

It is imperative that we understand brokenness but more importantly it is critical that we embrace a theology that allows us to see it through God's Word; a theology that doesn't run from it or view it as a sign of God's displeasure. Brokenness happens to all of us in one form or the other. The question is how will we handle it? Will it make us better or bitter? Does the Bible have anything to say that is helpful or can serve as a guide to help us?

In 1956 it was five brilliant young men who set out to be missionaries but were murdered on the banks of a river by Auca warriors. One wife, Elizabeth Elliot, although heartbroken went back to help the very people who had killed her husband. The head of that war party is now a Christian and has been for many years. He was asked what he would do when he gets to heaven and sees Nate Saint the missionary he killed. He responded that he would throw his arms around him and thank him for bringing the gospel message to him and his people. . . and Nate Saint will throw his arms around me and welcome me home.

An old pastor in the former Soviet Union (under Stalin) was approached by the KGB many years ago and offered great wealth to inform on his people in the church. He was promised prosperity and wealth and anonymity. If he refused he would be given a free ride to Siberia. He refused and sure enough was sentenced to prison in Siberia. He got on a boat with 1500 other political prisoners but along the way an explosion took 600 of their lives. The remaining people were forced to march in freezing January weather to the prison camp. It was ten years of hard labor before he was released. During his last few years there he was sent out to help build towns all over this forsaken country. When asked about it he responded, "Today, there are many, many churches all over Siberia that proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ – a direct result of those prison groups that met all over Siberia." It's as though God might have wondered how to get the gospel to Siberia and said to Stalin, "I want you to send my finest to Siberia. I don't want you to just send anybody. I want only the ones who are fully by faith, committed to Me regardless of the outcomes. And I want you to pay for their transportation cost and support them while they are there."

Faith believes and acts in the face of extreme odds. Faith permits God to write the last chapter in the journal of our struggles.

In this message I want to bottom-line it for us. I want to answer three questions: Did Jesus give us an example to follow? What is our role? Who is the ultimate example?

1. An unlikely example to follow: Become childlike

About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

² Jesus called a little child to Him and put the child among them. ³ Then He said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the

Kingdom of Heaven. ⁴ So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 18:1-4 NLT

I want to give you several examples of how children model healthy brokenness for us.

a. Children are vulnerable

We are not born worrying about what other people think about us. Commercials and TV shows have been produced around the vulnerability of children to not wear masks and to say whatever is on their mind. A broken person will be able to be vulnerable. You have no pretenses or nothing to hide. Of course this doesn't give us license to be crude or rude but it does allow you to be genuine. What you are on the inside will match what you are on the outside.

b. Children are forgiving

Kids fight. It's a simple statement that we all know is true but they also have an incredible capacity to forgive and forgive quickly. The older we get our ability to hold on to grudges increases until eventually it breaks us. God instructs us to forgive. You don't get to make it up or customize your Christianity. Brokenness may have to happen for you to experience the healing that has to come from forgiveness.

c. Children are trusting

Kids will trust you when you hold out your hands and say jump off some high place. Broken people become trusting of God and others. It's ironic how that works but people who live in self-pity, self-reliance and self-focus are usually cautious and self-centered in relationships. They avoid vulnerability because they are afraid of being rejected or hurt and therefore their friendships are shallow and few. Emotions are withheld in worship and in life. Trust God. You can cry with Him or laugh with Him. Let Him into your life at its most personal points. Trust Him!

d. Children are loving

People who are unloving need some brokenness. We can wake up one day and find ourselves in a prison of no hope. We can't love others because we are too busy pointing out all their faults. We can't appreciate others because they don't do things like we do them or they think differently than we think. People who are broken in the right place allow God to fill them. When you and I are full of God we ooze love. Qualities like pride, selfishness and unforgiveness get in God's way. Broken people are sensitive to others in a way no one else can be.

e. Children are teachable

Infants are constant learners. They learn with their senses. They stick whatever they have close to or into their mouths. Four and five year olds live on the word "Why?" But the older we get the greater our tendency is to stop learning. We read less. We put our heads down and muddle

our way through our lives, our work, and our relationships. We only learn when we have been broken and have teachable spirits. Broken people are teachable.

