

A PILGRIM'S Distress



BSSF3

BSSF-3

**A PILGRIM'S
DISTRESS**

Four Common Spiritual Dilemma

**By
Lee Bee Teik**

BYTE SIZE SOLID FOOD SERIES

For the Ordinary Believer



A Reconre Publication

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About the “Byte Size Solid Food Series”

Why Byte Size?

A byte is a unit of information storage in computer chips which is already an accepted means of messaging technology since the late 20th century in Malaysia. *Byte size* also has the same sound as *bite size*, which is to imply that the BSSF Series is to reach readers with small chewable and digestible amounts of the sharing of God’s word. The Reconre Team prays that you will have an enjoyable meal as you ponder on His word while reading through each title in the series.

Why Solid Food?

Living in a developing nation has its advantages and disadvantages, if hindsight assessment of more developed nations may be a guide. We are glad to discover more of God’s creativity through mankind. However, in our hectic rush to advance in technological research, we may forget the One who alone has endowed us with the means to use and enjoy the fruits of our research. Therefore, this series of small books are the result of an effort to feed not only the minds but also the hearts and souls of readers so that they may fulfill God’s vision of remaking them into His image. For this, we need the solid study and meditation of His word from the Bible, and not only the drinking of the milk of the first teaching when we first trusted Christ to be our Saviour and Lord.

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us in 5:11-14...

“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

Reconre hopes that many other home grown writers and publishers will surface to contribute their solid food through the written word so that God’s people in Malaysia will not remain or become spiritually anaemic. That the pen is mightier than the sword still holds true in many ways, I believe.

Finally, let us proclaim with Jude in :24...now,

“To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only wise God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.”

How to Use this Book

- Take your time to read through the book.
- Pause to ponder in between.
- You may use the main text and later reflections for Personal/Group Study or during your Quiet Times alone with God.
- If used in a group, meet weekly or at any regular interval to share, pray and apply what you have learnt together.
- Suggestion for Personal Reflection:

Spend 30 minutes or more daily [depending on your nutritional deficiency or appetite] meditating on what you have read and talk to Him about it. Better still, take a few days off work and ponder on the reflections with Him by Your side. If you need a venue for this purpose, contact the Reconre staff at www.reconre.org in Malaysia.

Come,

Let us Read...

Let us Listen...

Let us Ponder...

Let us Pray...

Let us Love, Trust & Obey...

JESUS!

A Pilgrim's Distress

Four Common Spiritual Dilemma

Galatians 6:2,5

*“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will
fulfill the law of Christ...
for each one should carry his own load.”*

Many are the woes of humankind, and Christians do not seem to be exempted from them. When we read through the Bible, God seems to want us to know that well. Whether current personal problems are due to our personal sins, the sins of other people or to being in a broken world generally, we do agree that all of us face problems. This knowledge seems to increase as we grow older. How then do we respond to such a condition? One way is to feel defeated, grit our teeth and endure such inner struggles till all pain and sorrow will be no more. The other way is to try to understand what God may be saying to us about Him and us, about others and us and about ourselves, so that His abundant life in us will become increasingly real each day. So we pray, so read and so we ponder... May He be our Guide as we plot on along this journey of discovery together. Shalom!

- Dilemma 1. Difficulties in maintaining a sense of forgiveness (having been forgiven) and assurance of salvation (having been saved once and for all).
- Dilemma 2. Difficulty in surrendering to God wholeheartedly.
- Dilemma 3. Intellectual doubts and questions that seem to block faith in God.
- Dilemma 4. Difficulties in accepting an imperfect self, church and world.

Dilemma I

Difficulties in Maintaining a Sense of Forgiveness and Assurance of Salvation.

In Romans 8:15-16, Paul teaches us about the witness of the Spirit with our spirit that God is our Father. According to Jewish law, it takes two witnesses to confirm a deed. Then, why is it that many Christians, after being convicted of sin and having repented, still feel that they have not been forgiven? Some feel this guilt again...and again...and again. This condition of ***Guilt-Condensation Anxiety*** is often worsened by the accuser's taunts and lies, as in Job's case and confirmed in Rev.12:10. This type of anxiety often creates a deep spiritual and thus emotional and/or mental problem in us. Recall that the whole person consists of body, spirit and soul (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Consequently, when one part suffers, the other parts are affected as well.

Cause of Guilt-Condensation Anxiety

A person's spirit can be so scarred and wounded that he cannot understand or feel the Father as He really is e.g. He is just and yet merciful.

