

## The Pain of Crooked Paths

**They have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace** (Isaiah 59:8, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 59:1–8

**Song:** “Not the Malicious, Nor Profane”

In December 1744, John Newton (1725–1807) literally abandoned ship to ask the girl he loved to marry him. He wanted to secure an engagement before embarking on a long voyage, but the proposal was a disaster. She said little, and her parents told him to go away and never return. Back at the docks, he was received as a felon for his desertion. Publicly found guilty and flogged, Newton’s heart grew dark. His speech overflowed with bitter profanity, and he persuaded others to join his frequent debauchery. For many years John Newton walked in darkness.

Just as Isaiah says in today’s passage about such paths, Newton didn’t know the way of peace. His feet ran to evil, and desolation awaited him. His corruption led him into painful circumstances. His shame-filled rage turned to desperation and hopelessness when he became enslaved by a slave trader.

When Newton finally came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, he humbly admitted that the chaos of his life had come from his own sinful choices. When any of us comes to Christ with a humble heart, confessing our sin, we receive His cleansing, His healing, and His peace.

**Father,** as Your child, I want to continue walking in Your ways. Please forgive my sin and bring Your healing and peace to my heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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April 7–13. **Sara Schaffer** is a speaker and writer. She lives in Colorado with her husband and two daughters.

## Trust the One Who Is Just

**When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23).**

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 2:19–25

**Song:** “Yet Not I but Through Christ in Me”

The Japanese stormed the tiny mountaintop settlement of Benteng Tinggi in New Guinea as though they were conquering a capital city. Demonstrating great force, they rounded up the 10 missionaries working in the small town. One man, Russell Deibler (1905–1943), stood in line as he was ordered to do. His hands were clasped together in front of him when a soldier marched toward him and began beating Deibler’s hands repeatedly with his covered sword. “Russell, they want you to put your hands down at your sides,” his friend told him. Deibler dropped his arms, and the beating stopped. His folded hands had been understood as a posture of arrogance by his captors.

In today’s passage, Peter tells us that when Jesus suffered injustice, He didn’t make threats or retaliate. Rather, He committed himself to God. Similarly, none of the people or the missionaries at Benteng Tinggi retaliated. However, one of the missionaries later said they were all praying. They were following Jesus’ example.

It’s not surprising when we have negative consequences for wrong decisions, but when innocents suffer—including ourselves—we yearn for justice. May we too have wisdom to put our circumstances, reputations, and lives constantly into the hands of our Lord, whose judgment is perfect.

**Father,** thank You for being a God of deep love and ultimate justice; I entrust myself to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Sure of Our Citizenship

[Jesus said,] “You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again’” (John 3:7).

**Scripture:** John 3:1–15

**Song:** “Ye Must Be Born Again”

American Jean Fritz (1915–2017) attended the British School in Hankow, China, and felt disloyal singing the British anthem, “God Save the King.” When the young girl talked with her parents about her dilemma, her mom suggested just participating in England’s anthem. During the discussion, however, her father jumped up and went to the piano and started singing “My Country ’Tis of Thee,” a song with the same melody as “God Save the King.” Problem solved! From then on, during that part of class, Fritz patriotically, albeit very quietly, sang her country’s lyrics.

Although Jean Fritz had been born to missionary parents in China, she was certain about her earthly citizenship. Nicodemus, on the other hand, was confused about Jesus’ words to him regarding heavenly citizenship. Patiently Jesus explained that just as we are physically born into this world, we must be spiritually born into Heaven’s realm.

When we become children of God by His Spirit, we have citizenship in Heaven. As the people of God, then, we have the privilege of being loyal to our home *and* to our King. May we think and sing of them often with full conviction and joy.

**Father,** thank You for my home in Your kingdom even as I reside here on earth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## No Condemnation

**God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned** (John 3:17–18).

**Scripture:** John 3:16–21

**Song:** “How Marvelous (I Stand Amazed)”

The counselor spoke gently about a darkness she could sense in Kathy’s heart, but Kathy mistook her meaning and spat back hotly, “It’s my sin.” With self-rebuke, Kathy went on to list the many ways she’d transgressed in her adult life. But what the counselor was perceiving had to do with injury and pain. She inquired about Kathy’s older brother, whom she had lost decades earlier. Without much emotion, Kathy described the fun they’d had as children. The next few weekly therapy visits were pleasant walks down memory lane but little else.

