

# From Distress to Progress





**BSSF-4**

**From  
DISTRESS  
to  
PROGRESS**

**Biblical Motifs for  
Pilgrims in The Way**

**By  
Lee Bee Teik**

**BYTE SIZE SOLID FOOD SERIES**

**For the Ordinary Believer**



**A Reconre Publication**

Title: From Distress to Progress – Biblical Motifs for Pilgrims  
[Materials from sermons given by Dr. D.A.Seamands are used with his permission. Some of the materials was originally used in Malaysia as part of the unpublished *Companion to Friends of the Bridegroom* in the author’s Pastoral Counselling Course Part II]

Author & Copyright: Lee Bee Teik 2006

ISBN : 978-983-9398-10-6

Layout & Design: Cornerstone Corporation Sdn Bhd

Printer: Akitiara Corporation Sdn Bhd (390199-U)

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P.O.Box 91, 70710 Seremban  
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Or

The Distributor: Cornerstone Corporation Sdn Bhd  
Tel: 03-77266335  
Email: [inquiry@cornerstone-msc.com](mailto:inquiry@cornerstone-msc.com)  
Website: [www.cornerstone-msc.com](http://www.cornerstone-msc.com)

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## About the “Byte Size Solid Food Series”

### Why Byte Size?

A byte is a unit of information storage in computer chips which is already an accepted means of messaging technology since the late 20th century in Malaysia. *Byte size* also has the same sound as *bite size*, which is to imply that the BSSF Series is to reach readers with small chewable and digestible amounts of the sharing of God’s word. The Reconre Team prays that you will have an enjoyable meal as you ponder on His word while reading through each title in the series.

### Why Solid Food?

Living in a developing nation has its advantages and disadvantages, if hindsight assessment of more developed nations may be a guide. We are glad to discover more of God’s creativity through mankind. However, in our hectic rush to advance in technological research, we may forget the One who alone has endowed us with the means to use and enjoy the fruits of our research. Therefore, this series of small books are the result of an effort to feed not only the minds but also the hearts and souls of readers so that they may fulfill God’s vision of remaking them into His image. For this, we need the solid study and meditation of His word from the Bible, and not only the drinking of the milk of the first teaching when we first trusted Christ to be our Saviour and Lord.

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us in 5:11-14...

*“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”*

Reconre hopes that many other home grown writers and publishers will surface to contribute their solid food through the written word so that God’s people in Malaysia will not remain or become spiritually anaemic. That the pen is mightier than the sword still holds true in many ways, I believe.

Finally, let us proclaim with Jude in :24...now,

*“To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only wise God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.”*



## **How to Use this Book**

- Take your time to read through the book.
- Pause to ponder in between.
- You may use the main text and later reflections for Personal/Group Study or during your Quiet Times alone with God.
- If used in a group, meet weekly or at any regular interval to share, pray and apply what you have learnt together.
- Suggestion for Personal Reflection:

Spend 30 minutes or more daily [depending on your nutritional deficiency or appetite] meditating on what you have read and talk to Him about it. Better still, take a few days off work and ponder on the reflections with Him by Your side. If you need a venue for this purpose, contact Reconre staff at [www.reconre.org](http://www.reconre.org) in Malaysia.

**Come,**

**Let us Read...**

**Let us Listen...**

**Let us Ponder...**

**Let us Pray...**

**Let us Love, Trust & Obey...**

**JESUS!**

# **From Distress to Progress**

## **Biblical Motifs for Pilgrims in the Way**

*John 15:13-15*

*“Greater love has no one than this, that He lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learnt from My Father I have made known to you.”*

Malaysians are familiar with the concept of motifs as repeated patterns for a particular work of art. We are proud of our batik heritage. I vividly recall designing a motif on a block and then printing it on a piece of white teteron cotton in our school art class back in the 60’s. A motif takes time to design and it takes time to put into good use. Similarly, in pastoral counselling, in the hope of discovering a root cause for a specific problem, we pray and take time to look for motifs or repeated patterns in the counsellee’s relationships, attitudes and life generally. We want to see whether there is any habit that is consciously or subconsciously expressed so that we may pray for these undesirable habits to be reduced and, in God’s mercy, be eventually removed through the renewal of the mind and the Holy Spirit’s transformation process.