In our natural life, a toddler learns a language of relationship and feeling long before he learns the spoken language of the mind. One positive example is that of John the Baptist who jumped for joy in Elizabeth's womb when Elizabeth excitedly greeted Mary, their visiting relative.

Our childhood feelings usually continue to affect the way we understand relationships, whether with God or man, long after we have become adults. If we have a tendency to be moody, to feel unloved, unimportant and isolated from the righteous because of some past hurts or sins, we may have greater difficulty in accepting the fact that God has actually cleansed us once we have repented and asked Him to forgive us (1 John 1:9). Our new life in Christ takes time to grow to a stage where we are able to increasingly exercise a child-like faith in Him, a faith like that of Adam and Eve before the fall, and a faith like that of the Son of God in His Father God.

Case Study

Peter the Fisherman turned Shepherd

Let us watch how our Lord Jesus lead the “Heroic-Disillusioned/Cynical Peter through his dilemma of being unable to know and feel God’s grace of forgiveness.

Question 1.

Read Luke 22:31-34

How may we describe Peter?

Suggestion:

Peter over-estimated his ability to be loyal to Christ. He appeared to be

- self-opinionated
- unrealistic
- boastful
- rash
- unwilling to take warning seriously and overawed with his own heroic attitude. However, he did try to care for and protect Jesus from harm.

Question 2.

Read Luke 22:54-62

What was Peter's main problem?

Suggestion:

- He took much pride in his own abilities.
- He seemed to have a lack of short-term memory e.g. just a while ago, he pretended he was a stranger to Jesus, he had vouched to be with Jesus all the way, even unto death.
- His cowardly attitude led to his betrayal of a true friend in order to save his own skin.
- He turned to lying at a time of crisis.
- He was impulsive in speech and action.

Did he show remorse that needed to be changed into godly sorrow, which would eventually lead to repentance?

Question 3.

Read John 21:3

How did Jesus heal and transform Peter?

Suggestion:

Confusing Transition

Jesus is alive! He's for real! It was not Jesus who was a coward for not fighting His captors, Peter was.

By then, Peter was too disillusioned with himself for having failed the Master he loved; he felt unworthy to be His follower, he was certainly not good enough for Jesus!

On the other hand, facing one's real self is not easy...he had become cynical and questioned the practicality of returning to His discipleship. What is better and safer to do in times of confusion? Return to his old trade...fishing. It was something familiar and tangible. After all, he'd been at it for years before meeting Jesus. The "born leader" had an instant group of six followers among his old friends!

Healing of Memories through recognizing Jesus...

Actions that reminded Peter of better times with his Master.

The disciples caught nothing. Jesus arrived and told them to throw the net over at the right side. They obeyed an apparent stranger and caught 153 fishes (compare this event with that in Luke 5:1-11) One of them said to himself,

“Wait a minute, I’ve heard that voice before...I’ve witnessed such a miracle before...of course! It’s Jesus!”

What did Peter do?

Impulsive as usual, though he did remember to be decently clothed before his Master, he jumped into the water and rushed towards Him, momentarily forgetting the embarrassment of having recently repeatedly denied Him!

Question 4

Read John 21:4-23

How did Jesus Minister to Peter?

Suggestion:

However, Jesus, whom they had given up of ever becoming their hero again, cooked breakfast for His tired and bewildered old friends. Beside a fire (there was one in the courtyard of the high priest's house), He performed the familiar "ceremony" of the breaking of bread and the sharing of it with His disciples; He broke the fish too and did the same with it, thus reminding them of His manner of ministry...with a difference. Their nets were not going to break with fish any more...their nets would be strong enough to hold all that He led them to catch! On their side, were they willing to be made broken bread for His sake?

Jesus' attention was then focused on Peter, the bullheaded disciple; Jesus gently asked him the same question three times, not once...

"Peter, do you love (from God's agape to brotherly love) Me more than these...your fishes, your career, your family, your friends...yourself? Peter, am I your Friend of friends?"

Impatient Peter felt hurt...

"Why, Lord, Why ask me the same question three times...Don't You trust me? Is it because of my shameful

cowardly act towards You, that night, that You do not believe me any more?...My Lord, please forgive me...it grieves me to have denied my love for You...but You know that I really do love You..."

Yes, the Lord was so gentle (gentleness being a mark of the Holy Spirit's fruit of humility and love) in reassuring Peter of His love for him, and in accepting Peter's love for his Lord. Peter felt forgiven, reconciled and was re-commissioned to feed and care for His lambs and sheep.

