

A Better Self

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, October 30, 2016
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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Philippians 3:10

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.

Every person wants to be better than they are. The only person who doesn't want to be better, is the conceited and arrogant person who thinks they have already arrived. That's a sad place to be.

We all want to improve in some way. There's something in our lives we know we can do better. Whether it's be a better husband, a better wife, a better parent, a better son or daughter, a better employee, a better boss. Maybe you want to improve your golf scores or you need to brush up on your math and increase your test scores. Some of us, need improvement in our attitudes and temperaments. There is always somewhere we can find room to grow and be better.

We long to be a better person. We want to impact people's lives in a better way. We want to be an improved Christian, do we not? And, when we move into the spiritual realm, we find a lot of room for improvement. "Oh, I wish I could pray better." "I wish I had better insight into the Word of God." "I wish I was more disciplined in reading the Scriptures." "I wish I was a better witness for the Lord Jesus Christ." Everyone has some area which they would like to improve.

Paul wanted the same thing. I think sometimes we look at these people, these apostles, and make them almost semi-gods. We see them as being almost perfect, as being impeccable and nearly infallible, but they were not. They were, in every sense of the word, like you and me. It's hard to believe but you need to believe it. Once you understand that you're reading the words of a man, though inspired by God, you're reading the words of a man who is flawed at best. You're reading a man who knows he can be better.

So the Apostle Paul says to the Philippians, in this autobiographical section of this short and brief book, "Oh, that I may know Him. Oh, that I may know Him better and grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, that I might know Him in the power of His resurrection. Oh, that I might know Him. Yes, even in the fellowship of His sufferings I want to be like Him so that people will treat me the way they treated Him. They used Him, persecuted Him, crucified Him, murdered Him. I'm willing to be so knowledgeable of Him that I'm like Him."

That's the heart of this statement. Paul didn't just want to know more about Him, he wanted to know more about Him so he could be like Him. He said, "As I imitate Christ, imitate me." He knows there's room to improve here, he even said it, starting in verse 12 of this same chapter.

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Here's his own testimony, his own profession: I have not arrived. I am not all I can be. There's still room for growth in my life.

If the Apostle Paul can say this, how much more can we? We need to be better than we are today. We long to be a better self, a better person, a better soul. The whole crux of wanting to improve is in one thing—to know Christ. To know Him. This is the longing, the heartbeat, and the passion of every true Christian.

I want to speak bluntly but as compassionately as I can, with God's help. I don't mean this to be disrespectful or ugly in any sense of the word, but if there is no passion in your heart, no desire in your heart to know Christ in a deeper, more experiential, real way, you're not a Christian. I say that because I do care. There has to be this acknowledgement that all of life centers on a person and it's not me, it's not you, the person is Christ. "Oh, that I may know Him." Here's a person who saw Christ with his very eyes, but he knows there is more to experience and that's what he's longing for.

In fact, this word *know* is an integral word. It's a word used in the book of Matthew, when Matthew tells us about Joseph's pondering about the difficulty of what he should do about his pregnant fiancée. Mary told Joseph that an angel appeared to her and said she would have a child but the child would not be conceived by a man but by the Holy Spirit, and he didn't believe her. So he thought how he could divorce her. The Bible says the same angel that appeared to Mary appeared to Joseph in a dream. After that dream, Joseph took Mary as his wife but the Bible says, "He knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son."

What does it mean that he didn't "know" her? It means he didn't have physical, sexual relationship with her until sometime after she had borne Jesus. The Bible uses this word *know* to talk not about information stored in the brain, but about something much deeper. This is a word denoting relationship on a very deep level. "Oh that I may know Him and experience Him in the depths of the soul."

Dear friends, communion with God hits a nerve, a spiritual nerve, far deeper than any physical pleasure that can come between a man and a woman. We're talking about something that's far deeper, not just physical, that penetrates to the core, the soul of your being. Paul says, "Oh, that

I may know Him. I know I don't know and haven't experienced all there is." Some of you think you have. Some of you have cooled off, leveled off, in your pursuit of Christ. Oh, may God awaken that heart again, that first love. Oh that I could pursue Him and be like the deer that pants after the water brooks, so my soul will pant after Thee.

