

The Cup
and the
Glory

Lessons on
Suffering and
the Glory of God

GREG HARRIS

Kress Christian
PUBLICATIONS

The Cup and the Glory: Lessons on Suffering and the Glory of God

© 2006 Greg Harris

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other – except for brief quotations embodied in critical articles or printed reviews, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published by:

Kress Christian
PUBLICATIONS

P.O. Box 132228
The Woodlands, TX 77393
www.KressChristianPublications.com

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations were taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by the Lockman Foundation.
Used by permission.

ISBN 0-9772262-1-2

Editing: Lauren Harris, Chris Doerfler, Traci Stephenson
Cover and text design: Layne Moore, Layne Moore Group



To my wife, Betsy
and to Cindy Walters
and to De Lee
—all partakers of the cup
and one day the Glory—
and to Roland



And James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Him, saying to Him, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You."

And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

And they said to Him, "Grant that we sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left."

But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?"

—Mark 10:35-38

CONTENTS

Chapter 1	The Wilderness	9
Chapter 2	The Cup	19
Chapter 3	The Road	37
Chapter 4	The Gift	51
Chapter 5	The Fellowship	61
Chapter 6	The Footprints	79
Chapter 7	The Surprise	95
Chapter 8	The Blessing	111
Chapter 9	The Agreement	127
Chapter 10	The Glory	145

Chapter One

The Wilderness

In the chill of a predawn Monday morning, I walked down into our unfinished basement where I had a small office. As pastor of a church in Maryland, my responsibility was to write the monthly church newsletter, something I very much enjoyed doing. I needed to write to the church, and I needed to write to myself. It had been a life-changing week.

Berwyn Baptist Church Newsletter

March 29, 1993

“Place them both in my hands.”

“But I don’t want to.”

Joe Hammond had just given me a piece of peppermint taffy, a ritual he had performed after every church service for as long I can remember. Ben, almost three years old, watched him as he gave it to me, as did my daughter Lauren. Being a father of two I knew the predicament of having one piece of candy that could not be shared. Doris Stough saw this too and graciously added another piece of peppermint candy she had in her purse. My children and I then headed back to my office. Placing my Bible and the candy on the desk in the foyer, I proceeded to deal with some office details in another room. When I came back to the foyer, Lauren had taken both pieces of candy.

“Place them both in my hands,” I told her.

“But I don’t want to, Daddy,” she replied.

The Cup and the Glory

“Lauren, those are my two pieces of candy. They are not yours until I give them to you. I may give you one or both, or I may not, but they are mine to give or mine to keep.”

“Place them both in my hands.”

Lauren reluctantly placed both pieces of candy into my hand. I think she was expecting since she had given them to me, I would automatically give them back to her. In this case, I closed my hand over the candy and told her we would talk about this on the way home. As parents, Betsy and I do not want our children to take what has not been given them or to be presumptuous. We want gifts to be pleasant surprises and not perceived as some guaranteed right of their existence. We want our children to learn a gift is, well, a gift—something to be appreciated and never taken for granted. We also want them to learn the necessity of waiting; not everything that we want works out in the way we desire or even as quickly as we would like.

This vignette happened last Wednesday night, March 24, after our Wednesday night service. Little did I realize what I was trying to teach our children would in just a few hours be thrust on Betsy and myself as our heavenly Father would call for the same obedience from us. Having informed those at the Wednesday service of the serious problems in Betsy’s pregnancy, problems discovered only on the previous day, and having been comforted by the love and support of these cherished friends, we moved in a dazed stupor as Betsy unexpectedly went into labor later that very night. As we rushed to the hospital about midnight, we knew the situation was quite grim for the identical twin girls she was carrying. As Lauren’s earlier, my response was quite reluctant. Even at the hospital when we first received the news the babies yet to be born would not live, I still expected down deep inside if I gave the twins to God, then He would give them back to me. Until the nurses gently wrapped the first lifeless baby into blankets and carried her away from us, and then repeated the process with the second baby, I somehow believed there was still an outside hope for them. Only after the nurse walked down the hall with our second baby and turned the corner forever out of our sight this side of heaven, did I fully realize this was one of those times when God had closed His hand over what had been placed into it.

Actually, Betsy and I had not yet placed our twins in God’s hands. It was something God did. We had no choice but to accept what He in His sovereign wisdom had chosen to do. Our part in placing the twins into His

The Wilderness

hands occurred for us after the fact when we acknowledged God is God, and God is good. If God saw best for the twins to be in their eternal home with Him, then we could—and actively would—entrust their keeping to their ultimate Father. This is the cornerstone of our hope and confidence in Christ Jesus.

Hours earlier I had instructed Lauren how deeply we loved her, and how we desired the best for her. I told her whether or not I gave her the candy she wanted was no indication of our love for her. These words were said probably more for my own benefit than for that of a four-year-old. Once more the Lord brought my own teaching back to me. God's love for His children is not only stated in Scripture but also ultimately demonstrated in the sacrificial death of His own Son, Jesus. Even more so, God knows firsthand what it was like to stand by and watch the death of His own child—and He could have intervened and stopped it at any moment. God has exhibited His love for us in not only making us His children, but in infinitely countless ways every day of our existence. His love for us—and for the twins—is not contingent on whether we bring the little girls into our home, or God brings them into His.

“Place them both into My hands.”

“We have, Lord, and thank You for taking such good care of them.”

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus, we shall always be with the Lord.

Therefore, comfort one another with these words.

—1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

May the Lord bless you all. We are greatly blessed and comforted by you.

Your brother in the Lord,
Greg

The Cup and the Glory

There. It was finished. Having a child or children die is something unnatural. I do not have anything with which I can compare it. I have found although you can enjoy life again, you never completely get over it. Part of your deepest heart will always contain a hole. I marvel how it is possible for someone to endure a child's death without leaning on the love of Jesus. People do it every day, but for the life of me I cannot bring myself to perceive how they do.

Nobody knows what to say when someone's child dies, and nobody knows what to say especially to the pastor when he is among the grieving. I wrote to the church to try to give the death of the twins the proper perspective, and as I mentioned, I wrote for myself as much as I did for them. I meant what I wrote then, and I stand by it today. Nothing has changed.

