

Wounded Hearts

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Abstract

Pain comes to us all in varying degrees and in different ways throughout life. Pain is an inescapable aspect of being human. Pain shapes us and at times seems to define our lives by its intensity. Western culture seeks to alleviate or avoid pain at all cost but the reality is that pain is proof of our humanity and of being alive. God is no stranger to pain nor is he ignorant or uncaring of the pain we suffer. When we suffer pain we get the choice to respond to it as Christ did, allowing ourselves to be humbled, willingly relinquishing the right we have to a pain-free existence. If we follow the path Christ trod before us we have the hope of something new emerging from the pain and loss, something perhaps unexpected; an even greater reality than that which we willingly relinquished. The path through pain leads to new life and strength.

Introduction

C. S. Lewis said that “pain insists on being attended to.” And pain comes in all shapes and sizes; jobs do not turn out to be as interesting as we had hoped, friends turn nasty, marriages sour and fall apart, children annoy and disappoint us. As we are relational beings, wired to operate in connection with one another, much of the pain we experience in life comes about through relationships that falter and fail. Then regardless of our gender, our emotional IQ or our age, our hearts get hurt, even if we do not or even cannot, acknowledge it.

Most of us have had our hearts wounded at some time, in some way and in differing degrees. Some things hurt a whole lot more than others. These wounds are nearly always caused by some sort of failure in our relationships, either by what others *do to us* or what they *fail or neglect to do*.

This failure so often begins in childhood when things happen that we are not old enough to understand or have the words to articulate. Perhaps we fall out with our friends, feeling rejected or being ignored, even if it's only for a day. We all know the pain of being chosen last for a team, or being excluded from a group. Then there is the bullying that most of us face at some point in our

school years. This can be felt directly – verbal, physical, via SMS or over the Net, or indirectly – by being left out deliberately from social groups. These feelings of exclusion, of not fitting in, of not being good enough often shape how we see ourselves for the rest of our lives.

Then there are the hurts caused as important relationships break down when parents split up and children are caught in the bun-fight that ensues. Even when a parental split is amicable children feel the loss and often blame themselves. They can make vows regarding their own future relationships, either vowing to do it better than their parents, or vowing never to let themselves be hurt by another and so begin to build relational walls behind which they can hide and feel safe.

Then for others even greater breaches occur when trusted adults abuse them verbally, physically, mentally or sexually. These scars go deep, shaping and forming attitudes to others and to themselves, scars that can take a lifetime to heal or never heal at all.

Typical Patterns of Dealing with Relationship Pain

As we grow and mature we learn to deal with the ‘normal’ failures in relationship. We learn that friendships stand the test of time and that being on the outer today can change tomorrow. Even children who suffer the most severe forms of relationship breakdown, namely abuse, develop ways to deal with what is happening to them. They will often use one of our most favoured but least effective means of dealing with woundedness, that of denial. In this they are encouraged to secrecy and a refutation of what is happening to them by the very people who have hurt them.

But what about those of us who have loving safe childhoods but still experience some form of woundedness through the normal processes of life, who as we get older and relationships grow deeper, find that failures in relationships wound us even more deeply than we could imagine?

Perhaps we find ourselves asking these questions:

- So what do we do when the hole in our heart is so big you could drive a truck through it?
- What do we do when the ache is so great you're desperate for it to go away, any way it can?
- What do you do to make the pain go away?
- How do you comfort your wounded heart?

There are a number of different options that we try with varying degrees of success. All are in some way a form of separation, as we try to separate ourselves from the problem, from the pain. These options include things such as:

- Food...we comfort eat...lots of pasta, bread, chocolate.
- Movies or books...we lose ourselves in the story, in the characters. We allow ourselves to escape for a while, perhaps give ourselves a shot of what we hope for, what we dream of, but do not experience.
- Drugs and alcohol...the pain is numbed for a while, and the world can even look rosy. However the problem is that we have only added another difficulty to that which we already face; as well as the original problem we now have a drug or alcohol dependency.
- Straight out denial...we pretend it really isn't happening, we pretend that life is wonderful, our job fulfilling, our marriage sound, and our friendships sure and comforting. We put on the brave face, but inside we're dying.
- We move on...to another relationship in the hope of finding what was missing in the last, in the hope of avoiding the pain of the last; to another job forgetting that we take ourselves with us wherever we go; to another friendship and repeat the same mistakes all over again.