Do you want this? Is this the crying of your heart? Is this your desperate soul and its petition? "I want to know You better as I pray. I want to know You in speech, hearing Your Word and You hearing my heart. I want to know You as I open this Book and read. I want the words not just to tell me about You, but in those words I want to experience You." Oh, that I may know Him. Is this your heart? Is this the craving of the new person God made you?

I know there has been several recently converted and brought to Christ. Those people would say, "Yes, this is the craving of my heart!" And we see evidences of this hungering and thirsting in them for more of Christ. This isn't just knowledge. Although knowledge is important and God uses that to help us experience Him, as we watch them we see they're not happy with just the facts, they want the experience of the facts. They want the heart moved upon. They want the heart to sing the same song as when He saved them. They don't want to lose that song. Have you lost your song? Have you lost the song God has put in your soul?

I pray that today God would revive the song. I pray that once again the melody would start to play and you'll hear it and your heart will respond as it did time and time again in the past. "Oh, that I may know Him."

Friends, there is nothing more valuable than communion with the God who made you. Nothing is more fascinating. Nothing is more fabulous. Nothing is more deserving of your time. What is it like to be alone with God Almighty? I can't explain it to you. I cannot tell you in words, but those of you who have experienced it know what I mean. There's a longing to be alone with Him.

As I've said to you, hundreds of times before. There's something about Christ, unlike anybody else in the world, that once you meet Him, once you know Him, you cannot have enough. He never wears out His welcome. He always leaves you in such a state that you want more.

I cannot tell you how many times on a Sunday morning as I'm alone with the Lord at the house, seeking Him right before I come over here, that sometimes I've asked, "Lord, do I have to go? I would rather just stay here in your presence than to even go and preach Your Word. Oh, that I may know You better than I do today."

Paul had found somebody who was a better Person than he and he longed to be like Him. He found a better self in the person of Jesus Christ.

In this amazing text, the Apostle Paul tells us how you can know Christ better and thereby become a better self, a better person. "Oh, that I may know Him in the power of His resurrection, in

the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death.” There it is. Within those three phrases is the answer to how you can know Him better and be a better person.

Let’s spend a few moments on these words. I want you to look specifically at the construction and order of the words.

I. The Order of the Sentence

First he says, “That I may know Him,” and, again, we’re not talking about gaining more information, we’re talking about communion and fellowship with God. This is an amazing thing. I can’t hardly get to my first point. I’m still marveled that I can know God, the Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth. He made Pluto, Mars, Jupiter, all of the galaxies beyond. God, the Maker of Everest and the seas—I can know Him and He knows me, and He wants to commune with me. He wants me to know Him. Isn’t that astounding? Let’s just stop and pray right now. Let’s just cry out to the Lord, “Oh, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.”

What power was in the resurrection? It was power to bring life to a body dead three days. Power to roll back the stone that sealed Him and locked Him away from view. The power of God that came into that ancient sepulcher and brought the body of our bruised, battered, and dead Lord to life. Paul says, “This is what I want to know. I want to know the power of our resurrected Christ. I want to know resurrection power.”

How do you do this? I guess I must go on. I want you to look at the order of the words. “Oh, that I may know Him.” We understand that, I pray. We understand the longing and cry of the Apostle’s heart. He had been walking with Him for almost three decades and he still says, “I don’t know Him enough. I want to know Him better.”

In just a few weeks, I will have been walking with Jesus for 30 years myself. I’m thankful to God I can say because of Him and His activity in my life, “Oh, that I may know Him. I’m not satisfied.” He’s so awesome. I’ve never met somebody like Jesus. Do you know what amazes me about my Jesus? He loves me. That amazes me about Him. That’s the most amazing thing about Him. He loves me. He loves you. Even you who are not yet His children. He loves you and He wants you to know the joy of loving Him.

Christianity is not this drab, difficult, dreary, hard life that some Christians seem to portray it as. You may say, “You don’t want to be a Christian because it seems Christians have no fun.” What are you talking about? I know of no pleasure greater than meeting with the God of the universe. He’s right here. He’s not locked away in my prayer closet, He’s right here. He’s beside me, around me, and in me, and He’s in you. Listen, He so loves us. That’s the most appealing thing about Him. How in the world can He love me? He must be a super duper lover. And He is.

How can I be better at knowing Him and therefore a better self? The Bible says in the power of His resurrection. That’s what Paul lists first and the order here is strategic. It’s on purpose.

