

Beauty for Ashes

A decorative flourish consisting of a central horizontal line with symmetrical, ornate scrollwork extending outwards from both ends.



Day One: This is Freedom

1 Corinthians 2:1 – 5 (NKJV) *And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

I once saw a woman riding a horse with just a thin rope around its neck. The woman was in full control, the horse stopping and turning and going as directed. I remember thinking, *'That's a beautiful picture of us yielding to God, just directed and guided by a slender cord, totally controlled by the Holy Spirit.'*

Yet I felt the Lord speak to my heart, *'Mandy that is a lie, that horse is still bound, not in true freedom.'*

This is the subtlety of the lie we can be caught in. The hold is slim, the cord very thin but nevertheless to the horses mind, that hold is so big that a 500kg horse will yield to it.

Yet, *Where the spirit of the Lord is there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17). Know the truth and the truth will set you free (Jn 8:32). Whom the son sets free is free indeed (Jn 8:36). It was for freedom I set you free (Gal 5:1).* These are some of the things Jesus - the Word - says about true freedom.

Freedom is a big deal in heaven. God is the most free Person there is and we are created in His image. He made us free, and He redeemed us to freedom. He seriously means for us to be free.

Galatians 5:1 (BSB) *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.*

Then I thought about riding horses at liberty, where there are no strings and no holds - not even the slightest sense of control. The mind of the horse and rider are as one, in complete harmony of thought and motion. There is no hesitation, only complete yielding on both parts. Everything the horse has is at the disposal of the rider and vice versa.

This is the video Holy Spirit brought to my heart: Stacy Westfall's Championship Run 2006. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEaMI5PkLIM>



What a beautiful picture of what true freedom and yieldedness looks like! I realised that there cannot be true freedom unless there is a choice... unless we choose to step into it and believe the truth of our rider. To believe in His goodness, His vision and His love and care for us.

Freedom is not a slender cord. It is boundless, unconditional love and enduring mercy. It is the gift of grace.

Soak Time

There is no cord around you... nothing to make you choose to be directed, guided or controlled by Holy Spirit. This is complete freedom. You can respond to His direction or roam where you please. YOU ARE FREE! What do you CHOOSE to do with that freedom?



Day Two: No Bondages

Following the picture God had given me of real freedom, I had another picture of myself. This time it was like I was surrounded in cobwebs of fairy floss. I felt so frustrated and closed in and trapped. It didn't matter where I turned, there I was, surrounded.

It was sticky but yet it was ever so gossamer thin... what looked so big to my mind and felt so big to my body, the Lord showed me, was a wispy lie that was so very thin. I was in fact bound by wispy nothingness, which even a child could break.

I realised that just as there was no cord controlling me in the first picture... neither was there a cord binding me in this one. The Lord was showing me that I am completely free... and so are you! He is not controlling us... and neither is anything else. Even when we feel trapped and bound in the lies and circumstances surrounding us, the truth is that we are in indeed completely free.

It is the essence of humility and surrender to declare your active belief in the truth of God's Word when everything in your life looks the opposite. When you feel sticky and surrounded and trapped wherever you turn... to believe that actually you are free... to believe that actually you are who God says you are even when it all feels and looks completely the opposite... that is humility. That is surrender. That is faith.

And what does God say about you?

He calls you the hope of glory.

Did you get that? He says that you are His hope... the hope of His glory being seen in this world.

Colossians 1:27 (NIV) ...the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

I stand in the glory and power of the cross - this is my hope and my future. Christ in me, the hope of Glory. Amen.



Soak Time

Have you felt the sense of being surrounded by 'sticky' lies? What was 'binding' you?

Can you lay aside the 'stickiness' you feel... the sense of being surrounded or being trapped, and make this declaration of humility, submission and faith:

*I stand in the glory and power of the cross - this is my hope and my future.
Christ in me, the hope of Glory. Amen.*



Day Three: God of the Living

This year has been a tough year - you might have guessed - and fail I have, look foolish I have, been embarrassed, judged and accused I have. It has challenged all I believe and know to be true. I confess, things have gotten mighty dirty, down in the pig sty, this year.

To share these beautiful truths from the Father's heart is both my humility and my freedom. It is the hardest thing I have done in a long while. But what I perceive as false... even what others might see as false... pales into insignificance compared to what God says is true about me.

