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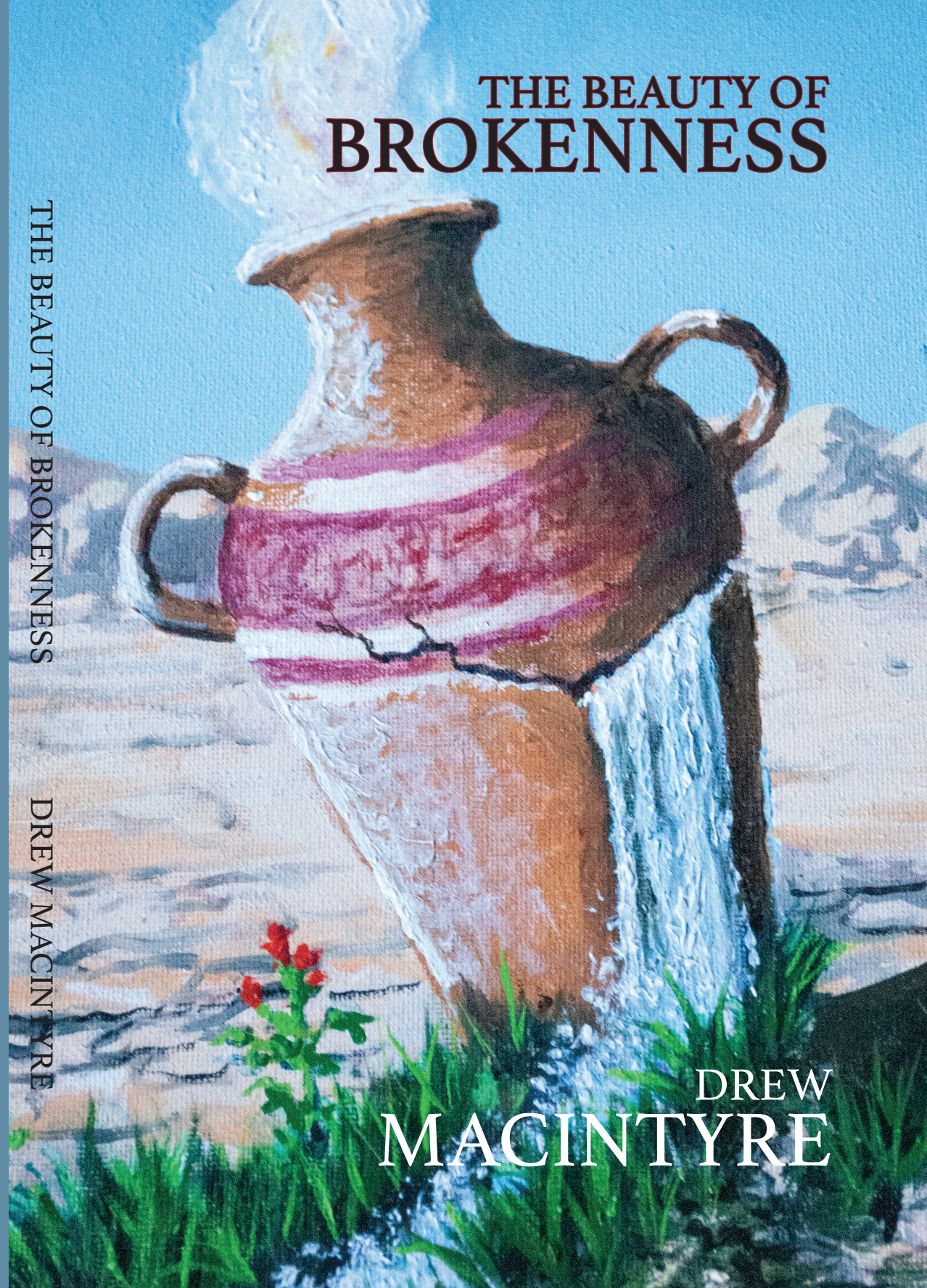


THE BEAUTY OF BROKENNESS

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DREW MACINTYRE

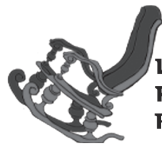
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Preface

This book has been a long time in the making, several years actually. Over this time, I have become more familiar with the subject of brokenness; intellectually, experientially, and biblically. It has not all been enjoyable, but I have come to realize that brokenness is absolutely necessary for any man or woman who wants to be used by God, walk with Jesus in a more intimate way, and know Him—really know Him—as the Apostle Paul writes:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. —Philippians 3:7-11

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Prologue

Perhaps there has never been a larger divide between what the world esteems and what God esteems than there is today. We live in a day and age in which good is called evil, and evil is called good. The attributes that God calls us toward are called foolish by the world, and what He warns us away from is embraced by it.

What is more, many people in the church have begun to embrace the world's view of how we should be, rather than God's view. While there are plenty of different examples of this divide, perhaps none is more definite than the one between pride (self-sufficiency, self-reliance, self-confidence, or self-esteem) and humble brokenness.

Every man and woman used by God has had “issues,” as we like to refer to our own failings, with pride. In reality, these issues can be correctly identified as sin, manifesting itself through pride. We explain pride away as just “how we are,” pretend it is good for us because it helps us love ourselves, or hide it away through a mask of false humility. But God is not fooled.

Before He can or will bless us through His use, these “issues” need to be addressed and dealt with. Put simply, if we are filled with our pride (full of ourselves), then we leave no room to be filled by the Holy Spirit, and thus cannot be blessed through God's use.

To the world, these prideful characteristics are admirable, worthy to be esteemed and held in high regard, but this does not mean God sees them the same way.

And He said to them, You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.—Luke 16:15

Instead, God's plan for his children is to empty us of our pride through brokenness so that He can fill us with His Holy Spirit. And while God has many tools for breaking us, it should come as no surprise that His most effective and useful one is suffering:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24).

In the following chapters, we will examine how God broke His chosen men so that He could work in and through them to accomplish His will to His glory.

We will learn about who we are, who we should be, and the means God employs to get us there. It is my hope and prayer that, as we come to know and understand the way God works in preparing a man or woman to be His, we will no longer resist, refrain, be shocked or surprised, or run away when He begins to prepare us for Himself by breaking us.

Instead, I pray we will gladly humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and say with all our heart as Adelaide Pollard famously penned:

*"Have Thine own way Lord
Have Thine own way
Thou art the potter, I am the clay
Mold me and make me, after Thy will
While I am waiting, yielded and still."*

| I |

What is Brokenness?

Picture with me in your mind's eye a vessel such as a vase, one like that on the cover of this book. Now consider the variables that determine the value of such a vessel: the material from which it was made, the maker, the age of the vessel, the degree of artistic ability displayed, the shape and size, and its usability. The more of these qualities the vessel displays, which society deems important, the higher its value.

But let there be some kind of flaw such as a crack, chip, or disfigurement in any way, and the value of the vessel will diminish significantly. Sometimes its value will diminish to the point of being worthless.

To illustrate this, imagine my taking a vessel that has all of the qualities deemed necessary to make it of great value. It was made many years ago by a master potter; with the best materials available; has retained its size, shape, color, and beauty; and is without any flaws.

I take a hammer and hit the vase ever so lightly, causing a chip of the vase to fly off and a hairline crack to appear on the side. Now the vase has lost its value significantly. If I then take the vase and tap it on the hard concrete floor, causing many chips to fly and multiple cracks to appear, it will lose its original value and become all but worthless.

This way of determining value applies not only to a vase, but to most everything in our society, including people. Let a person lose some of his or her valued traits by going through various hardships or difficulties—even accidents or illnesses and diseases—and society places lesser value upon that person. Society esteems the person who has beauty and stature. The fewer flaws apparent in the person, the more value is placed upon him or her.

Other qualities that our society uses to determine the value of a person are such things as success, strong or beautiful physical appearance,

self-sufficiency, confidence, self-reliance, wealth, intelligence, as well as a charming appearance and voice. We actually see these very traits in a number of people mentioned in the Bible, such as Israel's first King Saul, Jezebel, Judas, and especially Satan. The proud, self-asserting, self-assured, confident individuals are much sought after and applauded. Today, many of them have hundreds of thousands of followers on their various media outlets. But God sees things very differently than men.

'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways;,' says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. —Isaiah 55:8-9

It must be understood that those things that man esteems are often an abomination to God: *And He [Jesus] said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).*

God's economy is different from man's.

The value of people is not defined by the things they have, achieve, or find in themselves; but rather, it is found in being created and loved by God. Now, when it comes to a person's characteristics that are of value in God's eyes, they are vastly different from those of the world. If someone desires to please and serve God, this must be done according to His way of things. God will not bless a man or woman who is proud, self-sufficient, self-confident, or self-reliant to accomplish His work of the ministry.

He did not use Paul when he was the proud, self-righteous Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus. He did not use men like Joseph, Moses, Peter and a multitude of others in their natural, sinful condition. They first had to go through a process that would break them off their pride and bring them into humility before God. Then they were ready to be used by God for His glory.

Let me illustrate this idea of being broken. Think of a horse. In its natural state, horses are fiercely independent and refuse to be corralled

or controlled in any way. In fact, if you tried to ride a wild horse by jumping on its back, you would promptly find yourself bucked off as the horse trotted away in a temper. A horse must be “broken” before it can be ridden.

Now, there are two ways to break a horse. One is to get to know the horse, become friends with it, and gain its trust until it allows you to ride it out of love. That is obviously the preferred way to break a horse.

A more stubborn, prideful horse needs to be broken the hard way. It needs to be ridden and ridden, as it is jumping and kicking and throwing a fit, until it eventually accepts that it cannot get the rider off, and maybe it would be better to obey the rider’s commands.

When the horse finally stops resisting, and submits to the rider, then it is “broken,” and can finally be used for the rider’s purpose. Until the moment that the horse submits, it cannot be used.

In the same way, before we can be used by God, we must be broken. And depending on how stubborn and prideful we are, God can do it the easy way or the hard way. It might hurt, and it will definitely hurt our pride, but just like the horse, God cannot and will not use us until we are broken.

When we are obedient to Him, in meekness and humility submitting to His every command, then God can use us. In short, to be broken is to be humbled to the point of total obedience, not out of fear or obligation, but out of love and gratitude for the God Who saved our souls and brought us through all of the trials in our lives.

Now, a word of clarification. When I say that God will not use an unbroken person, I do not mean that unbelieving or disobedient people cannot be used for the Lord’s plans, if He so wishes it.

God has used many evil people according to His own will, without them desiring or knowing it—including the Egyptian Pharaoh, Israel’s King Ahab, the brutal Syrian army, and countless others. This demonstrates the sovereignty of God above all human power. These people would all receive the proper judgment for their willful disobedience and

wicked deeds. The way God is able to use these people for His own plan is more like they are being outmaneuvered by Him, and not like they were ever playing on His team.

In contrast, we see how wonderful the blessings are that God has in store for those who willingly submit to Him, to be an eager servant for the Lord, ready to do His will, relentlessly seeking His glory. God will use this person and work through him or her in ways that we could never possibly do on our own. The reward will be great for those who allow Him to break and use them in order to build His kingdom.

The brokenness that God requires is the humbling of oneself under the mighty hand of God. It is seeing ourselves for what we really are, helpless sinners before a perfect and holy God. It is dying to self—the flesh, the sinful nature which we are all born with, the nature that wants nothing to do with God or the things of the Spirit, that is diametrically opposed to all that God is and desires.

It means giving glory to God and not ourselves. In essence, it means being completely surrendered to Him, not seeking one's own will, but rather desiring only the will of God. True brokenness, displayed in profound humility, is best observed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As we look at His life, recorded for us in the Bible, His Word, we see what true brokenness is, and it is this brokenness that God desires to work into His children:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

—Philippians 2:5-8

Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. —Mark 10:43-45

For I [Jesus] have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. —John 6:38

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to follow His example. Jesus spoke clearly that *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me”* (Matthew 16:24). And as the above passage from Philippians 2 starts off to say, *“let this mind be in you which was also in Jesus Christ.”*

It cannot be clearer. Jesus is the example we ought to follow.

Romans 8:29 teaches us that God’s will for our lives is *“to be conformed to the image of His Son”*—to become more and more like Jesus. Our thinking, our actions, our course of life are all to be directed by God and not by the natural tendencies of our flesh. And brokenness is an essential part in becoming more like Jesus.

As we find ourselves in the process of being broken, we can know that God gives us all that we need to reach the goal—the fullness of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), every spiritual blessings in the heavens (Ephesians 1:3), and everything we need pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3)—if we will humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and allow Him to complete the work that He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6).

In the following chapters, we will learn more about pride and brokenness, the instruments God uses in the breaking process, and how these played out in the lives of different men of the Bible. If you find some of the things in this book too challenging or uncomfortable, and you find yourself desiring to ignore these things, consider the words of Jesus on our need for, and the foundation of, our brokenness:

And whoever falls on this stone [Jesus] will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.
—Matthew 21:42-44

Men who Were Broken by God

In the Bible, we see different men, who, though they were distinct in many ways, were alike in these two: they were first broken, and then used, by God. We will examine the lives of five men and learn from them some valuable lessons about being both broken and used by God.

Remember that during this time, it is not the virtues and character traits of these men that we should be paying closest attention to, but rather the way in which God worked in their lives.

Joseph

Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob. By all accounts he was a good boy, and daddy's favorite, which made him very unpopular with his brothers.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. —Genesis 37:3-4

To make matters worse, Joseph displayed his own unbrokenness by pridefully boasting about the messages that God had given him by way of dreams:

Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, 'Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and

indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.' And his brothers said to him, 'Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?' So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, 'Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.'

So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind. —Genesis 37:5-11

This only brought greater contention between him and his brothers. Envy and jealousy gripped the hearts of his brothers, and Joseph became a condemned man in their minds:

Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. —Genesis 37:18

But God had a different plan for Joseph, and not even his brothers' envy and jealousy could have prevented it. One day, as Joseph brought provisions to his brothers, they laid hold of him and threw him into a pit to die. However, God placed it in the heart of Reuben, the oldest brother, to save Joseph.

In the end, Joseph was sold into slavery rather than killed, and became property of a man named Potiphar of Egypt. For the next number of years, Joseph served in this man's house, and despite the heart-breaking circumstances, God's hand was upon Joseph to where he found such favor in the sight of his master that he made him in charge of all his household:

So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field. Thus he left all that he

had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. —Genesis 39:5-6

Just when things began to look up for Joseph, something unexpected happened. Trouble was ahead. The wife of his master began to have desires for Joseph and repeatedly tried to seduce him. Joseph refused her, until one day Potiphar's wife became so upset over the rejection that she falsely accused Joseph of trying to force himself on her, which led to Joseph's imprisonment (Genesis 39:7-20).

God was not through with the breaking and preparation process of Joseph. Had Joseph done anything wrong? Did he deserve such treatment for doing what was right? No! But trials like this play a part in the preparation of the man or woman that God will use for His glory.

Joseph still had to go through some further preparation before he could enter the place God had for him. While Joseph was in prison, God worked through different circumstances and people:

But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper. —Genesis 39:21-23

While in prison, Joseph had occasion to make the acquaintance with Pharaoh's baker and butler, which the Lord would use in an unpredictable way in the future. One day these two men each had a dream and did not understand the meaning.

