



June 2003

*Those who wait on the LORD shall renew (exchange) their strength (for His strength).
They shall mount up with wings like eagles...and run and not be weary...and walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).*

The grandest privilege I know is to be sent by God “to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives” (Isaiah 61:1-2). The Message Bible says it this way, “God sent me to announce the year of His grace.” I really like that. For God to allow us this privilege, He must break His children from anything we are depending on besides Him...anything...including our good works and our trained abilities. It takes a broken but healing heart to minister God’s healing balm to another broken heart. Oswald Chambers, a British army chaplain in the early 1900s, wrote that when we realize God wants to work through us instead of us working for Him, we will surrender solely to Him as “He makes us broken bread and poured-out wine with which to feed and nourish others.”

God led me to proclaim healing grace and freedom to several people this month. At the end of the month, I came across the following testimony “His Beauty for My Ashes” from Honeycomb Publishing in Taylors, SC, that describes the growing testimony of each of these special people.

His Beauty for My Ashes

Once I held in my tightly clenched fist...ashes. Ashes from a burn inflicted upon my (young) body. Ashes I didn't ask for. The scar was forced upon me. And for years the fire smoldered. I kept my fist closed in secret, hating those ashes, yet unwilling to release them. Not sure if I could. Not convinced it was worth it. Marring the things I touched and leaving black marks everywhere...or so it seemed. I tried to undo it all, but the marks were always there to remind me that I couldn't. I really couldn't....

...But God could! His sweet Holy Spirit spoke to my heart one night in my tearful desperation. He whispered, “I want to give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for your mourning, and the garment of praise for your spirit of heaviness” (Isaiah 61:3). I had never heard of such a trade as this: Beauty? Beauty for ashes? My sadly stained memory for the healing in His (God's) word? My soot-like dreams for His songs in the night? My helpless and hurting emotions for His ever constant peace?

How could I be so stubborn as to refuse an offer such as this? So willingly, yet in slow motion, and yes, while sobbing, I opened my bent fingers and let the ashes drop to the ground. In silence, I heard the wind blow them away. Away from me...forever. I am now able to place my open hands gently around the fist of another hurting soul and say with confidence, “Let them go. There really is beauty beyond your comprehension. Go ahead – trust Him. His beauty for your ashes.”

I think about these special people who God has allowed me into their lives recently and how they have been “burned” by circumstances: abandoned by a spouse...abused as a young child...abused with religious condemnation...losing an infant child.... And I think so much about my wife Joy who has been burned with chronic pain nearly every day of her adult life. These people did not ask for these burns. I also think of others who have self-inflicted burns...which includes all of us. And I think of the young boys at the orphanage (where we minister) who have burns of rejection still so fresh. Most of all, I think of the great good news I have been given to proclaim that can set us ALL free from the bondage of these burns! *[The great good news continues on the back.]*

[Continued from the front.] The great good news is that God's healing goes much deeper than the burns from circumstances...much deeper than the scars. God doesn't CHANGE the lives of people to make them better able to cope with the burns of life. God EXCHANGES all that He is for all that we were...through the cross! God prophesized this through Isaiah...we can have the beauty of Jesus for our ashes!

God goes much deeper than our scars and all the way to our spirits...the deepest part of us...to the very heart of our being. He plants the life of His dear Son Jesus there! He exchanged my sinful heart for His righteous life (2 Corinthians 5:21)! Yes, He took away my sins, but Romans 5:10 says that "MUCH MORE you shall be saved by His life!" That's the great good news of the gospel! He didn't take away my difficult circumstances; in fact, He promises them (1 Peter 4:12-14). However, He gave me His life to transform my focus from my circumstances to His life through any circumstance, which transforms despair into true hope.

The majestic life of Christ is deeper than our scars, which is why each of the people I have mentioned in this newsletter radiate true beauty and life despite their scars...no...through their scars! Each one is genuinely ministering Christ's life to others.

Just look at Jesus now...He still has His nail-scarred hands! The risen Jesus asked Thomas: "Look at Me Thomas, look at My hands...do not be unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:27). The world subtly whispers to us that our scars make us less than average humans. However, God shows us our scars as being one with Jesus' scars...a bold testimony to the world of His resurrected Life in and through us!

GraceLife Conference

Friday evening July 25th

through

all day Saturday July 26th

Simpsonville, SC

GRACE NOTE

A Christian (a Christ-one) is not a burned product of his or her past. He or she is a beautiful product of the cross of Jesus Christ!