f. Children have simple values

Ever spend a ton of time tracking down just the right toy or gift for your kid only to discover them on Christmas afternoon playing with the box the object came in? The toy lies under a mound of wrapping paper and they are mesmerized by the simplicity of the box it came in. People who are or have been broken find that they desire simplicity in life. Objects that were once attractive have lost their value. For adults it's a certain kind of car or a home in the perfect neighborhood, or clothes or electronic gadgets but somewhere broken people begin to realize the fleeting satisfaction that things bring. You may find some enjoyment in things but you are no longer owned by them. Unbroken people join the rat race for more stuff and more entertainment and the symbols of success. Broken people are of another world. We are just passing through this life but we belong to the kingdom of Heaven.

Children provide a model of healthy brokenness and dependence. As adults living in our world we should be broken enough to realize how powerless we are on our own. There are things money can't buy. There are things you can't wish away. Brokenness comes and no amount of titles, positions, bank accounts, toys, great looks, homes, cars, or anything else can fix it.

2. An urgent exhortation/endeavor: Become Conscious

We are called to totally surrender. We have heard it over and over but rarely do we do anything about it. I wish I could motivate you somehow. Surrendering our lives to God is not optional. There is no such thing as second-class Christian.

I call on all of us to a declaration of dependence. Our lives, our circumstances, the good, the bad and the ugly should all be declared dependent on Jesus Christ. We are dependent on God whether we know it or not.

It would be amazing if you could gain consciousness of that fact on a daily basis and live it out moment by moment.

You and I will leave behind just as much as Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and any other rich person in this world. We all leave behind the same thing: All of it!

Henri Nouwen wrote, *“The world says, ‘When you were young you were dependent and could not go where you wanted, but when you grow old you will be able to make your own decisions, and go your own way, and control your own destiny.’ But Jesus has a different vision of maturity: It is the ability and willingness to be led where you would rather not go.*

Immediately after Peter has been commissioned to be a leader of his sheep, Jesus confronts him with the hard truth that the servant-leader is the leader who is being led to unknown, undesirable, and painful places. The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on

the cross. This might sound morbid and masochistic, but for those who have heard the voice of the first love and said 'yes' to it, the downward moving way of Jesus is the way to the joy and peace of God, a joy and peace that is not of this world."

Somewhere in the heart of the true disciple there will come a time of awareness; maybe it would be better to refer to it as a call, but there will be a time when we hear the Spirit of Jesus call us to a deeper life. In those moments we will realize and become conscious that this world has nothing for us. That living with eternity in view is the proper perspective and that the things that call for our attention from a fleshly standpoint are not lasting but the fleeting pleasure of sin that lasts for a few moments and then goes away.

Broken people own nothing. They view themselves as gifted stewards of whatever God has entrusted to them. In his terrible moments of brokenness Job realized he owned nothing although he had been very rich. Unbroken people find it very hard to be positive or praise God when things aren't going their way. There is nothing uglier than an adult temper tantrum or an adult personal pity party. Job responded in his pain with these words, God gave and God took away blessed be the name of the Lord.

I'm calling us to a conscious maturity. Listen to the words of 1 Timothy 6:6-10:

Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. ⁷ After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. ⁸ So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.

⁹ But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

Broken people understand that life is not perfect nor will it ever be on this planet. Heaven is perfect and we are not there yet.

¹³ Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." ¹⁴ How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. James 4:13-14 NLT

It is only when we have been broken that we can truly be used by God. The fruits of brokenness include, humility, authenticity, integrity and sensitivity. The opposite of that is the person that is proud, legalistic, hypocritical, and lukewarm in their spiritual life. Broken people have a zealous love for God that makes others want to be around them. You feel good around them because they seem to have a spiritual depth and warmth. Unbroken people make you feel uncomfortable, unholy, intimidated and generally unable to ever measure up.

3. The ultimate example: Become Christlike

The ultimate characteristic of a healthy broken person is not responding defensively when criticized, accused wrongly or misunderstood. I don't even know if we have the capacity to process this but listen to these words from Isaiah describing the then coming Messiah who would be crucified for our sins even though He did nothing to deserve the punishment.