In the Old Testament, God constantly reminded the Israelites of their repeated rebellion against His laws and His repeated calls to repentance and renewal. In the New Testament, Jesus repeatedly used parables to speak to His listeners. Parables are motifs or they will not be useful. They are meant to portray a summary of man's common attitudes and actions before God. If we will to obey Him, we will understand the parables; if we will not to obey Him, then the parables will simply fly over our heads. That was why Jesus used parables to teach the crowds and His disciples. I have picked up a set of Bible characters as examples of motifs because their problems are shared by many people in deep need.

The movement in the lives of these biblical characters form what I call the therapeutic motifs for those seeking God's deep transformation of lives. They consists the man by the pool, Lot's wife and Abraham to show a pilgrim's life from distress to progress in this world. As we proceed, I will ask questions to enable you to come to your own conclusions about how God sees them and how He ministers His saving and healing grace to them. Where the ideas are careful speculations from human observations, I will let you know. Watch out for how the people responded to Him too.

For those helping others grow in Christ-likeness, they need to recognise the progressive stages of our counsellee's pilgrimage so that we will not stand in the way of their transformation. We need to wait for the right time to intervene on the one hand, and not be too slow and miss the opportune time to help them on the other hand.

## Stage I. The “Responsibility of Choice” Motif

### Read John 5:1-14

#### *Question 1.*

***Who was the man described in the passage above?***

The man, at the pool with the five arches, had been an invalid for 38 years. Jesus asked him a question about his will but he evaded the question by:

- \* blaming others for not helping him...  
e.g. *“It’s their fault-lah!”*
- \* appealing to a of lack of time to get help...  
e.g. *“Ayoh, cannot come to meetings on time because of traffic jam-loh!”*
- \* self-pity...  
e.g. *“Poor me!”*

Jesus wasted no time in alerting him to his masks; He commanded him to exercise his will. The man never dreamt that he could do it...but he obeyed Jesus and was healed, even though he did not clearly state he wanted Him to heal him! See how accommodating Jesus is if we really want to be healed but are evasive about it due to our fear of not being healed again...and again...and again.

#### *Question 2.*

***What was the diagnosis for him?***

He committed the sin of neglecting to take responsibility for his own life.

*Question 3.*

***What are the implications of this motif?***

\*\*

We are being *held accountable* for our abilities to do what we can do.

The man's sin was that he did not even ask for help and settled into life as an invalid.

\*\*

We are being *held responsible* for admitting that we are helpless in a situation where we cannot help ourselves, and for seeking help when necessary.

For example, in Mark 9:21-24, Jesus encouraged the father to ask Jesus to help him to believe in Him when he realised how little he actually trusted Him.

*“If you are able...” became “I believe, help my unbelief!”*

***Add in your personal comments:***

## **Stage II. The “Pillar of Salt of Retrospection” Motif**

### **Read Jeremiah 7:24**

*Question 1.*

*What is the significance and role of retrospection in pastoral counselling?*

*Retrospection can be positive or negative.*

*If negative, it will lead us to loathe the past bad and yet long for the past “comfortable familiar.” God described such people as stubborn, of vile heart, walking in their own counsel, looking backward to the old life rather than forward to His new life for them.*

### **Read Genesis 19:17, 24-26**

The angel came to rescue Lot’s family from God’s judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. He commanded them...

*“Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”*

They were not to look back but to focus ahead at where God was leading them. Surely, He knew what he was doing!

However, Lot’s wife looked back and was instantly turned into a pillar of salt, a monument of disobedience. While loathing the bad immoral life she left behind, she still longed for its comfortable luxuries. Note that our Lord considered this lesson significant enough to remind us about it in Luke 17:32-33.

*Nevertheless, retrospection can be positive.*

It will help us to give thanks and then to move ahead with God. It shows us how He has been with us even without our knowing and how He has turned bad into good according to His purpose (Read Genesis 50:20 & Romans 8:28). We see this process in Joseph's pilgrimage after his brothers met up with him in abundant Egypt.

**Read Genesis 42:7**

Joseph was still bitter, angry, resentful and revengeful. He had suppressed his emotional wounds for more than 20 years.

**Read Genesis 43:30**

When Joseph saw his playmate brother Benjamin, he wept for joy because he had good memories of him and felt safe in his presence. Further, something positive was definitely emerging in his other brothers' lives. At least, *Judah* had cared enough for Papa Jacob by standing as guarantor for Jacob's youngest and second favourite son's safety.

This part of the story shows us that, sometimes, when we suppress our painful memories, the beautiful ones are hidden too.