We seek something, anything to make us feel alive again, to make us feel desired again, to feel whole again.

Seeking Wholeness

For we *are* seeking wholeness; we *have been* hurt, wounded, and we *have* a hole in the centre of our being, a hole that makes us feel hollow and nothing. But none of the things we try, no amount of food, escapism, drugs, denial or change can fill that aching void.

Perhaps you can identify with one or both of the following scenarios:

A friend of mine had struggled for years with one of her sons who made all the wrong choices, choosing the hardest paths to get through life. He wanted to hang with friends who led him where he wanted to go but who did not have his best interests at heart. He went to a different high school from this group but only found another group that was going the same direction and ended up being expelled in year nine. His life spiralled till he was homeless and on drugs.

My friend's heart was broken. She and her husband had done the best they could to raise their three children well, and the other two showed no sign of following their elder brother's course through life, so they knew it was their son's choice rather than a terrible fault in their parenting. My friend did the best she could to maintain some sort of relationship with her son without allowing him to further hurt her family. The impact on her was great. It impacted her marriage. As her friend I could sympathise,

even empathise, but I could not know her pain, nor did I have any real answer in how to help her deal with the constancy of that pain.

Another woman lived in a marriage that had been spiralling downhill for over a decade. Her husband, a good man, was unwilling to share any emotional intimacy with his wife. They were able to communicate quite well about the surface things of life, and had quite close physical intimacy, but there was nothing in between. Friends knew she was unhappy but no-one knew the depth of the neglect she suffered. Like many women she experienced loneliness within her marriage, a loneliness that only increased as her children grew up and left home, leaving her with no distractions from her pain. As a person who believed in God she knew that change was possible, and she really tried to let God handle it, but her pain was still there. She felt hollow, longing for a relationship in which there was a sharing of selves beyond the superficial of work, family and holiday plans. She found herself vulnerable to the attractions of other men in her lonely life, often thinking of leaving her husband, but knowing that would not necessarily solve the issues of her marriage and not wanting to take those same issues into another relationship.

Now, if we're Christians, like this second woman was, we bring a whole lot of religious baggage with us from our childhood, our churches, our friends. All sorts of ideas jostle around in our heads: just be obedient, keep the 10 Commandments, or find what you need in Jesus. But words so often do not bring comfort; frequently all they bring is condemnation as we see ourselves giving into temptation, as we see ourselves filling our lives with food, drugs, changes, because inside us there is the wild animal of desperation. Not even spirituality seems to help; we can sing "He's more than enough for me" but know that we're lying because Jesus just isn't enough to fill that void, and nice sounding well-meant spiritual clichés intended as encouragement leave us discouraged, condemned, or wanting to hit the person who said it! Verses such as Psalms 37:4, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart," are wonderful promises of God, but how do we live between the promise and the fulfilment? How do we cope while we're waiting for God to do His thing? Well-meaning friends often tell us, "Just leave it to God", and there is truth in this because only God can bring change, but that advice does not address the pain you feel while you wait.

The truth is this is very real pain that you feel; even if often we try to ignore it, even discount its impact. But the pain is real, ongoing, year after year after year with no end in sight.

Bible Heroes and Seeking Wholeness

It is so easy to look back, flick through the pages of the Bible, read the lives of great saints who have gone before, and believe that somehow they had it all together. Despite the difficult aspects of their lives, they came through with flying colours. Or did they?

Let's take a look at Abraham.

God made Abraham a promise that his children would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, as many as the grains of sand on the sea-shore. This promise was made when Abraham was an old man and his wife Sarah was incapable of having children. Time dragged on and his wife Sarah still did not fall pregnant. In the end the time lapse between the promise and the fulfilment was twenty years.