I had stepped into the ever-expanding society of mourners and sufferers. I had rarely been there before and never on this level. It is not a realm you enter voluntarily. Still in the midst of my overwhelming grief the underlying support and love of God were evident in a manner I never knew existed. Although the death of the twins was the greatest sorrow I had ever experienced, I could not break through the quarry rock of God's support of me. I existed in a composite of grief and grace, mourning and peace, heartache and hope—and I have never felt so infinitely loved by God as I did during this time.

I had weathered my trial, or stated more accurately, God had sustained me through it. I expected to continue with both life and ministry. A few months later I left the church in Maryland and moved my family to North Carolina. My brother had built us a house, mostly because the twins would have made us a family of six. We signed the contract for the house on a Monday; the twins died three days later on Thursday. We could not explain the timing, but we knew it was no practical joke with God. While pastoring the church I was also a professor at Washington Bible College. After the twins died I still taught at the college, commuting from North Carolina on Tuesday nights and returning home in time for supper on Friday.

An additional chapter was added almost two years later when I encountered sorrow's twin sister, suffering. Having just completed a two-week summer school session at the college, I returned home for the start of summer break bursting with plans and activities. My plans soon changed. I awoke the first morning I was home and literally fell on my face. Only with much effort could I walk at all. I had been involved in athletics all my

The Wilderness

life and figured maybe I had a small stress fracture from my run of the previous day. A red dot about the size of a large pea was the only symptom, appearing on the base of my right foot's big toe. My condition, however, rapidly worsened. Soon, my entire right foot massively swelled and had turned to a sickening blue-black hue. I spent almost a week in the hospital as multiple doctors performed countless tests and procedures attempting to identify what was so viciously attacking me. In the meantime, the mysterious assailant spread throughout my body: both feet, both ankles, my right knee, hips, my left wrist, some of my fingers, and even my jawbone. Massive swelling and excruciating pain intensified as the unknown marauder invaded each new body part. After a long process of elimination, the doctors determined I had rheumatoid arthritis, and had it quite severely. It would be more accurate to say not so much that I had rheumatoid arthritis, but rather "it had me."

I became virtually crippled for three months and on disability for seven. I eventually progressed to walking with a cane. Only after about a year could I attempt to wear shoes without getting nauseated. During the initial stages of arthritis, I learned a new definition of the depths of physical pain as my condition continually worsened for a while after I left the hospital. The arthritis became so bad that I could not lie in bed; my only "comfortable" position was in a recliner we had downstairs. Surprisingly the pain was not on a constant level, but would instead peak and recede. For some reason my most severe pain began about four o'clock in the morning. Throbbing would begin, intensify into frenzy, and then gradually level off about four hours later. During the throbbing, the sensation was similar to having my bones broken about every fifteen seconds, being so engulfed in pain I could not isolate what hurt—*I hurt*. Sometimes the prescription painkillers deadened the pain; sometimes they did not. I would break out into a full-body sweat, pass in and out of consciousness, not knowing whether I had previously passed out, and if so, for how long. I would grovel in the chair or on the floor, thankful my children were asleep upstairs and did not have to see me in this condition. They were six and five at the time. They knew Daddy was sick, but they were oblivious to the severity of the disease. After the throbbing ceased I spent the remainder of the day trying to walk on feet that felt as though each had several broken bones in them. At the early stages it took four to five hours to "loosen up." Night would soon come, and the warfare would begin all over again. This was my normal routine for months.

The Cup and the Glory

I began to wonder if I would ever walk or even stand up straight again. Yet, as strange as it seems, and at the time of this writing the arthritis has improved tremendously, I never was really all that much concerned about it. As with the death of the twins, I felt the reassuring peace and presence of the Lord. I knew He was fully aware of both me and my illness. I also knew my arthritis was abnormally severe in its onset, so I figured it must somehow be part of God's plan for my life. What I really wanted to do was preach again. I missed the treasure hunt of digging deeply into God's Word on a weekly basis, and the unspeakable joy of watching God use it first in my life and then in the lives of others. Not that one can bargain with God, but I told God if I had my choice whether to preach again or walk normally again, I would choose to preach. In simplest terms, I would rather preach while having arthritis than to walk normally and not preach. I do not write this as a bragging statement; it was merely the desire of my heart, and I believe God placed the desire there.

So I had a dose of both suffering and sorrow, but in my heart knew we had honored God. I fully expected Him to assign me my next ministry task. Since God had wonderfully blessed the previous ones I had been a part of, and since we had been tried by fire, I expected a substantially more extensive ministry.

Instead, exactly the opposite occurred. Far from having suffering and trials ending, they intensified as I unexpectedly stepped into the wilderness. The wilderness is a domain that I did not know existed. I was, however, learning. My first step in the learning process came when I listened to a Michael Card song entitled "In the Wilderness". His song perfectly expressed where I was. Before that I viewed the wilderness as a place in the Bible such as where Satan tempted Jesus. I also know now from additional studies that "In the Wilderness" is what many Hebrew scholars called the Book of Numbers, based on the fourth word of the Hebrew Bible. "In the Wilderness" is much more expressive a description than the rather bland designation of Numbers. I understand much more about the wilderness now than I did.

The wilderness is not a place as much as it is a condition. Nonetheless, it is quite real. Often we will seek to be with God away from the distractions and problems of our everyday life. We call this a retreat, or to some, communion with God. What makes the wilderness the wilderness is the *appearance* of the lack of God's presence. It is that baffling condition of

The Wilderness

going from spiritual light into spiritual darkness, and often you do not realize you are there until you are in its midst. I had been in a teaching and pastoring ministry for over ten years, and I know that nothing—*nothing*—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. While I understand and acknowledge that I am a sinner saved by grace and have many areas of my Christian life that fall short of God’s desire, still I was actively seeking God and His work in my life. I was not a Jonah—I was a Paul. Yet, this juncture was unlike any I had previously encountered. For almost eight months it was though for some unknown reason to me, God did not desire fellowship with me any longer. I felt as though a close friend were mad at me and marked me off his list of close associates, without letting me know why, or what I had done to cause this. The wilderness is extremely painful, and it is extremely lonely. You do not have to be in a prison, in isolation, or under persecution. Family and friends can surround you in the comfort of your own home, and you still remain in the wilderness. In some ways, this was more painful than the death of the twins or the ravages of arthritis. I was more confused than I had been at any time since I began following Christ. I could not explain to others what I was experiencing because I could not adequately explain it to myself. I had reached an insurmountable wall. I had nowhere to go, and no way out, completely devoid of any direction or light. And by all means the hardest part of all—no apparent fellowship with God.