They shared what they had dreamt with Joseph, and God gave him the interpretation: in three days time both of the men would be called to the Pharaoh, the butler to be restored to his position, and the baker to his death sentence. Joseph pleaded with the butler to repay the favor and bring the case of his unjust imprisonment before the Pharaoh. The three days went by and everything happened exactly like Joseph

had predicted it. No doubt, Joseph thought for sure he would be let out of prison now. He had the butler, one of the most trusted servants of Pharaoh, to take his side. He was obviously being blessed by the Lord, as he had been given favor in the sight of those he served, as well as given interpretation of dreams, so surely he would be released! Not yet.

The butler forgot about Joseph, so he would have to spend another two years in prison. It was when Pharaoh had two very unsettling dreams, which none of his magicians could interpret, that the butler remembered Joseph.

Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying: "I remember my faults this day. When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, both me and the chief baker, we each had a dream in one night, he and I.

Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. Now there was a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his own dream. And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him."—Genesis 41:9-13

As you probably know, Joseph was called out of prison and brought to the court of Pharaoh where he interpreted Pharaoh's dream. He also was able to give wise counsel on what to do next.

He told him that the dreams meant Egypt would have seven years of good crops, and seven years of famine after that. He then advised Pharaoh to ration the grain during the years of plenty that would come, so that they would survive the years of famine that would follow.

So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is

no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.” And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.”

Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, “Bow the knee!” So he set him over all the land of Egypt.

—Genesis 41:37-43

Finally, Joseph was ready for what God had for him. He was sold into slavery by his brothers at the age of seventeen, and for thirteen years he was a slave, servant, and prisoner. He had been hated, despised, rejected, mistreated, misunderstood, and forgotten.

For Joseph, this was God’s method of breaking and preparing him for his calling: to save the known world. Just as the Lord had said, the time of plenty and the time of famine both came, and if it had not been for Joseph being in the right place at the right time (and being in the right relationship with God), who knows how many people would have perished?

Without doubt, during this time of breaking, preparation, molding, and shaping, Joseph experienced moments of doubt, discouragement, and even depression. He certainly wondered: “Why? What have I done to deserve this? How long will this go on? What is the purpose of all the suffering and mistreatment by family, friends, and enemies?”

Some of the reasons became clear to Joseph when his brothers came to Egypt in desperation, as the famine had affected them also. Not knowing that it was Joseph, his brothers came with humility, bowing down to him, who was second only to Pharaoh in power.

Had Joseph not gone through God’s breaking process to a place of humility, he may have sought revenge on his brothers rather than to have mercy on them. You can read about it in its entirety in Genesis 42-44, but now let us take a look at how Joseph revealed his identity to

his brothers in a scene that must have been shocking for all:

Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near.

Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.

And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. —Genesis 45:1-8

In the end, Joseph and his family were happily reconciled, and he brought his father, all his brothers, and their families to a safe place in Goshen, Egypt, and provided for them during the famine.

But there was still doubt in the hearts of his brothers about whether or not his forgiveness was genuine. After their father's death, they sent to inquire what Joseph would do to them.

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father's household. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. —Genesis 50:19-22

From a human perspective, Joseph had every conceivable reason to have resentment, unforgiveness, even bitterness toward those who had mistreated him without recognizing him for who he was:

“the receiver of godly dreams.”

This included his parents, brothers, slave traders, Potiphar, the butler, and the captain of the prison. Some would even say that Joseph had a right to be angry at God for allowing him to go through such horrible experiences.

But Joseph had become a broken man through all of his suffering, and had submitted himself to God, surrendering his life to the Lord and trusting Him. As Joseph did this, God took any ill feeling that he may have had toward others and replaced it with love and compassion.

God’s plan for Joseph’s life was to save thousands of lives, including his own family’s, through his interpretation of the God-given dreams. God also put Joseph in a place of great power in order to complete His plan for him.

But remember, God’s plan for Joseph’s life also involved long years of slavery and imprisonment before that could happen. Not because God wanted Joseph to suffer for His own amusement, but because He needed to break Joseph and bring him to a place where He could use him.

Joseph recognized this with the remarkable statement that what his brothers meant for evil, God meant for good, showing an early understanding of Romans 8:28: *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*

We often think that those words only apply to the pleasant things God allows in our lives, but Joseph came to understand—as we all must—that it applies to the unpleasant and painful things as well. Joseph trusted God through the suffering, and could now see the good He meant it for.

The only way Joseph could be put in his position of saving lives and forgiving wrongdoings done against him was by being broken by God. We have the same choice to make with the wrongs that have been done to us, and the right thing to do is to follow Joseph's example rather than that of the world.

Joseph knew that nothing could separate him from the love of God—not his brothers, not Potiphar, not the prison, and not even success. Like many other figures in the Bible, Joseph was in a very dangerous place when the Lord lifted him up.

He could have allowed his heart to be filled with pride and leave his brokenness behind, becoming unfit for service to the Lord. Few things are as dangerous to the man or woman of the Lord as success, as with it comes the temptation to attribute it to our own actions and abilities.

Joseph appears to have learned his lesson taught by all those years of suffering. And continuing in humility, he faithfully walked with the Lord for the rest of his life.

Through that brokenness and obedience in suffering, he became an early picture of Jesus, as so many great figures in the Old Testament are. Both men stayed faithful and humble until their death, and I pray the same may be said of us.

Moses

The first months of Moses' life were marked by uncertainty and danger, as he and all male children born to Hebrew mothers in the land of Egypt were under the sentence of death:

So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor. Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one was Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah; and he said,

“When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstools, if it is a son, then you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.”—Exodus 1:13-16

It was in this time of oppression and great injustice that Moses was born, a son of Hebrew parents who hid the baby to save his life. When the boy could no longer be hidden, his mother placed him in a basket to float on the Nile river.

God miraculously intervened and saved Moses through Pharaoh’s daughter, who found, adopted, and raised Moses. He grew up in the house of Pharaoh and spent the first forty years of his life being taught all the wisdom of the world, enjoying all the delicacies available while having a trouble-free life.

While this might sound good, consider the implication of what it meant to live in the house of Pharaoh. “Pharaoh” was a title, like king or emperor, and even though the position of Pharaoh was filled by a real person, many times in Scripture he serves as a type or picture of Satan in the same way that Egypt, though a real place, also serves as a type or picture of the world.

So, Moses was raised in all of the wisdom of Satan and the world. His upbringing could not have made it any harder to become broken before God. Moses had it made in life. Many believed he even had the possibility of becoming the next Pharaoh at some point. He had a life that many can only dream about—wealthy, well educated, and on the road to success: *And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds* (Acts 7:20-22).

The training Moses received certainly did not equip him for the task that God had planned for his life. Unfortunately, many serving in churches today are relying on the training the world gives to equip them for the ministry. However, there are certain experiences that may be beneficial in ministering to people.

For instance, as a San Diego police officer, I learned some valuable lessons in dealing with people. But in ministry, what we need more than anything is the calling and equipping of Jesus, which

comes through biblical discipleship and following Him with total abandonment of the world. We are not sure what stirred Moses to go and visit the Hebrew slaves, the people of his heritage, nor where his knowledge of God and sense of calling came from.

It may have possibly been the years he spent with his mother, as she nursed and took care of him under the orders of Pharaoh's daughter, during which she could have told him about the true and living God and His plan for the Hebrew people.

Or, it could have been the Spirit of God stirring his heart, producing the faith we read of in Hebrews 11:24-26. Whatever it was, we know that at this point Moses took matters into his own hands, and intervened in the situation for the worse.

Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. —Acts 7:23-25

The Hebrews, the very ones Moses felt compelled to deliver, rejected his attempts, spreading word that Moses had killed an Egyptian.

And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, "Why are you striking your companion?" Then he said, "who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" So Moses feared and said, "Surely this thing is known!" When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian —Exodus 2:13-15

Out of fear of men, Moses fled from Egypt and spent the next forty years of his life in the wilderness, hiding and tending sheep. His pride, which told him that he had a right to decide how and when God's people were saved, was slowly molded into humility. God used this time to break Moses and prepare him for tending a different kind of flock:

the people of Israel. It is important to note that the self-confidence and self-assurance Moses had acquired living in Egypt and the house of Pharaoh could not be used by God. Instead, God had to strip Moses of these things so he could see himself for who he really was.

It is commonly believed that D. L. Moody once said, “Moses spent forty years thinking he was somebody; then he spent forty years on the backside of the desert realizing he was nobody; finally, he spent the last forty years of his life learning what God can do with a nobody!”

When God came to Moses at the end of these second forty years, his attitude had changed drastically. Listen to the verbal exchange that took place between God and Moses:

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.”

So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then He said, “Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.” Moreover He said, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord said: “I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey [. . .]

Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians

oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” —Exodus 3:1-11

Who am I? That was the place of surrender for Moses, and likewise, it must be for any man and woman who desires to become ruled by Christ. Remember, we are merely the vessels by which God will accomplish His work. For Moses, the work was to deliver Israel from Egypt and lead them to the Promised Land.

So He said, “I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” —Exodus 3:12

At this point, Moses began to offer a number of excuses as to why he was not the man for the job. This may sound good, but it must be realized for what it is: an excuse. An excuse has also been called the “thin skin of reason stuffed with a lie.”

The source of Moses’ excuses was a focus on himself and a fear of man, rather than a focus upon the Lord and what He had promised. God answered each of Moses’ excuses—in His grace, mercy, and longsuffering—and brought him to the realization that it was not Moses himself, but God who would deliver. Finally, Moses had one last excuse for why he was unfit for service.

Then Moses said to the Lord, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” So the Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.” —Exodus 4:10-12 (Emphasis added)

Interestingly enough, we read about Moses’ ability to speak in the New Testament, in Stephen’s one and only recorded sermon: “And Moses

was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22). Some translations render it this way: "There was no one more eloquent of speech than Moses." Moses ran out of excuses and resorted to this:

But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send." So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do.

So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God. And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs."—Exodus 4:13-17

Moses went from thinking he was God's man for the job to "Who am I?" He thought he could deliver them in his own strength and abilities, but then realized that deliverance could only come by the power of God, not man.

He went from thinking that his education and all he had learned from the world would enable him to talk sense into Pharaoh to "I cannot speak for I am slow of tongue." He went from "I, Moses, am the Hebrews' deliverer" to "God will be their deliverer."

He was now ready for the task God had for him, a task that was bigger than any human could bear alone. Moses was to present God to the people, and the responsibility weighed heavy on him. He absolutely needed to be broken and empty of himself in order to be completely filled and led by God.

From this time forward, the truths spoken of God to Moses were settled in his heart and mind. He fearlessly went to the most powerful nation at that time, faced the most powerful man alive, and boldly proclaimed God's Word by presenting His demands for all the children of Israel

to leave Egypt. He also represented God's will to his own people, who constantly complained and challenged him, acting even more obstinantly than his sheep had. Without his newfound humility and brokenness, he never would have been up to the task.

This did not exclude Moses from experiencing death threats by both Pharaoh and the very people he was leading out of bondage; attempts to overthrow him by his brother, sister, and the crowd; facing mutiny by Korah and his gang; experiencing a steady stream of criticism, complaining, murmuring, arguing, carnal activity, and the constant cry of "let's go back to Egypt," —to name just a few.

Moses is one of the men I admire most in the Bible. In order for him to be used by God, he had to submit himself to the Lord's breaking process. He needed to repent of self-sufficiency and everything related to independence.

We can see this brokenness evident all throughout the rest of Moses' travels with the Isrealite people. Though he was not perfect, he demonstrated a broken spirit on many occasions, especially during moments of crisis.

The Hebrew people were stubborn, grumblers, and rebellious, very much like us sometimes. As seen in Exodus 32, they fully demonstrated all their *issues* when Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God.

While he was gone, the people fashioned for themselves a golden calf as their new god, and gave up the worship of the Lord almost immediately. When the Lord saw what they were doing, He told Moses to stand back, so He could destroy the people and start all over again, making a great nation of Moses as He had done with Abraham.

Think how much pride one could gain from being the father of God's great nation. However, Moses pleaded with God for the very people rebelling against both of them, and God had mercy on Israel once more. Moses cared more for the people under his care than for the glory of his own name, which shows how well he had learned the Lord's lessons.

We see Moses' brokenness on display again when his own siblings rebelled against him. In Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, questioning his appointment by God. At once, the Lord called the three of them to the middle of the camp, publicly reminded them that He had chosen Moses, and struck Miriam with leprosy.

A prideful man, upon seeing the righteous judgement of the Lord, would have rejoiced to witness his enemy defeated and his position proven to the people. Moses, who at this point was more humble than *"all men who were on the face of the earth"* (Numbers 12:3), instead at once interceded for his rebellious sister. He cried out to the Lord, saying *"Please heal her, O God, I pray!"* (Numbers 12:13)

Not only did Moses intercede for those who had challenged his authority, but he did so at once, and with sincere emotion. His brokenness was evident through his immediate forgiveness towards his sister, and the Lord rewarded that humility by healing her.

Finally, we see perhaps the greatest display of Moses' brokenness during the rebellion of Korah. In Numbers 16, Korah and 250 other Israeli leaders stood against Moses and his alleged arrogance. Take note of that. Is that not just the way of the world?

Its pride warps its vision—seeing the most humble and broken of men as prideful and self-centered.

Moses had been affirmed by God multiple times now, and he could have simply ordered the men killed without even considering their claims. But what did Moses do?

The man they were condemning as exalting himself above them fell down on his face before them. In Numbers 16:4 we read how he told them that the Lord would choose between them.

Rather than force his authority over them, or rule them, Moses presented the decision before the Lord. If the Lord had chosen Korah, we know Moses would have accepted it. Instead, the Lord honored

Moses' submission to His will and consumed Korah and the others who rebelled with him. What we see in these three instances are many chances for Moses to display his pride in his "self life." He could have had the Lord make a great nation out of him. He could have left his sister as a warning for others who challenged his authority. He could have gone ahead of God and had Korah and the others killed.

However, in each case, we see Moses' brokenness as he interceded for his enemies and left his authority in God's hands. Many like Moses, when faced with a similar decision, have chosen to hold onto the "self life," rendering themselves unuseful to God. Jesus warns us of this danger:

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" —Mark 8:34-36

Take a moment and reflect on either past or present times where the Lord had you in a wilderness experience to humble you and break you of some area in which you are trusting in yourself.

Will you forsake it, repent, and surrender yourself completely to God? If you do, then as He did with Moses, God will use you. He may not make you the leader of His chosen people, and you may not stare down the principality of the known world and issue the demands of the Lord. You will, however, have the privilege of glorifying God's name by being used by Him for His purpose, which is the greatest hope any of us can have. As we have seen in Moses' life, this privilege is impossible to receive without brokenness.

David

If we were able to look upon David as a young man, in his teens growing up, there may not be anything that caused him to stand out

among others his age. Though he was a handsome young man, ruddy in complexion (many believe he may have had red hair), he was just one of many young men of his day.

He was the youngest of eight sons of Jesse, and he was born in the little obscure town known as Bethlehem (meaning: “house of bread”). He was a simple shepherd boy who watched over his father’s sheep. But if we were to take a closer look at him, we would see that he was a strong and brave young man.

