

Broken for Good: The process of brokenness

Someone once said, “Adversity introduces you to yourself.” One of the hardest things to understand in our lives is why pain, suffering and problems are a part of our existence on this earth. We do know that living in a world of sin promotes a lot of pain and suffering. Our bodies are scheduled to only go so far and we face the fragileness of our lives head on at some point in our lives.

There are two kinds of brokenness, voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary brokenness will allow God to do whatever pleases Him with your life. Voluntary brokenness is an attitude that responds to both the good and bad things of life with confidence, faith and love, all of which focus on God. Voluntary brokenness is a critical component of the Spirit-filled life.

Involuntary brokenness enters our lives whether we want it or not. Very rarely are we prepared for it. Usually this comes in the form of unexpected problems – financial, physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual. It is events gone wrong. Families gone wrong. It is a car wreck, burnout, an untimely death of someone we love, the loss of a job, serious illness, divorce, or failure in our personal lives.

You have at least three responses to involuntary brokenness:

- 1. Rebel which leads to bitterness**
- 2. Resist but give in eventually**
- 3. Respond positively which leads to maturity**

You can either go through it or grow through it. Obviously our goal as disciples of Jesus Christ is to learn how to respond and how to mature in our faith.

Today we are going to be in the book of James and let it help us understand the process of brokenness.

1. Finding joy in brokenness

One of the most popular sections at the bookstore is the self-help section. You can find books on nearly every subject imaginable. We love to find ways to do it ourselves. ATMs, online banking, self-serve gas stations, online shopping, online church, and self-serve food, reduce stress, improve your marriage, manage your time and the list goes on and on. If the book of James were just being published it would probably wind up in the self-help section.

² Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. James 1:2-4 NLT

Here is a really important principle to remember. The joy of a disciple is not synonymous with pleasure. This is not about being someone who finds pleasure in pain. This is talking about learning the discipline of walking in relationship with Jesus regardless of what is happening on the outside of our lives.

Trials in our lives are not unlike taking an examination. We study a subject at our leisure but eventually there will be a test. We can come to enjoy these tests because the Bible teaches that the testing of our faith produces perseverance.

When we are tested by something it nearly always challenges our faith. We may be tempted to give up on God or become discouraged, get angry, hate or even depend completely on ourselves.

Look up Romans 5:3-5:

“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴ And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. ⁵ And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love.”

James says we are to find joy in our trials and brokenness and then he suggests if we lack wisdom we should ask for it and God will give it to us. The need for wisdom comes in finding out questions like these:

“What good can come from this situation?” “Where should I go from here? Which direction should I take?” “What is God’s will?”

By seeking God’s wisdom in our crushing times and allowing His Spirit to work in us we eventually become strong in our faith. We learn to trust God even when everything around us may feel like it is coming apart. We come to embrace our brokenness on the day when we realize that we cannot fix our problem but must lean solely on Christ.

It’s why the Edward Mote wrote these words:

*My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly trust in Jesus’ Name.*

On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand;

*When darkness seems to hide His face, I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.*

Our faith is to be strong and not weak. It is to build up a strength that will not fail us when we are severely tested and we will develop a sense of the joy of the Lord when there is nothing happy about our situation.

2. Filing for spiritual bankruptcy

⁹ *Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them.* James 1:9
NLT

Use this as your slogan and you will get laughed out of America! The very idea of boasting because of your poverty would be viewed as ignorant and ridiculous. God wants us to find wealth in our difficult and humbling circumstances.

This is not talking about financial resources although it could apply. Believers who are poor in spirit, or brokenhearted or in a dilemma are those that can find honor in God. When everything is going great (wealthy) we trust in ourselves but when we are in a humbled position we have no place to turn but to God's resources.

Sociologists will tell you that before societies and individuals will pursue a more excellent way of living they have to come to a point of desperation. Unless something is broken in our lives we more than likely will not want to find a better way or embrace change. Even though God offers to be a friend that sticks closer than a brother we more often than not do not want that close of a relationship unless we are in need. (sad and pathetic truth)

It is in our humbled circumstances that we find God. It could be emotional, financial, spiritual or a number of other things but in the brokenness we can discover the strength of God.

The Sermon on the Mount has at its heart the Beatitudes. The first one says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 5:3) Poor in spirit means simply that we are utterly empty, incapable of experiencing what God has for us. Poor in spirit does not mean low self-esteem but it does mean being aware of our spiritual inadequacies.

Filing for spiritual bankruptcy is acknowledging that without Him we are nothing. It is acknowledging that sometimes we are pretty sure that God should be thankful we are on His team. That is the height of arrogance and pure silliness.

Brokenness creates repentant and humble hearts not feelings of pride and arrogance. Brokenness before God will stop the super egotistical person that can't ever seem to think up enough ways to promote themselves. One who is poor in spirit loses self-preoccupation. When we are poor in spirit we turn to God and plead with Him to sustain us.

Remember all who enter the Kingdom of God, do so, on their knees.

When we figure it out our focus will shift from ourselves to others. When we figure it out we will realize that we can live with much less and be content. Spiritual bankruptcy is allowing ourselves to reject the pull and push of the American dream and shift our priorities from material to spiritual. We are not made for this world. What happens here is a blink of an eye compared to eternity.

“An old man showed up at the back door of the house we were renting. Opening the door a few cautious inches, we saw his eyes were glassy and his furrowed face glistened with silver stubble. He clutched a wicker basket holding a few unappealing vegetables. He bid us good morning and offered his produce for sale. We were uneasy enough that we made a quick purchase to alleviate both our pity and our fear. To our chagrin, he returned the next week, introducing himself as Mr. Roth, the man who lived in the shack down the road. As our fears subsided, we got close enough to realize it wasn’t alcohol but cataracts that marbled his eyes.