My prayer life changed considerably during this wilderness segment, being marked repeatedly by tears and anguish. Often I would speak intensely to the Lord—and for hours. In trying to explain to others what it was like, the best example I could think of was the Apostle Paul. In Colossians 2:1 Paul wrote of how great a “struggle” he had for those at Colossae and Laodicea. He used the Greek word *agon*, which is where we get our word “agony.” What Paul referred to was his agonizing prayer for those at Laodicea. This one verse offers a glimpse into just how arduous true prayer can be. When was the last time you would describe your own prayer life as agonizing? If you want to be humbled further, when was the last time you would use the word “agony” to characterize your prayer life on behalf of others? If you want to feel totally unworthy, when was the last time you would describe your prayer life as agonizing on behalf of others whom you do not know? Paul had never met the Colossians or Laodiceans, yet he was consumed by agonizing prayer on their behalf. To top it off, Paul ministered his agonizing

The Cup and the Glory

prayer while he himself was imprisoned in Rome. I have not consistently arrived at the last two levels of sacrificial prayer yet, but prayer for me became agonizing—and prolonged. I do not know what it was like for Jacob to wrestle with God, and there was no accompanying physical manifestation, but wrestling with God was what I perceived was occurring. Instead of God being the Paraclete or Helper, He seemed like the opponent. Instead of assisting and uplifting, He held me down and held me away—and I did not like or appreciate it at all.

Part of the pain during this time came from what others unwittingly said to me, but I knew God knew. As mentioned, my brother built us a wonderful house, partly with the twins in mind. Friends would compliment us on our house and comment on how blessed we were by God. Deep inside I boiled in turmoil. I didn't want the house—I wanted the twins. People who saw me crippled would see me months later walking or even running again and would praise God before me for His wonderful faithfulness to me in restoring my health. Again the dull ache of sadness permeated throughout me. I didn't want to walk; I wanted to preach—and I knew God knew. Similar to my arthritis scenario, this became my normal routine for months. I would pray for one thing, and God would give me exactly the opposite. God sustained us and met our physical needs, but not the secret desires and passions of the heart. Ministry opportunities vanished before my eyes. Students I had taught years before would excitedly call or write to inform me of their first pastorate, mission placement, or teaching ministry. They would inform me how great things were going, and then would thank me for making such a profound contribution in their lives. Although their situation delighted me, and it warmed me to have played some part in their spiritual growth, I failed to see why God no longer used me. It was not that I was better than they were; it was that God had used me before, but now He chose not to. I felt as though He had forgotten all about me. While former students actively worked in their new ministries, I sat on the sidelines and watched available positions for which I had applied turn me down. Frequently the human references I had were of such a magnitude it would be most unlikely I would not receive the invitation to minister there. Despite this, each ministry possibility would evaporate before me. I would return to agonizing prayer in the depth of the pit, wondering why God would not have mercy on me and rescue me from my despair.

The Wilderness

Although I do not blame them for this, one of the hardest things to endure during the wilderness was attending different churches, especially those who deem themselves a “seeker sensitive church.” “Praise songs”—which are misnamed because most of them are songs about us and what we intend to do for God (“We proclaim that the kingdom is here” . . . “I will go with Jesus” . . . “I will stand up for Him”) instead of songs about who God is in essence and what He has done for us—were most difficult to endure. I would watch as the congregation enthusiastically sang about the Christian experience and how they would gladly take up their cross and follow Jesus. No sacrifice was too great—their victory assured—and how they would joyfully bask in the radiance of God’s presence each day of their lives. I would be thinking, “You don’t know what you’re singing. You just don’t know.” I would hear messages admonishing people to accept Jesus. “He will give you His unspeakable joy. You will continually feel His love and His presence. You’ll never feel alone again. Jesus will lead you and give you a sense of direction you currently lack. Life will have meaning and fullness and joy in it—all you have to do is give your life to Jesus and walk with Him.” And I would be ripped on the inside. It was not what they said was wrong, it was only incomplete. *I was walking with Jesus*, but the elements of which they spoke were absent from my life—and I did not understand why. I thought how much better it would be to become a baby Christian all over again just to experience afresh God’s grace and presence, but I did not understand why He would care less for those who had walked with Him for years.

I would return again and again to the lonely isolation of prayer. Repeatedly my prayer would be, “I do not understand. I do not understand.” One of my greatest heartaches was as a father I have a deep and joyous relationship with my children. I also know Scripture teaches that God is our loving, heavenly Father as well. Yet, here was one of His children repeatedly calling out to Him in despair—but God would not answer. I told God, “Lord, I know you are a better Father than I am. Everything I do as a father, You are my role model: love, support, security, discipline, protection, and encouragement—I learned them all from You. But I do not have a parallel for what You are doing now. I cannot think of any situation where I would hold my children at arm’s length and not want to be with them when they sought me. I will not curse you, and I will not deny You are my Lord and my God, but I do not like what You are doing. I would not treat my children the way You are treating me. I do not understand. I do not understand.”

The Cup and the Glory

At the height of this intense struggle the college where I used to teach invited me to speak in chapel. Even the week before I was scheduled to preach I still had not the remotest idea what the message would be. Somehow 1 Peter 5:10 came to mind as a possibility: “After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” Only a few weeks before, my family and I had survived a hurricane that did massive damage to our county and state. I knew the four words Peter used to describe what God would do were words of rebuilding and remaking, in some cases making something right after extreme devastation. I asked, “Lord, what can I tell these people? I believe You and Your Word, and know this is true, but I cannot speak experientially of this passage in my own life yet.” It greatly bothered me because for the first time I was about to preach something I was not totally convinced would transpire—and I felt sickeningly hypocritical.

So battered, bruised, weary, and despondent, I hunkered down in God’s Word. I did not set out to prepare a sermon or to write a book; I set out to find answers from God and His Word, trying to make some semblance of sense out of the last three-and-a-half years of my walk with Him. As with virtually everything from God, what I found was vastly beyond what I had expected or imagined. He more than answered my questions—He answered my heart. Then He patiently and lovingly bound up that which was hurting, as we would expect the Good Shepherd to do. What follows are some of the lessons He taught me from this, some of which I was most reluctant and slow to learn. They are not necessarily for everyone, but rather are intended for those who are presently struggling with suffering in some area in their life, especially the painful perplexity of why God would allow them to experience such depths of misery, when we know He could remedy it whenever He wanted. Hopefully, it will offer new insight into the graciousness of God as He lovingly uses suffering to draw us nearer to Him and to conform us closer to the image of Christ. At its heart, the lessons re-teach us the simple truth that God is God—and God is in control. We can never walk with God long enough to out-walk this essential doctrine; He will not permit us. If this book helps you or someone you know through their dark times of suffering, or even the darker times in the wilderness, then it will have been wonderfully worthwhile. I invite you to bring your heart and bring your hurt. But you need not bring your cup—God has one waiting for you.