As a shepherd, he stood up against a lion and a bear that had attempted to kill his father’s sheep, instead of simply running away as others might have done. David also had a great gift of music. When out in the fields tending sheep, he looked up into the heavens with amazement and wrote some of the most beautiful psalms attesting to the glory and power of God.

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, who have set Your glory above the heavens! Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?

For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen— even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth! —Psalm 8:1-9

Yet with all these characteristics, David seemed an unlikely candidate to become the successor to King Saul when God ordered for Israel’s next king to be anointed. After all, David was just an inexperienced teenager, so how could he rule over God’s people? All he had ever done was take care of sheep.

As King Saul (whose life we will examine later) was the “people’s choice” to be ruler over Israel, David was God’s choice to reign over His people. When Samuel the prophet, who was prompted by a word from God, came to the house of Jesse to anoint the next king, he asked for the oldest of Jesse’s sons. Certainly, he thought this would be God’s choice, but it was not. In fact, as Samuel went from one son to the next, God informed him that none of these were the one He had chosen.

So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him!” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” [. . .] Then he said, “There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here.” So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!” Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.” —1 Samuel 16:6-13

From this text, we can see why God chose David. “*But the Lord looks at the heart.*” David’s heart was right before God. He loved God, was in awe of God, and he trusted in God. We see the Lord’s focus on the heart of man as He says:

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. —2 Chronicles 16:9

Though David, like the rest of us, was not perfect, his heart’s desire was for the Lord. In fact, look at what God says of David.

The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him [David] to be commander over His people, because you [Saul] have not kept what the Lord commanded you.” —1 Samuel 13:14

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, this is what Stephen said about David in the New Testament:

“He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will’”—Acts 13:21-22

Now, even though David had been anointed by God to be the next king of Israel, and he had a heart after God’s, David was not yet ready to become king. He was already chosen and anointed, but David went through years of God’s “school of preparation” before he could assume such great responsibility, power, and authority. This preparation included times of great highs and lows. He was despised by his brothers, but had a great relationship with Jonathan, Saul’s son.

He was welcomed into the royal family, only to later on have Saul take away his wife and attempt to kill him by throwing a spear at him. Saul even put a contract on David’s head, forcing him to be on the run for years while living in caves in the wilderness. At the same time, he gathered his famous and faithful “mighty men” around him, and became a successful military leader.

David’s breaking really took off when he started running from Saul. On the run from the king, he had no time to arm himself, or even to prepare food for the journey. When he came to Nob, who knows how long it had been since he had last eaten.

He was hungry enough to beg them for their showbread, even though it was meant only for the Levites (Leviticus 24:9). These dire circumstances of hunger, poverty, and lack of peace plagued him the entire way, but they were God’s tools to break David.

However, take note of David’s lack of brokenness in this situation. He lied to Ahimelech, telling him that Saul had ordered him to be there (1 Samuel 21:2), clearly fearful for his own life despite having received Samuel’s anointing. His lie gave him the bread he wanted, but it also resulted in the slaughter of the men, women, children, and animals of that city (1 Samuel 22:19). David was still not fit to be king and needed more preparation.

From there, David faced betrayal at the hands of those he had saved, lived in the wilderness for years, was nearly killed by Saul (1 Samuel 23:12-26), and suffered many other injustices. The Lord broke him piece by piece through these trials.

Of special note was the time David's humility was tested by Nabal, the type of unpleasant man we are probably all familiar with. Nabal had the particular gift of insulting people, something some people seem to have in abundance. Where a man like Saul could seek David's life and still be forgiven, Nabal's curses hurt David's pride in a way that he immediately sought to slay the man.

Are we not the same way sometimes? We can play the part of humility as long as those around us praise us for it. But, once someone sees our humility as weakness, and insults us viciously, suddenly we find ourselves rising up in protest, and the pride we had thought long gone is back in full force. To the good of David (and as well for Nabal), Nabal's wife Abigail had far more sense than her husband, and she met David with humility and pleaded for her husband's life.

If David had continued in his prideful rage he would have ignored Abigail's pleas, slain her husband, and taken what he felt he was owed. However, the Lord worked through Abigail's humility to break David in that very moment, and show him a better way than revenge: forgiveness. Years later, when a man called Shimei insulted David at his lowest, David responded in a very different way than with Nabal, proving that he had learned from that lesson.

Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the Lord has ordered him. It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day.
—2 Samuel 16:11-12

Both Nabal's intense pride and Abigail's blessed humility were used in David's breaking process, and we see the man after the Lord's heart accepting that breaking. David's humility was put on trial many times more when it came to his loyalty to the very man who sought to kill him: King Saul. Twice David had the chance to kill Saul while the king hunted him (1 Samuel 24 and 26).

The first time, his men encouraged him to kill Saul, but David answered, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.” —1 Samuel 24:6

After Saul had “forgiven” David because he spared his life, just to turn against him once again, David had a second chance to end his torment. This time, as he stood over the sleeping king, one of his men asked David to allow him to kill the king so David wouldn’t even have had the king’s blood on his own hands. But once again, rather than to take what God had promised him on his own terms, David said *“The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord’s anointed”* (1 Samuel 26:11).

David knew the crown was his by the anointing of God. But in his humility and brokenness, he dared not take it for himself, trusting instead in God to give it to him in His time. What a marked difference between David and Saul, who wouldn’t even wait a few days for Samuel to perform a sacrifice.

This would not be the end of David’s tribulations related to his situation with Saul. He would be outcast from everywhere he visited, fight many bitter wars, and save the king’s life only to be hated once again. Sadly, he also suffered the death of his closest friend Jonathan.

When it was all over with and Saul had died, David was a broken man, and ready to become the King of Israel. Nowhere was this brokenness more evident than when he wept over the death of King Saul, the man who had sought his life all of these years (2 Samuel 1:12).

Through these events, and others, David became a broken and humbled man, at times even despairing of life itself. We see this reflected in many of the Psalms he wrote. Here is just one example:

O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, and from the heights of Hermon, from the Hill Mizar. Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and billows have gone over me.

The Lord will command His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me—A prayer to the God of my life. I will say to God my Rock, “Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?”

As with a breaking of my bones, my enemies reproach me, while they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God. —Psalm 42:6-II.

It was through these times of great difficulties that David came to know the Lord in a much more intimate and deeper way. He also came to learn what it is to be dependent upon God for the task that he had been raised up to fill.

Even more amazingly, through his sufferings and brokenness, he was given the opportunity not only to pen the words Jesus would say on the cross, but also give us an early glimpse of Jesus’ own suffering.

Many years after being anointed to be king of Israel, the time had finally come for David to be king. And, thanks to the Lord and His work in David, he was a great one. To this day, he is still remembered as the greatest of Israel’s kings. He led his nation to defeat all their enemies. the country prospere, and there was justice for the people.

David led the people in following the Lord, and brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem with rejoicing and praise to God. Relying on God to be the ultimate king, David was able to do well in what God had called him to do.

Yet during his time as king, David still made some foolish decisions that were motivated by pride. His decision to stay in Jerusalem, when it was the time in which kings went out to war, led him to commit adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. Consequently, David killed Uriah in his attempt to cover up his sin.

One sin (if unconfessed and not repented of) will lead to another and another. At one time David also chose to count his army, which was

clearly forbidden by the Lord, despite the warning against it by his commander Joab. Once again, it was David's pride that inspired such an act of disobedience.

This would call for further breaking through God's discipline. For these acts of disobedience, David suffered both the chastening of the Lord as well as the consequences for his actions, for "*whom the Lord loves He chastens*" (Hebrews 12:6). David's child with Bathsheba, which was conceived in their adultery, died shortly after birth. The counting of the people brought about a plague that cost the lives of 70,000 men.

In all of this, it was David's response to these chastenings that made all the difference and set him apart from other kings, such as Saul. Each time the Lord confronted David, he acknowledged his sin and repented. This is David's response to his sin with Bathsheba:

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer [. . .] I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah. —Psalm 32:1-5

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge. —Psalm 51:1-4

And here is David's response to his sin of numbering the people:

And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what

I have done; but now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.” —2 Samuel 24:10

Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, “Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father’s house.” —2 Samuel 24:17

One final example we have of David’s brokenness and humility was when his own son Absalom chose to take his birthright early. When Absalom marched on Jerusalem, David could have withstood him, or forced a siege of the city, hanging on to his capital at the cost of his people’s lives. Instead, he chose to vacate the city peacefully, sparing thousands of lives in the process.

Though Absalom would force him into battle later, look at what David commanded his officers concerning the usurper who was actively trying to kill him: *“Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom”* (2 Samuel 18:4).

Especially given how strongly David felt about the sanctity of kingship, the fact that he was urging gentleness on the man attempting to kill him is even more telling of his broken state. And God blessed that brokenness with eventual victory against his son and stability in the country restored. David was blessed to live a long and full life and to die in peace.

Even with all of David’s failures, shortcomings, and flaws, God used him. David became the archetype of what it means to be a good king: humble, obedient to God, seeking His will, and blessed by the Lord. Whenever a king of Judah after him would do right in the sight of the Lord, it would be said that he did it “after his father David.”

God used David because he responded in the right way to His preparation, correction, and discipline. Had David not responded favorably, we would be reading a different account, possibly much like Saul’s.

God chastens us for our sins because He loves us.

And just like David, we have a choice of how to respond to that chastening. We can either harden our hearts and continue in our prideful sins or we can repent, let God break us, and become useful to Him once again. The choice is ours.

Have you had a situation where God chastised you? How did you respond? Do you feel like God is chastising you right now? How are you going to respond this time? If you are living in sin, and God is not chastising you, what does that suggest about your relationship with Him?

Peter

In the small town of Bethsaida lived a man called Simon, son of Jonah. He and his brother Andrew were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. While not well educated, Simon was a strong-headed person—a natural leader with his own opinion on things. He lived the life of a simple man, and was not a well known figure in the Jewish society.

That all changed when Jesus met him. He, who was at the edge of society, was called to follow Jesus. Through a turbulent, wonderful, spiritual, difficult, but fruitful time of walking with Jesus, Simon was being prepared to be used by God to be a leader and a pillar in the founding and establishing of the Christian church in Jerusalem, from where it spread in all the world.

And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. — Matthew 4:18-20

Peter followed Jesus and received much teaching, training and correction from Him. In the first years with Jesus we see many of the characteristics in Peter that the world delights in—self-confidence, self-reliance, pride, bravery, boldness, courage, and boastfulness. These traits are exhibited through his interaction with Jesus and the other disciples.

Peter was outspoken, often the spokesman of the group of disciples and the one who asked the questions. But he also objected to Jesus' words on several occasions. He was bold when he was the only one who asked Jesus if he could walk on the water to Him, yet he quickly failed when he saw the waves.

Peter thought he had great faith, but Jesus clarified that he actually was of little faith (Matthew 8:26). When someone asked Peter whether or not Jesus would pay temple taxes, Peter was quick to give a defensive and people-pleasing reply that yes, obviously Jesus would.

Shortly after he was corrected by Jesus, who explained to him how, as the Son of God, He did not have to pay (Matthew 17:26). Peter was boastful of his servitude and loyalty, claiming that even if all the other disciples would desert the Lord, he would never do so.

One of the harshest rebukes Peter received from Jesus was when he tried to talk Him out of the cross. Jesus had explained to the disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die (and mind you, rise again to life after three days). Still, Peter talked back to Jesus for speaking about suffering and death. *“Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” (Matthew 16:22)*. Jesus rebuked Peter sharply: *“Get behind me Satan!” (Matthew 16:23)*.

I cannot imagine what must have gone through Peter's mind at that moment. He went from an ultimate high—understanding that Jesus is the Messiah—to the lowest—having this same Messiah call him “Satan” to his face. Peter had his own idea of what the agenda of the Messiah would look like, and suffering was not part of it.

I am also very certain that he truly loved and cared about Jesus and did not want him to suffer. From a human perspective, this was

understandable, but he was still greatly prideful, trying to rebuke Jesus: “*far be it from you, Lord.*” Peter needed to learn to see things spiritually and to be broken of his own flawed ideas and stubborn pride.

The final hours of Peter’s time with Jesus, prior to going to the Garden of Gethsemane, were instrumental to bring about Peter’s breaking point.

Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.” Peter answered and said to Him, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.” Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” And so said all the disciples. —Matthew 26:31-35 (Emphasis added)

Peter had the perpetual “I-problem” that we all suffer from. He thought about himself, relied on himself, and spoke about himself all the time. Even at the plain and clear words of Jesus about Peter’s upcoming failure, he still believed that he was strong and knew better than the Lord.

And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.’

But he said to Him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.’ Then He said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.” —Luke 22:31-34

As Peter protested, the rest of the disciples chimed in and claimed the same thing, probably not wanting to be outdone by Peter, and all aiming to be the number one in the group. None of them wanted to look bad, not realizing how much pride this arguing with the Word

of God really revealed in them. We need to be careful and remember how our foolish words and actions can influence those around us to follow our example. Remember the context in which this happened: it was the Last Supper and Jesus had washed their feet and confronted them regarding their continued attempts to be the greatest. Oh, what a hard, slow death pride and self die.

As we consider Peter's response, we see just how little we really know ourselves. He thought he was strong in faith, willing to give his life for the Lord, but he was far from it. There is no doubt that Peter, along with the other disciples, was very sincere at that moment. But he was sincerely wrong.

He did not know his own heart and allowed his feelings and emotions to rule him rather than to listen to the words of Christ. Now, if you think that I am picking unduly on Peter, remember that he merely serves as an example, to which we can all relate too well, if we are honest.

Of course what Jesus said came to pass, as the Word of God always does. Just a few hours later, the guards came to arrest Jesus. Peter fought at first, hurting one of the servants and bringing reprimand from Jesus, but quickly ran away and forsook Jesus, just like the rest of the disciples (Matthew 26:56).

Despite all of their claims to stand with Jesus, each of them made the decision to flee. Peter followed the mob at a distance, caught between his fear of being found and his love for his Lord. Peter stayed near the house of the High Priest where Jesus was being questioned by a "kangaroo court."

While Peter was trying to be inconspicuous outside, warming himself by a fire, questions and accusations began to come his way, and this particular breaking process began.

One after another, he denied people's claims of him knowing Jesus, mere hours after testifying so proudly that he never would. His pride was what set him up for the fall:

Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying." And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth."

But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!" And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you." Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. —Matthew 26:69-74

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So Peter went out and wept bitterly. —Luke 22:61

When Peter made his third denial and the rooster crowed, Jesus was situated in such a way that He was able to look around and see Peter. Their eyes met, and Peter remembered Jesus' words. Consider this scene with me for a moment and let me ask you:

What kind of look do you think Jesus gave Peter?

Your answer will reveal your concept of the character of God. Was it a look of dismay and disbelief that said, "I can't believe you did that, Peter"? Or was it a look of disgust and disappointment, shaking His head as parents sometimes are apt to do?

I suggest to you that it was none of the above, or anything that even resembles them. Rather it was a look of compassion and mercy. This is how God looks upon His children as we fail and fall along the way. He is not shocked or taken by surprise.

