

WHAT IS OUR CROSS?

By Marta Alves

*“Yet it was our pain that he bore,
our sufferings he endured. We thought of him as stricken,
struck down by God and afflicted, but he was pierced for our sins,
crushed for our iniquity.
He bore the punishment that makes us whole,
by his wounds we were healed.”*

Isaiah 53:4-5

The pain of the soul is greater than the pain of the body. The soul suffers when it feels separated from God. Our home is in the heart of our Lord Jesus. Let us hide in His heart and ask for God to shelter us from suffering and pain, for Christ to hide us in His heart and shelter us from pain.

Be still and know that I am God!

Psalms 46:11

Who am I? I am God's creation. He made me out of nothing. Out of my mother's womb I came with nothing and at the end of time, I will leave this world with nothing, and God will ask me, *“What did you do with the life I gave you?”*

I need to wake up to the reality of pain in the world.

We were created by God with the purpose of knowing, loving Him and following God revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

I thank my family and friends for their prayers. I am in the middle of fighting cancer. There are good days and bad days, and I cannot tell what a day may bring when I wake up in the morning. I turn to God and ask why, but I say: *“May Your will be done.”*

In prayer, I turn to God and ask Him to guide me through the day.

Saint Paul complained about pain. He talked about a thorn in the flesh. In *2 Corinthians 12:7-12*, he says:

“...that I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an

angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Our Lord Jesus said: *"Pick up your cross."*

*"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself,
take up his cross, and follow me."*

Matthew 16:24

What is our cross? Is our cross, sickness? Loneliness? Pain? Fear? Cancer?

We can be sick in the body, mind or spirit. The sickness of the spirit is brought about by fear and lack of trust. Many negative thoughts may fill our mind. What is easier, to conquer the body, the mind or the spiritual pain? On our own, any pain is overwhelming but with God's help we can overcome any pain and be at peace.

Our Lord Jesus loves us like a good shepherd loves His sheep. He told us:

"I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me,

just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.^f

*This is why the Father loves me, because
I lay down my life in order to take it up again."*

John 10:11-17

I like to think of God as the Good Shepherd.

I remember in Switzerland in the summer of 1980. We were staying in Montreux. In a cool afternoon, we drove around Lake Geneva, because we wanted to cross into France and get our passport stamped. As we drove out of town, the traffic almost stopped because there was shepherd boy with his flock crossing the road. There was no fanfare or greatness to the flock. It was a pastoral scene from the

Bible, and to this day, I treasure that memory more than anything else I saw in Switzerland.

I think of Christ as a Good Shepherd always gathering us in an embrace of love and care. I just imaging Him tell us:

Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek, and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Matthew 11:28-30

I think of the love of God for me. I think of Christ, as my Good Shepherd. I have Cancer. Did I plan this? No. Do I turn to God and say: "*Why me?*" Or do I turn to God and ask: "*Why Lord?*" I have done both. I am facing pain and discomfort. I never understood what you go through with cancer, but now I know, and pain is molding me and teaching me many things that I did not know before. Pain has a way to refine the soul. It brings us down where we cannot argue or fight, all we can do is survive.

I believe that life is a gift. Every breath is a gift of life from God.

We look in the Bible and find consolation in the Word of God. Our Lord Jesus said:

*"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself,
take up his cross and follow me."*

Matthew 16:24

Cancer will not have the last word. My cross is heavy, but I accept it. It may become lighter as I turn to God in prayer. Our Lord Jesus Christ rules the world, and He rules over cancer. He has given us life. The greatest gift we can give God in return is to turn to Him in thanksgiving and praise. Why? Because He has given us life.

I do not understand pain. It consumes my every thought. When I may be in the middle of it, I cannot think of anything else, but God is greater than pain.

Pain focuses us on the reality of our existence. We are here for just a moment in time, and one day God will call us and will ask us: "*What did you do with the life I gave you?*"

As I accept God's will in my life, He will bring me closer to Him. There is holiness in suffering. God chose pain to redeem us. Christ was crushed in pain for our sins:

*But He was pierced for our sins,
crushed for our iniquity.*

*He bore the punishment that makes us whole,
by his wounds we were healed.*

Isaiah 53:5

We do not have to suffer alone. We call upon our brothers and sisters to pray for us and walk with us. We offer our pain and pray to Christ to help us carry our cross, so our crosses become lighter. The Lord, Christ our Redeemer is our shepherd:

The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.

In green pastures he makes me lie down; to still waters he leads me;

He restores my soul.

He guides me along right paths for the sake of his name.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

your rod and your staff comfort me.

You set a table before me in front of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Indeed, goodness and mercy will pursue me

all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of the LORD for endless days.

Psalms 23:1-4

My strength is in the Lord. It is a blessing to receive the Body of Christ. In my weakness, I find consolation knowing that He is with me, that He will never abandon me. I give myself completely to Him. May God's perfect Will be done in my life.

*My soul, be at rest in God alone,
from whom comes my hope.
7God alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not fall.
8My deliverance and honor are with God,
my strong rock;
my refuge is with God.
Psalm 62:6-8*

*Praise the **LORD**, for he is good;
for his mercy endures forever;
2Praise the God of gods;
for his mercy endures forever;
3Praise the Lord of lords;
for his mercy endures forever;
Psalm 136:1-3*

*Praise the God of heaven, for his mercy endures forever.
Psalm 136:36*

In the short time we are on earth, let us love one another and bless each other with friendship and kindness. United with mercy, let us gather and make this world a better place, entrusting our life to God.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

John 3:16

Today, let us embrace our pain and give thanks to God for life. Let us reach out to our loved one and call them on the phone or stop by and see them. Let us turn off the electronics and games and reach out to our loved one and say: *“I love you.”*

United in the love of God and each other let us build community and worship God

with our lives and our hearts. United in the love of God we will grow as the people of God cultivating peace and harvesting the fruits of the kingdom of God on earth.

God bless you and your family with peace today and always. Amen.

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