

Broken for good: A positive response to brokenness!

In the book, *A Layman's Guide to the Lord's Prayer* the author talks about watching a potter mold a lump of clay. "On the shelves in his workshop stood gleaming goblets, beautiful bases, and exquisite bowls. The potter went to an odorous pit in the floor and took out a lump of clay. The smell was from rotting grass that increased the quality of the material and made it stick better. The potter patted the lump of clay in his hands into a ball. Placing the lump onto the slab of stone with seasoned skill, the potter sat down on his wobbly little wooden stool. Already the master potter could envision the work of art this lump of earth would become. Whirling the wheel gently, the artist caressed the spinning mound. Prior to each touch, he dipped his hands into the two water basins flanking each side of the wheel. The clay responded to the pressure applied by his fingers. A beautiful goblet arose from the pile, responding to each pinch and impression.

Suddenly the stone stopped and the potter removed a piece of grit. His seasoned fingers detected the unpliant aggregate. The stone spun again, allowing him to smooth out the former lodging of the grit. Suddenly the stone stopped again. He removed another hard object from the goblet's side, leaving a mark in the vessel. The particles of grain within the cup resisted his hands. It would not respond to his wishes. Quickly, the potter squashed the form back into a pile of clay. Instead of the beautiful goblet, the artisan formed the material into a crude finger bowl. "What might have been a rare and gorgeous goblet was now only a peasant's finger bowl. It was certainly second best. This was not the craftsman's first or honest intention, rather, just an afterthought." When we resist the Master Potter's hand, we run the very real risk of becoming less than we could become. The process of brokenness is like stopping the potter's wheel, where gritty, grainy, noncompliant attitudes and character traits can be extracted to allow further work on our beauty. But if those pieces remain obstructive, we will surely become a vessel that cannot be used to the extent that He originally intended.

When we are broken in the right place, in the arena of the soul and the will, we experience great peace and productivity." (Nelson)

In keeping with our theme of being broken, I want for us to think once again about being broken like a horse that is being broken to ride or drive. Being broken in this way makes us useful and not just consumers like a horse who is only good for eating and drinking. Once we are broken we have the ability to be productive in God's Kingdom.

When a horse is being broken it is critical that it is broken in the right way or it will pick up bad habits that can last a lifetime. While it may be broken to ride or drive there are things that keep it from being as good as it could have been had it been broken correctly.

That's what we are going to look at today. All of us face brokenness but the question is will we be broken the right way. Today we learn about the best way to respond to brokenness which by now you should know is about surrendering.

Balsa airplane illustration

There's a lot of brokenness in this world. Broken people fill up all kinds of places to find help. From counseling centers to bar rooms, from immoral sexual relationships to destructive addictions you will find broken people in search of answers. You may find them in church, at work or you may find them within your own family. In fact, all of us at one time or another, are broken people.

People who lose their health, go bankrupt, get laid off, suffer from an addiction, go through a divorce, burn out, have their teenagers rebel, suffer from depression, and a hundred other things are people that are experiencing breaking events. Broken relationships, dreams that are never going to come true and disappointments threaten to destroy us from the inside out.

Responding to these life situations in the wrong way can bring perpetual devastation into our lives. If we are not careful we will wind up broken in our emotions, our will to live, in our self-image, in our finances and in our relationships. The wrong response can lead to anger, bitterness, hate, un-forgiveness, and even thoughts of suicide in extreme cases. When healthy healing does not take place we can become empty and walk through our lives with an emptiness that is devastating and paralyzing.

None of us want that so let's try to figure this out together. What are some things we can do or approaches that we can take to have a positive response to brokenness?

1. Avoid walking wounded

Our feeble attempts to encourage, inspire and soothe the hurting person are often unintentional decoys that keep the broken person from being able to truly express their brokenness. Christians probably do this worse than about anybody I know. We are quick to talk and jump in and in an effort to encourage we tell others how they should be feeling.

Philip Yancy gives an example of this as he discusses our typically negative view of suffering. "It is an interruption of health, an unwelcome break in our pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. Visit any card shop and you will get the message unmistakably. All that we can wish for suffering people is that they "Get Well!" But as one woman with terminal cancer told me, 'None of those cards apply to the people in my ward. None of us will get well. We're all going to die here. To the rest of the world, that makes us invalid.' Think about that word. Not valid."