He begins with saying “I want to know Him **in the power of His resurrection,**” then he moves to **the fellowship of His sufferings,** and then finally in being **conformed to His death.**

As you read that, you wonder, “Paul, I know you’re under the influence of the Holy Spirit and God is guiding your words here, but could it be that there was a mistake and you’ve gotten the order wrong? Because that’s not the order in which it happened to Jesus.”

The order in which it happened, the resurrection, His sufferings, His death, began first with His physical sufferings, which, by the way, didn’t begin when they arrested Him. It began when He was placed in the womb of Mary. God was subjecting Him to a wicked environment, a sinful world, to be walking with men who, at best, were jealous and couldn’t trust Him. That’s what Jesus said of His apostles; we’re not talking about those who took Him and crucified Him. His suffering began long before they arrested Him.

Then you move to the arrest and from that moment they mishandled Him, mistreated Him, maligned Him, they beat Him, and then they took Him and put Him on a post, stretched Him taunt so they could mutilate Him with an instrument that killed most of its victims, *then* they took Him to Golgotha’s Hill where they placed spikes in His wrist and feet and drove them into the roughhewn timbers called the cross. There He agonized under not just the physical pain but under the wrath of God. He was subjected to the punishment of God for all of our sins until He couldn’t handle it anymore and His heart literally burst within His chest and He died. There are His sufferings.

This is the order in the life of Christ. First there was suffering and secondly there was death. But in our text Paul ends with death. It’s not second; it’s in the third place in his list. Then, three days later, “death could not keep its prey, Jesus tore the bars away, up from the grave He arose,” and He did. He is alive. Having been buried by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two of the Sanhedrin, attended by Mary Magdalene, His mother, and a few ladies, they saw the stone rolled over the tomb, sealing Him in. They walked away in the dark of the evening weeping and heartbroken. On the third day, they went back to the tomb and the stone had been rolled away. He was not there. “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, He is risen.”

Can you imagine the power that filled the room that morning? I heard this week that one of the supposed historic sites of the tomb was unsealed this week for repair. I don’t know if it’s the actual tomb that Jesus was in but it was somewhere around there, and it’s empty. Why? Because God Almighty infused that room and that body and Jesus could not stay dead and nothing could keep Him in the ground. It was the power of God.

Paul starts with that rather than ending with that. I want us to see the reason for the order so we can better know Him and become a better self.

II. The Reason for the Order

Why does Paul start with the resurrection? Because it's the legal basis to become a better person. The resurrection is the legal basis for you to be better than you once were and the hope that you can be better tomorrow than you are today.

The Apostle Paul told the Romans in the fourth chapter, the very last verse, that Jesus was delivered up for our offenses and He was raised for our justification. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the legal basis for God, the eternal judge, to declare you right with Him. Justified. Just. Acceptable in His sight. It's Jesus' resurrection.

We know that His death justifies us. How does His resurrection? When God raised Jesus from the dead, He was vindicating before the whole world that His Son was His Son and that what Jesus said was true and what He had accomplished in His death was finished and acceptable to the Father. It was a justification of Christ.

To be a Christian doesn't mean you have to come and weep tears or even have a certain kind of feeling. To be a Christian means that you're saying, "From this moment on I identify with Him. I'm on His side, which means I'm not on the side of the world anymore. I'm not on the devil's side. I identify with Him because He has already identified with me, taking my sins on the cross so that I bear them no more. He rose from the dead, the Father says, 'Son, You've done a good job. I like it. I'm going to accept it. I vindicate You. I will verify that You are the spotless Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world.'" And I'm saying to the Father, "This is what salvation is—I'm with Him." That's all it is. I'm with Him.

With whom are you this morning? Can you say you're with Christ? Can you say whatever He represents you stand for also? This is what salvation is.

At salvation, because of that identity, what's true about Jesus is true about you. He starts with the resurrection because it's the legal basis for you to be able to know God and come to Him. But, as good as that is, it's better than that.

Secondly, it is the very power to be a better self. The resurrection power is the power you and I need to grow and be better people. You cannot be better on your own. This is the great deception of the American population. We are a people, by culture and construction, to think, "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. God helps those who help themselves." As I've always told you, be careful. There's a seed of truth somewhere in some of these heresies or heterodox statements. There is a reality there that I am to apply myself and I have certain responsibilities, but to become better by myself, with my own strength, forget it. It's an impossibility. I can't do that. I can't even save me of my guilt.