There is one expectation God has of all of us: that we will fail. He knows that we are but dust. He is ready to receive and restore us back

into fellowship with Him when we humble ourselves before Him and confess and repent of our sin. After this exchange of looks with Jesus, Peter departed from the courtyard weeping bitterly. Finally, by the grace of God, Peter broke. As painful as it was, it led him to humble himself before God so He would be able to do what He wanted with Peter's life.

Peter was now broken and in a place where God could do the work that He wanted to do in and through his life. It took such a grave failure for Peter to be broken. All along he had not been able to see his own weakness, his selfishness, or his pride.

It must have been an incredibly painful place for Peter to be in, but it was necessary. If he did not have the comfort of Jesus' words from before *"when you have returned to me, strengthen your brothers,"* he might have easily given up hope to ever be useful for God again. But in fact, it was through this brokenness that he became useful for God to begin with.

In Isaiah 57:15, we read: *"For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'"*

We cannot imagine what must have gone through Peter's mind as he saw Jesus being crucified—and saw Him raised to life again. After Jesus visited Peter and commissioned him to feed his sheep (John 21:17) (lead the believers), Peter and the rest of the disciples received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

The Holy Spirit never would have been able to fill him completely had he not been broken and emptied of himself. We see the fruit of his broken life after that moment.

Peter immediately gave an eloquent and impassioned speech that made the people of the city marvel (Acts 3). He also gave himself over to the authorities for questioning, when only days before he would have resisted, and spoke against the Sanhedrin to their faces (Acts 4).

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” —Acts 4:13

Imagine that! The very man who could not stand against the accusations of a small girl was now preaching to the men who had killed his Lord, and who could very easily do the same to him. Here we see the boldness of the Lord that came from a place of brokenness, whereas before Peter was filled only with the bluster of pride.

And what a wonderful testimony this was to the people around him.

I desire that the same can be said of you and me, that people will look at us and understand that we have been with Jesus.

God blessed Peter’s ministry throughout his life, as he continued in humility (Galatians 2:1-9, Acts 15:7-11), even as the Lord saved untold thousands through him. We can also see Peter’s humility in how he took correction from Paul on the matter of giving in to hypocrisy, when he visited the church in Antioch.

At first, Peter enjoyed the fellowship of the gentile Christians, but when Jewish believers from Jerusalem arrived, he secluded himself from the gentile believers, which led others to fall into the sin of hypocrisy along with him.

Paul corrected Peter to his face, in the presence of everyone, because he was misrepresenting the Gospel and leading people into legalism. Paul recounts the dispute in Galatians 2:14-18. Peter could have responded in pride and anger, or rebuked Paul like he had Jesus so many years ago. But Peter was a changed man now.

In fact, Peter became a key figure in establishing the firm teaching in the church that gentile believers were equal with Jewish believers and needed not to be put under the law. He powerfully advocated at the

Jerusalem Council: *“God, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He has done to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith.*

Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”—Acts 15:8-11

Good was done through Peter’s brokenness, and he became a pillar of the early church. God used him in mighty ways to establish the church and reinforce important theological truths.

He was the apostle with a special ministry to the Jews, and a key person in the understanding of the unity of the church, despite differences in nationality. The wonderful grace of Jesus had broken him and enabled him to lead the church to stand on the living grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For Peter, it was his pride—boasting and self reliance that he needed to be broken of in order for God to work through his life.

What might it be for you?

Is it pride and self-reliance, or something else that you need to be broken of before God can use you?

Paul

Paul began his life with the name of Saul (Hebrew, meaning: “asked of God.”), He came from a very prestigious Jewish lineage and had a strong drive to be someone great in the hierarchy of Judaism. He was very successful and full of pride, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness. We learn some about Paul’s background from his writings in the New Testament.

“Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” —Philippians 3:4-6

“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” —Galatians 1:13-14

It was the famous encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus that led to his conversion, however, the beginning of Saul's transition into Paul may have already begun earlier. We read in Acts 22:20 that Saul was there at Stephen's death and listened to the first martyr's powerful sermon, as recorded in Acts 7. Though we know that Saul *“was consenting to his death”* (Acts 8:1), he heard the Word of the Lord that day, and since we know that God's Word does not return void (Isaiah 59:11), the seed was surely planted within him.

Saul was still *“breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord”* (Acts 9:1), when he met Jesus Christ. That powerful encounter marked the earnest beginning of the breaking process necessary for Saul to become the man whom God would use in a mighty way:

As he [Saul] journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were

opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. —Acts 9:3-9

It must have been a shock to have such an encounter with the living God, telling Paul that he was in fact persecuting the God he claimed to serve. Furthermore, Saul was struck with blindness, rendering him helpless and dependent upon someone else to lead and care for him.

This was a whole different experience for the proud, self-sufficient, and self-righteous Pharisee. It is quite a humbling experience to be blinded and in need of someone to help lead you around.

This happened to me a number of years ago, as the retina in my right eye became detached, causing me to be nearly completely blind in that eye. Surgery followed to reattach the retina (which I praise God for), and during the recovery time, which lasted months, I was greatly limited in what I could do. I can attest to the fact that such an experience is incredibly humbling, and showed me how weak and dependent on the Lord I truly was.

Do not wait until the Lord has to get your attention by shutting your body down around you. Allow yourself to be broken now through your light afflictions, or in His love the Lord will turn to more severe measures.

Though blinded and in need of being led by the hand, Saul now began to be able to see more clearly than any time in the past. This encounter with Jesus gave Saul a different—the correct—perspective of himself and his accomplishments. Jesus showed him that he was a sinner, that nothing he did in the law could save him, and that he needed the redemption found in Jesus to be saved.

Saul saw himself for who he was: a murderer of God's people, and a persecutor of Jesus Christ. He knew that no one but Jesus could save him from the fate that awaited him: hell. And he was beginning to understand the great mercy in God's willingness to save him from that fate if he repented. He wrote about this to the Roman Christians:

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? —Romans 7:22-24

And in I Timothy 1:15, we read: “*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*”

Eventually, God sent a man named Ananias to pray over the blind Saul, saying “*Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake*” (Acts 9:15-16).

When Ananias prayed for Saul, something like scales fell from his eyes, and he was able to see again. More important than gaining his physical sight, Saul was granted the ability to see Jesus for who He is—the Lord of all, the Alpha and the Omega, and the only true God worthy of serving. He was also able to finally see himself—a sinful man, hopelessly wicked, and unable to achieve righteousness through his own actions.

This opening of spiritual eyes, brought about by brokenness, marked the moment his ministry for the Lord actually began. As the Lord made sure to note; it was also only the beginning of his sufferings. He promised Paul suffering and, true to His word as always, this was what would come to pass.

Saul was a changed man. And a little later, he even changed his name to Paul, which means “little.” What a contrast to the man who previously thought himself “blameless” before the law of God! Having acquired this correct perspective of himself, Paul was also able to see all his former accomplishments in a different light—everything he had lived for and strove for all his life.

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered

the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. —Philippians 3:7-11

The breaking process did not end for Paul with his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. We know that he spent some time alone with God in the deserts of Arabia, and even though we do not know much of what exactly happened there, we know the Lord did a work in Paul to prepare him for the work he had been called to.

The breaking continued, as Paul was now rejected and hated by those he once thought to be his friends in the Sanhedrin court and his fellow Pharisees. All throughout his life, Paul faced persecution for preaching the Gospel, mostly from his own people, the Jews. There was also the well known “thorn in the flesh,” an instrument of God to keep Paul humble, that we will take a closer look at in a later chapter.

In the Book of Acts, we see an excellent example of Paul’s complete brokenness and willingness to endure whatever it took to save those around him. In Acts 16, when Paul and Silas were taken before the magistrates of Philippi, they were beaten with rods.

Paul endured this, even though he could have stopped it at any time, since he was a Roman citizen, and it was unlawful to beat a Roman citizen without a trial.

If he had claimed his citizenship at any point before or during the beating, he would have been spared the agonizing pain of being beaten and bloodied. However, Paul said nothing. Why? Paul knew that if he allowed that vicious torture for the name of Christ, his witness amongst the people and the magistrates would be greater.

Because of that beating, Paul was able to encourage the brethren in Philippi more, who would also face their own trials. It seems a steep price to pay, but Paul paid it gladly, “praying and singing hymns to

God” even in prison (Acts 16:25). Paul later told the Corinthians that he was beaten with rods three times in total (2 Corinthians 11:25), and was whipped by the Jews five times (2 Corinthians 11:24).

Many of those beatings could have been avoided by leaning on his Roman citizenship, but Paul allowed them so that his witness in those areas would be expanded.

What a clear picture of a broken man, willing to undergo anything that the Lord may be glorified. So broken and humble was he, that we see very clearly the low opinion he had of himself—not to be confused with self-hatred or insecurity—when he calls himself “*the least of the apostles*” (1 Corinthians 15:9) or “*the worst of sinners*” (1 Timothy 1:12-16).

The suffering Paul endured also helped to keep him in a place of humility as his “success” in ministry grew. He founded and fathered many churches, being looked up to as apostle with people listening to every word he spoke. In Corinth, the believers took their allegiance to one or another apostle too far, causing division.

“Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” —1 Corinthians 1:12-13

It would have been easy for Paul to let this flatter his personal pride and think that he really was someone great. But by the grace of God Paul dealt with this issue with as much sternness as clarity:

“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.” —1 Corinthians 3:5-7

But there was more temptation for Paul to take credit for what God was doing through him.

“Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.” —Acts 19:11-12

Miraculous healings always attract the crowds, and people are quick to praise the one through whom they are worked. When Paul and Barnabas healed a man in Lystra, the people took it one step further and prepared to sacrifice to them, thinking they must be gods. It takes great humility and grace from God to stay in a place of brokenness when people are ready to worship you, recognizing that it is God who is at work.

“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God.” —Acts 14:14-15

God used Paul’s humility and brokenness to spread the Gospel to much of the known world over the next number of years. He authored at least thirteen books in the New Testament, led untold multitudes to a saving knowledge of Christ, started churches in Corinth, Thessalonica, Rome, Ephesus, and countless other cities.

He also discipled an untold number of people, not only during his lifetime, but still today, through the Epistles that he wrote. I know, because I have personally benefited tremendously from all of them, especially from Philippians and Romans. Think of how much poorer the church would be today, had Paul not responded correctly to God’s breaking process!

Paul lived a life that was completely sold out for Christ and his mission to share the gospel with as many people as he could. Knowing that the end of his life was drawing near, he wrote to his faithful Timothy: *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”* (2 Timothy 4:7). Paul held on to Christ till the end, faithful and broken before his Lord despite the trials.

What about you? We know that as the Lord has worked in Paul's life, He desires to do work in you and me. Is there an area of your life in which you are resisting God from breaking you? Are you already in a place where you are completely broken and surrendered to God?

Conclusion

And so we conclude our study of these five men who were used mightily by God. We saw five men broken by God through rebukes, suffering, loss of faculties and status, discipline, and countless other methods.

We saw men who were strong in their own eyes—and in the eyes of the world—become men who understood that they were nothing and that God is everything. They went from being useless to God, filled as they were with their own pride, to being used mightily by God in their humility.

These men each ended their lives on earth faithful to the Lord and awakened in the presence of their Savior Jesus Christ. They learned the lessons God had for them, they trusted in their Lord, and they stayed broken until the very end. I encourage you to also break under God's gentle touch so that He can use you to His glory, just like them.

Sadly, that is not the only way people respond to God's chastisement. Whether we become broken or not is up to us. We can become broken early and easily, staying in that place of total dependence on God, or we can resist Him and require more drastic measures intended to break us.

And even then we might continue in stubbornness and devote all of our energies into resisting and rebuilding ourselves back up to our own liking. What we are going to see next are people who refused to be broken by God, and we will see the consequences of their actions.

| 3 |

Those who Refused to be Broken by God

In the previous chapter, we saw five great biblical illustrations of men, whose brokenness became a tool in God's powerful hands. God's Word also tells us about people who resisted God and failed to respond with humility to His call. Because of this, the consequences were devastating.

The Children of Israel

No other story can tell the “refusing to be broken” drama better than that of the people of Israel. And if we examine our hearts, carefully and honestly, we will see ourselves in their familiar play. God chose Israel to be His own beloved people, just like He chose us. He delivered, established, blessed, and made them a nation. He loved them, protected them, and provided for them—just like He is doing for us.

Like us, Israel was nothing special. There was no reason for God to choose them, but He looked on them with the love and grace of a Father. As His children, not only did they bear His name and receive His inheritance, but they also had the honor of showing His glory to the world. However, as great as God's mercy has been towards Israel, so has Israel's sin been great against God.

The people of Israel would walk with God for a time, only to sooner or later turn back to idolatry and sinfulness. When they felt the chastisement of the Lord for their sin, they cried out to God for help and pledged their allegiance.

But when God had delivered and blessed them and they were comfortable in life again, they soon set their desires back upon themselves, following their sinful wants instead of the God they

claimed to love. Continuing in a tragic spiral, they betrayed the God of their youth over and over again, and resisted the works of God that were meant to lead them into brokenness—and all the wonderful plans and blessings He had for them.

In Psalm 106, the psalmist gives a shortened, yet powerful summary of Israel's rebellion against God during the time from when God delivered Israel out of Egypt until He brought them into the promised land.

We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders; they did not remember the multitude of Your mercies, but rebelled by the sea—the Red Sea.

Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power known. He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it dried up; so He led them through the depths, as through the wilderness.

He saved them from the hand of him who hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. The waters covered their enemies; there was not one of them left. Then they believed His words; they sang His praise.

They soon forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tested God in the desert. And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul. When they envied Moses in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord, the earth opened up and swallowed Dathan, and covered the faction of Abiram.

A fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked. They made a calf in Horeb, and worshiped the molded image. Thus they changed their glory into the image of an ox that eats grass.

They forgot God their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, wondrous works in the land of Ham, awesome things by

the Red Sea. Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them. Then they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe His word, but complained in their tents, and did not heed the voice of the Lord. Therefore He raised His hand in an oath against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness, to overthrow their descendants among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands.

They joined themselves also to Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices made to the dead. Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds, and the plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stopped. And that was accounted to him for righteousness to all generations forevermore.

They angered Him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses on account of them; because they rebelled against His Spirit, so that he spoke rashly with his lips. They did not destroy the peoples, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them, but they mingled with the Gentiles and learned their works; they served their idols, which became a snare to them.

They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood. Thus they were defiled by their own works, and played the harlot by their own deeds.

Therefore the wrath of the Lord was kindled against His people, so that He abhorred His own inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles, and those who hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times He delivered them; but they rebelled in their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. —Psalm 106:6-43

It is bewildering and scary to consider the background of the Hebrew people and realize that over 400 years of slavery had not yet broken them of their pride and self-sufficiency. One might think that if the

true God revealed Himself to a people and raised a leader up to deliver them from centuries of oppression, that these people would gladly follow and serve this God for the rest of their lives. Not so with Israel. From the very beginning, their hearts and mouths were full of disbelief, complaint, distrust and rebellion. It started right from the beginning when they were still in Egypt and continued every step of the way.

The fact that they witnessed the most incredible miracles, like the parting of the Red Sea or the manna falling from heaven, did not change their hearts. Instead of letting God's goodness lead them to repentance and humility, they were following the pride of their hearts into all kinds of sins. Consequently, God would use other methods to break them.