*(In the author's childhood, there were more happy times than unhappy ones; yet, for decades, the happy scenes were hidden. She could only automatically review the painful scenes when she recalled her childhood. But, as the Lord healed her stage by stage, she realized, after many years of sad memories, that whenever she tried to recall her past now, the happy scenes of childhood freedom and joy were spontaneously coming to her conscious mind while the*



*unhappy ones had disappeared. True are the words of the hymn writer...*

*“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see!”*

### **Read Genesis 45:1-15**

Joseph could not contain his freed emotions any longer; he was losing his self-control and willingly forgave his older brothers while he warmly embraced each of them. Once he was willing to be reconciled with those who deeply hurt him, God’s compassion flowed through him to them.

### **Read Genesis 50:15-21**

After Papa Jacob died, the older brothers feared Joseph’s possible revenge. They had not really understood him yet. But Joseph calmed their fears with the reassurance of his forgiveness, made possible because of God’s sovereign grace to each of them. He who had received grace was able to give the same grace to others.

*The vision of Genesis 50:20 enabled Joseph to simply state: “God cares, therefore Joseph cares”. Indeed, God makes everything work for good to those who love Him, to those called according to His purpose, not ours.*

**Joseph’s perspective implies that after a particular sin or wound is dealt with, we need to move on with God’s power and promises.**

*Question 2.*

But how do we move on...?

### **Stage III. The “Abraham-Risk” Motif**

#### ***Question 1.***

***What sort of relationship did Abraham have with his God?***

#### **Read Genesis 12:1**

God called Abraham (then Abram) to leave his familiar and secure environment to go to the land He will show to him. “Go, I will show you...” formed the crux of his calling.

Abraham trusted God with a childlike faith and obeyed. He moved on even though he was as weak as we are.

#### **Read Genesis 12:10-20**

Abraham told his wife to tell a lie. Consequently, God punished the Egyptians because Pharaoh took her as his wife. Did Abraham do that to save his own skin (which sounds like Peter’s denial of having been Jesus’ disciple)? He probably did though he really cared for God’s honour before outsiders. Hence, God honoured his humility and integrity as shown in Genesis 14.

#### **Read Genesis 15**

Abraham openly expressed his doubt to God.

***Was God angry with him for asking sincere questions?***

No, instead, He reassured Abraham of His faithfulness in fulfilling His promise to him. He just had to wait. God understood his struggle in learning to trust Him and reassured him of His promise. Abraham believed God’s word and God counted his faith in Him as righteousness. When he needed a sign, God granted it to him. *God*

*appreciated his trust* so much that He entrusted His secrets about the future generations to Abraham.

*Abraham trusted God and kept moving*, even though he failed again by listening to Sarah's pestering to help God give them a child (Genesis 16).

### **Read Genesis 17**

God did *not* talk *to* Abraham; He talked *with* Abraham and changed his name from Abram to Abraham, signifying a change of role as head of a family clan to head of a nation. That God honours those who honour Him is indeed true.

### **Read 2 Chronicles 20:7**

When King Jehoshaphat prayed for help, he added his appeal with a reminder to God,

*“Lord, we are descendants of Abraham, Your friend...remember? Abraham with whom You talked...we are his descendants...I am sure You will listen to us because of him...”*

Rather Asian indeed! Again,

### **Read James 2:23**

It is stated once more that Abraham believed God and his faith was reckoned (counted) to him as righteousness. How privileged to be called *“the friend of God”*!

Therefore,

*The Critical Issue* at this stage of one's pilgrimage is that once a person has dealt with his bad past before God and

man, he is to jump like an acrobat on a trapeze. An acrobat has to let go of one swinging bar before he can reach out to grip the next one. In a similar manner, the recovering pilgrim needs to let go of the bad past in order to be able to reach out and receive God's new present and future blessings i.e.

\*\* From the Known -> to the Unknown

because

\*\* Faith in God's word as **command means obeying** Him through the exercise of faith

and

\*\* Faith in God's word as **promise means trusting** Him even when we cannot see ahead of us clearly.

This jump is often difficult to take because:

*It is sometimes less painful and therefore more comfortable to remain in a bad situation (with the known old patterns of thinking and behavior) than to deal with deeper hurts in order to let them go. Further, the future with God, though good, can be rather uncomfortable at first because it is so new. Hence, often, most hurting people need a temporary assistant to the Holy Spirit to stand with them till the crisis is over. Then they are able to proceed with joy with their Saviour and Friend!*

For example,

Siew Chin grew up in a dysfunctional family where, as the eldest child, she had to father and mother her own parents who could not fulfill the roles of leadership at home. They would call on her to solve family problems much of the time. After God's healing in her own life, something happened to her Dad.