What a wonderful ending...but...Peter, as if to illustrate that the reforming of good habits takes time, immediately got into his old attitude of "*running-away-from-unpleasant-experiences*" again when the Master forewarned him of the suffering ahead. One day, he would lose his freedom to go where he wanted; someone else would capture and harm him. He wanted to know why only he had to suffer.

"What about that fellow behind us...John, the one who's often by your side...would he have to suffer too?"

Typical Peter, one might say!

Jesus was quick to respond,

"Peter, mind your own business; never mind about John...you simply follow Me!"

Question 5

What made the crucial difference in Peter's life?

Suggestion:

It is the unchanging friendship of Jesus which gave Peter the courage to take up his own cross (not Jesus' cross), and follow Him! (Tradition has it that humbled Peter asked to be crucified upside down, during the persecution of the early church, since His Master was crucified with His head up.)

Question 6.

Read the hymn below:

Lord, you have come to the Lakeshore

1. Lord, You have come to the lake shore
looking neither for wealthy nor wise ones;
You only asked me to follow humbly.
2. You know so well my possessions;
my boat carries no gold and no weapons;
You will find there my nets and labor.
3. You need my hands, full of caring
Through my labors to give others rest,
And constant love that keeps on loving
4. You, who have fished other oceans,
Ever longed for by souls who are waiting,
My loving friend, as thus You call me.

Chorus:

O Lord , with Your eyes You have searched me,
and while smiling have spoken my name;
now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me;
by Your side I will seek other seas.

United Methodist Hymnal No.344

“What is the Master saying to me?”

Pause and Reflect

Journal your answer to Him.

Guidelines for Receiving His Healing Grace

[*From *Friends of the Bridegroom*, a Reconre Pulication, p.179-180]

1. Pray with a trusted friend or counsellor for healing from past hurts.
2. Make a list of incidents which are troubling you in order to differentiate between your true and false guilt related to those incidents.
3. Forgive those who have sinned against you, and receive God's forgiveness for your resentment or other sins against that person.

You may like to use the booklet on **Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, a Reconre Publication) to guide you.

4. Confess all known and unknown sins, including any occultic associations.
5. Claim God's promises in the written word literally, for example, 1 John 1:9. True guilt is washed away in a split second after confession but false guilt haunts us by its power to trap us in a vicious cycle of self-condemnation and confession of 'false guilt' (which is one of the common causes/symptoms of chronic depression).
6. Reject Satan's lies in Jesus' Name instead of letting anxious feelings weigh us down and stop us from living joyfully in Him.

Some of Satan's lies may sound like this:

- * "You were not sincere enough when you repented."
- * "You are not good enough for God to forgive you."
- * "God does not really love you because you still feel so terrible."
- * "How can you be so sure that you are already saved?"

We may have to repeatedly reject the enemy's lies throughout our pilgrimage on earth. If he did not leave Jesus our Saviour alone, he will probably not leave us alone too. We have the example of Jesus to follow, i.e. remember relevant parts of God's word and use it as the sword of the Holy Spirit. I find it helpful to speak out the appropriate Scripture verse or passage aloud. The armour of God mentioned in Ephesians 6:10-18 is actually Jesus Himself. Hence, consciously putting on or acknowledging His presence in our lives each day helps us affirm His victory over sin, death and the evil one, on our behalf. Jesus restated this in His high priestly prayer in John 17:11-15. Both portions of Scriptures remind us that the Name (which signifies the character and authority of the person) of the Son of God is our Protector.

7. Give thanks to our Father for His faithfulness to His people.

Reflection

1. What was Peter's sin(s) in Luke 22?
2. How did Jesus show He had forgiven Peter?
3. Why did Peter return to his former job?
4. Are you more like Judas or like Peter or neither?

How sure are you about it? What do others know of you?

What are you going to do about it?

OR

If you are already trying to be as loyal to the Lord Jesus as you know how, rejoice for He is rejoicing too!

Dr. Lee Bee Teik is the founding director of Reconre Ministries. She earlier laid down the practice of medicine to be with her children. In 1992, the Lord called her to the writing ministry and then to minister to His fulltime workers through pastoral counselling and quiet retreats. Her other areas of service include the training of lay pastoral counsellors and the facilitating of personal or small group quiet retreats and seminars. Dr Lee is married to Bishop (Dr) Hwa Yung of the Methodist Church in Malaysia and they have three adult children.



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