When they complained about the food, God provided, but tried to show them their pride by giving leanness, too. They rebelled against their God-appointed leadership, and God tried to break them of their unwillingness to submit by bringing death to those who led the rebellion. Still they would not humble themselves, but rather turned to all kinds of idolatry. God tried to lead them to a place of brokenness, but they stubbornly resisted.

We should not judge the Israelite people here, as if we were better than them; but rather, see a truthful representation of ourselves in them.

At the conclusion of their forty years of wandering in the wilderness, God addressed the new generation of Hebrews as they were finally preparing to enter the Promised Land. God gave them some important instructions and reminders, so that they would learn from the past and not repeat the same sins again.

Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers.

And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. [...]

When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end—Deuteronomy 8:1-16 (Emphasis added)

God urged the Israelites to continually remember all that He had done for them and the lessons they had (or should have) learned. This would help them to walk towards humility and prevent them from becoming prideful in the future.

The first important aspect to remember was that of Who had led them for forty years. It was not Moses—it was God. Moses was merely the instrument that God used, though most of the time the people acted as if it were Moses who made the decisions, not the Lord. It was God who led them and God who had a reason for all the different circumstances that they faced along the way. It was God Himself who led them out of

Egypt to the Red Sea, where they felt trapped and in danger of death by the Egyptian army, who was coming after them to take them back. Because He was going to show them that He would fight for them and protect them. It was God who led them to where they had no meat, so that He might teach them that He is Jehovah Jireh—God our provider. It was for the same reason He let them walk on foot those 40 years without their sandals and clothes wearing out.

It was God who led them to the place where they had no bread so He could show through the giving of manna that He is the “Bread of Life” that comes down from Heaven (fulfilled in Jesus). That they would understand that *“man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD”* (Luke 4:4).

It was God who led them to the place where they had no water so He could show them that He is the “Living Water” that would be provided by striking the Rock (a reference to Jesus’ death).

Did the Israelites receive God’s provision with thankfulness? Did they humble themselves before the one who took such good care of them in whatever they needed? Did they understand the deeper meaning of all of this?

But they sinned even more against Him by rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness. And they tested God in their heart by asking for the food of their fancy. Yes, they spoke against God: they said, “Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Behold, He struck the rock, so that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?” —Psalm 78:17-20

God had explained in Deuteronomy 8, that He had led Israel in the wilderness *“to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”*

Please understand, God did not do this so that He could find out what was in their heart; He always knew. It was so that they could see what was in their heart. They had failed the test, and the things revealed about their hearts were catastrophic. When these things came to

light, the people should have been broken about their own state and repented. But they refused. God was dealing with Israel like a father, chastening His children for their own good. However, they only saw the terrible wilderness, the fiery serpents and scorpions and saw that they were hungry and thirsty. And they did not understand, nor did they want to hear, that God was bringing these things into their lives for their benefit. They didn't like the things "God was doing to them," and continued in their pride.

All too often we, like the children of Israel, do not believe that God always has our best interest in mind. We argue, debate, resist, and harden our hearts. We might even throw an occasional tantrum when God puts us through difficult circumstances, as He is trying to work our sinful inclinations out of—and His good and perfect will into—our lives.

The people's sin did not come without consequences:

As the Holy Spirit says: 'today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, "They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways." So I swore in My wrath, "they shall not enter My rest." —Hebrews 3:7-11

As a consequence for their outrageous sin and rebellion against God, He did not allow any Israelite to enter the Promised Land who had been twenty years or above at the time they left Egypt. Everyone from that generation died, while Israel wandered in the desert for forty years. Only Joshua and Caleb were exempted, because of their faithfulness towards God.

But this was about more than just about entering and settling in the Promised Land. When God said that the people would not enter "His Rest," He wasn't just talking about His rest in the land of Canaan, nor the absence of trials and difficulties. When the newer generation of Israel entered into the Promised Land, they still faced trials and difficulties, and there were many battles to fight, some of which they

won and others they lost. “His Rest” is to have peace and find comfort for the soul in the midst of any and all trials and difficulties.

This serves as a warning to God’s people today as well. If the children of God refuse to submit to Him, humbling themselves under His hand, they too will not enter into the rest of His peace and calm through the circumstances.

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: “today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” —Hebrews 3:12-15

As Israel was about to enter Canaan, the occasion on which God spoke to them as we read in Deuteronomy 8, He gave them a command, a promise and a warning. God commanded the people to keep His law and walk in His ways; to be faithful and obedient to Him.

He promised them a good land with all kinds of goods and blessings they could want or need. He told them He would make them prosper. And He warned them not to forget that it was Him who gave it to them.

He warned them to be careful not to let their hearts be lifted up in pride, thinking that they had made this life for themselves. Tragically, they did not listen. Again. When they entered the promised land, they turned right back to their old ways.

The Book of Judges portrays the continued tragic pattern of a lack of faith and brokenness in the nation of Israel. They followed in God’s ways for a while, then they turned away from Him to live in sin. The Lord chastened them, they cried out in their suffering, He sent them a deliverer.

They turned to God for just a while, but soon their pride got a hold of them again. And so the same old story continued over and over again. When they eventually called for a king—yet another act of rebellion

against God—things didn't get any better. Their first King was Saul, whose life we will look at in just a moment, as he serves as a fitting example of an unbroken man.

King David did well, but it went mostly downhill from there, with a godly king every now and then, but never for long. And the people always wavered, never able to stay faithful and humble before their God for long.

- When their enemies fought them, they did not listen.
- When they went into captivity, they did not break.
- When God stopped speaking, they did not humble themselves.
- When God sent them the Messiah, they did not receive Him.

The people of Israel refused to be broken. So much destruction and death was brought down upon them before they would repent, and countless lives were lost over the centuries due to their stubbornness.

It was God's intention to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt's captivity, bring them to a wonderful land that He had promised to their forefathers, and make them a people that He would not be ashamed to be called their God.

However, God's plan for them was not merely to make them happy. His way for them was not just to grant them victory over their enemies and settle them in a comfortable place. What He wanted for them was to be conformed to His image, so that they would be a people who would shine His light to the world.

He wanted to make them humble and obedient before Him, and to work brokenness within their hearts. It was His intention to free them from the bondage of "self," unbelief, hard-heartedness, and stubbornness,

so that they might also experience the abundant life that accompanies a life of faith and obedience. Tragically, they stubbornly refused, all the way up until the destruction of their nation by the Babylonians.

God has these same intentions for you. He wants to free you from the bondage of sin and death and lead you to a place of blessing in brokenness.

Do you follow His lead?

Or do you kick and scream about the circumstances God is placing you in? Are you willing to follow the Lord in all His ways or do you want to follow your own? I hope you have learned from the sad example of the Children of Israel.

King Saul

There have been countless individuals throughout history who refused to submit themselves to God's breaking process. One of the most prominent examples is Israel's first king. Saul.

From being a nobody among the men of Israel, he was being raised up by God to be their king. He started off well, but soon entangled himself in his sins and refused to repent, following a downhill path to a miserable and sad end.

We see at least some semblance of humility in Saul at the beginning of his story, when Samuel chooses him to be king over Israel. His first response to the calling was to say *"Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak like this to me?"* (1 Samuel 9:21).

He also did not talk back to people who criticized him for prophesying, and spoke to no one about his anointing until the day of his ascension was at hand. These signs of humility must have been what God saw in Saul, and he began his reign with the Lord's Spirit on him. If only Saul

had kept this small opinion of himself, God could have continued to use him throughout his reign, but once Saul's situation changed, and he went from being a regular guy of the smallest tribe to the king of all Israel, that humility turned to self-reliance with tragic swiftiness. The Spirit of the Lord was replaced with a spirit of madness.

It took only two years into his reign for Saul to fall greatly and sin against God. It was at this point that God told Saul through Samuel that his kingship would not continue. God had already chosen someone else to follow as king—a man after God's heart—David.

Soon after being anointed as king, Saul began to experience success, and with that came confidence in his own abilities and strength. But then, he came up against an enemy he deemed too strong for the Lord to defeat.

When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel.

But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. So Saul said, "Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me." And he offered the burnt offering. Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him.

And Samuel said, "What have you done?" Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the Lord.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering."
—1 Samuel 13:6-9

Rather than seek the Lord in time of trouble or wait on and trust in the Lord, Saul took things into his own hands and did something he had no business doing. The law of God was very clear that only a priest of the tribe of Levi was allowed to sacrifice offerings. When Samuel confronted Saul, instead of fessing up and repenting, he made excuses for himself.

I have said this before. An excuse is nothing more than the thin skin of reason stuffed with a lie.

Notice what Saul said: *“when I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, ‘The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the Lord.’ Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering” (13:11-12 emphasis added).*

This is really the crux of the problem, is it not? The major “I-problem” within each one of us. We have an unwillingness to die to self, to dethrone self so that Christ may rule and reign on the throne of our lives.

From that point on, Saul’s leadership continued to deteriorate, tied closely with his refusal to give up his pride. When Saul and Jonathan fought the Philistines, Saul made a foolish command that no one could eat until the battle was over.

Not only did this command weaken the Israelite people, but it also eventually caused them to sin against the Lord by consuming meat with blood in it, out of hunger and impatience, once the ban was lifted.

The foolishness continued when the Lord did not respond to Saul’s inquiries, due to someone having broken the unnecessary vow he made before. Incensed, Saul vowed that whoever broke the vow must die, and was ready to kill his own son Jonathan when he found him guilty, although Jonathan had been instrumental in their victory. Saul relented on both accounts, allowing the people to eat once he saw

them sinning, and sparing his son's life when the people protested, which shows that he was not completely overtaken by his pride yet, but it does show the stirrings of it within him.

We see this pride escalating with time as we read 1 Samuel 15, when God gave Saul clear and concise instructions to utterly destroy the Amalekites and take none of their belongings. He partially obeyed (which is the same as disobedience), and then was confronted by the prophet Samuel regarding this.

So Samuel said, "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel? Now the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord?" [...]

So Samuel said: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king." —1 Samuel 15:17-23

Saul was given a number of opportunities to humble himself and submit to God's attempts to break him and keep him in a place of usefulness. Sadly Saul refused, choosing rather to blame others and try to hold onto what was no longer his.

The failures of Saul are even more tragic in a way because he started out well, as you can read in 1 Samuel 9-12. He was humble, chosen by God to be king of Israel, had the promises of God to bless him and be with him as he obeyed the Lord. He had good men around him, and even had the Holy Spirit come upon him at times, but then came the infamous problem with pride.

This pride caused God to say through Samuel, *"but now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own*

heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:14). God was referring to David, who as we have seen, displayed a God-given willingness to be broken before the Lord.

Because of his pride and unwillingness to be broken, God removed His anointing and Spirit away from Saul (1 Samuel 16:13-14), which Saul took as reason to become jealous and envious of David. Just like his decision to not humble himself, he also did not release this jealousy, but rather allowed it to take such a grip on his heart and mind that it led to his demise.

God had brought David into Saul’s life to be a help and a blessing to him. Tragically, Saul looked upon David with suspicion and jealousy. Pride, bitterness, and anger had taken a hold of Saul’s heart and were blurring his vision and eating away at his sanity. Rather than humble himself before God and be thankful to God for David, Saul tried to kill him on a number of occasions.

There is an important lesson here for all of us.

God sometimes brings people into our lives to be a blessing to us.

And like Saul, if we do not realize God’s hand in them, we tend to become envious and jealous of them, and in the process get robbed of the blessing.

At other times, God brings people into our lives to sand off the rough edges in our lives. But we end up resenting them, becoming angry with them, and resisting to the point of missing the work God wants to do upon our lives through them.

Toward the end of his life, we begin to see Saul’s final descent into madness, witchcraft, and slaughter. He realized his folly in dealing with David whenever David spared his life, yet afterwards allowed himself to be consumed by his jealousy all over again (1 Samuel 24, 26).

Saul had an entire town killed because the priests in it aided David without knowing he was on the run (1 Samuel 22). He also consulted a witch to try to gain Samuel's insight long after his death, choosing demonic and satanic powers over those of the God he had once sworn his life to (1 Samuel 28).

These atrocities and abominations did not come about at a whim, but rather they came from years and years of refusing to become broken, and allowing himself to become consumed by his own pride.

What can seem like a “harmless” sin, and what some see as a necessity for a “fulfilled” life, led Saul down into the deepest depths of sin, and it can just as easily do the same thing to you and me. What's worse, is that toward the end of his life Saul was aware of his own folly. A lifetime wasted in pride and sin led to one of the saddest confessions of one's life that we read in the Bible.

Then Saul said, 'I have sinned. Return, my son David. For I will harm you no more, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly'” (1 Samuel 26:21).

What a tragic end to a life, and yet it is one that many have ended with—realizing he had been a fool all this time. This will always be the end of the path of any who will refuse to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God.

Saul's heart was hardened to the Word of God, and even though he somewhat understood that he was wrong, he never found repentance and brokenness before God.

Are there any aspects in the story of Saul that have spoken to you in particular?

Do you have a tendency to do things your own way instead of waiting on God? How have you responded to someone whom God sent to correct you? I pray that you would learn the valuable lesson from Saul's life that is not to make the same mistakes as he did in resisting the Lord.

King Uzziah

Uzziah, his name means “my strength is God,” had a marvelous start as a king. At only sixteen years of age he did exactly what was right and most important: He sought God.

Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done.

He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper. Now he went out and made war against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath, the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod; and he built cities around Ashdod and among the Philistines. —2 Chronicles 26:3-6

Notice how God's hand of blessing was on Uzziah and made him prosper. Uzziah made war, and the Lord granted him victory; all aspects of his life and kingship were a success. His fame spread far and wide because of what God had done for him. Unfortunately, things did not continue this way, and pride crept into Uzziah's heart and brought his downfall.

We can remain broken through the victories God works through us, or we can be lifted up by them.

Read what happened when Uzziah chose his own pride over brokenness.

But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. So Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him were eighty priests of the Lord—valiant men.

And they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the Lord God."

Then Uzziah became furious; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the incense altar.

And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there, on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him.

King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord. Then Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land. —2 Chronicles 26:16-21

What a tragic ending for a life that started off so well. Notice how Uzziah's sin progresses. First, his heart was lifted up so he became prideful. Pride is preying on everyone, but it is a great danger for those who are "successful" in life.

Rather than being broken before God through the acknowledgement that all of his victories were God's doing and not his own, Uzziah allowed himself to become full of pride, and believed that he had a special position that allowed him to do whatever he wanted.

What started in his heart soon turned into action. Uzziah tried to make an offering while clearly disobeying God's holy order for sacrifices. Two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, had done a profanity like that before (Leviticus 10:1-7) and God had killed them on the spot.

This is what the Lord spoke, saying: "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified." —Leviticus 10:3

Considering this, Uzziah had to be thankful that his life was spared. How arrogant of him to think that he could come before God Almighty in a manner that contradicted His very own command. Something to note is Uzziah's reaction to being confronted with his sin. Azariah and the other priests had every right, responsibility and authority to rebuke Uzziah for his sin against God.

However, instead of repenting and turning from his sin, Uzziah became angry with the righteous ones. This is a very typical reaction of one who is called out on his or her sin, but is unwilling to repent.

