**Connect Study—Crossed**

*Ps Steven Furtick:*

*“The greatest pain and pleasure you will experience will be in the context of relationship.”*

As we consider the cross of Christ coming into the Easter season, we realise that the cross has two beams—the vertical representing our relationship with God and the horizontal representing our relationships with one another. In those relationships, it is almost inevitable that offence would come as Jesus predicted. We will all offend someone or be offended by someone at some stage in our lives.

As we look at Scriptures, we realise God also causes offence. He is a good, good father, yet he causes offence.

A few examples in Scripture include:

1. Cain and Abel

Both Cain and Abel brought an offering to God. God rejected Cain’s offering of his crops but accepted Abel’s gift of a newborn lamb. Cain’s countenance fell when he was rejected and he went off to talk to Abel instead of God

Offence—Cain felt rejected because he wanted to serve God on his own terms.

Results—Because Cain did not deal with the offence, he became a wanderer and that led to unfruitfulness.

Application—Do we serve God on our own terms? Do we leave church when God/the church does not use us according to our expectations?

1. Lazarus

When Lazarus died, Jesus was deliberately late. Both Mary and Martha said to Jesus, “If you had come earlier, he would not have died”

Offence—Things not happening according to their own timing

Results—The sisters overcame the offence and saw a miracle

Application—Do we trust God with his timing when our prayers are delayed or not answered according to what we expect? Do we become bitter or better? If we abide in bitterness instead of Christ’s love, we cannot be fruitful.

Deut 8:2 says “Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands.”

There are other incidents when God offended different people including King David, the Pharisees (Matt 15:6), John the Baptist (Matt 11:3, 6) and his own disciples (Jn 6:61)

How should we deal with offences?

* Be unoffendable—don’t take the bait
* Remember the spiritual identity of the offending brother/sister—that they are members of the “whole family in heaven and earth” (Eph 3:14) and that we are not to be “accusers of the brethren”
* Pray for the brother/sister (Lk 6:28)
* Cover the offending brother/sister –Prov 17:9 says “Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.”
* Confront the brother/sister—be Biblical in doing so by going and telling the person of his/her faults in private. If it fails, then bring along other brothers and sisters with you.

Discussions:

Do you agree with the statement—“The greatest pain and pleasure you will experience will be in the context of relationship”? Share your experience.

Have you ever been offended by God? What happened and how did you deal with it?

How do you practically help yourself not to take the bait when offences come?

Is the Holy Spirit reminding you of certain offences that you have held onto? Pray for each other to be released from any bitterness or unforgiveness.

(*Optional question*—Do I have to trust the person again after I have forgiven them? What does the Bible say about restitution?)