So just how did Abraham cope with that time lapse? Like most of us, not very well! Neither did Sarah. In fact, they took matters into their own hands. In ancient times it was quite an acceptable arrangement for a man to sleep with his wife's maidservant in order to father children if his wife was not able to get pregnant. Sarah thought this would be a good option to overcome her barrenness and to bring the promise to fulfilment. However, the result was not a pretty one. There were two women in the one house, one with a son, one without, at war with each other as only women can be. Sarah found this situation impossible to endure any longer and she demanded that her servant Hagar be thrown out of the camp along with her son by Abraham, Ishmael. Thus a barren woman orders a woman under her protection to be abandoned along with her son, abandoned and left to die. Thank goodness God is neither dismayed nor thwarted by human foolishness. Hagar and Ishmael find protection and eventually a nation would come from Ishmael that would oppose God's people for generations to come.

For Abraham and Sarah, taking matters into their own hands didn't work. God however came through with His promise in his timing and those of us who are Christians are testimony to that "grains of sand" promise – although not directly descended from Abraham we are his spiritual descendants.

Taking matters into our own hands doesn't necessarily work any better for us than it did for Abraham. When we try to separate ourselves from our pain, or the cause of our pain, we only end up with obesity and associated conditions, adulterous liaisons, drug dependency, a separation from reality or ulcers from denying what is happening on our lives.

At the Heart of Pain

However, before we can even attempt to understand how Jesus might possibly help in our pain we must identify what it is in us that is hurting, or why we are hurting. This may seem like a given, of course we know why we hurt...we've been abused, we're in a dysfunctional marriage, or our children are off the rails. But there is something deeper, something that underlies all these hurts that we must acknowledge and address.

For all of us, no matter what our particular wound is, we hurt because a need in us is unmet. All hurts stem from unmet needs, frequently going unmet for a long period of time, and even more regularly neither acknowledged or accepted as part of our reality.

The child in the playground hurts because their self is at risk, as they gain identification from being with a particular group of friends, but friends who for the moment have turned their backs. The abused child hurts because their need for safety and security not only goes unmet but is trampled underfoot by the overriding desires of an adult. The mother of the rebellious child hurts because her identity, her value as a mother is shaken, challenged, by their behaviour and choices. The lonely wife needs and longs for intimacy and has none. Abraham needed an heir; Sarah needed release from the shame of barrenness.

Here is the killer: if we had no needs then we would not get hurt. But that just ain't gonna happen! So what do we do? Where do these unmet needs come from?

All that we identify as a need in our lives comes from desires in our heart that are part of the very fabric of our being, encoded it would seem in our emotional DNA. Sometimes these needs arise from expectations that we have developed from childhood, sometimes they are desires that spring out of our personality. Wherever they come from, they are very real and nearly always valid.

Take for example the desire for intimacy within marriage – this desire is set deep within the heart of a woman, who is at core a relational being, who operates collaboratively and relationally at all times; this need is part of her very makeup.

Take the desire to see your children grow up to lead responsible productive lives – this is the natural desire of a mother's heart, it is her *raison d'être*, her reason for being, since she conceived her first child. Both of these desires are natural, normal and godly.

But given the hurts we all experience to some extent or other in childhood and the accompanying methods we use to deal with those hurts, many people try to forestall the recognition of need by cutting themselves off from relationships, by withdrawing even in the midst of relationship. However the needs are still there, the hurt is still there; it is just not acknowledged. And unacknowledged need festers and impacts life, just as an abscess under a tooth, although unseen, impacts the well-being of the entire person...there is nothing worse than toothache!

We know however, as we mature, that circumstances may never change; it will not be better when we grow up! So we can either mutely accept our lot, we can try to deny or dull our pain and need or we can choose to live, not just to exist, in the midst of trying and frustrating circumstances even when each day has the potential to bring pain.

God's Response

So what's the answer? Does God really have anything to offer us, if what we can do for ourselves is ultimately ineffective or self-destructive?

If you've ever been to Sunday School or taught in Sunday school then you'll know that the answer to every question is Jesus! But if Jesus truly *is* the answer, how does He help with the hole, how does He fill the hole, how can He help us be whole again?

If we take a look into the life of Jesus we find that he expressed the mandate for his life and ministry by referring to a quote from Isaiah 61:1-2:

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim freedom to the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

(The circumstances around Jesus acknowledging his mandate can be found in Luke 4: 18 -19)

Those of us who have broken hearts will know that we are held captive by pain, by the situations or relationships that cause that pain. We know how easily it takes over our lives. We find that we can think of nothing else; when we wake up in the morning it's the first thing we think about and it's on

our minds the last thing before we go to sleep, or perhaps it robs us of sleep. We are captive to the pain.

