus. Our death in “crucifixion” could never bring eternal life to people, but it did bring about change in us.

Nobody ever enjoys experiencing the cross; not even God did. We had to die before we could become the new people that we are in Christ. Jesus died on the cross for humankind's benefit, but I "died" for my own benefit. Jesus died; was resurrected and received total glory before the Father. We "died", and we are still in the process of being "resurrected", but already our spirituality has reached a much deeper level before our Father, than previously. Could it be that other people will also benefit from our deepening in God?

"Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Hebrews 5:8-9 - NIV).

Jesus is God, was always God, and always will be God; yet, he had to learn obedience on the cross. Through this obedience came authority in heaven and on earth, which results in every knee bowing, and every tongue confessing the Lordship of Christ (Romans 14:11). It is only the Lamb who was slain, that was found worthy of opening the scroll (Revelation 5).

It is because of Jesus' obedience that we have the right to be called, children of God (John 1: 12). Milingo worte:

"It is Jesus who has shared his Sonship with me, which is why I am today a child of God. Just as 'through him all things came to be' – meaning through Christ Jesus who is known as the Word of God – I find that my second sonship as a child of God has also been worked out through Him. God uttered a word in order that I should be created, and that word was Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and so I came into being. Again, after my ancestors Adam and Eve sinned, it is through the incarnation of Jesus Christ that I am able once again to say I am a child of God. As in the beginning God said 'Let us make man into our own image' and a man came into being, the same thing happened when we had sinned. God said, 'Let us save man from his misery,' and so in Jesus, God Himself became man in order to recreate me. This is how today I am able to be called a child of God" (Milingo 1985: 106).

BUT FIRST THERE WAS GETHSEMANE

Gethsemane was no picnic. Jesus wrestled in prayer to the point *where, "his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground"* (Luke 22:44 NIV). It was here in the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus' will was submitted to his Father's will when he said; "Not my will, but let your will be done" (Luke 22:42). For most "crucified" Christians the Gethsemane experience only comes after they have been "crucified". Like Jesus we too need a Gethsemane where we can say; "Not my will, let your will be done!" Because without Gethsemane our "crucifixion" will only bring pain, bitterness, and we will see no positive fruit from this suffering.

Jesus died naked, exposed in his fullness to the observing crowd! We too will "die naked", fully exposed to the "observing crowd"! It is only in "Gethsemane" where we will find the strength to be "crucified" for God's purposes. Payne wrote that:

"When we make our will one with God's, we find that integration of personality begins to take place" (Payne 1989: 73).

Only in Gethsemane will we find peace through this pain inflicted upon us.

CHAPTER 7

WHAT THEN SHOULD
OUR RESPONSE
TO OUR CROSS BE?

“CRUCIFIED” FOR CHRIST

Why are we crucified? Could God not bring about change in us in any other way? These are the questions Yancey wrestled with as he wrote:

“God holds back; he hides himself; he weeps. Why? Because he desires what power can never wins. He is a king who wants not subservience, but love. Thus, rather than moving down Jerusalem, Rome, and every other worldly power, he chose the slow, hard way of Incarnation, love, and death. A conquest from within” (Yancey 1988: 126).

“God is more interested in what he can do within you than what he can do through you”. This was the opening statement of my first lecture in seminary. Now, many years later, I am still pondering upon the truth of these words. Ministry is not so much what I do, it is what I am. That which God allows in my life builds and shapes what I am. And it is what I am, that will accomplish God's true purposes in my life.

Our problem is not so much the fact that we are “crucified”. Rather, it is our response to our “cross”. Many people react by withdrawing from the things that cause so much pain because they simply cannot bear them any longer. Unfortunately, we cannot escape this pain. Sometimes we try to escape, and in so doing, we separate ourselves from the source of this pain. This will leave us at a place far from God's presence.

There are also those people that deny these painful circumstances in their lives. They cannot believe that this is really happening because God will not allow so much suffering. Thus, in their opinion, it must be Satan who needs to be blamed. They believe that if they persevere long enough the enemy will tire and move on. In their denial of what God is doing in their lives they separate

themselves from God. More often than not, these are the tired people wondering in the “desert” for many years, suffering endlessly and aimlessly.

Payne wrote that this separation and evil are closely related:

“Evil, theological speaking, is separation from God – and in that condition, separation from our fellows, the good earth, and all creation as well. Evil, psychologically speaking, is separation within ourselves. In truth, the fallen self cannot know itself”(Payne 1989: 58)

Once we are separated from self, we lose reality in life itself and we lose our self-identity.