A year after she was discharged, Siew Chin called me out of the blue for another counseling session. I thought she had had a relapse into her old lifestyle. What happened? For the first time in their family history, Dad had called a family meeting and led in the discussion. However, Dad's action made her nervous. She complained about feeling queer and not knowing how to respond to her Dad's new behavior at home. She was so used to leading her parents and siblings; she would rather have his old ways back...at least she would know how to respond to him! When I explained to her that God was answering her prayers by helping her Dad to grow up, she began to see the changes from God's perspective and rejoiced in his changed perspective in the family. If I had also panicked, which I almost did, I could have encouraged her to slide back into her old thought patterns and life again.

*Question 2.*

***Where did Abraham find the strength for his on-going faith?***

**Read Genesis 12:7**

*An altar represents something stable, strong and immovable.*

Abraham built an altar each time the Lord spoke to Him about the certainty of His promise to him and his descendants. More significantly, as we have seen, is the constant awareness of the presence of God in his inner life. This led him to know that in a crisis, *“The Lord will provide”* (Genesis 22:9).

However, he was willing to hold on to the temporal external necessities of this life by living in *tents that are mobile, unstable and changing*.

Therefore, the *secret* of the ability to trust in God is to get to know Him better by meeting with Him as much as possible.

**It was God’s unchanging friendship with Abraham that enabled Abraham to trust that God would and could raise Isaac to life, if He has to do that, in order to fulfill His promise of an heir through Sarah and Abraham.**

*It was this trust that enabled him to move from the known to the unknown when God called him “to leave” his homeland and “to go” to the promise land of blessings. God did not tell him what would happen in between.*

*Question 3.*

Therefore, as we seek to help ourselves and others, we need to ask them and ourselves, in the later stages of healing:

***“Are you willing to trust God enough to leave your wrong ways of thinking in order to receive God’s blessings of right thinking, and eventually, feeling and living?”***

Otherwise, how are we to receive God's blessings?

**God reminds us in Hebrews 12:1-3 to:**

*Give up the past to Him...*

*Live today for Him...*

*Move forward into the future with Him...*

What a joy it is for us, together with those helping us, when we finally see ourselves beginning to walk with our God, our Bridegroom and our Friend, like Abraham did!

***“If the heart of healing is forgiveness,  
then  
the head of healing is Providence.”***

*D.A.Seamands*

[i.e. Our minds are to be renewed to trust God's faithful provision as He transforms us, through a series of changes, into the image of Christ, in order to be prepared for the grand finale of human history described in Rev. 19:6-8 & 21:1-7]

## Reflection

1. Where are you in your pilgrimage with Christ while in this world?

Journal.

2. Read John 8:31-36; Romans 12:1-2, Psalms 139 and Romans 8:28-29.

**Listen to God, journal your thoughts and talk to Him about your life.**

3. Name a few Bible characters for study, analysis and discussion with your team.

4. Are you ready and willing to be God's tool in His ministry of reconciling men and women, children and adults, with Him? If so, may this be your prayer...





## Jesus I Come

Out of my bondage, sorrow and night,  
    Jesus I come, Jesus I come;  
Into Thy freedom, gladness and light,  
    Jesus I come to Thee.  
Out of my sickness into Thy health,  
Out of my want and into Thy wealth,  
Out of my sin and into Thyself,  
Jesus I come to Thee.

Out of my shameful failure and loss,  
    Jesus I come, Jesus I come;  
Into the glorious gain of Thy cross,  
    Jesus I come to Thee.  
Out of earth's sorrows into Thy balm,  
Out of life's storms and into Thy calm,  
Out of distress to jubilant psalm,  
Jesus I come to Thee.

Out of unrest and arrogant pride,  
    Jesus I come, Jesus I come;  
Into Thy blessed will to abide,  
    Jesus I come to Thee.  
Out of myself to dwell in Thy love,  
Out of despair into raptures above,  
Upward for aye on wings like a dove,  
Jesus I come to Thee.

Out of the fear and dread of the tomb,  
    Jesus I come, Jesus I come;  
Into the joy and light of Thy home,  
    Jesus I come to Thee.  
Out of the depths of ruin untold,  
Into the peace of Thy sheltering fold,  
Ever Thy glorious face to behold,  
Jesus I come to Thee.

*William T. Sleeper*

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