Honouring the treasure is another message but suffice it to say that my sisters and husband and kids have been the only ones at times this year to call out the treasure in me, to see Christ in me when I just couldn't. The pit was too deep for me to see the sky.

I was going to share my testimony, but I realised that that's really the wrong word. I was actually thinking of my past. However, a testimony is living and active - our God journey through life, new and growing every morning. My testimony has little to do with my past and much to do with my future.

I tried to write it and just couldn't. It felt grubby and shameful and not honouring to the price Jesus paid for me. It felt like giving glory to the dead, and inviting death to again wash over me. Lord knows I don't need to do that again! It is enough to say that, I know shame and guilt and worthlessness, very intimately. Fear has been my companion in life, far too often. So I knew that my 'testimony' was not the story of my life lived in this shame, guilt, worthlessness and fear.

I woke up one morning earlier in the year with this phrase in my spirit. *"Don't live like a dead woman - you are alive!"* So I went on a journey with Mary Magdelene to the tomb of Jesus. Mary and I have a bit in common, a hidden ugly past and the liberty of a beautiful saviour.

I was struck by the phrase the angel spoke to Mary as she cried at the tomb of her saviour, ready to anoint his body with herbs to embalm him in death forever. Aren't our customs backwards and often so contrary to God - we keep people dead, Jesus brings them alive. We anoint or embalm the dead, almost



bringing glory to death. Yet Jesus calls dead things to life. Our perspective is often all that needs to change.

So she is peering in there looking desperately for Her saviour, when the angel says to her, *“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen”* (Luke 24 5-6).

It was like I was suddenly captured by the truth:

We will never find signs of life in the dead stuff of our past.

The living is simply not found amongst the dead. God is the God of the living not the dead (Luke 20:38). It’s the whole reason Jesus came - to set us free from sin and shame, death and every work of the enemy in our life.

Soak Time

What have you considered to be your ‘testimony’? The ugliness of your past, or the life of your unfolding journey with Christ?



Day Four: You Being Dead

I was tormented many times this year, thinking, *“I just have to die. These things of my past simply aren’t dead if they can come back and bite me. I need to crucify my flesh.”* Man, I got in a flap! I spent the year chasing about in my past trying to kill everything.

It was only yesterday that I came to a sudden realisation (some of us are slower than others). I was reading the Word and Colossians 2:13 pulled me up short where it says *“...and **you being dead** in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven all your trespasses.”*

Oh wow - I was already dead!!! What a relief - you can’t get any more dead than dead! I came from a place of death. My past before Jesus was already dead... I don’t have to die again or try to kill it... I was born dead in sin. I couldn’t resurrect it even if I wanted to! Not even Jesus tried that - He instead recreated me, made me new. He gave me a new life and a new home.

Immediately I was set free from my own foolish efforts and dismal failures to crucify my own flesh. I literally felt freedom, rest and peace wash over me.

The reason it was so painful and I felt like my past was alive and killing me is because it was. I was literally living death warmed over - it was bad the first time, and it got even worse after multiple visits.

Trying to live alive in death causes great pain to us.

It’s like trying to breath under water...which is how I often felt - like I was drowning. I felt like my flesh and emotions were pitching a fit and they were, because I was trying to live out of a place where there is simply no life.

The ultimate form of pride is not believing what Jesus says to be true, just because you can’t see it. The ultimate humility is declaring your agreement with it when it doesn’t look true.

“It’s not how you look that matters, it’s what you see.” Lisa Bevere



Jesus never returned to the grave. *"He is not here He is risen."* The death He died, He died once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God, never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.

We are so busy, thinking we still have a part to play in this. Yet this was God's idea, His plan and we have nothing to do with it except to believe it, to become fully convinced of His faithfulness.

Jesus didn't even put Himself to death! He presented Himself as a living sacrifice, and sin killed Him - the weight of the entire sin of the world.

Every area that mankind will ever fall short, is met in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. *'It is finished'*, means sin is finished, it's hold on us is finished, and righteousness is granted to all who will believe that it is true.

Soak Time

Have you ever believed the lie that you have to crucify your own flesh? How did you attempt to accomplish this and how did it make you feel?