But there is also another option. We could enter into our suffering and wrestle with God. Jacob’s wrestling with God lasted throughout the night, but the sun rose again the next morning and it brought an end to this struggle. Wrestling with God left him limping, but Jacob also overcame. According to Ross, there is a strong link between hearing and overcoming! (Ross 2000: 15). One cannot claim to have heard if one is not willing to overcome! Without wrestling with our suffering in God, we cannot overcome the pain. How then could we claim to have heard what God was saying through the suffering, because we could not overcome our “cross”!

Jacob wrestled with God and walked away limping for life. Our wrestling with God will leave us scarred for life. But it is through the scars upon our Lord that we are saved. Yancey wrote that:

...“in many ways the act of Re-creation is ‘harder’ than creation, for it relies on flawed human beings. Surely, it has cost God more: the death of his Son. Still, God insists on healing the world from the bottom up, rather than from the top down” (Yancey 1988: 198).

Our re-creation in God will leave us limping, but it has cost God more. It has cost God his Son!

HOW DID JESUS REACT TO THE CROSS?

Jesus came to serve people, and the very same people crucified him. *"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him"* (John 1:11 - NIV). How did Jesus respond to the cross and to the people who crucified him? Did he return to the scene of the crime to take revenge? What about his disciples that disowned him?

On the cross Jesus cried out; *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* (Luke 23:34 - NIV). Three times the disciple disowned him, three times Jesus asked; *"Simon son of John, do you love me?"* (John 21:17 - NIV). Three times the disciple was reinstated into the task the Lord laid upon him. "Go Simon and feed my sheep". With these words Jesus not only reinstated Simon Peter, he also appointed him to a higher position than he had prior to disowning the Lord. Now, even through his death, Peter would bring glory to God (John 21:19).

Not once do we hear an angry word directed towards those who caused Jesus so much pain. There was no bitterness, yet Jesus acknowledged his cross. Come, *"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side"* (John 20:27 - NIV). He said to Thomas, -"see the scars, put you finger in the marks, so that you can find healing. See Thomas, I have suffered for your Salvation".

Yet, the greatest words of unselfish love were uttered while Jesus hung on the cross. "Dear woman, here is your son," and also, "Here is your mother" (John 19:26-27 - NIV). Jesus' pain didn't cause him to become inwardly focused. During this time of suffering he kept on asking, "how could I bring healing while I am bleeding too"? Even in this time of suffering he intervened to improve life quality for people around him. Dortzbach believe he did it:

"to secure the increase of life and privilege of another" (Dortzbach 2002: 25).

From this we see that Jesus' suffering became a redemptive suffering, because he never isolated himself from his people. His suffering actually became the means with which he used to bind people's wounds in a deeply human manner. His wounds became a source of healing rather than an increase in misery (Dortzbach 2002: 109).

PURPOSE IN OUR SUFFERING

The most difficult characteristic of the Christian faith is that we need to accept God just the way he is. We must love God for the person he is and not because he can do things for us, or because we are afraid of what he can do to us. This will imply that our love for God will unite us with God, even through 'Gethsemane' and 'Golgotha'. Yet, many people will resist this total commitment towards God because they fear the real pain 'Gethsemane' and 'Golgotha' will bring (Herhold 1986: 10).

The Difference between Jesus' life philosophy and ours is manifested in these words Jesus spoke, "Let not my will be done, but yours, Father" (Luke 22: 42). Most human beings biggest striving in life is to be happy. Even when People

do God's will, they often do it with a hidden agenda, because the joy of the Lord is our strength, (Nehemiah 8: 10) and joy is most treasured. The problem is that so often joy and happiness is believed to be synonymous. Yet, God's joy is not equal to happiness. Happiness is closely related to circumstance because it receives its energy from external sources, whereas joy, is sourced from God. God's gift of joy is far deeper than the absence of pain. Strangely enough, but often, once people begin to pursue God's joy in the midst of pain, happiness will manifest as fruit of their effort.

It is only once we realise that our pain and struggles build and change our character, will we begin to embrace our pain. The problem is that this change of our character is always embroiled in pain. Yet, once we begin to embrace God's purpose in pain, we will find meaning in our suffering. We can never enjoy our pain, yet the struggle that accompanies this pain is the agent used by God to bring about change in us. Our biggest challenge is to trust that God has a purpose with our lives and in our pain. We need to trust God that this pain we experience will take us on a journey to a better destination (Herhold 1986: 14). Yet, Yancey wrote:

"We may at times question God's wisdom and lose patience with his timetable"
(Yancey 1988: 201).

Knowing God is more than knowledge about God. It is more than facts or theological truths. Knowing God requires faith, faith that will enable us to believe and accept that God has a purpose in our lives. This knowledge through faith will manifest in joy that cannot be taken from us. Yet, so often we

let go of this joy because we are scared to remain at the point of total commitment toward God (Herhold 1979: 11).

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO OUR “CROSS”?