We long to be free of it but don't know how to, not in the long term, even if we can dull it in the short term by food, drugs or escaping. Maybe for a day or two we can push it aside, keep ourselves so busy we can ignore it, but the moment we stop, the moment we have time to think, it comes roaring back and we go round the mountain again.

So can Jesus really make us whole again?

The obvious answer given cerebrally is "Yes, of course He can, he's God." But if we're honest we wonder if even God can do anything with our situation.

Before Jesus can help us we must be prepared for him to identify our pain. This means that we might have to face painful situations from our past and let long-buried pain surface. If we don't face our pain, then the chance of healing is minimal and wholeness is only a pipe dream. The process is slow and there will be many bleeding points along the way.

However if we choose to bring our unmet needs and the pain that accompanies them to Jesus He can heal us. These are not just nice religious words because if they were then I need someone to hit *me* for uttering them.

So how does this work out in practice? What does this look like in my life, in your life? There are a number of steps. It must be said that in the process of grieving, although there are a number of steps to grief, including anger, denial and acceptance, no two paths are identical and often it is may be a case of two steps forward and one step back. Sometimes it may seem that we cover old ground over again but each time something seems to resurface it can be addressed at a deeper level and more healing can occur.

- Firstly, we need to recognise our pain, to feel it. (Enough already, you say, I feel it, I feel it!)
- Then we need to identify what the unmet need is that is causing us so much pain. To do this might mean talking with a trusted friend, asking them for insight. Often those looking in on our situation can see what we who are so closely bound up in it are unable to see. It may mean that there will be things identified that we would much rather not see, but if the friend or advisor is a trustworthy person then we can be sure that what they reflect back to us is meant for our good. This too will take time. Be prepared to "sit" with a little bit of knowledge.

God knows how much we can handle at any given time. Discovering unmet needs often shakes our self-image so “sitting” with a small amount of knowledge about ourselves allows us time to adjust to how we see ourselves.

- Lastly, let Jesus do the work he needs to in you. Give him permission to do what needs to be done. Do not shirk this part of the journey. It is so important, for God will not do in us things we have not given him permission to do. He will not over-ride our will. This is somewhat like coming to a surgeon after your GP has diagnosed a serious illness. The surgeon has been recommended, you trust his skill, but you really don't know how the surgery will turn out or what life will be like post-surgery. He will only operate after you sign a consent form. We need to sign a consent form with God, allowing him to do what needs to be done in us. And it may well look very different for differing situations, even for similar situations for different people.

So how do you do that with Jesus?

If you're not following Jesus then there will be a greater need of trust. Perhaps a friend has suggested that you ask God for help but you're not sure God even exists, let alone wanting to help you. The amazing thing about God is that he is just waiting for us to ask for his help; he is more ready to give to us than we are to receive from him.

There needs to come a point when whether we are following Jesus or not, that we recognize that we can't make the situation better, that we don't know what to do with our pain. Acknowledging need is the first and most important step in both coming to know Jesus and beginning the healing process.

A Biblical Strategy

Many millions of people for thousands of years have trusted the words faithfully recorded in what we know as The Bible. Although the Bible does not particularly address each specific life situation we find there is a Biblical strategy for addressing the issues of life that hurt us. I did say address, not necessarily resolve the circumstances of our lives.

In Philippians 2:5-9 we read:

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,*

*taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death –
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth ,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Let's unpack this:

Jesus was God and had every right to be God. However, although Jesus was God, although he had been with his Father in the creation of the world, he chose to let that right slip away in the face of a much greater need, humanity's need of reconciliation with God. Jesus made a choice because others had made choices to live without God. If people had not chosen to live life on their own terms Jesus would not have needed to relinquish his place at his father's side in eternity. Just the mere fact of relinquishing his rightful place would have not been easy for Jesus. Not only did he give up a place, a position, that was rightfully his but Jesus chose to limit himself to the confines of a human body, with all its physical limitations. Imagine that, the limitless God of eternity squeezed into the tiny frame of a helpless vulnerable dependent baby! This is a mystery that the Bible does not seek to explain but a mystery that has been debated and accepted as true many, many times in the history of the Christian church.