Chapter Two

The Cup

From our initial prayer for salvation throughout the remainder of our Christian life, we continually ask God for something. Scripture both commands and commends us for doing so: pray without ceasing; in everything by prayer and supplication make your requests known unto the Lord; knock and it shall be opened unto you, seek and you shall find, ask and it shall be given to you. It does not displease God when His children make requests of Him; quite the contrary. What a joyous time of thanksgiving when God gives a couple a child in response to years of prayer, a directive light after so long a time darkness, physical healing for loved ones who are ill, or the salvation of a friend prayed for over an extended period. The list is endless. How bleak both our physical world and spiritual life would be if God did not answer prayer.

You will find, however, suffering changes the scope of your prayer life. It causes you to reexamine the content of what you ask, especially when contrasted with the pleasant junctures of your Christian walk. This does not mean you are wrong in asking God for things, but you will find suffering cultivates a different mentality regarding what you ask. Your prayers are not the same when you are looking up from the pit. In fact, an aspect of suffering occurs when God does not grant many of the requests we bring to Him, at least not answer them in a way we expect or even appreciate. Intense and prolonged suffering forces you to address in your own life the simple yet profound questions, “What do you want from Jesus? What do you want from God?” The questions are not as easy as they sound—and the answer is even more difficult. If you pray for a deeper walk with Jesus or deeper blessings in the spiritual realm—and really mean it—how God

The Cup and the Glory

answers these prayers precious to Him may surprise you. It will most assuredly stretch your faith. Answered prayers of a deeper walk or deeper blessings are not so much a matter of God giving these to us as much as it is for Him to bring us to the point where we can receive them. The road to spiritual deepness with God is unexpectedly long and often severe with its numerous pitfalls and impediments. Once we grasp this concept, it will make us consider the cost before we ask God to have His own way with us.

Fortunately, we have such a request described in Scripture. In Mark 10:35-41, James and John approached Jesus and said: “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.” Before going any further, we might as well pencil our names in there next to James and John’s. The content of our prayer requests gives overwhelming proof that quite often the desire of our heart is to have whatever we ask of God.

“Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.”

And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

“Grant [give] that we may sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left” [and we’ll fight it out among ourselves to see who gets to ride shotgun and who comes in second].

But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

And they said to Him, “We are able.”

And Jesus said to them, “The cup I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

And hearing this, the ten became indignant toward James and John.

What James and John pray to Jesus—and it is a prayer, whether He was present on earth or in heaven—they ask Him to give, not to get God the Father to give. They also ask something beyond the present, worldly sphere, namely, to share in the awe-inspiring glory of Jesus. James and John receive much bad press concerning what they asked. Commentators describe them as selfish, ambitious, spiritually immature, yearning for worldly rewards,

The Cup

proud, and carnal-minded in what they ask Jesus to do for them—and again pencil in you and me there too. James and John had much to learn about what was required of them if they chose to follow Jesus. They had not at this point had their hearts torn away. But soon they would: at Gethsemane, fleeing in horror at Jesus' arrest, at Calvary, and during the appearances by Jesus after His resurrection.

While some of the accusations against James and John stick, there are other matters to consider:

At least they left everything to follow Jesus.

At least they valued the Pearl of Great Cost and pursued Him.

At least being with Jesus changed their priorities of what was of genuine value.

At least when many of His disciples no longer walked with Him (John 6:66), they still did.

At least they stayed the course and did not give up, despite their disappointments that the way God worked was often contrary to how they thought things should be.

At least they wanted to be in glory with Jesus.

At least they realized it was His glory, not theirs, and without Him there was no glory.

By the way, what do you pray for . . . when you pray?

At least they believed Jesus could answer their prayers.

At least their prayer had a spiritual element in it. They did not pray for worldly goods, riches, money, a mate, a job, health, a career, to have their business blessed, or a long list of other things on our wish list we call prayer.

At least they asked to be a vital part of the glory of Jesus after walking with Him for some three-and-one-half years. This was more than Judas believed—and vastly more than Judas wanted.

At least they believed in the identity and mission of Jesus and longed to be linked eternally with Him. This, too, was more than the scribes, Pharisees, and other religious leaders of that time believed or wanted. Instead of Jesus they desired places of prominence and authority so they would be revered by the masses, living a life of relative prosperity.

At least the prayers of James and John had an eternal consequence.

By the way, what do you pray for . . . when you pray? What comes after your own “Jesus, I want you to do for me whatever I ask of you?” How do you fill in the blank? While it is fitting and good God grants believers the privilege

The Cup and the Glory

of prayer, we must continually evaluate what we desire of Jesus at the core level. When I look back over the bulk of my prayers in previous years, frequently I omitted eternal elements and desires. It was not what I prayed for was wrong; it was merely superficial, especially while simultaneously giving lip service to wanting a deeper walk with Jesus. Suffering was one means God used to bring me to examine the sum and substance of what I asked. What transpired was not so much that I purposely changed my prayers as much as the severity of the circumstances changed them for me.

So what James and John asked was not a repulsive request before Jesus, and was actually better than the elements of many of our prayers. But so much more exists in this account than we initially view on the surface. Our responsibility as good students of God and His Word is to step into the world of James and John “to see with their eyes and hear with their ears.” Viewing this account from their world helps us gain a better understanding of what and why they asked Jesus what they did. After this, we will tie in what we learn with our own spiritual pilgrimage. Deep treasures lay embedded in God’s Word, ready to be mined and assayed. The digging takes effort, but the benefits are life changing and eternal. And what we find may surprise us.