The Bible gives many accounts of righteous men who suffered for speaking up for God's truth; just consider the prophets Elijah, Jeremiah, and John the baptist, just to name a few. God did not allow Uzziah to continue in his sinful ways, and acted mightily by striking him instantly with leprosy.

Rather than continue to win victories through God's might made manifest through his brokenness, he chose to look to his own strength. This, of course, was utterly feeble and impotent compared to the strength of the One who gave him everything.

Many Christians today act the same way, believing they can blaspheme the name of the Lord with their lives without any repercussions. We never read of Uzziah repenting, but rather spending the rest of his life suffering from the consequences of his prideful sin. I pray the same does not happen to you or me.

King Uzziah's life also teaches us that "doing well" at some point in your life does not spare you from falling later on. *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).*

Even if someone is broken before God and greatly used by God, as Uzziah was, he or she will need to continue humbly at the feet of Jesus. And many times that means to be broken again and again, to continue to be useful for the Lord. We will talk more about this subject in chapter nine.

King Nebuchadnezzar

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, was used as God's judgement upon the wicked kingdom of Judah after years and years of warnings. When describing him, the prophet Jeremiah even called him "God's servant."

"And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him." —Jeremiah 27:6

However, though what he did was according to the Lord's plan, Nebuchadnezzar was anything but humble and broken before the Lord. It is evident that the Babylonians knew of the Lord and of his judgement against Israel.

King Nebuchadnezzar respected God's prophet, when he spared Jeremiah during the conquest of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 39-40).

But Nebuchadnezzar was a very proud man, and had to be reminded of God's sovereignty many times. He learned the lesson time and again, but he always returned to his own pride until God finally humiliated him and brought him so low that he had no choice but to recognize God's complete authority.

Unlike the men before him in this chapter, Nebuchadnezzar was finally broken under God's heavy hand, but it was not without many struggles on his part. Nebuchadnezzar began with an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty when Daniel interpreted his dream. None could tell him what his dream was, but Daniel—led by the Lord—told him both the actual dream and its meaning.

While doing so, Daniel reminded Nebuchadnezzar that *"the God of heaven [had given him] a kingdom, power, strength, and glory"* (Daniel 2:36), and that everything he possessed was a gift from God. Confronted with God's omnipotence to even know his mind, Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face before Daniel, and proclaimed, *"Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret"* (Daniel 2:47).

Nebuchadnezzar seemed very humble here, with his face on the floor before the Lord. But in what will become a theme for him, this small show of humility was short-lived, and pride wormed its way back into the forefront of his heart.

In fact, in just the next chapter of the Book of Daniel, we read about Nebuchadnezzar setting up a golden statue, eerily similar to the one he had seen in his dream being destroyed, commanding all of the people in the city to bow down and worship it. Essentially, he called himself a god, implying that he was worthy of worship in God's place. Talk about pride!

Well, some of the Jews remembered the first commandment, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to worship this mere man as a god. For calling him out on his mortality,

Nebuchadnezzar had them thrown into a furnace to burn to death, but to his amazement, they remained unharmed, and the Son of God Himself came to join them. Upon witnessing this miracle, Nebuchadnezzar was humbled once again, and this time he added actions to his words.

Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!

Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this. —Daniel 3:28-29

What an immediate change from pride to humility. Unfortunately, like the one before it, a miracle was not enough to break him of his pride. Some time after this Daniel gave the king God-given specific warnings against pride and sin, as he told him to turn from his iniquity and change his treatment of the poor to delay punishment (Daniel 4:27).

But Nebuchadnezzar allowed his wealth and prosperity to foster his pride until it once again consumed him. We read that he was simply walking in his palace when he made this proclamation:

“Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:28). God heard the boast, which disregarded the very truth Daniel had shared with Nebuchadnezzar before—which is that everything he had, including his kingdom, power and honor, was given to him by God.

The Lord’s response was swift and stern. God made this shocking judgement upon the most powerful man in the world:

King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses. —Daniel 4:31-32

Sure enough, Nebuchadnezzar at once lost his mind and sanity and was driven out from his own palace by his guards. He lived in the wilderness for seven years, eating grass like an animal, with hair growing wild and nails forming into claws.

After the seven years of judgment were over, and the breaking process of the Lord was finished within him, his reasoning returned, and he had this to say about the Lord:

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.

No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’ I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down. —Daniel 4:35-37

Now, it would be fair to believe that this humility, like the ones before it, was short-lived, but we never read of Nebuchadnezzar acting in pride ever again. Therefore, we can assume that the Lord had finally broken him, and that he had allowed himself to be broken.

Like the people in the chapter before him, Nebuchadnezzar could have refused to be broken until the end, but instead he humbled himself before the Lord, and his kingdom was restored to him for that humility.

Still, these intense methods for brokenness would have not been necessary if Nebuchadnezzar had humbled himself from the beginning and stayed a servant of the Lord. He could have spent those seven years in the grace of the Lord, rather than living as a beast in the fields.

Even more so, Nebuchadnezzar could have been used mightily by God had he been humble from the start, but instead he just barely kept himself from total destruction. By God's grace, he was led to repentance, but if he had been less stiff-necked, he could have been so much more than just "saved."

If Nebuchadnezzar's life teaches us anything, it is that it is never too late to be broken. The people of Israel were called countless times, even up to the moment before their destruction, to repent and return to the Lord. Saul could have repented before the Lord and stayed within the grace of the Lord. Even Uzziah could have repented and possibly been healed, but we never read of that.

These men and women hardened their hearts and stiffened their necks against God's reproof, and they paid the price for their pride and rebellion.

Nebuchadnezzar very well could have joined their ranks, but he repented, and the Lord accepted his repentance. Perhaps you see yourself as too far gone to repent. Maybe you see the life of pride you have lived, and you believe you have wasted all of your opportunities to return to the Lord.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Today is the day of repentance. So, do not harden your hearts to the Lord's voice. If you humble yourself before the Lord, like Nebuchadnezzar, he will restore to you a kingdom. You are promised an eternal kingdom in which the presence of the Lord never passes away.

Learn from the stories of these men, and repent as the Lord puts you through his breaking process. Yield to Him, do not resist, like Saul and Uzziah, or you will eventually pass by your last chance to repent, and die in your sins.

Setting the Foundation

Reading the accounts of these different people might have been easy for you—interesting stories of people’s past. Maybe you have started to wonder and question God’s work or the methods He used in their lives. Perhaps you may think that their suffering was too intense or His rebuke too strong. Maybe some of the questions posed have stirred something in you—an unpleasant feeling of some sort.

Now, before we can continue to get deeper into the topic of brokenness and make it real and personal, there are some basics we need to clarify first. It saddens me that we need to cover this, but if we look at the church today, we see that there is an urgent need to do this: the Bible is the Word of God, it is completely true, and it is directory for the life of a believer.

You see, our modern society has abandoned the idea of an absolute truth. Instead, it promotes an absurd construct of relative truth—that whatever feels right or true to you is your own personal truth. This questioning of truth is not a new idea. In fact, when Jesus told Pilate that He came to bear witness to the truth, Pilate replied and ended the conversation with “*What is truth?*” (John 18:38).

People enjoy this adjustable approach to truth because it allows them to make everything fit their personal, selfish, and sinful desires. Romans 1:25 describes such people, “*who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.*”

People might call such self-created, self-centered ideas “truth,” but they’re really not truth at all. God is truth, and He never changes. God, as portrayed in both the Old and New Testament, in all three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is specifically ascribed the characteristic of being truth, as is His Word.

And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth.” —Exodus 34:6

For I proclaim the name of the Lord: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He. —Deuteronomy 32:3-4

The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever. —Psalm 119:160

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. —John 1:14

Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’ —John 14:6

Notice that Jesus does not say that He is a truth, but the truth.

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. —John 16:13

Here we are also given one of the functions of God's truth, which is to sanctify us (i.e. to make us holy and cleanse us for proper use).

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. —John 17:17

Some people might say that God Himself may be truth, but that does not mean that the Bible as we have it is all truth. However, the Bible itself speaks clearly on this: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

All of Scripture is inspired by God. Meaning, by His Holy Spirit, God directed the human authors to write what they did. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).*

This concludes that the Bible has divine authority and, as we see in the above verse in 2 Timothy, with this authority it teaches, corrects, instructs and equips the believer on how to live.

The Word that comes from the God of all truth cannot be altered, changed, ignored, or explained away. As much as so many people throughout history, along with the men-pleasing preachers of our day, have attempted to ignore, reject, or explain away these words, they are still the Word of God. And as God has not changed and never will, neither will His Word.

God is not a man that He should lie. —Numbers 23:19

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. —Matthew 24:35

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. —Hebrews 13:8

The Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. —James 1:17

This understanding of God’s Word is foundational and of utmost relevance. It will determine how you perceive the Bible: whether you reject it and try to conform it to your thinking, or whether you receive it and let your thinking, and with that your whole life, be conformed to the Word of God.

If you start reading the Scriptures, it will not take long until you will come upon a statement that is contrary to your thinking, and you might disagree with it or feel offended by it. I hope you do! Let me explain. An important function of the Word of God is described in Hebrews 4:12-13: *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit,*

and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

If you feel the Word of God knocking on—or piercing—your heart, and if it is revealing something about your thoughts or intention, it is doing exactly what it should. Now when this happens, and it shows that your thoughts are contrary to what the Bible teaches, the question is what you will do with it.

If you consider arguing with the Bible, you need to remember that since it is the Word of God, every time you disagree or argue with anything the Lord says in His Word, you are arguing with God Himself. In essence, you are telling God that you know better than He does. Quite audacious. Talk about pride, and the need to be broken and humbled!

We saw a classic example of this pride in chapter two of this book in the section about Peter, when Jesus predicted to His disciples what was to take place just hours later:

Then Jesus said to them, ‘All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: “I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.”

But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.’ But [Peter] spoke more vehemently, ‘If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’ And they all said likewise. —Mark 14:27-31

Jesus plainly told His disciples that they were all going to forsake Him and they all objected that this would not happen. I have no doubt that all the disciples were as sincere as they could be, but they were sincerely wrong. You only have to continue reading a short bit until it shows who was right:

Then they all forsook Him and fled. —Mark 14:50

It is not difficult to imagine that the disciples would have felt offended when Jesus predicted their failure. They had been with Him for three years and now here He was, doubting their love, devotion, and even their manliness, to stand strong in the face of danger. They wanted to be strong, spiritual, and faithful; they surely were sincere when they answered Jesus back.

Being sincere does not mean you are right, and Jesus knew the disciples' hearts better than they knew themselves. He also knows our own hearts better than we do, so when the Bible tells you something about yourself that you disagree with, I plead with you to change your own mind, rather than trying to change the Word of the Lord.

The reason why we looked at this basic understanding of the Word of God is because I know two things for certain concerning what you are reading in this book and the biblical truths presented: Firstly, they are offensive to many.

Secondly, they are not the message of the “modern church” of today. So if in this book you are presented with biblical ideas that are offensive to you or unheard of in your church, please remember what you read at the beginning of this chapter.

Much of what you are reading in this book will be offensive to many. Not only can it cause unwanted mental anguish, but it may be a tremendous blow to a person's self-esteem. Some people may even choose to close this book, throw it against the wall or in the trash, and never pick it up again. I hope not. I do hope you will read on.

This is not a new phenomenon. From beginning to end, the Bible gives accounts of people who were offended by God's words. Jesus Himself was quite provocative, and an offense to many with the things He taught, especially when He was exposing people's hypocrisy and sins.

When He spoke about communion (eating His flesh and drinking His blood), many of his disciples said, “*This is a hard saying; who can understand it?*” When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, “*Does this offend you?*” (John 6:60-61)

Just a few verses down we read: “*From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more*” (John 6:66). Will you also walk away from Jesus, or are you willing to listen, even if it makes you uncomfortable?

It is no surprise that the “uncomfortable” truths of the Bible are not the message of the “modern church” today.

Many churches have laid the Word of God aside, and instead are teaching men-pleasing empty words and philosophies. This is nothing new either, and has happened numerous times throughout the history of the Jews and the Christian Church. One such time was during the time of Jesus:

For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother,

“Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban”—’ (that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.” —Mark 7:8-13

The people of that time did not like the commandments that they were given in God’s Word, so the religious leaders modified their teachings to attempt to justify those sinful actions. Because they liked the feel-good idea of being religious, they kept up the facade with their man-made traditions, but it was nothing but lip-service. Their hearts were far from God and the words that He had given them. When he was writing to Timothy, encouraging him to stick to the Word of God, Paul described the very thing we see again today in the modern church.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.
—2 Timothy 4:1-4*

The “modern church” does not acknowledge or teach the truths from Scripture that you are reading about in this book for fear of offending its members, audiences, and potential investors. Simply because the words of the Bible are offensive, causing much discomfort, and this is definitely not what the “modern church” is all about.

What it is about, is to make people feel comfortable and help them lead a more productive life that will bring them greater happiness and prosperity. This is one of the greatest tragedies of the “modern church,” because it is hard at work trying to make the “narrow road” and the “straight path” that Jesus spoke of more accessible, easier, friendlier, less exclusive, and more inclusive. Yet Jesus described the way to Heaven like this:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. —Matthew 7:13-14

Did you catch that last thing Jesus said? He said few are those that find it. In order to achieve its goal, the “modern church” has adopted the world’s philosophy of “the ends justify the means.” Offensive Bible passages are neglected or re-interpreted, terms are changed, and the teachings adjusted to the hearers’ preferences.

Sin is usually not addressed at all, and if it is somehow, it is usually done so by using washed down terms like “mistakes” or “weaknesses” to not offend anyone. Coveting, which is against one of the Ten

Commandments, is taught in many churches and by television preachers—commonly known as the “health, wealth, and prosperity gospel.” The Apostle Paul correctly identifies what coveting really is: idolatry (Ephesians 5:5). The list of omitted, twisted, and re-interpreted teachings goes on and on. But please, take the time to take everything you hear, see, feel, and experience to the Word of God and test it to make sure that it is truly from the Lord.

Unfortunately, those who teach such erroneous things fail to realize that it is the means that will determine the ends, meaning that if you use the world’s means, you will get worldly results.

You can never get spiritual results from using carnal methods.

In the United States, the divorce rate is as high in the church as it is in the world; alcohol, drug use, sexual immorality, pride, greed, and many other sins are common among so-called Christians today.

Think about this. It is extremely serious and it will affect your eternity. Jesus followed His statement about the narrow path with one of the most chilling statements made by Him:

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’—Matthew 7:21-23

Please take note of some of the important words Jesus uses in this sobering statement. He said “many.” Not a few, not some, but many. These “many” will include those popular people who taught before thousands and performed “miracles” on TV. All those who worked hard to try to “widen the gate” and make the path easier to get to heaven—as well as the crowds who believed their hellacious lies. People who “accepted Jesus” for what they could get out of Him: a

better life, better job, more money or a clean slate so they could start over. All along this multitude thought they knew Jesus. A Jesus after their own liking, a fairy tale Jesus, a meek and mild Jesus, who requires no repentance and no denying or dying to self.

Their “Jesus” was just someone to assist them in having a more improved life. What they believed in was not the Jesus of the Bible, rather it was a “Jesus” created in the minds of men and women who looked at God as merely a means of acquiring something more for themselves.

