

The unhappiness we sometimes experience in the spiritual life may come from two different sources. It may come from our sin, the wrong things we do when we should know better. But unhappiness may also come from situations we cannot control. We might be ready to make amends with someone but they're not interested. We may not have the concentration for long prayer. We might be the passenger of an irrational driver. The unhappiness we experience in the spiritual life may come from our own actions or from sources completely outside us. It is not unusual to go through periods of wonderment, confusion, struggle to do what's right, and exasperation with circumstances beyond our control.

Prayer will help. Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray as he taught them, and to keep asking even if they fear the answer will be no. He challenges believers to call on God's name with the frequency and tenacity of telemarketers. And if the answer is no, to try again and again.

In the Letter to the Colossians, Paul says Jesus has handled both the situations that can disturb the spiritual life. He tells his readers that they have two sources of spiritual death: one is their transgressions. They have sinned. They knew what was right and they chose something else. The other source of spiritual death is what Paul calls "uncircumcision." The readers of his letter were Gentiles, not Jews. The men had never been circumcised. But more importantly, they had been living outside the covenant – they did not previously have the benefits of a relationship with God.

These were circumstances beyond their control. They were not responsible for being Gentiles. They were just born that way. Their spiritual death, then, came from two sources: their own transgressions and uncircumcision or life outside the covenant, over which, up to now, they had no control.

Nonetheless, Paul gives them this good news. Through his death and resurrection, Christ has forgiven their transgressions and obliterated the bond against them. Christ has eliminated both sources of spiritual death. Whether it was sins they were responsible for or circumstances over which they had no control, Christ nailed it to the cross and brought them life.

Sometimes we ourselves or our family or friends go through a time of spiritual death. It isn't pretty. In our frustration, we expect it is up to us or to them to change things.

But Christ has already done that. His resurrection has already brought us hope and promise for any difficult situation. It sometimes just takes people a while to catch on.