The previous chapter before James and John’s request, Mark 9, records the Transfiguration of Jesus. We tend to read about the Transfiguration rather casually, concluding it would have been nice to witness it, but it generally does not stir our souls. It did, however, stir the three who witnessed it. Jesus had revealed to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power” (Mark 9:1). To a band of itinerant followers who had virtually no possessions, but who also looked to Jesus as the promised Messiah of Israel, this was a momentous disclosure, although they could not comprehend exactly what Jesus meant. By this time the disciples had already viewed Jesus’ power over sickness, death, nature, Satan and his demons—virtually every aspect in His earthly creation. It would be difficult for the twelve to conceive of any other realm Jesus had not already subjugated by His power. But what Jesus now promised intensified their collective imagination, especially since Jesus associated this display of power with His coming kingdom.

The Cup

As expected, the inner circle of Peter, James, and John were the ones Jesus selected to witness this anticipated event. The three spectators would come down from the mountain changed forever. For the rest of their lives, they would revert to what they had witnessed on that most memorable day. In fact, this preview of the coming kingdom glory of Jesus made more of an impact on Peter than when Peter walked on water, or any of the other miracles Jesus did. In 2 Peter 1:16-18, just weeks before his own crucifixion for the cause of Christ, in some of his final thoughts before his own death, Peter recalled the impact and importance of the Transfiguration:

“For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased’—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.”

One usually writes or speaks about matters dearest to the heart whenever someone knows his death is imminent. Peter was no different. The Transfiguration was one of Peter’s most memorable episodes in a life comprised of thousands of lessons and encounters with Jesus.

Also, the aged John wrote in John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John’s declaration probably refers more than anything to the Transfiguration. Although Jesus gradually revealed His glory to His twelve (John 2:11), it was only in the smallest of displays. For the most part, except at the Transfiguration, the disciples beheld the humility of Jesus more than His glory. Even Jesus’ resurrection and ascension did not match the display of glory God manifested at the Transfiguration. This may have been one of the reasons John recognized Jesus decades later when John was on Patmos; he had previously beheld His glory years earlier.

Nevertheless, the Transfiguration was a life-changing event for the three present. How could Peter, James, and John view the things of the earth the same once they had witnessed firsthand the glory of Jesus? Do you think

The Cup and the Glory

having seen His glory, having seen Moses and Elijah, having heard the audible voice of God giving testimony concerning His beloved Son, they would return to the others the same? Would the longing of their hearts be to become Roman citizens and progress socially and economically during their brief and transitory lives on earth? Would they be envious for the sterile and burdensome position of a Pharisee? Do you think anything on earth or any position or rank that the world has to offer or any of its fleeting riches, would attract them?

We must remember Peter was also with James and John. He saw what they saw, heard what they heard. However, Jesus “gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man should rise from the dead” (Mark 9:9). Notice the importance of Jesus’ revelation: “And they (Peter, James, and John) seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what the rising from the dead might mean” (9:10). This statement is an important one, and we will come back to it momentarily.

When you read the account in Mark, it seems as though only a matter of days transpired between the Transfiguration of Mark 9 and the request by James and John in Mark 10. Actually almost a year went by. All the matters revealed in Luke 10–13 and John 7–10 took place after the Transfiguration but before the questions of Mark 10. This can be seen by the change in locale of where Jesus was with His disciples. The Transfiguration occurred on a mountain in Galilee in northern Israel. The events of Mark 10 take place on Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem—and occur only days before His crucifixion.

Still the Transfiguration never left the minds of the three witnesses. Although not disclosed again in Scripture, Peter, James and John must have repeatedly discussed the events and meaning of the Transfiguration among themselves, away from the other disciples—and likely when they were alone with Jesus. How much additional truth Jesus revealed to them—if anything—will have to wait until the full disclosure in heaven. But the Transfiguration glory did not immediately clarify much for Peter, James, and John; it only produced multiple and ever increasing questions—and much, much debate.

As with so many other instances, when Jesus did reveal additional truths, they often clouded the overall picture. Such is the case regarding the death—and glory—of Jesus. In Mark 9:31-32 Jesus again spoke openly to all the disciples about His death, concluding once more with the promise that He would rise again. The Twelve collectively—which included the three

The Cup

Transfiguration witnesses—“did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask.” Jesus’ statements bewildered them—but their confusion was only beginning.

So after almost a year James and John did not simply blurt out their request to reign in glory with Jesus in Mark 10. What they asked was calculated and specific, most likely fitting for the situation at hand. Something must have occurred to trigger their approach to Jesus, hearing a word or viewing an event that moved them to action. A unique event had indeed happened—and when considered from the standpoint of James and John, they responded most logically.

Jesus had only a relatively short time to live when the events of Mark 10 occurred. Not only had He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem to finish His God-ordained mission (Luke 9:51), He also just as resolutely determined to teach the disciples on a daily and continual manner. Often the events of a particular day or an encounter with a group or individual would serve as the chalkboard for the Master’s class on truth and life. The closer Jesus journeyed to His cross, the deeper the spiritual lessons He taught the Twelve.

One such encounter deeply affected those who witnessed it, namely, the account of the rich, young ruler (Mark 10:17-31). Not only did this lead to a discourse about heavenly rewards, it eventually led to James’ and John’s requests of Jesus. That a rich ruler would inquire of Jesus would most likely have caused the disciples to respond somewhat optimistically. It was not so much that they wanted someone else to join the Twelve. Rather, they would have viewed this interview as a positive event, a prelude to the changing tide of Jesus’ popularity as they drew nearer to Jerusalem. Although Jesus had continually faced opposition from the religious leaders throughout His earthly ministry, now one came who not only had financial means and worldly influence, but who also possessed an interest in spiritual things. No doubt such a man would be a good catch for the kingdom. Unlike the majority who received the Gospel, this man had something to give. However, as often was the case, how Jesus responded to the rich, young ruler was exactly the opposite of what the disciples expected.

The man who approached Jesus lacked something—the recesses of his soul revealed this to him daily. Though he owned much property, he also

The Cup and the Glory

concluded life must consist of more than what he was master over. He wanted and needed God, but he could not understand his current spiritual void. In fact, this very absence of God in his life surprised him because, by his own estimation, he had lived a righteous life, keeping the required law (Mark 10:20). He viewed himself as a good man, not a bad one. But his self-estimation was the primary obstacle toward receiving eternal life: his view, his estimation, his standard—not God’s. Jesus, who searches even the crevices of man’s thoughts and motives, addressed the man rather mildly by simply quoting a few of the Ten Commandments. Even these few commandments demonstrated the vaporous nature of the inquirer’s spiritual base. The rich, young ruler came up lacking. He knew it—and Jesus knew it, knowing the depth of the man’s failure sank far beyond these initial commandments.