Let me ask you, do you view Jesus as a means or as an end?

Is He the prize you seek at the end of it all, or is He a way to get what you want in life? Jesus will never be used by anyone. If anyone tells you that you can “accept Jesus” without changing anything about your sinful way of life, they are deceiving you.

Jesus made it clear that *“he who does the will of My Father”* will enter heaven and not those who *“practice lawlessness.”*

Obedience towards God is not an option, but a requirement. Repentance is presupposed for receiving forgiveness and eternal life. It is not merely saying “oops, sorry” and going back to what you were doing, but it means that you acknowledge your sin, have a change of heart and a change of direction, as you turn away from that sin and commit it no more.

Read the following passages for a deeper understanding of true, biblical repentance: (Amos 3:3, 2 Corinthians 7:8-10, John 8:1-11).

Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” —Acts 2:38

From beginning to end, from every prophet to Jesus, this has been the Bible’s clear message.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent” (Revelation 2:5).

“I never knew you” are the four painful words that will haunt many people on Judgment Day as they face eternity without God. Because of this, it is of significant importance that you know Jesus—the real Jesus—as portrayed in the Bible.

There is, however, another pressing question. Does the Lord know you?

Yes, of course. God obviously knows all about you and me: every hair upon our head; every thought and word before we utter it; our past, present, and future; and the day and hour that we will breathe our last. However, this is not the type of “knowing” that Jesus is speaking about in the passage of Matthew 7.

The Greek word here that is translated “knew” is “ginōskō,” which means “to know by experience” and “to know in a very intimate way.” It is the same word that is used to describe the intimacy of marriage as a husband and wife become one.

And as marriage is a picture of the relationship between Jesus and His bride the church, this shows the very personal, and emotionally and mentally intimate way that we ought to relate to Jesus.

Do you know Jesus in this way, and does He know you, as you have given yourself and your whole life completely unto Him? After all, He gave Himself completely for you when He humbled Himself and became a man and went to the cross to suffer the wrath of God and died for your sins. How can we respond besides giving all of ourselves back to Him in thankfulness for this precious salvation?

There is something beautiful that happens when we are known by Christ and get to know Him more. Seeing Jesus for who He is, we become more and more aware of our own sinfulness and unworthiness to be a child of God, thus leading to a great amazement and appreciation for the grace, mercy, and love of God.

Because the message of the *modern church* omits and neglects to address sin for what it is, as well as the demand Jesus makes for us to repent of that sin, there is little to no appreciation for the love of God.

We can only acquire the correct appreciation for the great love of God when we first see Him for who He is, thus then being able to see ourselves for who and what we really are in contrast to that.

This is a key element of the breaking and humbling that is necessary for a real relationship with Jesus and the absolute surrender to Him, so He can do whatever He desires in and through our lives. We see this portrayed in the life of a sinful woman:

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." [Then Jesus said] "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?"

I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in.

You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

*Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."
—Luke 7:36-50*

What led the woman to enter the home of the self righteous Pharisee Simon and risk the shame of being thrown out? This was a place she would never in a million years be invited to, so why would she humble herself to take on such a lowly task of washing Jesus' feet with costly ointment and risking everything?

Because she, unlike Simon the Pharisee, and many professing "Christians" today, knew she had sinned much and deserved nothing but judgment and wrath from a holy and just God. Jesus had compassion on this humble and broken woman and forgave her sins.

When we realize the depth of our sin, then and only then can we begin to understand and respond appropriately to the love of God. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15:

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

As I come to know my own sin—past, present, and future—as being great as it is, and understand that Jesus still loves me despite that—how can I do anything short of being broken before Him, who suffered and died for me? Yes, I must offer myself to be a living sacrifice to serve Him with everything I have until my last breath. He is worthy of all that and more.

We must all come to understand the depths of our sin, like the sinful woman crying at Jesus' feet. If not, then we will never see our need for a savior. Have you come to recognize that you are a sinner, in need of a savior? Have you repented of your sin, asking Jesus for forgiveness and acknowledging Him as the Lord of your life? If you have not, I urge you to do so right now.

When we have been saved, we must then offer our life to God to do with us He wills. He has given us not only our salvation, but also innumerable blessings besides. He has bought us with a great price, and our lives are not our own.

Do you understand that He earned the rights to do with your life as He wishes, when He saved you from eternal death?

Have you committed to do God's will, whatever that might be? If not, then do so now. If you refuse these truths, then I'm afraid nothing else in this book will be of any use to you.

Remember, you cannot be broken without the knowledge and admission of your sins, and God cannot use you until you have offered everything that you are to Him for that use.

Our Initial Condition

We have learned that we need to see our true condition apart from God, and also that God's Word is the truthful source to turn to if we want to find out. Now, what is this "correct" view of ourselves that we have been talking about? Are all people as bad and sinful as I make it sound, or are they actually inherently good at their core and just need God to "polish" them into their best selves?

Let us explore what the Scriptures have to say about this. The following passages are just a small sample to attest to God's assessment of mankind. The prophet Isaiah had a glorious vision of God and in light of this he understood:

Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. —Isaiah 6:5

Isaiah was a great prophet, and brought us one of the most beautiful and valuable pieces of prophecy. However, he still saw himself as the sinful person that he was. Later on in his book, he continued to describe the human condition:

But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. —Isaiah 64:6

This passage is a blow in the face to anyone who thinks he could rely on, or at least contribute to, his own righteousness by doing good deeds. Or who thinks he is "ok" because, after all, he has never done anything "really bad." Whatever we do and consider to be our own righteousness, in the light of God's holiness, anything we could come up with is nothing but a filthy rag.

King David, the “man after God’s heart,” acknowledges his own sinfulness in Psalm 51:2-5: *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.*

There was nothing especially sinful about David’s conception, but just like him, we all are conceived and born as sinful humans. It is inherited; it is part of our nature and we all have a great need for cleansing.

The Apostle Paul, in writing to different churches, found it necessary to remind the believers of their former state, apart from God.

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. —Titus 3:3

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others [. . .]

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. —Ephesians 2:1-16

We were far off, hopeless, dead in our sins, walking in the course of the world, following the leadership of Satan, disobedient, lustful in mind and actions, wrathful, foolish, disobedient, envious, and hateful. We were lost in our sins, overcome by them, and unable to escape them.

Even more, we lacked the desire to ever escape them, convinced that they were right and good. For every sin there was a way to make it sound “nicer” and justify it. We told ourselves that our pride was just self-esteem and good for us.

By following our heart and “true self,” we were merely worshiping ourselves. Lust was natural to us, wrath was our earned right, disobedience was a result of poor leadership, envy was just a goal-oriented mind, and the course of the world was what we thought we needed. We were in bondage to sin and Satan, and without God’s intervention, we never would have even wanted to escape, let alone had the strength to do so.

Jesus writes to a church with people who also were deceived about their true condition:

“These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot.

I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” —Revelation 3:14-17

These verses are especially interesting as we see Jesus addressing a professing church and not just talking about people in general. They were in an awful condition, but they didn’t realize it. They did not (want to) see the truth. In their own opinion, they considered themselves to be perfectly fine; great, actually.

This describes exactly what so many in the modern church are like today, deceiving themselves. Thankfully, Jesus does not just leave it with this, but continues to instruct them in what to do.

I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and

anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.
—Revelation 3:18-19

If we repent and turn to God, He will graciously provide healing and restoration, correct vision, righteousness and true riches. Lest you think that these passages speak about some people, but not all—and maybe not you—the Bible is very clear that this indeed is true for all:

There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.

Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. —Romans 3:10-19

Hopefully, it is clear that our true, natural condition is one of abject sin and hopeless bondage to that sin. It is not just that we sometimes do bad things, but rather that we are unable to please God with any of our attempts to be righteous. We are slaves of our own pride, and most of us do not even see the danger of that servitude.

We are unclean and unworthy to even try to approach the Lord and His perfect righteousness. We are hopeless sinners, and every sin we commit builds the wages of death higher and higher against our souls. One day, the bill will be asked for, and we will have to stand accountable before God.

It is rather easy to see these various failures, shortcomings, and sins in the lives of others around us, but we are amazingly blind to their existence in our own life.

If anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.—Galatians 6:3

It is pride that blinds us to our own sin. King David was blind (or at least he chose to be so) to his own sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband Uriah to cover it up.

But eventually, Nathan the prophet confronted him at the direction of the Holy Spirit. He told him a story of a rich man with many sheep, who took the sheep of a poor man who loved that sheep like a father and killed it. He asked David what to do with the rich man and David, full of righteous anger and unaware of what Nathan was truly saying, said he should be killed.

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! ‘Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon.

Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun.

For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.” So David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die.
—2 Samuel 12:7-14

When David heard the story of the two men and the lamb, he was very quick to recognize and condemn the very sin that he had committed. As king and judge, he was ready to give the death sentence to someone who would do such evil. Yet he did not see that he was the guilty one until Nathan spelled it out for him. This is what the Word of God and the Holy Spirit still do today, spelling out and showing us our own sinfulness.

Looking closely at the center of David's sin, we see that he committed adultery and murder. Therefore, he sinned against Uriah, Bathsheba, and his own family. But, most of all, his actions despised God and gave his enemies occasion to blaspheme the Lord. When we sin, we always sin against God, whether or not other people are affected or not. It was pride, maybe somewhat hidden within David, that started him down this incredibly sinful and damaging path. The same can be said about sin working in our lives with great force.

It was pride that caused David to commit these sins, and pride that kept him from seeing it for what it was. When David saw Bathsheba bathing on her roof, he should have looked away and left that place. But pride duped him, and so he believed it was okay to lust, and that there was no harm in it, even though God said differently.

Pride would dictate that as King David had the right to take Bathsheba if he felt like it. And that there would be no consequences for his sin, even though David ignored God's clear commands for marriage. Pride would also say that David needed to protect his own reputation and selfishly have Uriah killed, that this horrendous act was justifiable, though clearly against God's Word. The thing is, pride makes us believe that we know better than God, or somehow have the right to do what we want instead of what He instructs us to do.

Pride is the number one thing that keeps us from coming to God.

It convinces us that there is nothing wrong with us. In fact, it is one of the most prominent sins in all of mankind, and one that leads to plenty of other sins.

Pride is the number one sin that opposes brokenness like nothing else.

And because of that, it is the main cause of man's unwillingness to humble himself—to be broken—before God. Pride is the antithesis of humility. Humility is not a characteristic natural to mankind—what is natural to mankind is pride. Pride is a disease that is common to all men.

As I have been blessed to travel the world teaching and ministering the Word of God, I see this disease everywhere. Though it may disguise itself in different ways, it plagues all people. It has many faces, and all of them are hideous and ugly.

Pride is at the root of most, if not, all sin.

Pride is the exertion and insistence of our will over, above, or against the will of God. It is the unwillingness to bend our will to the will of God, while insisting things be done our way, in our time, and to our liking.

Pride in man is expressed in many ways. Think of David's murder of Uriah, Joseph's bragging about his dreams, Paul thinking he was blameless according to the law, Saul's belief that he could sacrifice in Samuel's place, Nebuchadnezzar's exclamation that he was the one who earned his kingdom, and many more.

Pride is expressed most profoundly through what the Bible identifies as "self." Self, and its constant striving for gratification, is the greatest hindrance to anyone following Jesus in the way He demands.

Pride is being expressed in every walk of life, and we see it increasing greatly these days. I am tempted to say that the pride we are seeing today in the world is unprecedented, but then I have to remember that during the time of Noah, pride had reached such a great height that God brought judgment by flooding all the earth. And of course, there was the time of Lot in infamous Sodom and Gomorrah, the children of Israel in the wilderness, and the time of the prophet Jeremiah.

However, we are told by the Apostle Paul that pride will be the top characteristics of people during the Last Days.

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! —2 Timothy 3:1-5

Every one of the above-mentioned characteristics comes from the root of pride. Jesus tells us to deny ourselves and die to ourselves, yet pride calls us to love ourselves and pursue our own pleasure instead of loving and obeying God.

Pride makes us think we have something to boast about. Just look back at what we learned about ourselves at the beginning of this chapter and see if this is reasonable. Pride leads children to do the things they want the way they want to, instead of submitting to and honoring their parents like God commands.

Pride tells us to forget about God's directions for our lives, to let loose and gratify every and any desire no matter how unholy, unloving, brutal, sinful, or abhorrent it is.

Pride causes filthy language and lying as Psalm 59:12 clearly states: *"For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride: and for cursing and lying which they speak."*

When we focus on ourselves and our desires, we can even go as far as justifying the murder of another person—a person who was made in God's image.

Take Cain, for instance. He murdered his brother out of jealous rage—a result of pride. The way Cain saw it, God should have accepted his offering the same way He had accepted his brother's. We often believe that Sodom's main sin was sexual immorality. Ezekiel tells us what it really was:

Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.

—Ezekiel 16:49

Notice how pride is top on this list. It was pride that wanted them to indulge themselves, made the citizens of Sodom unwilling to care for the poor, and which led them to give in to their sexual desires even if that meant to gang-rape men who were just visiting their city.

Since pride is often the root of other kinds of sins, we sometimes fail to deal with it, only seeing and dealing with what is on the surface.

If you have been struggling with a specific sin in your life and seem unable to overcome it, I encourage you to pray and ask God to search your heart and reveal to you if there might be more to it than what you see. If pride is at the root of this sin, you need to deal with that first, or it will keep “growing back,” whether it will be manifested in the previous sin or in another.

Pride is such a serious sin because it is a straight out rebellion against God. It is idolatry—the worship of ourselves over God—and there is no worship more dangerous.

Think of the audacity of man, who is nothing more than a tiny speck of dust floating around on a bigger speck of dust called Earth. And this Earth is in a universe more vast than man’s puny little mind could comprehend. So for us to stand before our Creator and say “I don’t care what you say, I want to do things my way,” believing we can make demands, accuse and lay blame on, or reprove, argue with, and even rebuke God—it is more than ludicrous.

We have seen examples of this lofty and insolent behavior in chapters two and three. Peter with his constant questioning and talking back to Jesus, the people of Israel and their notorious complaining and

rebellious, or Uzziah, who thought highly of himself and forgot that it was God who had made him great. And of course, we see one of the most infamous examples of pride in the fall of Satan, in which a third of the angels followed him in his rebellion.

Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, and the sound of your stringed instruments; the maggot is spread under you, and worms cover you. How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!

For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit. —Isaiah 14:11-15

Did you notice Satan's "I" problem? He had been created perfectly as an angel to serve God, but instead of looking to and praising God for it, he only had eyes for himself and what he wanted to be and do. He was not content with the position in which God had placed him. He did not just want more, he wanted it all. He wanted to be like God.

Since he was cast down to Earth, his goal has been to spread that pride—that focus on "I"—to as many people as he possibly can. If nothing else, he has been very successful in that effort.

We live in a society totally sold out to Satan's ideals, which glories in pride and its sinful outgrowths. There are actual parades of people who take pride in being proud. Self-reliance, self-love, and independence from anyone including God.

They find great value in being strong-willed and capable of standing up for what they want. Throughout time, these ideals have been highly applauded and are still actively taught to people of all ages.

Do not be fooled. God hates pride.