We often feel tempted to make the cancer patient feel happy and act as if there is little wrong. But trying to console is not always the best policy. Sometimes it is even an injustice. It could be that we need to embrace the breaking and brokenness. It just could be that it would be helpful to acknowledge it openly and not have to hide it or treat it as the gigantic "elephant in the room."

Embracing our brokenness is not about wearing it like a badge of honor but it is about not trying to hide or mask it over. Embracing our brokenness is about allowing God to develop us while we

are in the fire. It is an acceptance that with God we may become bigger than the problem and that He may want to grow our character through the process.

Much of our growth as a person, a Christian or a disciple of Jesus Christ is going to take place when we are feeling like we are in a time of challenge or affliction. Some life lessons can only be learned by loss. It could be the loss of any number of things but it happens. When the breaking happens in a correct way we begin to realize that God is shaping and molding us to His image.

There is a distinct difference between walking wounded and embracing brokenness. The person who has embraced being broke, although they may feel wounded and hurt, is on their way to being healed. The people whose hurts are not allowed to result in spiritual breaking become a wounded person and are known as the walking wounded.

Walking wounded people keep emotional sores that are never allowed to heal

Walking wounded people are people who have experienced some form of physical, financial, emotional, relational or some kind of breaking but who have not allowed that breaking to bring them to the place of realization of their deep need for depending on God.

Walking wounded people often demonstrate and act out their anger toward others.

Walking wounded people have extremely low self-esteem which might be demonstrated in their lack of personal care, or letting themselves go physically, to drug and alcohol abuse or even promiscuity.

Most anger will be directed toward other people. Wounded people constantly will feel the urge to be frustrated with the people around them. Even casual interactions with another driver, a waitress, a boss, a fellow employee, a spouse, children, a pastor, or anyone really can produce some kind of trigger and exposure of their inner pain and hurt.

If we discover that we are walking wounded people we need to do the hard work of letting God heal us from the inside out.

2. Add intimacy with God

Jesus had an encounter with a man who couldn't walk at the pool of Bethesda. Listen to this story:

Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. ² Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. ³ Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. ⁵ One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, He asked him, “Would you like to get well?”

⁷ “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.” ⁸ Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!” John 5:1-8 NLT

Jesus asks a really important question that might seem like it is foolish at first glance. He asked the man, “Would you like to get well?”

It’s a question every one of us has to ask ourselves. Even today as you sit here and listen inside of you this question has to be answered. There is a difference between “getting well” and making your problems go away. This is not about eliminating the brokenness but it is about allowing yourself to be broken the right way.

I know that some of our people are in very deep waters. It’s family stuff, it’s marriages and relationships, it’s job related and kid related, it’s these and a hundred other things. They are not going to go away and they are breaking you. It is critical that you and I are broken the correct way.

3. Act and respond wisely

Several not-so-wise options of response:

a. You can choose to find excuses for it

Sometimes people’s brokenness is reflected in sinful behavior. While this is not acceptable to God weak excuses are offered to cover the behavior. “Everybody is doing it,” is a common excuse or, “It’s not that bad.” If you are doing something that is sinful and goes against God’s will it is harmful and eventually it will destroy your life. It’s that simple. Nobody escapes the effects of sinful behavior so quit downplaying and making excuses.

You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God. Psalm 51:16-17 NLT

Obedience is key to being broken the right way.

b. You can choose to blame others

Adam blamed Eve in the Garden of Eden in ridiculous attempt to avoid judgment for his own behavior. We love to blame other people for our situations. Words show what is in our hearts and tough times reveal character. Blame is often a common dilemma that is seen in marriage counseling and divorce. The pain will just keep growing until one or both take some responsibility for the problems. We blame our spouses, our kids, our parents, our siblings, our bosses, our fellow employees, our friends, our church, the government and anything else to keep from having to acknowledge or take responsibility. Are you playing the blame game?

c. You can fill your life with activity so that you won’t have to deal with it

This is probably a trick most of us have used time and time again. It can be in the form of work, play, hobbies or any number of things that keep us from having to deal with the broken places of our lives. Sometimes people experience an emotional breakdown and that is our body's way of forcing us to slow down and let it heal. Brokenness is kind of like a speed bump. When we fail to slow down it can do long term damage to our lives and those around us.

d. You can try harder on your own

There are some things that you can't fix on your own. It's just the way it is.

Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted. Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good. ²It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to His loved ones. Psalm 127:1-2 NLT

So what are you going to do? What are you going to do with the pieces that are broken that are all around you? For some of us we may be tempted to think that it is too broken but I want to tell you a story as we prepare to close.

Once upon a time, in the far, far east, east even of Eden, lived a great emperor, in a great palace, gorgeously stocked with the richest of goods. It was early spring, and the season of royal visits, when kings and princes called on one another and admired each others' choicest possessions, gave wonderful gifts and enjoyed bountiful banquets. And this year was special, because the visitors would see the investiture of his beloved son Kintsukuroi as Crown Prince of the empire.

The emperor was excited this year because he had a new and beautiful bowl to show to his friends, specially made for him by the finest of craftsmen from the finest of materials. Imagine then his horror when on going to his cabinet he discovered that it was broken apart, into a hundred pieces. How could it have happened? No-one knew. What could be done about it before the first visitors arrived? No-one could offer any idea, for the time was too short to start again and make another one.

The emperor was dismayed, sad that he could not show off his beautiful bowl, but even sadder that something so beautiful should have broken. He retired into his private apartment with only his beloved son to share his sorrow, and they talked long into the night together.

The next morning the emperor woke to the sound of a great commotion. His senior ministers demanded to see him urgently. The cabinet of treasures had now been broken into, and this time the great new golden diadem that has been made for his beloved son, ready for the investiture, was quite simply gone – along with the broken pieces of the broken bowl, but who cared about those now.

What is more, the thief had been seen, but not recognized, since he was covered in dirt and scars, with nothing to distinguish him from a thousand other down-and-outs who hung around the

palace, for the emperor – to the annoyance of his ministers – refused to turn them out but shared his food with them.

No-one knew for sure where the thief had gone, but he had, they thought, run off towards the prince's apartment. There the doors were most unusually now locked and there was no answer to their knocking, though they could hear sounds inside. Would the emperor give his permission for them to break down the door: they dare not act without it.

The emperor was silent for many minutes. On his face his ministers saw sadness but not anger, lament but also love. What was going on? Eventually the emperor spoke. "Leave the prince and his apartment alone. If he is ready to rule, he must be allowed to act. His will and my will are as one." The ministers were not at all sure just what this meant, but the message was clear. They were to do precisely nothing.

So the day passed. The emperor remained in his private apartment. Those of the prince remained locked, though smoke could be seen coming out of the chimney and a fire had obviously been lit. And eventually the ministers tired of their waiting and went to bed. The important guests were expected the very next day.

Imagine now their surprise in the morning when they went to the treasure cabinet to prepare its items for display and found the precious bowl back in its place, whole again, but glistening with veins of gold where the cracks had been. Its beauty seemed all the greater. And by it the prince's crown, a slim band now, but speaking in its simplicity of strength, an authority all the more striking, because it had given itself away and given glory to another, but was the greater itself for it. The investiture could go ahead.

A smile of secret understanding passed between the emperor and the son whose newly scarred hands had shown him worthy to come into the kingdom.

Kintsukuroi means 'to repair with gold' in Japanese, and is the art of repairing pottery with gold and understanding that the piece is more beautiful for having been broken.

When the Japanese mend broken objects, they aggrandize the damage by filling the cracks with gold. They believe that when something's suffered damage and has a history it becomes more beautiful."

So you've been broken . . . life is not at all what you thought it would be. The stuff you thought would bring you happiness has left you feeling empty and cold. You feel that it is so meaningless. I'm inviting you today to let God help you put the pieces back together. Let Him in. Quit avoiding Him and let Him work with the mess and the brokenness. It will cost you something but He can and will do it if you let Him.

Invitation and Prayer