Jesus quoted only the commandments that dealt with human relations, none of the first four commandments that instruct about man’s relationship and responsibility to God. It was a fitting place to begin since here was someone accustomed to maneuvering in the material world and usually gaining an advantage. The man countered Jesus’ quotes by insisting he had done all that God’s Law commanded. Yet deep inside he knew he still did not possess the one thing that continually haunted him: eternal life. But his responses reveal that he defined eternal life by the parameters of his current status rather than by God’s standard. Nowhere in his discourse with Jesus does the man even once refer to God. He wanted eternal life—but by his terms, his efforts. He wanted an eternal reward—not an eternal relationship. This man had acquired all he wanted—he simply desired to slow down the clock of life, or better still, make his current prosperity continue into the next life. But his internal emptiness contradicted his external evaluation. There still must be more to do, he reasoned to himself, admitting to Jesus he still lacked something (Matt. 19:20). Because of his claims, Jesus met the man on his own field of play, responding with a “to do” of His own: “Sell your possessions and give them to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me” (Matt. 19:21).

The question the rich, young ruler asked gives us further insight into his value system. The man asked what he was still lacking—the better question was Who was he still lacking. Mark 10:22 records his response after Jesus’ invitation, “But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved; for he was one who owned much property.” So by addressing the man in his own world—the world of the material; the realm where he

The Cup

considered himself blameless—Jesus exposed the fact that the rich, young ruler had, in reality, broken the first law: “Thou shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3). The young ruler clung to his accumulated material gods that would never give him life or peace in its fullest. Instead they would only strangle him tighter and tighter the more he strove after bigger and better ones. The rich man came to Jesus lacking and burdened; he returned even more so, departing this time engulfed by grief as well. Grief is usually reserved for the death of someone you love dearly. In this case, it was the death of a dream, an evaporation of a self-defined concept of what eternal life entailed.

All the searcher actually heard from Jesus was the injunction to sell all he had—not the personal invitation to follow Him. The rich, young ruler could not comprehend the loss of the one or the gain of the Other. The grieving man departed that day without Jesus, without blessing, without peace, and at this point of his life, without God. From that day onward his massive property ownings never brought him any satisfaction, only a silent mocking that constantly echoed off his own depravity.

The disciples, however, would not have conducted this encounter the way Jesus had. Although they would not say it aloud, they were not fully convinced Jesus handled the interview properly. Their reaction reveals their thoughts. Mark 10:24 records that “the disciples were astonished at His words.” Mark 10:26 adds, “they were even more astonished” when Jesus told them how hard it was for one who is wealthy to be saved. But why—why the disciples’ extreme astonishment at what Jesus said? They had heard Jesus speak countless wonderful words and seen Him do innumerable miracles for over three years, and yet Scripture rarely records the amazement of the disciples, especially to this degree. What was it about this statement that would cause the Twelve to be so completely astounded?

The answer is, from the disciples’ perspective, the rich young ruler was obviously already tremendously blessed by God. How the disciples reacted to Jesus’ comments indicates how they viewed and defined blessings from God—and from our perspective as well. After all, is not the content of most of our prayers in essence requests we, too, may be a rich, young ruler? Rich in the sense of possessions we acquire, income, things we want, the financial freedom to be loosed from dependency on God. Young in the sense of good health, vitality, or as Jesus told Peter, “When you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished.” Ruler as one having

The Cup and the Glory

the respect of others, prominence, a “someone,” above the crowd, a well-paying position, security; we want others to look up to us—and we want others to serve us.

In essence, the gist of most of our prayers could be summarized as follows: freedom to do what we want financially, with the good health to enjoy life, while also being respected and envied by others—if not for what we do or who we are, at least for what we have. The content of most of our prayers give strong evidence we ourselves would trade places with the rich young ruler, desire the possessions he had, and still tack Jesus on at some point to our lives. It’s how the disciples—and we—generally view blessings from God.

By the way, what do you pray for . . . when you pray?

As usual, it is Peter who asks the questions that most mirror our own hearts. In the parallel passage of Matthew 19:27-28, notice how Peter’s mind works. By his way of thinking one could not be more blessed of God than the rich young ruler was. This man had virtually everything anyone could ever want, his cup overflowing with the good and bountiful blessings from God. However, Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell his possessions and “you shall have treasure in heaven.” Jesus’ answer surprises Peter. Maybe Peter better get this straight. So the treasure or blessing is in heaven only? Peter does not ask—nor at this point in his life does he really care—about the salvation of the rich young ruler, nor in why being rich is an obstacle to eternal reward. He wants to know about “us.” And with Peter being Peter, if he were alone with Jesus, would in reality be asking, “What about me?” Peter begins his question with “behold” (Matt. 19:27), which is an extremely important introductory word. Its purpose is to point out the seriousness of the upcoming statement.

“Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” In other words, “We have already done what you asked the rich young ruler to do, but what he would not. We might not have had as many possessions to leave, but still we abandoned what we owned to follow You. What then will there be for us?” It’s a logical question under the circumstances, and Jesus does not rebuke Peter for his interest in eternal rewards.

Jesus responded to Peter’s question by saying, “Truly, [‘Amen’] (in answer to the “behold” of Peter), I say to you that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on

The Cup

[literally] the throne of His glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Remember, James and John were at the Transfiguration. With the exception of Peter, they knew so much better than everyone present what comprised Jesus’ throne of glory—and their hearts must have leapt within them. Luke 19:11 states the disciples “supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately,” and, of course, with the kingdom would come the kingdom glory they had once witnessed. Only this time the glory would not be limited to a fleeting glance by three confused disciples, hidden on an isolated mountain—the kingdom glory would shine forth unto the nation of Israel, and ultimately into all the world itself.

“We will be part of *that*!” James and John must have cut their eyes toward each other. It was one thing to see Jesus in His glory, glory rightfully due Him. But to be associated with it, share in it, to be intimately and eternally linked to it and to Him—what a reward! What a marvelous, indescribable, beyond-all-comparison reward.

Jesus then broadened His answer to embrace anyone (including you and me) who leaves people or possessions for the Gospel’s sake. He promised an abundance of replacement, some while still on earth, but much more in the future (Matt. 19:29). However, Jesus ended His discourse in a curious way, “But many who are first will be last” (Mark 10:31). In Matthew’s account Jesus continued with a parable of the landowner and his laborers and the reward that will follow (Matt. 20:1-15). He concluded the parable with the question, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?” And, of course, James and John are present, listening to the instructions of the Savior.