Yet it was our weaknesses He carried; it was our sorrows that weighed Him down. And we thought His troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for His own sins! ⁵ But He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. ⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on Him the sins of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet He never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, He did not open His mouth. Isaiah 53:4-7 NLT

Very few of us would go down to the county jail or a state prison and turn ourselves in to serve someone else's punishment. We would be more inclined to hire a lawyer, stand up for our rights, or seek revenge.

Alan Nelson writes, I visited Romania not long after their revolution. While visiting an open-air market, I walked through the meat section, which consisted of a couple of small trucks with a few sheep in them. A few of the sheep were lying on the ground eyes closed, feet tied, motionless. I thought this strange that they would slaughter the lambs before they actually sold them. They had no refrigeration. These poor people could not afford to kill a sheep and then not sell it. Then I looked closer, much closer. There was no blood coming from the carcasses, and no blood around the truck. No, these sheep were still alive. They just looked dead. I then understood the scriptures that refer to Jesus as a sheep to the slaughter. Jesus never fought it. He never kicked and screamed about it. He just took it.

You want to hear the words of a broken and mature Christian? You can find them in Romans 8.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:35-39 NKJV

We may never be called to actually give up our lives for Christ but we are called daily to lay down our egos, our rights, our money, our personal agendas and our will. This is how we can give our coat to the person suing us, or turn our cheek when we are slapped. This is how we pray for those who persecute us and love those who hate us. In unbrokenness we fight going to the slaughter and we demand our rights. We go out kicking screaming and throwing a fit but Jesus

remains our example. You can't escape it. He draws you to it. He is the model. He is our standard of measurement.

I want to ask you some questions. You can find them at the bottom of your message notes in the worship folder.

Attitude Checks for Brokenness

- Am I willing to let go of my dreams and ambitions if such is God's will?
- Am I defensive when accused, criticized or misunderstood?
- Am I coveting what others have instead of waiting for heaven's rewards?
- Am I forgiving when offended, with or without apology?
- Am I complaining or arguing out of un-surrendered rights?
- Am I thinking of others first out of love?
- Am I proudly appearing that I am always right or know all the answers?
- Am I practicing the spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, solitude, simplicity, etc.)?
- Am I being silent regarding self-promotion and letting God do my public relations?
- Am I daily saying, "God, whatever it takes, I'm willing to submit to Your leadership"?
- Am I expressing joy in the difficulties, which serve to refine me?
- Am I taking risks out of obedience to Christ instead of giving into fear, pride, or denial?

The fruits of brokenness are humility, authenticity, integrity, and sensitivity. All of these qualities are desirable as a leader.

Seven very common ways to spot a humble spirit:

1. Humility does not demand its own way.
2. Humility exudes an attitude of service (service is doing mundane things that help others).
3. Humility does not seek attention or credit.
4. Humility forgives when offended but is hard to offend.
5. Humility does not criticize others.
6. Humility produces a teachable spirit.
7. Humility is gracious and thankful. In fact, one of the most Godlike attributes we can express is a gracious spirit, a spirit of mercy and thanksgiving.

You have tested us, O God; you have purified us like silver ¹¹ You captured us in your net and laid the burden of slavery on our backs. ¹² Then you put a leader over us. We went through fire and flood, but you brought us to a place of great abundance. Psalm 66:10-12 NLT

Annie Johnson Flint's life on earth could never be measured in any degree by comfort and ease; quite the contrary, from childhood her body endured the onslaught of Rheumatoid Arthritis until she could no longer rise from bed. Over the years the affliction took a great toll, leaving her with no choice but to seek some comfort from sleeping and resting on soft pillows. Her body developed serious bedsores and finally she suffered the ravages of cancer.

Yet her attitude through all the struggles with pain and confinement may best be expressed through one of her great Christian poems that has been set to music in many hymnals. Her faith in God and His purpose, reflected through these words, portray her deep commitment and disposition of hope and peace:

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater;
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase.
To added affliction He addeth His mercy;
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

His love has no limit;
His grace has no measure.
His power has no boundary known unto men.
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limit;
His grace has no measure.
His power has no boundary known unto men.
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

Now I pray that God will grant you and I the ability to keep our eyes on Him and our faith strong. That no matter what we may be feeling or seeing that our trust will be completely in Him.