

“Yeah, but I kinda got distracted,” Greg said. “Can we talk about something a little lighter tonight?”

“How about the nature of suffering?” Luke said with a sly grin.

“Oh yeah, that’s lighter,” Greg said sarcastically.

“But it’s already on your mind,” Luke nodded his head toward the bed where they’d sat to have their conversation earlier. “So you don’t have to think as hard about it.”

“That’s true,” Greg said seriously.

“You gotta love the Shepherd logic,” Steve said to Nalani.

“Yes. Weird, but strangely logical,” she grinned.

“Suffering’s not as bad as we tend to think it is, especially in the big scheme of things,” Greg said.

“Beauty from ashes,” Beth agreed, “like Danny.”

“Sometimes it takes a long time and comes in a weird way,” Heather said, “like Steve’s scars.”

“My father used to beat me,” Steve said thoughtfully, “and almost two decades later, God uses the scars to help Heather and I see him more fully.”

“And me too,” Greg said. “After our conversation about your scars last night, I got to thinking about how we don’t look for God in places of suffering. That means we miss opportunities to witness.”

“You mean like keeping my scars covered except in the privacy of my own home?” Steve asked.

“May I ask what scars?” Nalani interjected. Steve explained about the scars on his back.

“So that’s why you always wear a swim shirt when we surf,” Luke said.

“But if Steve didn’t hide them all the time, he could use them to talk to people about Jesus’ suffering,” Greg said. “Same thing with Heather.”

“Me? What do my scars have to do with Jesus’ suffering?” she asked.

Greg rolled his eyes. “Other than the fact that no matter how much you suffered to get your scars, Jesus suffered more because his suffering included your pain and everyone else’s too? How about the fact that you have a built-in reminder of the blood and water that flowed from Jesus’ side when he was

pierced?”

“You mean ...?” Heather frowned and touched her left side just above her hip.

“Yeah. The bullet’s damage was mostly internal but the incision they made when they repaired the damage, that points right to Jesus’ death.”

Silence reigned for a moment as everyone thought about what Greg had said.

“Show us your scars,” Greg said suddenly. “Both of you.”

“What? Why?” Heather protested, sitting back and pressing her hand protectively over her side.

“Did you hear *anything* I just said?” Greg snorted in disgust. “And you wonder why I believe I’m not the right man for the job.”

“You’re right about the scars, wrong about the job.” Steve stood, turned around and pulled up his polo shirt so everyone could see his scars. Heather and Greg were very familiar with them by now, but the others gasped in surprise.

“Your *father* did that to you?” Beth said. Steve nodded and smiled slightly at Beth’s unknowing imitation of Heather’s response to his scars. He pulled his shirt back down and sat at the table again.

“Last night I thought that the fact that it was Steve’s father who did it hurt worse than the beating itself,” Greg said thoughtfully, “and that’s true, but I was thinking it was something that separated Steve’s scars from Jesus’, but ... I’m not so sure now.”

Greg toyed with his spoon for a moment, gathering his thoughts. “It was his Father’s will that Jesus be beaten. It was prophesied many centuries before, and don’t forget that Jesus said, ‘My God, why have you forsaken me’ when he hung on the cross. Maybe Jesus did feel the betrayal as much as Steve did.”

Stunned silence reigned once again.

“But he hadn’t,” Greg continued after a moment. “I mean the Father. God the Father hadn’t really forsaken Jesus. He was still with him. He had to be because they’re inseparable, God the Father and God the Son. Over and over Jesus said, ‘the Father is in me and I in him.’ John tells us that just before Jesus was taken in the Garden, he told the disciples that they would leave him but he wouldn’t be alone because the Father would be with him. Jesus also said that he would personally dwell in us and never leave us. If we believe that the Father can’t be in the presence of sin so he actually did leave the Son when he hung on the cross, then our faith is miserable because we have no guarantee that God won’t bail out on us every time we sin. If God the Father had to leave Jesus because of the presence of sin, then how can God the Spirit dwell in us without bailing out every time we sin?”

“God said he would *never* leave us or forsake us, not even when we sin. We need to understand that the weight of sin was so intense on Jesus that he could no longer feel the presence of the Father even though he was still there.

That's what gives power to our faith. It energizes the 'knowing' part of faith, the part that fixes on the known truth. God lives in me and he'll never leave me or forsake me. That allows us to ignore the feelings that God has abandoned us and stand fast in knowing that he's still there even if he's grieved."

Greg looked around the table with a concerned frown. Had he communicated well?

Heather slowly stood and raised her shirt to expose her scar.

"So what's this tell us about Jesus and our faith?"

"The blood and the water," Greg smiled softly. "It flowed freely at his death. In the Gospel of John, which is the only one to tell of the piercing, Jesus talks about both. He told the woman at the well that he was the source of living water. Whoever drinks of his water will never thirst again. After he fed the five thousand, he called himself the Bread of Life, then he said that only those who drank of his blood would remain in him and have eternal life.

"Drink the living water and never thirst again. Drink of his blood and abide eternally with God himself. Both water and blood flowed freely at his death. The physical truth of the blood and water flowing from Jesus' pierced side illustrates the spiritual truth. Whatever your cup is, bring it to Jesus' side to fill it. Drink from him and you'll rock your world."

Heather dropped back into her chair and stared at her brother.

"Let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." Paul said that at the end of his letter to the Galatians. That's a strange, isolated comment that doesn't have much by way of context to understand it. But this context ...," Greg motioned with his hand to Steve and Heather. "This tells me that when we become aware of our union with Christ through our own sufferings, nothing's ever going to really trouble us. At least not for long. How can it if we carry with us the reminder that he really does know our pain and trouble? We like to ask God 'why.' Why does he allow such horrible stuff to happen to us? Maybe we need to ask 'what now' more often. What do I do with this suffering I've been gifted with? How's God going to be glorified?"

After another long moment of silence, Luke shook his head slowly. "And this with a concussion that makes your brain not fully functional. I really have underestimated you, Greg. ... Thank you for showing God to me in a new light."

"So we have the scourging and the sword," Beth looked around the table. "What about the nails?"

"Did you know that the nails are only mentioned in the Gospels once?" Greg observed. "By Thomas when he was doubting. In fact, in the whole New Testament only Peter in the first Christian sermon and Paul in Colossians mention the nails in the cross."

"Does that mean they aren't important?" Nalani asked.

"No! Not at all," Greg replied, "but they aren't *more* important than the

scourging or the sword. But the nails are what we mostly talk about.

“The beating Jesus received was specifically mentioned by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. John was the only one to mention the piercing, but it was prophesied by Zechariah. And yet the biblically unremarkable nails get so much press while the beating and sword get so little. I’m just saying that we need to keep things in perspective. The nails are very important, but so are the scourging and the sword.”