After this discourse, while continuing the final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus again took the twelve aside and began informing them about His approaching suffering, torture, and death (Mark 10:32-34). He once more concluded by promising the disciples He would rise again. With all Jesus taught His little flock in the past few days, this is a crucial concept. It is the same statement Jesus told Peter, James, and John immediately after the Transfiguration. This is what the three had been discussing, but also what they did not understand. Yet, whatever rising from the dead meant, it somehow tied in with Jesus sitting on the throne of His glory. Not only that, but it also connected the twelve to sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel and receiving their long-awaited reward.

The Cup and the Glory

Jesus' statement about rising from the dead is the prompt for James and John; it is their catch phrase. Matthew 20:20, which records James and John's approach to Jesus, begins the account with the word "then," that is, the request by James and John comes because of the information just given by Jesus. This triggers the opportunity for James and John to ask what was already resident in their hearts.

Put yourself in James and John's place. They were witnesses of Jesus' glory at the Transfiguration. Were they not in a sense "first" to view the coming kingdom with its power and glory? Since Jesus said not to speak of the Transfiguration until He rose again, and since Jesus now spoke openly of rising again, even coupling it with the rewards to be given at that time, then the glory must soon follow. Also, since Jesus said many who are first will be last—many, but not all—James and John should see about securing their place. Not to ask Jesus might have been taken as an under-appreciation of what He offered. James and John knew their reward; their question is one of position. The truth is they beheld Jesus and His glory, and they did not want to be last in being a part of it. It meant enough to them to approach Jesus and make request concerning this.

Notice that James and John did not include Peter in their request before Jesus, even though Peter had witnessed what they witnessed. Mark 10:41 discloses the ten became indignant, and you can again pencil in they were led by Peter. No one would be more indignant than he; none of the other apostles had the same base of comparison. Peter probably placed a hard stare on James and John with the intent, "Jesus said not to say anything until after He rose from the dead. You aren't playing by the rules. You're cheating. Rebuke them, Jesus!" More true to his personality at the time, Peter was most likely mad he did not think of asking for this privilege himself.

What many people fail to see, however, is Jesus never rebuked James and John for what they asked. In a way, the request of James and John is a statement of faith and worship, even as a small child says things to his father that the father knows is from a child's perspective. ("You can have my dollar to get the car fixed, Daddy"). Jesus had taught them, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." He also taught them,

The Cup

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

(Matt. 6:19-21)

James and John knew their treasure, they knew where their hearts were, and they wanted to be with Jesus forever.

By the way, what do you pray for . . . when you pray?

Jesus’ response to James and John’s request casts a piercing light on our own hearts and our own understanding, or stated better, our own misunderstanding of prayer. For instance, Jesus told James and John they did not “know” what they asked, using a Greek word meaning “to know intellectually; to understand.” Scripture does not give any record of the facial expressions of James and John but they must have looked incredulous after the reply of Jesus. To them, it must have seemed at the time as though Jesus did not understand them. James and John “knew” what they wanted—and they knew He knew—and made request for it, being not at all ambiguous in what they asked. What they did not understand was the nature of prayer. They looked at their request as totally contingent on Jesus. He had what they wanted, He could open His “gift bag,” wave His hand, and give it to them, much as He had done with the turning of water into wine and the feeding of the multitudes. What they failed to see at this point in their spiritual life was what they asked was not so much contingent on the ability of the One to give it as it was on their spiritual capacity to receive it. God is more than willing and gracious to give them—and us—what we pray for to the extent it accomplishes His own glory and our own ultimate good. The question is whether we are willing to let God bring us to the point where we are vessels fit to receive the deeper blessings from Him. So instead of “Give me this, Lord,” our prayer should be “Lord, please work in my life and remove the obstacles that keep me from knowing You better and which keep Me from being the vessel prepared for a deeper walk, deeper service, and deeper blessings.”

By the way, what do you pray for . . . when you pray?

Another lesson emerges from the previous point. Often our entire perspective of prayer is off-center from the beginning. We view prayer as

The Cup and the Glory

having to pry open God's hand to receive something "good" from Him—something He often seems quite reluctant to give—when in reality the delay may be with our own worthiness or fitness to receive. I cannot give my six-year-old son a shotgun, car, or a chain saw. I cannot leave him alone in certain places. Although he may think he very much wants all these things, I would do him both disservice and harm to give him all he desires. The parable of the Prodigal Son demonstrates the folly of having all we wish given to us before we are ready. It is equally true in the spiritual world. Do you not think Jesus desires deeper fellowship and intimacy with us, and that He delights in giving good things to His children? Is the delay because of Him, or because of us? In order for the Master to give James and John what they requested, they would have to go through the grinding and refining process of having Jesus increase and they decrease (John 3:30)—and it will also be true for us as well.

Jesus taught James and John—and us—their whole perception of what they asked was wrong. He did this orally, and the text itself does it subtly. Six times in Mark 10:35 the Greek word *de* is used, which is usually translated "but." This gives a new understanding to the heart of their discourse. What James and John want is at variance with what they actually were requesting, which they really did not "know."

Notice how the use of *de* ["but"] alters the tenor of the conversation:

"Teacher, we want You to do whatever we ask of You."

But Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

But they said to Him, "Grant that we may sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left."

But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

But they said to Him, "We are able."

But Jesus said to them, "The cup I drink you shall drink, and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized."

Three times in succession the text indicates "But Jesus said" came in response to what James and John said. It is though two different topics of conversation were occurring simultaneously, and in reality, two were. Jesus knew of what He spoke; James and John did not know, but thought they

The Cup

did. The same is true for much of prayer throughout the history of the church, including many prayers we pray. Often we simply do not know what we are asking.

Many people, especially in a Christian gathering or class, will declare, “I want to know Jesus deeper!” If this is to occur, God must intervene to remove elements that hinder us from doing so. This includes even things we view as good and working in ways that leave us dumbfounded and confused. An aspect of this particular work of God is withholding or delaying temporal blessings so we can receive greater blessings in the future. Some blessings will be given while we are still here on earth; others we will ultimately receive in heaven, all carefully accomplished with the pinpoint precision of the generous God who delights in giving yet better gifts to His children.

“Why don’t you give me what I ask, Lord?”