Now that I'm a Christian, do you think that makes me somehow qualified to improve my temperament, my character, my attitudes, my heart? Is there something in me that gives me the ability to do as I please and make myself improved? Not at all. I'm saved by grace alone. And so are you. It's the resurrection power that does that. Do you remember when it came to you?

We heard someone testify that for him it was 11 years ago today. Do you remember when it happened to you? The same resurrection power that lifted Jesus out of the grave and restored His body infused your heart and soul. The very same power. Not a different power, not a lesser power, not a different degree or kind. This is the same living God. The soul of God came into yours and you're not the same. You do some of the same things but you don't do it the same way because you're not the same person. You've been born again. You've been made new. You're different. You've not been made new according to your own wisdom or experience or background, resources, and finances. No, a Christian has been made new by God. Can you say you have been made new?

A Christian is someone who has been made new by a power far greater than yours. Has the resurrection power of Christ come to your heart and awakened it out of its sleep of sin and caused you to see God in a whole new light? I maintain that those who are truly saved have had an encounter with Christ. They may not have realized that's what it was when it happened, but sooner or later they come to discover it's a sure thing. You cannot experience Jesus and not want more of Him.

The power to become a better self is His resurrected power. He does it in us. It's His activity and I cooperate with that power. That's what God's grace is, remember? We talked about it a few weeks ago. God's grace is God's undeserved activity of lovingkindness doing for you what you cannot do for yourself. How does He do that? For the believer, He does that by acting in their heart to give them the desire and the power to do what He's commanded.

So Paul says, "Oh, that I may know Him," because he realizes that unless the power and the activity of Jesus Christ is active and he is cooperating with Him, he has no hope of being better. He needs the same power that saved him to be working in him today.

There's a third reason and I think it's one of the most blessed reasons for the particular order of the sentence, and that is the comfort of the resurrected Savior.

Paul starts with the resurrection power because it is so easy to get discouraged in your sanctification. If you've been saved long enough, you know what I mean. You want to know Him better and therefore be better, but you don't do it very well. Have you ever said of yourself, "I'm my own worst critic"? It's true, isn't it? You will chastise yourself far quicker and far harsher than any of us.

Most of us in this room will want to console you. Some of us are so merciful that we want to move the Holy Spirit over so we can comfort you. No one here wants to get down on any one of us because we've all been there and we're still there, aren't we? Sometimes it looks so impossible that I'm going to be any better than I am today. It's like the old proverbial statement that says, "I take one step forward and two steps back," you think you're not making any progress when you do that and it feels that way, does it not?

I believe Paul starts with resurrection power by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; I think this is God-orchestrated, and we know God does everything on purpose, so Paul states the resur-

rection power first because it reminds us that what we have to go through, the sufferings of Christ, and being conformed to His death, is going to be so difficult, so hard. I'm going to be discouraged, but it's going to be wonderful knowing that I have someone who has been there before me.

That's what I want to show you now. Jesus said if we're going to follow Him there are certain things He requires of you and me. And with those things, you're going to know Him better, and who doesn't want to know Him better? There are certain things God does require, it's not passivity, don't sit on your hands this morning and say, "Okay, Lord, when You're ready, I'm ready. I know there's nothing for me to do except just wait on You." Not at all.

Listen to our Lord. This is Jesus speaking:

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it..."

You want to preserve your life? You're going to lose it. You're going to lose self, the very thing you're wanting to preserve and keep will go in this world unfulfilled. You will never know your potential. You will never know satisfaction or joy or pleasure, you will not know you. And millions upon millions upon millions upon millions of people are born and then die and they've never discovered their true self. They've lived a lie, a portrayal and projection of who they thought they were but they were not. And they live having never experienced what God intended for the soul.

"but whoever loses his life for Me will save it."

Jesus is giving you a big clue here. Whoever loses his life for Me will save it. You read that and you say, "Okay, I've got to lose, but I don't like losing." Nobody likes losing. So if I lose, that means I don't win, right? Wrong. God made up the rules in this thing called life, not Milton Bradley. The rules of life say: You trust Me with you and you'll always win. You'll never lose. Trust Me and you'll discover your true self, your true identity and you'll have absolute fulfillment.

Why do people join gangs? Why do young people do that? There are gangs in Paducah. Why do people join them? It's all about identity. They want to be identified with people that are cool, with people who win, and people who will accept them for their contribution to the gang, to the family. Jesus said, "Listen, here are the rules. This is where you find identity, with Me, and I will always guarantee winning." That's what Jesus is saying. That's His clue here. But we've got to do this—we've got to trust Him with us.