What has Holy Spirit shown you about the truth of your crucifixion?



Day Five: Eyes of the Flesh... Eyes of the Spirit

Hebrews 11:11 *"By Faith, Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised."*

Do we really believe that it is finished? Will we judge God faithful to complete what He began in us? To keep His promise? Do we really believe Him when He says, *"Their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more"* (Heb 10:17)? Do we really believe in the power of the cross?

God will never bring up your sins to you - He remembers them no more! If God doesn't remember, then the Holy spirit - the very Spirit of God - certainly won't bring them up to you, and Jesus never says anything that the Father didn't say, so you are never going to hear about your sin, your past, yesterday or last week, or the last minute where you failed (no matter how ugly) from God. When we feel condemned, it is not the work of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:1 says *"There is now therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."*

If we feel condemned, guilty and ashamed, it simply is an indicator to us that we are walking according to the flesh. That's because the flesh is dead and there is no life in it. *"For to be carnally minded is death but to be spiritually minded is life and peace"* (Romans 8:6). Being carnally minded is seeing with natural eyes, through our natural senses and not with the eyes of our spirit - which is according to the Word of God - who God's Word declares us to be. His Word is the mirror of our Spirit man.

If you look carnally, you will see flesh every time. It will remind you of death and have a terrible smell. God only sees us after the spirit. Where will you set your agreement with?

You see it's a lie, a very gossamer, thin cord. We are not riding at liberty but held by a thin cord of control. That control would be coming from our dead past, not our live future. Satan can even trick us into thinking God is doing it! I am telling you God will not control you in any way. If He would, Eve would never have had a chance to eat the fruit and every man would be going to heaven, for that is the ultimate will of God.



I am preaching to myself here - there could be no one else that needs this message more than me! Declaring belief in the truth is my only path to freedom. I believe You, Jesus, and align with your truth even if I feel the opposite and others 'see' the opposite. My only hope is to believe you.

Soak Time

If you look at yourself through the eyes of the flesh, who do you see?

If you look at yourself through the eyes of the spirit, who do you see?

Which is the truth? Which one does God see?



Day One: Buried Alive

I woke again one morning with this phrase in my heart: “If you try to bury something that is very much alive in you, it will keep trying to get out of the grave.”

For a start, I was confused. ‘*Father, what does this mean?*’ I wondered. Sometimes God says stuff to us that messes with our tidy little theologies.

I was off again for a little while with my bat, trying to kill my past again, searching for life where there is only death so I could kill it once and for all!

Then I realised what was alive in me, and it was not my dead past or sins! It was the truth of Jesus Word, His love, His faithfulness, and His very identity in me. It was calling to me continually, “*This is not who you are.*” The beautiful Holy Spirit was convicting me of truth, shining the light for me to see, asking me to yield upwards... to the life inside of me. All of the identity and life of Jesus inside me was saying, “*Get out of that grave! You are not dead anymore!!!*” Another gossamer thin cord, broken.

You know that song which says, “*Its no longer I that liveth, but Christ that liveth in me*”? That’s actually scripture. It took my lightning fast brain a while to put that together! All along, I’m thinking that somehow my past has come alive again in me and I have to put it to death – to crucify it so that I can be alive to God. Yet God says, ‘*You are dead to sin*’, simple as that. *Consider yourself dead to sin* (Rom 6:11). That means every shortcoming, and every failure to meet the mark. ‘Consider’ or another rendering of that word would be ‘reckon’. It is a precise accounting term. It means when all is added up, this is the answer.

You cannot reckon yourself to something that is not true. It means to align with a concrete truth. The ledger says your account is paid, and you owe nothing. So if God be true and every man a liar (Rom 3:4) and He says ‘*I have redeemed you, consider yourself dead to sin, remember it no more, I don’t...*’ Who are you going to believe?

What God believes will not change. He has called it. If you agree, you live it. If you disagree, you live a lie, trapped in the pain of a past that has been forgotten by all but you.



The Holy Spirit will never stop telling you who you really are... and there is the rub. Our born again spirit convicts us of Jesus' truth and our flesh is trying to tell us a lie. That is where the pain and suffering is. If we truly believed we were dead to our past sin (as near as yesterday or this morning), it no longer has power over us. It cannot hurt you - dead things don't hurt you! They don't get offended or have emotional breakdowns. They are dead!