On subsequent visits, he would shuffle in, wearing two mismatched right shoes, and pull out a harmonica. With glazed eyes set on a future glory, he’d puff out old gospel tunes between conversations about vegetables and religion.

On one visit, he exclaimed, ‘The Lord is so good! I came out of my shack this morning and found a bag full of shoes and clothing on my porch.’ ‘It’s wonderful, Mr. Roth!’ we said. ‘We’re happy for you.’ ‘You know what’s even more wonderful?’ he asked. ‘Just yesterday I met some people that could use them.’

3. Figuring out the better way

¹⁶ So don’t be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. ¹⁸ He chose to give birth to us by giving us His true word. And we, out of all creation, became His prized possession. James 1:16-18 NLT

Let’s work together for a few minutes on figuring out how to process what happens to us and choosing the better way.

a. Accept life circumstances

Flat tires, job losses, car wrecks, rebellious children, a tear in your favorite pair of pants, a sprained ankle, a miscommunication, a personality conflict, discouragement, and even death are just a few of the things that may come to you in a lifetime. God doesn’t cause them and Satan doesn’t cause them. These things and a thousand others are just things that can happen.

When the apostle Paul was imprisoned for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ he wrote about it but nowhere did he whine about it. Nowhere did he say pray that I won’t have to suffer.

“And pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the message of Christ, for which I am in chains.” Colossians 4:3 NIV

He didn’t ask for a lawyer or even for anyone to make bail. His focus was on being whatever he needed to be wherever he found himself. We may not be able to change our circumstances so by God’s grace we learn to accept life but determine to live in His presence.

b. Avoid sinful calamity

Way too often hurt, pain and destruction come into people's lives because instead of fighting the temptations of sin they pursue their own ways and wants. Sin will always come at a cost and you will always pay. If you find yourself in that situation, repent, turn and run the other way as fast as you can. There is no such thing as "enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season."

It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward. Hebrews 11:24-25 NLT

c. Acknowledge spiritual warfare

There is in all of our lives a warfare going on for our souls. We may not see it or feel it but it is a fact. What do we do about it?

Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. ¹¹ Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. ¹² For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

¹³ Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. ¹⁴ Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. ¹⁵ For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. ¹⁶ In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. ¹⁷ Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. ¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. Ephesians 6:10-18 NLT

d. Always keep the white flag of surrender waving

The way you will know you have embraced the brokenness is when you are able to wave the flag of surrender to God in every circumstance. The devil will come around and assure you that you deserve better. He will point out the people around you that never seem to suffer any harm, or that have more than you do.

Margaret Clarkson put it this way, "Perhaps the greatest good that suffering can work for a believer is to increase the capacity of his soul for God. The greatest need, the greater our capacity; the greater our capacity, the greater will be our experience of God. Can any price be too much for such eternal good?"

Max Lucado wrote these words: "I have everything I need for joy!" Robert Reed said. His hands are twisted and his feet are useless. He can't bathe himself. He can't feed himself. He can't brush his teeth, comb his hair, or put on his underwear. Strips of Velcro hold his shirts together. His speech drags like a worn out audiocassette. Robert has cerebral palsy.

The disease keeps him from driving a car, riding a bike, and going for a walk. But it didn't keep him from graduating from high school or attending Abilene Christian University, from which he graduated with a degree in Latin. Having cerebral palsy didn't keep him from teaching at St. Louis Junior College or from venturing overseas on five mission trips. And Robert's disease didn't prevent him from becoming a missionary in Portugal. He moved to Lisbon, alone, in 1972. There he rented a hotel room and began studying Portuguese. He found a restaurant owner who would feed him after the rush hour and a tutor who would instruct him in the language.

Then he stationed himself daily in a park, where he distributed brochures about Christ. Within six years he led seventy people to the Lord, one of whom became his wife, Rosa.

I heard Robert speak recently. I watched other men carry him in his wheelchair onto the platform. I watched them lay a Bible in his lap. I watched his stiff fingers force open the pages. And I watched people in the audience wipe away tears of admiration from their faces. Robert could have asked for sympathy or pity, but he did just the opposite. He held his bent hand up in the air and boasted, "I have everything I need for joy." His shirts are held together by Velcro, but his life is held together by joy."

God help us to embrace our brokenness and submit to the process. Don't run away or in the wrong direction but run toward God and allow Him to lead you and support you.

"There are two pathways at work in the human heart. One is directed back through the wilderness toward Egypt, that place of emotional and spiritual enslavement, difficulty, and division. The other is directed toward Home—toward life with God. The former clogs the spiritual arteries of our heart, preventing us from living and loving; the latter invites God to do heart surgery, opening us to life as it was designed to be. If we're honest, we are always headed in one direction or another. Our original design was for wholeness, unity, and harmony. But as exemplified by Adam and Eve hiding in the Garden, we've engaged in theatrics. We've become masters at arranging our lives to hide the darkness and display our greatness. Charles Spurgeon said, 'Appear to be what thou art, tear off thy masks.'"

With God so committed to healing our hearts, why do we avoid the hard work of dealing with ourselves? Wilderness survival strategies may work for us in the short run, but they will end up hurting us in the long run. While the wilderness exposes our false selves, we're invited into the new territory of Christ's life. God's Spirit invites us to find a welcome in the arms of a Savior who sees every part of who we are and loves us still. No doubt we'll continue to revisit Egypt, revealing new layers of our inner resistance to God. But gradually we'll see ourselves transformed into men and women who, in the words of Saint Irenaeus, 'glorify God by being fully alive.'" Chuck DeGroat