So let's bring it back to our situation, our life. What is the attitude that we are being encouraged to adopt in the face of our pain? What was Jesus' attitude?

He chose to give up what was rightfully his for the benefit of others.

So... I'm supposed to give up... what? Our very rightful claim to those things that are most precious to us.

All of these things, intimacy, mothering, safety, are legitimately rightful claims but we can choose, like Jesus, to relinquish our claim to them. We have the opportunity to choose to relinquish our rightful claims to intimacy, to have had a safe childhood, to enjoy the fruit of the mothering in our children's lives. This is enormous for us! This seems impossible especially in the face of the ongoing pain we experience. Even so, despite the pain, despite the seeming enormity of the task, it is the way to go. It is the way to freedom from bondage to pain, to hurt, to unmet needs.

Just as Jesus had the power and authority of God these unmet needs can have a certain amount of power attached to them, perhaps the power of knowledge or authority. We can nevertheless choose to give up that power too, choose not to use it, just as Jesus gave up his ultimate power when he inhabited a human body. Jesus' relinquishing of his rightful place and power was done so that he could bring what people needed, a way back to God, and he was the only one who could do this.

This process is both one for the mind to take as well as the heart. It may well be that our mind screams at the idea of giving up any more than we already have. It may well be that the very thought of giving up the thing we most sorely desire seems totally impossible and horrifying in the extreme. Our hearts may feel even more heavy and weighed down by the thought of what appears to be even less in our lives. But Jesus beckons saying, "Come follow me. Follow me though the darkness of your life, follow me through what seems like death, for I know that on the other side lies life." Just as for Jesus on the other side of the Cross was the resurrection, so too for us there is "the other side." Just as Jesus' resurrected body was like but not the same as the one that died, so our lives "on the other side" will be alike but different. Our circumstances, our past, our children, our spouses may not have changed, but we will. We will have made it to the other side and found that Jesus is there too, waiting for us.

As an aside, apart from following the example of Jesus, the Bible is often able to speak directly into our situation. Below are some options, some verses, which may be useful for you in the process of allowing God to work out in you the same attitude that Jesus had. Many of these verses can sustain us through difficult times, can affirm us as we move through the process, can speak into our situations, can show us what God really thinks of us when life would tell us something different.

* If you need intimacy, God wants to be intimate with you. Talk to Him, listen for Him speaking back to you (sometimes it's just a thought in your head, sometimes it's a friend speaking to you, at times it's something quite unexpected). Spend time just in His presence; He has things to say to you.

* If you need to know that you're beautiful and precious read:

Song of Songs 4: 1, 9 – 10.

How beautiful you are, my darling!

Oh, how beautiful!

You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride;

you have stolen my heart

with one glance of your eyes.

How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!

*How much more pleasing is your love than wine,
and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice!*

* If you need to know that you're safe and secure read:

Psalm 91:1-2

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High

will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

*I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God in whom I trust."*

So... does this really work? Yes and no.

Yes, it does if you do it. No, it doesn't if you don't.

This may sound rather obvious but like most people I'm not as consistent as I'd like to be. Instead of coming to Jesus I turn to other things without thinking, I flick on a movie or find a good book. Unfortunately I can then find myself caught up in other issues and leave the real ones unaddressed. When I remember to come to Jesus I am overwhelmed by His love for me, His high regard for me as a person, His enormous plans for me.

I need to remember, you need to remember that Jesus is not into quick-fixes; he is into wholeness and restoration, both of which take time.

So the challenge for me, for all of us, is two-fold:

1. To not let the pain hold us captive, to recognise it as a pointer to our own unmet needs.

2. To come to Jesus for the solution to our pain, the aching hole in our hearts, rather than turn to other less than effective things that more often than not lead only to further pain and captivity.

The Promise Beyond the Giving

So where does that leave us? With a promise, from the one who always makes good on His promises.

Have a look at what happened in Jesus' life in Philippians 2:9-11. God raised Him up, exalted Him, gave Him a new and amazing place above everyone else, where He is honoured above all others. That's what happened when Jesus gave up His rights and let God work out His purposes through Him.

Do you think perhaps that God might just have a purpose that He can only work out through you? God's not making these awful things happen in your life. God's heart grieved when He saw His only son nailed up on a cross, tortured, mocked and hated. He grieves over the things that go unmet in your life, the awful things that have happened to you, but He wants you to hand these desires, these needs, these situations over to Him, to let Him work out His purposes in the midst of them.