It wasn’t until sometime later, as Kathy witnessed the loss of a friend’s cancer-ridden dog as it was being put to sleep, that she broke down. Running out of the vet’s office, she called her counselor for help. As she processed the unresolved grief from losing her brother those many years ago, Kathy began to understand that the darkness in her heart was borne of hurt. God began to heal the pain that had infected her soul and every area of her life.

Jesus came to save, not condemn, us. He wants to heal each one of us from sin’s effects. Praise God for sending Jesus, who came to draw us into His life and light.

**Father,** thank You for giving us a Savior in Your Son who heals and restores our hearts when we come to Him in faith. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Millions of Dollars Isn't Enough

**By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin** (Romans 3:20, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Romans 3:19–31

**Song:** “Jesus Paid It All”

The audience enthusiastically applauded at the impressive altruism of a well-known musician. This individual had given millions of dollars to help hungry, impoverished people in nations around the world. An organization was honoring him and various other celebrities for their professional work and their philanthropic ventures. The next person heralded also had an inspiring story of charitable kindness, as they had paid for thousands of people to receive medical care.

As I watched the televised program, I couldn't help but think of Paul's words in Romans 3. Though such benevolence is worth celebrating, the Scriptures make it clear that we've all broken God's law and cannot save ourselves by our own goodness and generosity—even millions of dollars is not enough. If millionaires, the world's best artists, and even those who offer life-saving treatments to others can't earn God's favor, then who can?

The Bible is clear: we can't earn God's favor, but anyone can be saved by faith in Jesus alone. This is great news! It means we don't need a seven-figure offering or amazing talent to be justified before God. All that is necessary is the acknowledgement that we cannot save ourselves. Our justification is a gift of God's grace. Now *that* is worth applauding!

**Father**, thank You for the redemption You freely offer by grace through faith in Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Redeemed Rubbish

**When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly** (Romans 5:6, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Romans 5:1–15

**Song:** “Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It!”

I was sitting with seven women at our summer Bible study, grateful for the extra time to get to know these familiar faces I saw Sunday after Sunday. We went around the table, each taking a turn telling about our families and our interests.

At her turn, Cecelia told the group about her husband and baby. With a shy smile she also admitted she had started a new side job restoring furniture. Intrigued, I asked what that meant. She said she would find people who were giving away old chairs or tables or desks online. She would strip, sand, and repaint the pieces and then sell them for profit. The perfect item for her was one that was unwanted and worthless, because she could then turn it into something beautiful and valuable.

It’s humbling to realize that we too were once like those pieces of furniture that seemed worthless. The book of Romans says we were weak, ungodly sinners. Yet when that was our condition, it was the perfect time for Jesus to rescue us. Unlike the furniture, though, He doesn’t merely refinish us. He utterly transforms us from the inside, turning the sinful to righteous. Because God loves us, He has fully redeemed and restored us.

**Father,** Your love is deeper than I can comprehend. Thank You for sending Your Son at just the right time to rescue me and restore my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Courageous Rescue

**He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world** (1 John 2:2, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** 1 John 2:1–6; 4:9–17

**Song:** “Upon a Life I Have Not Lived”

During WWII, Darlene Deibler Rose (1917–2004) was one of many held at an internment camp in New Guinea. When the air-raid siren sounded, the prisoners were forced to lie in ditches they’d had to dig themselves. They would watch the sky and pray for protection from the dropping bombs.

One night when the alarm sounded, the captives heard dogs approaching as they lay in the ditches. Realizing one of the dogs was rabid, the prisoners tried to ward off the pack with sticks. When this didn’t work, Toos Hoogeveen, wife of the former governor of Bali, left the safety of the ditch she was in and fought the sick dog bare-handed until another person was able to kill it with a knife. The struggle left Toos with bites and scratches. Having no effective treatment for rabies on hand, she isolated to a hut and waited for death. Darlene Deibler Rose later wrote that everyone mourned the courageous woman’s passing.

Toos Hoogeveen was a woman willing to give her life for the people around her. What a picture of Christ’s love to those prisoners and to us! Jesus came to earth and sacrificed himself on a cross. He became the cure for our sin, saving us all from a dreadful demise.

**Father**, strengthen me to demonstrate the kind of selfless, sacrificial love that points to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.