Some of you think I've moved to the evangelistic part of the sermon but I'm really talking to Christians right now. You've got to be willing to lose, and how often do you have to do this? Every day. You have to pick up His cross daily. He inserted this word intentionally because He's talking to Christians.

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"
(Luke 9:23-25)

When you're playing the world's game, you're told you'll gain it all. Nobody is going to do that, but let's suppose you get everything in life you want. Young person, think about this with me. If you could have the perfect life and write it down in a paragraph, what would you like life to be like for you from this moment until you take your final breath? Jesus said if you gain all of that, what have you gained if you lose yourself? What's more valuable than yourself, you, your person?

Friends, it's not easy to do what Jesus just said. Turning over control is not an easy thing for a control freak and every one of us are. We're all control freaks. This is what keeps people out of heaven. They don't want to go somewhere God has the final say. They would rather be in hell trying to save self than to be with Jesus. God simply lets them have what they want and that's the pain and tragedy of hell.

I'm telling you though, before I can get to heaven, this is not easy. There are days I feel like throwing up my hands and saying, "I can't do this, even with Your help, Lord." I get discouraged and yet even the Apostle Paul said I have to have the power of the resurrection to do the next two things: the fellowship of His sufferings and being conformed to His death. What God intends for you in order to find true satisfaction in Him, to be a better self, is that you're going to have to suffer just like He did.

I want to think about bringing this to some kind of conclusion but listen to me, the Bible says in Hebrews 5:8, "Though a Son, He learned obedience through the things He suffered." Though a Son. Jesus, though He was the Son of God in flesh, He learned obedience by the things He suffered. Jesus was perfect. He never sinned. Yet He had to learn obedience. How? Through the things He suffered.

Christian, do you think you're going to escape suffering, if Jesus had to go through it and He had never sinned? Not hardly. So what God does to refine us, to improve us, to shape us into conformity to Christ, He brings on the fire. He brings on the fire and sets you in the fire to remove the things that are natural to yourself that keeps you, drags you, hinders you from being a better you.

There's an Old Testament story of three men who refused to bow before an idol that a wicked king had made. The king's name was Nebuchadnezzar. He built a beautiful golden statue of himself and he commanded the whole nation to gather in front of this idol and at the sound of the music everybody was to bow down to this idol. Everybody did except for three people. Three Hebrew young men: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

When word got to the king that these three boys were not bowing, he sent for them and said, "Listen, I'm going to give you one more opportunity and if you don't bow I'll throw you into the fiery furnace." And they said, "King, we don't care how many opportunities you give us, the answer will be the same. Our God is big enough to deliver us from your fiery furnace but if He doesn't, we still won't bow."

He was so angry, Nebuchadnezzar ordered the fire to be stoked seven times hotter than normal. In fact, it was so hot that the soldiers that threw those three young men in were killed by the flame, which means those three young men just walked in by themselves. When Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace, he didn't see three men, he saw four and the fourth one looked like the Son of God.

He orders them to come out and they come out and not even the smell of smoke was on them. But there was a difference about them. The only thing on them that was burned by the fire were the ropes that had bound them. It was the only thing that was burned. The only thing that the world had put on those men, God consumed in the fire but preserved them perfectly.

Beloved, God puts you in the fiery furnace—trials, adversities, difficulties, challenges, everything you don't like, everything that makes you feel like you're taking one step forward and two steps back—and God is saying, "I'm working to burn up everything that the world has put on you. Everything that you and your old self was like, everything Satan has contributed to you that keeps you short of being like My Son, I'm destroying, I'm burning. Trust Me." You've got to go through the suffering. That's how you learn obedience and that's how you're conformed to His death so that you don't live for you, you live for Him.

Friends, this is so difficult that God has ordered the word structure here for you to see that you've got somebody who has gone through suffering and death far worse than you will ever experience and He came out wonderful.

Friday in our staff prayer meeting, we have a prayer meeting every morning, Sophie mentioned a song she had heard and loved based upon *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis's children novels. She shared the lyrics with us of the song "Eustace Scrubb," one of the characters in the book *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

Eustace Scrubb is obnoxious, arrogant, and extremely selfish. A very unpleasant boy. In the book, the ship, *The Dawn Treader*, landed on an island where Eustace finds a dragon's lair and its treasure. He puts on a gold bracelet and on the golden pile he falls asleep, and when he wakes up, he discovers he has turned into a dragon. Lewis writes, "Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself."