Living in the Midst of the Pain

So how can we live even when we have handed over to God the desires and needs of our hearts, when we've given up the right to having these desires and needs met, but still we ache?

Ephesians 3: 16-19 has some wonderful words that will probably take a lifetime for us to fathom fully, but they are words that reassure us that their ability to help will never dry up:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all fullness of God.

Did you notice the word power is used a couple of times there? God wants us to have power *in* our situations. He does not want us to be overpowered by them. He does not want us to be held captive by the pain they bring – after all, He came to set the captives free.

Well where does this power come from? It comes from His love for us.

Did you see how much love that is? It's long, high, deep and wide; so long, high, deep and wide that it surpasses knowledge – an unknowable, unfathomable, un-scalable, un-climbable, un-go-roundable kind of love. That is as high, deep, wide, long and big as God is Himself. Pretty big indeed!

And how do we have the opportunity to know that love? Because Jesus didn't grasp onto the things that were rightfully His, but gave them up for us.

What an amazing circle!

So, to summarise all this:

- we identify what is causing our pain – usually an unmet but very legitimate need or desire;
- we choose to give up our rights to having those needs met;
- we come to Jesus, so he can fill the gaping hole with His love – it's the only thing that'll do it;
- we discover that we actually have the power to face the situations that cause us pain (not necessarily remove the things that hurt us).

Turning Pain into Power

Finally, not only does the pain we feel allow us to identify unmet needs, it can be used to point us in a positive direction.

Each person has a 3 or 4 'virtues' that characterise their lives, things that make us "tick", that when they are active in our lives satisfy us completely. These virtues can be identified by analysing, thinking about, what are our deepest needs:

- What are the things that hurt us the most when they are not there?
- What words would we use to describe ourselves; that others would use to describe us?
- What do we do well, or like to do, positively?

Do you feel unsettled at times and then you go and do something that you haven't done for a long time and you feel happier, more settled? Chances are that it was an unused virtue that caused the unsettledness and allowing it to operate for even a short time brought satisfaction, comfort and wholeness.

When these virtues are not operating we feel pain, often intense pain. The woman trapped in lonely marriage has a deep need for intimacy. Intimacy is a virtue in her life, it characterizes her life, and because it is not an active part of her life, she hurts, deeply.

So the deep and consistent hurting in our lives can actually allow us to identify our virtues, the characteristics that make us uniquely ourselves, that bring power to our lives regardless of our circumstances. Once our virtues are identified, even if they are not operating, we can consider our options. We always have options – even when we can't see them initially. Rather than stay in a place of pain we can look at what we can do to allow our inactive virtues to operate. The woman lacking intimacy can seek to have it operate in other relationships – friends, family. She can also seek a deeper relationship with Jesus, for He is the one ultimately able to meet all our relational needs.

The pain of unmet needs, of past hurts, of impossible situations can be the catalyst for change, for identifying and releasing power in our lives. Just as the cross became the resurrection so pain can be turned into power. Psalm 37: 4 reminds us that when we delight ourselves in the Lord he will give us the desires of our hearts. Philippians 2:9 affirms that after the Cross God exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name. For us too there is the promise of the fulfilment of our hearts desires, of being given back that which is rightfully ours. But it is not ours to take; only God can give us what we need in our particular situation. We can trust this Giver because when *He* gives something, it's perfect!

The end...and the beginning

So we come to the end...or perhaps just the beginning. The road we walk through pain to healing is a long one, an arduous one. There are no shortcuts, no easy ways through. But there is a way through and his name is Jesus. He said, "I am the way." (John 14:6) As I look back over my own journey, I see how long some parts of the journey were, how unready I was to take some steps. But through it all my Jesus led me, to a place where now I can stand firm, in which I understand that I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14), that I am a child of the King of Heaven, much loved and never abandoned, despite what circumstances may tempt me to believe. May you as you read this find hope that despite your circumstances, despite the loss of dreams and expectations, despite all that life may have dealt you, thrown at you, may you too be reassured that the God who made you loves and that is with you on the journey and will bring you through the pain to healing. With a wry grin I say...enjoy the ride!