

BROKENNESS

A Little Understood and Lightly Esteemed Virtue



“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” The popular slogan means as long as something is working—leave it alone! However, when it comes to the human heart, it’s not fixed until it is broken.

“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Ps. 34:18). We see here that brokenness is the essential condition for God’s presence in saving power. Both the prodigal who returned home, and the publican who cried to God for mercy, were broken. And both were the recipients of mercy.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:17). Brokenness is the opposite of arrogance and pride. Lionel Barrymore said, “The greatest disappointment of my career on the stage in the theater is that I could never step beyond the footlights and sit in the audience and watch me.” The essence of pride is the centralization of self. There can be no point of meeting between a proud heart and a holy God.

After the death of William II his personal servant said, “I cannot argue that my master was a vain and arrogant man. If he went to a christening, he wanted to be the baby. If he went to a wedding, he wanted to be the bride. If he went to a funeral, he wanted to be the corpse.” Lucifer, through his desire to be the center of attention, sought to exalt himself. Sin came into the universe through Satan’s self-exalting spirit.

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. 57:15). God is so vast and immense that He fills eternity. The heaven of heavens cannot contain Him (2 Chron. 2:6). Yet this high and lofty God who dwells in the holy place also abides in the heart of humble and broken men. Tom Palmer said, “You will never meet God in revival until you meet Him first in brokenness.” The broken, humble heart is the heart that God revives. Here is the essential element for the refreshing, reviving presence of God.

While brokenness may be an abstract concept, it definitely has concrete implications.

Brokenness is Surrender

When the Lord Jesus met Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road, Saul had two questions: “Who art thou?” and “What would thou have me to do?” From the outset at his conversion, the apostle-in-the-making was submitted to the Lordship of Christ. Surrender is a willingness to function within the sphere where God has called me. Surrender is a willingness to fulfill God’s purpose in life and God’s design in marriage, family, and church. It is a willingness to submit to the authorities God has placed over me. When I am broken, there is no longer any resistance or rebellion to the work of God in my life.

Alan Redpath had two daughters who loved to swarm him when he came home at night. As he came in the door one evening, his little girls ran to meet him. One grabbed his leg and hugged him with all her might. He snatched the other daughter up in his arms. The one squeezing his leg said, "Now, I've got all of Daddy." The daughter in his arms replied, "Yes, but Daddy has got all of me!" Perhaps the question we need to continually ask is, "Does God have all of me?"

Sin has been defined as my claim to my right to myself. Surrender is running up the white flag by yielding myself to the will and control of God. George Mueller, who experienced extraordinary answers to prayer, was asked to what he attributed his astounding success. He responded by saying, "There was a day when I died. Died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God." By dying to self, George Mueller was able to experience the Christ-life with the attending, incredible results.

A man who is crucified with Christ has no right to self-pity, bitterness, or retaliation. Since dead men have no rights, there is no place for fighting, fuming, fretting, or complaining in this blood-bought temple.

Brokenness is Seeing My Sin BIG

When my shadow is so big I can't see beyond it, I know I am filled with pride. And when pride has the ascendancy, the sins of others bother me more than my own. When other people's sins irritate me more than my sins, I have established myself as a judge rather than a servant. Instead of pouring contempt on all my pride, I tend to pour contempt on other people. In reality, the only difference between proud people and humble people is that humble people are willing to admit they are proud!

Did you know that there are two people in the Bible who had five "eyes"? The Pharisee said, "I thank God," "I am not as other men," "I fast twice," "I give tithes of all I possess." The Devil said, "I will ascend," "I will exalt," "I will sit," "I will ascend," "I will be like the Most High." The Pharisee and the devil both had "I" trouble. Likewise, our main problem is not optical; it's the big "I" of self.

Brokenness changes a self-righteous critical spirit into a burden-bearing, compassionate spirit. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3).

Brokenness is Shattering My Will

Brokenness is shattering my will so that all my responses are filled with the Holy Spirit. Moses had to smite the rock before the water could come forth. Rivers of living water can only issue forth from broken people.

A broken cistern can hold no water and a broken "Self" can hold no pride! Duncan Campbell said, "If you are filled with the Holy Spirit you can't be filled with anything else." In order to be

filled with the Holy Spirit there must be an emptying of “Self” and sin. Before this emptying takes place, there must a humbling of ourselves before God.

Brokenness is our response of humility and obedience to the conviction of God’s Spirit or the revelation of His Word. Humility is when we confess our sin by simply agreeing with God. “Confess,” in 1 John 1:9, means to say the same thing about my sin that God says about it. When I confess, I call my sin by the same name God calls it. But brokenness must also include obedience. Acknowledging sin is not enough! We must obey! Obedience is instantly doing all God tells me to do with the right heart attitude.

Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to be a “Christian” at church than it is to be a “Christian” at home? We all know how to act at church, but the way we live at home demonstrates who is in control of our lives.

Brokenness will change the way I respond to my family.

The opponents of George Whitefield took out a newspaper advertisement and listed fifteen of his faults. Whitefield’s friends brought the article and showed it to him. Immediately after reading, Whitefield took out his pen and began to write. His friends asked if he was writing a rebuttal. Whitefield replied, “Oh no! All these are correct. I am writing several more so they can have a complete list.” Brokenness will change the way I receive rebuke and criticism.

A wealthy businessman in London took a busload of poor children to the coast to spend the day at the ocean. These children had never been out of the city. They spent the day running, laughing, playing at the beach. On the ride home the businessman went through the bus talking with the children. He asked one boy, “What are you doing with that half bottle of ocean water?” The young boy said he was taking it to his mother because she had never seen the ocean either. The businessman then asked why the bottle was only half full. The boy replied, “I left room for the tide to come in.” There has to be room in our hearts if the Spirit is to come in fullness.