Our pain often causes many questions to be raised within us. Like Job, we very seldom find the answer to the question why we suffered so much. God never gave Job any explanation, nor asked his pardon. *“Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me”* (Job 38:3 - NIV). Instead of answers, Job was burdened with more questions. But it is through these questions that God revealed himself to Job and through which Job was able to respond, *“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know ... and repent in dust and ashes”* (Job 42:3 & 6 - NIV). The purpose in our suffering is not so much to find the answers to our battles, as it to find faith in God. Yancey explain it in these words;

“Job teaches that at the moment when faith is hardest and least likely, than faith is most needed. His struggle presents a glimpse of what the Bible elsewhere spells out in detail: the remarkable truth that our choices matter, not just to us and our destiny but, amazingly, to God himself and the universe he rules” (Yancey 1988:200).

Amazingly, but in our battle to find answers we can make an idol of our suffering! Foster wrote that:

“The person who does not seek the kingdom of God first, does not seek it at all. Worthy as all our other concerns may be, the moment they become the focus of our efforts they become idolatry” (Foster 1989 p107).

When our pain does not bring us closer to God, it will take us further away from him and will often leave us at a place far from God. We will not be able to hear God’s voice as so many other voices will drain this still voice we so long to hear. Leanne Payne wrote that:

“Self-pitty, envy, covetousness, pride are all voices temptation in a fallen world. When we begin to listen to them, we don’t listen to God. We obey the other voices” (Payne 1989: 72).

When our pain does not open our ears to hear God’s word, we will obey these other voices.

WHERE IS GOD WHEN WE ARE “CRUCIFIED”?

Often, during these experiences, we feel separated from God. Could it be that God really forsake his children! We find comfort in the words of Yancey:

“When God seems absent, he may be closest of all. When God seems dead, he may be coming back to life” (Yancey 1988: 252).

Because of Jesus, God does understand our loneliness on the cross. At Gethsemane and Calvary, God himself was forced to be confronted with separation from God;

“God striving for God” (Yancey quote Martin Luther 1988: 282).

On that difficult day God had to learn, for himself, what it means to feel God-forsaken. Many people would argue that God does not hide from us. A religious bumper sticker reads, “If you feel far from God, guess who moved?” Yet, the Book of Job teaches us that it was God who moved. Even though Job had done nothing wrong and he cried for help, God still chose to hide from him (Yancey 1988: 281).

In preparation for writing his book, Yancey spent three weeks in the mountains of Colorado. During this time he read through the entire Bible and discovered many truths therein. He wrote;

“In my study of the Bible, I was struck by the radical shift in its authors’ attitudes about suffering, a shift that traces direct back to the Cross. When New Testament writers speak of hard times, they express none of the indignation that characterizes Job, the

prophets, and many of the psalmists. They offer no real explanation for suffering, but keep pointing to two events – the death and resurrection of Jesus – as they form some kind of pictographic answer” (Yancey 1988: 252).

Jesus said that unless a seed dies it could bear no fruit. The fruit of our death upon our “cross” will bring glory to God, if only we would allow it to.

LIFE AFTER DEATH ON A “CROSS”

The only door to life after our “crucifixion” is through forgiveness: Forgiveness towards self, forgiveness towards God, forgiveness toward those who nailed us to the “cross”. We need to forgive ourselves because during our time of pain we made many wrong choices. We need to forgive God because he allowed this pain in our lives as he left us to suffer alone. We also need to forgive the “crucifiers” for the pain they have inflicted upon us.

Yet, true forgiveness will not come easily. To forgive is often a self-denying choice we need to make because our emotions will fight it vigorously.

Dorzbach wrote:

“The decision to forgive someone is made in the area of our thinking and our will, not in the area of our feelings. If left to our feelings, we would never forgive others” (Dortzbach quote Retief 2002: 113).

TO CONCLUDE, THE “RESURRECTION”

Six months after we left our congregation, one of the elders, who still served in the congregation, died. Her family asked me to take the memorial service. Peter did his best to stop me from ministering in that building once again, but her family insisted that I should preach the sermon. It was not easy to stand

before this congregation, once again, and preach, but I felt honoured that the family really wanted me to take the service.

It was a routine memorial service. Nothing spectacular happened, yet, at the same time something extraordinary happened. Although I could not pin point exactly what this was, but during this service God “resurrected” me into ministry once again. This was only the beginning, but a new life sprung into being.

Today I still have many scars to remind me of the “cross”. And sometimes these memories still bring pain. Yet in the words of King I found yet another reason to not give up:

“... strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be” (Masango quote King 1993: 74).

Together, we are the body of Christ, and together we will bring hope to the people held in God’s memory.

“Resurrection comes only because there is first a crucifixion. The cross must always predicate resurrection. The second is impossible without the first” (Edwards 1994: 93).

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