This is an allegory. It creates images of things that are real. What Lewis is saying is that Eustace was a dragon all along. Inside of him was a roaring beast called greed and selfishness and the golden bracelet and his love for it just exposed the dragon that was on the inside.

Eustace tried to make the best of his situation but realizes he is unwanted because who wants to be a friend to a dragon, and a fire-breathing dragon at that? He feels his loneliness and desires to be a boy again.

That night, Aslan (a large lion that is a type of Christ in these stories) comes to Eustace and leads him to a large well “like a very big round bath with marble steps going down into it.” Eustace recounts what happened to him after the event. He says the water was so clear he thought if he could get in there and bathe it would ease the pain in his leg (from the gold bracelet he had put on when he was human). But the great lion, Aslan, tells him that first he had to undress.

It is here the boy dragon finds out the impossibility that no matter how many layers of dragon skins he managed to peel off of himself, there was still another layer underneath, he was still a dragon. He peeled off a layer of scales and underneath he finds another layer of scales.

After the event, Eustace told Edmond, his cousin, “Then the lion said - but I don’t know if it spoke – ‘You will have to let me undress you.’ I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.”

What does that remind you of? Desperate dependency. You will never depend until you get desperate.

“The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I’ve ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off.

“Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off ... And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me - I didn’t like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I’d no skin on - and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone from my arm. And then I saw why. I’d turned into a boy again...” - C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

What’s the story here? What’s Lewis trying to say to you and me? Here it is: we cannot fix ourselves. Saved or unsaved, you can’t fix yourself. You can’t be a better you. You can go to a self-improvement class, if you want to. You can go to the bookstore and buy yourself a self-help book. You can lose weight, you can learn a new career, but my dear friend, you cannot make a better you. Because down deep, you will always be you. And even after the Master’s touch has changed us, we have an ongoing battle to surrender to God’s activity in our lives because His work can sometimes be very, very painful.

I like Lewis’s note of narration at the end of this scene as well:

“It would be nice, and fairly nearly true, to say that “from that time forth Eustace was a different boy.” To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun.”

How did the cure begin? With death to the dragon. I want to read to you the lyrics of the song Sophie shared with me called Eustace Scrubb. Listen closely.

For the first in my life
I'm not living a lie
And I hate who I am
I've become what I feared
And I cried dragon tears
Just to prove I'm a man

I tried to change my appearance but I am not changed
I'm just tired
I tried to heal myself long before I met your gaze
At the water
I'm at your feet
Would you tear into the deep of my heart
To heal me?

I've seen my own reflection
I know the pain I'm in
I've been a lonely wretch and
I can't get out of it

As he looked through my eyes
At the things I despised
I felt pierced by his gaze
But he peeled off my skin
And he then threw me into
The water to save me

I wore this bracelet, bright and golden
That overnight became a chain
I was a lonely, wretched soul that
Lost in the dark cried out your Name
You cut me deep, I know I felt it
But it's the sweetest kind of pain
Oh sweet relief, You took my burdens
Oh I believe Oh I believe

The sweetest kind of pain. "Oh, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Why does Paul start with the resurrection? Because as God begins to pull off the layers of the old you, you'll notice His hands. You'll see the nail prints there and you'll see that He knows. He knows what it's like. We have a Redeemer who knows pain and He came through it. You can then relax.

Why does Paul start with resurrection? Why does He start with the resurrected Savior? Because He wants to show us someone who has gone through the crucible of the furnace of fire and He came out pure gold. You have somebody who is able to be touched by the feeling of your weaknesses and understand it and not chide or scold you. He's showing you the resurrected Savior because he wants you to see the nails and know that this Savior has suffered on your behalf for you, so that when you go through it He can bear you through it with those same nail-scarred hands. He will bring you through on the other side different, better.

Yes, it's painful, but it's the sweetest kind of pain. Delicious. I pray you will join me as we pray now, "Oh, Father, help us to know You. Help us to know You so that the power of Your resurrected Lord would be in us, working so as You bring us into His sufferings, persecuted, reproached, even to the point that we are no longer in control, we are dead to ourselves, we will then know life, sweet life. Delicious life." Amen.