Just kick it in the guts and walk right on by.

Oh wow, can I say that?!?! Well I just have. That's about all we need to do when our past lies to us. Let's not even stop for it...

Soak Time

The Holy Spirit is continually whispering to you who you really are. What can you hear Him saying to you about you?



Day Two: Bold Grace in Time of Need

In Philippians 3, Paul is very forthright in what He thinks of His past. He equates it all to poop! That's right - some translations are spooked by such strong language, but the original word is actually 'dung', or poop. Let me ask you a question: Do you spend much time thinking about your poop after you are done with it? Well that's how much time I suggest you put into thinking about your past.

Well maybe Paul had it easy, really...what did Paul have to put behind him?!?! Only murder... persecuting Jesus... wrongfully imprisoning people... missing God so badly that he killed for it. Yet we read in 1 Corinthians that Paul called himself blameless! The only way he could do that was to truly live dead to his past failures – (to 'consider it so') and alive to God who held His future. Trusting God to complete in Him that which He began... judging the Father faithful and thereby receiving the promise.

This is exactly what He offers us.

Some might say, "*This is too easy... you can live how you want and get away with it. It's 'easy believism'!*" I suggest to you that it is just the opposite.

It will take every ounce of belief that you have in order to walk it out... in fact, you will have to lay down every single contrary belief you have, in order to do it. There is nothing 'easy' about living like this – we are all too familiar with the shortcomings of our flesh and find they're in our face all of the time and it's oh so easy to believe them. The life of faith is to believe the truth – even when the evidence appears to be contrary. That's what Romans 12:1 really means... a *living sacrifice*.

Hebrews 4:16 (NKJV) *Let us therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.*

We love to quote this verse, however it really says that we come boldly before the throne of grace, *WHEN* - not when we feel squeaky clean. No it says we come boldly **in our time of need**. I submit to you that our greatest time of need is when we have fallen mightily... when our face is in the dirt and we have failed dismally (we've *missed the mark* big time). That makes it harder doesn't it! Who wants to be caught in the throne room looking like that?!?! Yet that is the very time God says to come boldly, and to get the grace and mercy you



need and keep on going. That doesn't sound like 'easy grace' or 'easy believism' to me! That's what taking up your cross daily is. It is believing Him daily... minute by minute if you need to. Believing who He says you are, what He says you have and what He says you can do.

That is truly living by the spirit.

Soak Time

In time of need, have you felt like you could boldly go to the throne? Why or why not?

What does it look like for you to truly live by the spirit?



Day Three: Unless it Falls to the Ground

Your old man will produce no fruit in your life. Your old hurts, difficulties, abuses or abusing, your mistakes and failures... they will only produce fruit in your life IF you recognise them for what they are – a dead, sinful past - and deal with them appropriately.

John 12:24 (NKJV) *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, It remains alone: but if it dies, it produces much grain.*

Those seeds of hurt, pain, shame and contempt... let them fall to the ground and be buried where they rightfully belong - nailed to the cross of Christ! Trust the Father, as Jesus did, to bring new life. *“Father in to your hands I commit my spirit,”* Jesus said to the Father at His death.

I reckon that if Jesus carried the sin of the world, He had to let a few dead things fall to the ground and be buried, trusting the Father to bring the newness of life. The Father will bring forward a harvest of joy and multiply a hundred fold those previous seeds of pain. That is the only way to make failure work for us - to conquer our past and receive the harvest of our souls.

Recognise it as dead, let it fall to the ground (which is essentially forgiveness, of yourself and others) and trust the miracle of the seed.

Romans 8:11 (NLT) *The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.*

The exact same Spirit of God that raised Christ from the dead lives in you!!! This Spirit which brought life to Jesus, will bring you new life. Just as Jesus had to trust Himself to the Spirit of God to resurrect Him as He was nailed to that cross, so too when we trust His life in us, He will not fail to burst forth with life from within us and release us from the tomb into the newness of our resurrection lives!

This, THIS is faith...



Soak Time

Meditate on the fact that the very same Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in you. Close your eyes, and ask Him to show it to you.