“Why don’t you let Me?”

It is one thing to ask for deeper blessings. It is quite another thing to stand firmly during the refining process that makes us fit to receive what we ask.

“How bad do you want what you ask for, James and John?”

“How bad do you want it, Child of God?”

By the way, what do you pray for . . . when you pray?

We can learn another lesson from this one encounter with Jesus. In receiving the deeper blessings of God, we have a part and God has a part. Jesus asked James and John if they were “able,” from the Greek word *dynamai*, which means “to be able,” or “to have the power.” It is where we get our English word “dynamite.” Were they able to drink the cup He drinks or to be baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized? Jesus employed two metaphors in His questioning response, one active and one passive. In drinking the cup we do the action (active); we willfully partake of it. In being baptized we receive the action (passive); we submit to what God gives us. One is a voluntary choice on our part—which is by no means easy—and the other is to respond by faith to the cross we bear in whatever God brings or allows into our lives, to count the cost and keep going on in faith.

Are you able to drink the cup Jesus drank?

–The cup of not living by the world’s standards of success.

–The cup of walking by faith (deeply walking by faith) even in the darkest dark.

The Cup and the Glory

- The cup of evaluating your own life by God’s Word and His Holiness rather than your own perceived goodness.
- The cup of viewing the depth of your own sin and depravity and confessing to God and to others as needed.
- The cup of earnestly seeking Jesus above all else, including all attractions and all distractions.
- The cup of seeking first the kingdom in the midst of a world, including much of the religious one, which often seeks after the things this world has to offer. Left to ourselves the allurements of the world attract us as much as they do anyone else, but you will not find these in the cup offered by Jesus.

Are you able to discipline your life so that while everyone else may be seeking the world and its pleasures, you are seeking God? Are you able to walk alone with God, and, if so, for how long? Are you able to stand firmly against the multiple and painful darts from the Enemy who delights in turning you away from a deeper walk with Jesus? He has had centuries to perfect his barrages, and he is quite adept at what he does. Is Jesus worth it to get out of bed a few minutes earlier just so you can spend time with Him alone? Are you able to review your daily schedule and see that you have spent at least as much time alone with Him as you have in frivolous activities or hobbies? Are you able to turn off the T.V. so you can go to some isolated place to pray?

Although we will develop this throughout the remainder of this book, if you think drinking the cup is hard, it pales in significance with the baptism which God brings upon us because He allows us to experience suffering and sorrow we would never choose for ourselves. In fact, God sometimes allows suffering and sorrows so deep we would question His love for us if we did not have repeated promises in His Word of His unfathomable love—and even then darkness so overwhelming we still question Him.

How long are you able to walk with God through suffering, sorrow, repeatedly unanswered prayers, hopelessness, and spiritual darkness? How long can you walk with God—joyfully or just merely staggering along—when you cannot explain what God is doing in your life to someone else, because it makes absolutely no sense to you? How long can you walk with God while you have chronic and severe needs? You repeatedly witness Him answer the prayers of so many around you, but for some reason unknown to you, not yours. Will you still trust God? How long can you walk with God when it seems He has turned both His face and His blessing from you to someone

The Cup

else, and you do not know why? Perhaps stated in its simplest terms, how long can you wait on God until you give up on Him and put down the cup He offers?

James and John were not as spiritually strong as they thought—and neither are we. They underestimated both the extents of their spiritual resolve as well as the depths of the cup and of the baptism. If Jesus had shown them what comprised their cup and what comprised their baptism, they would not have waited until Gethsemane to flee in terror from Him. Nor would we.

We should also realize we do not “know” (“to understand”) what we ask any more than James and John did. A refining process occurs that makes us fit to receive the deeper blessings of God. Yet our prayers focus mostly on the removal of the very elements God uses to bring us to the point of blessing. Is it any wonder why Paul would say, “We do not know [“understand”] how to pray as we should” in Romans 8:26? We pray for greatness and blessing from God, and then for relief from the divine procedure that accomplishes this. On top of that, we usually blame God for unanswered prayers, while all the time He is in the process of answering what we glibly bring before Him.

By the way, what do you pray for . . . when you pray?

Finally, it is human nature to turn away from the cup placed before us and not want to partake of it. Jesus had His own cup to drink—one whose depth extends beyond our finite understanding. His cup was so intense it led to drops of blood mingled with sweat as He wrestled in agonizing prayer with His Father. In contrast to the protective ignorance of James and John, Jesus knew what entailed the cup He must drink, and it repulsed Him to look even momentarily into it. Jesus referred to His cup when He was in Gethsemane, which interestingly means “place of crushing,” where the olives were pulverized to produce oil that would bleed forth. We should wonder in amazement at the preview given in Isaiah 53:5, stating, “He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities.” Part of the crushing for Jesus began with His cup in Gethsemane. If Jesus had not drunk His cup, we would have no possibility of ever drinking ours. Even more to the point, our cup would have consisted of endless hell, eternally separated from God, with no Redeemer. When Peter attempted to rescue Jesus from His pending arrest, Jesus responded, “Put the sword

The Cup and the Glory

into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" Jesus knew He had to drink it. He drank His because we could not. He drank His cup so we could drink ours. He drank His cup God placed before Him so we could become sharers with Him—forever.

During three sequences of prayer Jesus pleaded with God to have His cup removed from Him. He pleaded with a depth of agony greater than the combined agony of all prayers offered before or after the cross. But three times He also prayed, "yet not as I will, but as Thou will" (Matt. 26:39). That last phrase cost Him dearly—and it will you too, if you really mean it, and not merely repetitiously incorporate it into what we call prayer.

By the way, what do you pray for . . . when you pray?

Put your heart on the table. The Cup is our responsibility to take up and drink. Jesus offers it, but not everyone takes it. Are you able to drink the Cup He drank?

Please pass me the Cup, Lord. It's as necessary for me as it was for You. Give me strength and courage because what I ask is a fearful thing to me. Change me into a vessel fit for receiving not only what You would have for me, but also whom You would have me become. I have no strength to do this but by You. Strip me of me, and replace it with You. Have your own way with me. Thy will be done on earth—my earth, my life—as it is in heaven. Amen.

If you pray that prayer, you begin a new and different level of walking with Jesus, consisting both of astounding heights and astonishing depths. Walking with Jesus is a road to be traveled one step at a time, not an instantaneous process—and the road beckons us to come.