Seeds contain the potential for fruitfulness, but they can never bring forth fruit until they are broken. Anyone who has planted a garden knows that life comes out of death. The earth is plowed and a trench is opened. The hard seeds are planted in their burial plot. Dirt is thrown over the seeds and the gardener waits. Normally, in a matter of days the seeds “break” open and a green shoot emerges from the seed. Before long the shoot comes out of the earth and grows into a stalk which bears fruit. The life of the plant emerges from the brokenness of the seed. Fruitfulness is preceded by falling in the ground and dying. Self-will must be shattered before the fruit of the Spirit can spring forth.

The Roof Off and the Walls Down

When Adam sinned, he went into a hiding mode. Adam and Eve sought to conceal themselves by crouching among the trees of the Garden when the Lord came looking for them. God called out, “Adam, where art thou?” God was not trying to locate Adam. He knew exactly where Adam was. The Lord was trying to help Adam locate himself! Before sin came, Man and God enjoyed

open fellowship. But when sin came everything changed. Man's disobedience had brought guilt, and guilt brought shame. Now Man no longer felt free to face God. Instead, Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the Garden. The Fall brought a barrier between God and Man. Heaven ceased to be open and Man's tendency from thereon would be to flee the light of God's presence and seek out dark places where he could feel comfortable.

The sin that brought a barrier between the Creator and His creature also brought a barrier between the first couple. Vertically, there came a roof between Man's soul and his God. Horizontally, walls sprang up between men. Not much time elapsed after the Fall before the first domestic quarrel took place. Adam and Eve not only hid from God, they started hiding from each other. The breakdown was so severe that of the first two offspring, Cain rose up and slew his brother Abel! Sin has a polarizing effect which isolates men from God as well as from each other.

Genuine fellowship can only be restored through openness. Roy Hession said openness is a willingness to know the truth about myself and a willingness to let other people know me as I really am. Anything short of openness will continue to perpetuate superficiality. Openness, before God and man, will lead to brokenness, and brokenness will lead to oneness or restored fellowship. Openness produces brokenness which causes oneness which has been defined as REVIVAL!

In revival men walk in the light. They stop hiding from God, stop hiding their sin, and stop hiding from each other. Honesty, humility, openness, brokenness, restitution, reconciliation, and unity are the result. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. . . . But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:5,7). Whenever men come to the light, get real with God and each other, the roof comes off and the walls come down! The cleansing blood covers all sin and fellowship is restored. Brokenness is the key that opens the door to revival blessing.

Brokenness is Joyfully Receiving Trials

Trials are God's method to lead us to brokenness. James tells us to count it in all joy when we fall into various temptations (Js. 1:2). Paul said, "but we glory in tribulations" (Romans 5:3). This mighty Apostle said he even gloried in his infirmities (2 Cor. 12:9). Choosing to rejoice at, and in the midst of, problems evidences trust and confidence in our Sovereign God.

Pride seeks to conform our circumstances to fit our minds. It would rearrange our surroundings to our liking and comfort. On the other hand, humility is adapting our minds to accommodate our circumstances. Since we all are going through tests and trials, it is to everyone's advantage if we

choose to respond properly and derive the accompanying benefits. God wants to use these fiery trials to build character in us. We cannot afford to waste our sorrows. Often it seems God refuses to change our circumstances until, through brokenness, we allow our circumstances to

change our character. There are some things in life that cannot be altered. When I have surrendered my rights I will not fume, fret, fuss, or fight. When I am broken, I have nothing to lose and nothing to prove. There is tremendous rest in being crucified with Christ.

Many are humbled, but not humble. Many are low, but not lowly. I had a friend who recently graduated to his eternal home. He suffered with brain tumors for about twenty years. He went through numerous operations, difficulties, limitations, and sufferings. Amazingly, he never complained. He was always praising the Lord. Several days before his homegoing some friends loaded him in their vehicle and brought him by our house. He was very weak and it was obvious he was dying. As he sat in the truck he kept saying, "God has been mighty good to me." He could have been angry and bitter, but he chose to receive his trials with joy.

Brokenness is not an emotion; it is an attitude. God brings the pressure to bear, but we must make the choice to bow to Christ. So brokenness is both God's work and ours. He uses His Word and circumstances to break us. Jesus walked the Calvary Road...to Calvary. We get on the Calvary Road...at Calvary! Pastor James Bell says we must walk the Calvary Road because love is better than hate; forgiveness is better than bitterness; faith is better than unbelief; trusting God is better than despair; and obedience is better than rebellion.

Brokenness means "Not I, but Christ." That hard, unyielding self which justifies itself, wants its own way, seeks its own glory, and stands up for its own rights at last bows its head to God's will. The big "I" admits it is wrong, surrenders its rights, and discards its own glory so the Lord Jesus might be all in all. As we walk the Calvary Road we learn that brokenness is that daily response of humility to the conviction of God's Spirit.

Is it not that old proud "Self" who gets irritable, envious, resentful, critical, and worried? Is it not "Self" which is hard and unyielding in its attitudes toward others? Is it not that shy, reserved, self-conscious disposition which must first be broken if the life of Jesus is to be made manifest in mortal bodies? That beautiful fragrance in the alabaster box could not be enjoyed until the container was broken.

The Bible says the stone which the builders rejected (Jesus) became the head of the corner. Our Lord said, "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Lk. 20:18). The choice is ours: fall fresh upon the chief Cornerstone (Jesus) and be broken, or have the Cornerstone fall upon us! It is only through brokenness that our lives become acceptable to God and useful in Kingdom purposes.

**Lord, bend this proud and stiff-necked I,
Help me to bow the head and die.
That it may no longer be I, But Christ that liveth in me.**

—Harold Vaughan