Do you trust the Spirit of God within you to raise you into newness of life?



Day Four: Beauty for Ashes

Isaiah 61:3 (NKJV) *To give them beauty for ashes, the oil for joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness: that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.*

This is the title God gave me for this message, so it is fitting that it be the conclusion. Jesus said He saved the best wine until last.

This verse is all about exchange, and let me tell you that the exchange rate is absolutely loaded in our favour! When you're sitting in ashes and mourning and heaviness seem to be your companions... what an exchange this is!!! Jesus - the One anointed to heal the broken hearted, proclaim liberty for the captives and open the prison to those who are bound, is indeed our great exchange!

Jesus says to you, "Girl, I've already made the great exchange." He doesn't make up the difference between us and God - this is not a pro rata agreement!

He becomes us, so that we can become Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV) *He became sin who knew no sin so that I could become the righteousness of God.*

- He takes my ashes, my mourning and my heaviness. The Amplified Bible describes heaviness as a burdened and failing spirit. That description has fitted me a time or two.
And then He gives me a garland or diadem of beauty (oh sounds like a crown!). He surrounds me with His love and beauty... He gives me the crown of life.
- The oil of joy - the blessed gift of the Holy Spirit - pure joy in the midst of circumstances. You know the saying, laughing in the face of circumstances. The oil of joy, baby, makes the devil really mad! It's for my mourning.
- A garment of praise – this is a robe of righteousness to replace my own garment of spiritual heaviness and burdens.

So I invite you girls to join me, like Sarah, and judge Him faithful to keep that which He has eternally promised to us. Sarah did, and she birthed a nation of Kings and priests. Rahab did and she saved her entire family. Esther did and she saved a nation. Jael did and she defeated an evil enemy. Hannah did and



her shame gave way to victory. Mary did and she birthed Jesus. Most of all Jesus did and He defeated death, hell and the grave.

Soak Time

Do you judge Him faithful to keep that which He has promised to you?



Day Five: Your Story – His Story

We are in pretty good company. I don't know all of your stories, but He does. He came to write you a new story... or really your true story. To issue you an invitation to be in **History**... OUR story, the one He wrote for me and you before the foundation of the world. When HE already loved us and planned for our salvation.

I don't mean to trivialise your story or make your pain seem to be a small thing. Jesus didn't do that and neither do I. In fact the Bible says, He stores all of our tears in a bottle. The sheer pain and desperation of humanity - which includes me and you - was such a big deal to God that He was willing to pay the most expensive price ever for our story. He paid with His son. It cost Him everything.

The cost of the sacrifice is the value God places on you and your story.

I invite you now to believe Him, to declare your faith and trust in Him despite any circumstance. Let Him show you the glorious story He wrote for you before the foundation of the world. Consider yourself dead to sin and your past and live the life He paid for. It is the greatest honour you could ever pay him.

He says to you today, *"You are worth every drop of blood."*

Beauty for Ashes

Beauty for ashes, treasure untold.
Mourning and sadness no longer to behold.
For He heals the broken hearted, binds up all their wounds.
Anointed by the Father, love fully bloomed.

Graves are opened, captives freed, liberty proclaimed.
God's breath upon His people, bringing the dead to life again.
For the oil of joy flows freely, like the crimson of the cross.
Transforming all it touches, as it seeks to save the lost.

Let praises ring, my heaviness gone, my Saviour is so sweet.
He offered Himself in my stead, my righteousness complete.
Now I'm planted deep, a planting of the Lord.
Evergreen with beauty, the ashes of my past,
Forgiven and forgotten, in the joy I have at last.



So come all ye weary, bring your burden to the cross,
And as you yield your offering of ashes, prepare to behold,
The beauty that replaces those painful scars of old.
Lift your face up to the Father, no shame there to see
And receive the oil of gladness, this is your victory.

Don't look back, but confidently ahead, your destiny so bold.
As hand in hand with your saviour you walk the streets of gold.
His kingdom is within you, the past left behind.
Your glorious future, no longer are you blind.

Will you make the exchange, the choice is yours, in Jesus be renewed.
Today is the day, now is the time.
His life for mine, O glorious Divine.

Soak Time

Let Him show you the glorious story He wrote for you before the foundation of the world.