These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren. —Proverbs 6:16-19

God hates pride because of the effects that it has on mankind; it keeps men from coming to God.

“The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.” —Psalm 10:4

God hates pride because it makes men reject His Word.

That Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men spoke, saying to Jeremiah, “You speak falsely! The Lord our God has not sent you to say, ‘Do not go to Egypt to dwell there.’ —Jeremiah 43:2

God hates pride because it leads to ruin.

Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. —Proverbs 26:12

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. —Proverbs 16:18

God hates pride no matter what size, shape or form it may come in. In the Book of Job, we read about the great suffering that Job endured, as his faith was being tested.

Over many chapters, Job and his friends discuss the matter and share their futile opinions. Many questions were brought up against Job, but also against God and His working. In chapters 38 to 40, we read God’s

powerful response to Job. I encourage you to read those chapters in full length. Here are just some verses:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Have you entered the springs of the sea? Or have you walked in search of the depths? —Job 38:1-7

Now, this puts things into the right perspective. When we see God for who He is and ourselves for who we are, there is no more room for pride. God asks a question through the prophet Amos: *"Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3)*

The answer is obviously no. Unless two people agree on a common destination, which way to take there and at what pace to go, they cannot walk together.

God graciously invites us to walk with Him, so we have to come into agreement with—well everything, but relating to our topic, especially with—His truthful statement in regards to our condition apart from Him.

These verses you read in this chapter are God speaking to us, describing our human, sinful condition. I know it is not a pretty picture that God paints, but it is an absolutely accurate picture of each of us apart from God. It is not until we agree with Him on this assessment that we can truly begin to walk with Him and get to know Him and His will for our lives.

This understanding is at the beginning of, and vital to the process of, being broken. If we wholeheartedly agree and truly acknowledge our

miserable, sinful condition, this will leave us heartbroken before the loving and holy Almighty. This might seem painful now, but in reality it brings great gain. In John 8:32, Jesus tells us that *“you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

It is likely that reading this chapter was not easy for you. After all, “self” does not enjoy being called out on its pride and various other sins. Now the question is how you respond to this “assessment” by God’s Word.

Will you come into agreement with God’s view about your sinfulness, or will you refuse to acknowledge His truth? Will you follow the masses of our society in its insolent ways that lead to destruction, or will you answer Jesus’ call to deny yourself and follow Him?

Maybe God has convicted you of a particular sin in your life that you need to repent of. Has something been stirred in you when you read about the many faces of pride? I want to encourage you to take some time right now to pray and ask God to reveal to you where there is sin in your life that you need to repent of and turn away from.

Pray as David prayed: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Psalm 139:23-24).

Do not delay. Remember that coming into agreement with God is the first step necessary to walk with Him.

Acknowledging your sinfulness is essential in the process of being broken.

God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. —James 4:6

Our Goal Condition

For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart— these, O God, You will not despise.
—Psalm 51:16-17

In the previous chapter, we did a thorough study on what pride is, what pride and unbrokenness look like in our lives, and how God views all of that. Now let us turn our attention to what our lives should look like as followers of Christ.

Just as many people have misconceptions about our true sinful nature, so people have many misconceptions about who and how we are supposed to be.

Many Christians today are under the false impression that God's goal and greatest desire for His children is to be "happy."

There is much attention being given within the church today to reaching and attaining to one's "full human potential" in life, of being your "best self," "all that you can be," and of experiencing the "full riches and blessings" that God has for you.

Many believe that if we just tack on the end of our prayers "in Jesus Name," we will get whatever we ask for. This kind of life-improvement is Jesus' main reason for being in our lives. This belief is not only unbiblical, but it is also a self-serving humanistic philosophy straight from the pit of hell.

Generally speaking, there is little wrong with the desire to live a life in God's blessings and reach our full potential. The problem arises when we consider what this "full potential" is, the way in which it is obtained, and the motivation behind it. Much of today's popular teaching has little-to-nothing to do with what God's Word says, and more to do with self serving and selfish motivation.

Does God want His children to be happy and have joy, peace, and rest?

Absolutely, but this is not His primary desire for us. Rather, these emotions are by-products of His ultimate desire for us.

God's ultimate goal condition, His objective or desire for all of His children, is not happiness—it is holiness. It is humility. It is brokenness. It is a life laid down for the glory of God. It is that we become more like the Lord Jesus Christ. And this can only occur by way of testing, trials, breaking, and the beautiful work of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:28 is one of the most famous and loved Bible verses: "*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*"

However, it is verse 29 that explains to us what this good is, that God is working towards: "*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*"

God is using even the most difficult circumstances in our life, the hardest seasons, the most tragic events for our good—in that He uses them to make us more like Jesus. This is the goal, this is what we ought to strive for—to become more like Jesus.

Not many understand that God's way of realizing His will and purpose in our lives is through brokenness. His way has nothing to do with the "self" life of this world, and rather has all to do with dying to self and living in and for Christ.

As for our intention to be our best selves, for many it is nothing but selfish pride. Most people, even within the church, simply desire to have a healthy, happy, pleasant life. And this desire comes in a religious shape as well, wanting to be a “successful Christian,” who feels good about himself and who gains admiration for living such a model life. Remember, pride comes in all kinds of forms.

However, our motivation to pursue “our best selves” and “full potential” needs to be nothing short of love. Our motivation needs to be our love for Christ, and even more so the love of Christ Himself, which He has shown to us by laying down His life for us. See chapters four and seven for more discussion on God’s love for us and what response that love dictates.

We ought to strive towards living the “best christian life,” out of love for Jesus, who said that “*if you love Me, keep My commandments*” (John 14:15).

The Apostle Paul put it well when he said in Galatians 2:20, “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*”

Do you see that, dear ones? I live my life for Christ not to fulfill my pride or gain selfish reward, but because of the love He has for me and because He has given His own life to save mine.

Being “the best you can be,” even in the most spiritual sense, is never in order to please ourselves, but always needs to be in order to please God and bring Him glory. As Psalm 115:1 says: “*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth.*”

And how can we achieve the goal of living a life that pleases Him and brings him glory? Brokenness and humility. Brokenness and humility

are what God delights in, takes pleasure in, requires, and demands within His creation because it is the path that Jesus took. Knowing that we are called to become more like Jesus, we need to look at Christ to see what we should be like, what our goal is in becoming a person who pleases God. He is our ultimate example, of whom God says *“this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (Matthew 3:17).

Jesus’ greatness in humility is portrayed throughout the Bible and becomes most evident when we see Him in contrast to those around Him. The Gospels show us Jesus around His disciples or the spiritual leaders of that time, and it becomes so clear just how different He is.

Jesus, being the Son of God and the Messiah, was still completely surrendered and submitted to the will of His Father. He did not act or speak based on what He wanted, but did everything in accordance to God’s Word and will.

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”—John 4:34

I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. —John 5:30

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. —John 6:38

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He told them to pray *“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven”* (Matthew 6:10).

His kingdom, His will, not ours.

We need to realize that a life of obedience and holiness is required of us, not simply suggested as 1 Peter 1:14-16 makes it clear: *“as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”*

Just a few chapters later, Peter admonishes us again to “*humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

There needs to be no fear in submitting to the One who loves us and cares for us. We can trust Him completely as we humble ourselves before Him. Peter had quite the experience, as we have seen in chapter two, with the struggle to humble himself and submit to Jesus. Before he reached the point of brokenness, he and the other disciples were consumed with their own ambitions while trying to be better and above each other.

The topic of “who is the greatest?” was often the subject of discussion—and I dare say argument—among the disciples during their time with Jesus. How ironic. Here they were with the King of Kings, Creator of the Heavens and Earth,

The Beginning and End, the Alpha and Omega. He, Who humbled Himself and took on the form of both a man and a bondservant.

Yet, the disciples could not see it because they were too occupied with their own selves. Even in their last moments with their Lord, they were still focused on their own status, rather than on the One they would soon lose. They, too, suffered from the common human “I” disease that affects us all.

Eventually, Jesus confronted the disciples concerning their obsession with rank and this ongoing argument as to whom among them was the greatest and He chose to do so at the Last Supper.

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He [Jesus] said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called “benefactors.” But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you,

let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves' —Luke 22:24-27)

That evening, Jesus illustrated what true greatness is by taking the position of a servant and washing the feet of the disciples—even Judas', who would then depart to betray Jesus.

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter.

And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!"

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."

So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. —John 13:3-17

Oh, dear Peter had to object to Jesus again, but is he not such an accurate reflection of us all? Jesus taught clearly, both in words and in deeds, that we must stop thinking about our own rank or supposed greatness. Instead, we are to humble ourselves, make ourselves the least of all, and serve others, literally. Washing someone's feet was the dirtiest task for the lowest servant in the house, but Jesus took it upon Himself.

Even more, He would continue to humble Himself still further that night, surrendering to complete brokenness. The deep and complete surrender that Jesus had towards God was probably most clearly and powerfully shown in the scene in Gethsemane, when Jesus prayed right before the arrest that would lead to His crucifixion:

He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." [...]

Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." —Matthew 26:39-42

Jesus was committed and surrendered to God and His will for His life, that He would do anything, even if it meant His own death. We might never be able to understand how low Jesus made Himself and what it meant for Him to take the wrath of God upon Himself. The Messianic Psalm 22 shows us a little more of what kind of state Jesus allowed himself to be humbled into:

But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts.

I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God. Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong

bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; you have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.

They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots. —Psalm 22:6-18

Jesus' willing sacrifice on the cross, what seemed like defeat and shame to people, actually was the climax of His greatness in humility. And soon He was raised to life, victorious over sin and death and seated at the right hand of God. Now we, as children of God, are called to follow Jesus in this path:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. —Philippians 2:5-11

Jesus is the ultimate example of humility, obedience, and brokenness.

He humbled himself even though he had nothing to be humble about. He is God, the ultimate being. He is all powerful, all knowing, and all present. If there is any creature in the entire universe who could

deserve to be proud of himself, it would be Jesus. And yet, He is humble, and He showed that humility by becoming man. He gave up his unlimited nature to become limited. He gave up his unflawed nature to dwell in a flawed human body. We cannot fully comprehend what it must have been like for Jesus to become human, to go from such a glorious existence to such a small one, but we do know that it took boundless humility to even become a man, and then incredible humility to die for us.

In light of Jesus' example, any act of submission and sacrifice towards God on our part seems almost meaningless. We do not actually have anything of worth to give up, like Jesus did. In fact it is mainly our pride we need to surrender to God, and unfortunately that sticks to us rather persistently. It needs to be broken off, quite literally, and God will do that for you. If we see anything like the kind of radical surrender to the will of God that Jesus had in the life of a believer, we can be certain that it comes from a place of brokenness.

Now people might say that this brokenness is hard to both attain and maintain, and they would be right. This life of a true disciple of Christ is not what many sign up for when they accept a men-pleasing false gospel. However, this is the life Jesus lived and what He calls us to when He says "come, follow me."

Who are we to expect to have it any easier and be exempt from similar experiences to His in our life?

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household."—Matthew 10:24-25

Jesus was mocked and persecuted, and we will be as well. Do not forget that a broken man or woman is not what the world considers of value, just like the broken vase we talked about. In fact, the world despises them. But this is what God values and considers being of worth. This

is what one must strive for in life. This is the goal condition. As we already read in Romans 8:29, we are “*predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son*”. The Greek word here for “conformed” (symmorphos) means to have the same form as another, in this case the same form as Jesus.

Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. —Hebrews 5:7-9

Brokenness might mean crying out to God in prayer or learning obedience through suffering—and for many Christians it meant suffering even unto death. Jesus’ call goes out to us all:

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). There is no following Jesus without denying ourselves and taking up our cross (death) daily, whether in the figurative or in the literal sense if need be.

This is nothing we could do out of our own strength, because it’s impossible. But here is the amazing thing:

The Lord Almighty promised to be with us, to be in us, and to come upon us to empower us to live the life Christ has called us to live:

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. —John 14:16-17

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. —Acts 1:8

For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. —Isaiah 57:15

Thus says the Lord: “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,” says the Lord. “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word. —Isaiah 66:1-2

I want you to reread the two previous verses in Isaiah 57 and 66 again. He is the Creator of the heavens and earth, Who is and was and will always be, Who cannot be contained by the almost infinitely vast heavens. His throne is above the heavens.

God is omniscient (all-knowing).

Omnipresent (all-present).

Omnipotent (all-powerful).

More than one could describe.

This God above all gods wants to—has chosen to—dwell with you and me. If this does not cause you to be totally amazed and stand in awe, or rather fall on your face in wonder, I don’t think anything will. How incredible this is! The Hebrew word we translate into English “dwell” is the same word God uses when talking to the children of Israel. God tells them that He will dwell with them:

I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Lord their God. —Exodus 29:45-46

That same continual, intimate dwelling is what He wants to have with you and me. For us to have the Almighty God dwell in and empower us to live the life of a true disciple, we must be humbled under the mighty hand of God, take up our own cross, die to ourselves, and follow Him.

Jesus Himself said He wants us to “abide” in Him, allowing him to feed life into us (John 15). Again, referring back to the two portions in Isaiah 57 and 66, God makes the conditions for Him dwelling with us clear: “*him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble*” and “*but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word.*”

As the Father delighted in His Son, so is He pleased with His children when we are humble and broken before Him:

Though the Lord is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar. —Psalm 138:6

As we come to an understanding of the necessity of humility, let us remind ourselves what humility is.

It is putting God’s will above our own, putting God’s desires above our own, and obeying Him out of love and gratitude for what He has done.

This humility can only be achieved through brokenness, because we have within us a constant desire to follow our own prideful will instead of God’s. Humility is the act of willingly surrendering one’s will to his or her Creator or being utterly dependent upon Him for all his or her needs, wants, and desires.

Humility is acting only upon the will of God as it is expressed either through His Word or by the Holy Spirit. We saw it as the result of brokenness in the lives of Moses, David, Peter, and others, and we saw it most clearly in the life of Christ Jesus.

As the Father delighted in His Son, so He does in a person who is broken before the Lord and humbled and surrendered to Him. As a result of that brokenness, we will see the Holy Spirit working the character of Christ more and more into that person's life. And we have proof of that promise!

The radical change we see in the life of the disciples as portrayed in the Gospels compared with the Book of Acts is nothing short of amazing. This radical change is attributed to two things: first their brokenness, which paved the way, then the Holy Spirit coming upon them to do all that we read about in the Book of Acts.

Had the brokenness not taken place, they would have never experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and unless it takes place in you and me, we can expect the same emptiness. We will learn more about the work of the Holy Spirit in Chapter ten.

As you look upon the “goal condition” for your lives, and are aware that brokenness and humility are essential, how does your heart respond? Are you willing to surrender and be broken before God? Or are you maybe filled with despair at the impossibility of the task before you?

Do you think “It’s impossible, so I may as well not even try?” In a way, you’re right! In our own power, we’d never be able to achieve holiness.

But take heart, because “*He who has begun a good work in you will complete it*” (Philippians 1:6) and “*it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13).

“But how can I become broken?” In the next chapter, we will look at the instruments and methods God uses to break those he loves. Keep an eye out for any he is currently using in your life, so you can give that area over to him and allow the process to continue unimpeded.

| 7 |

God's Tools for Breaking Us

As we have seen, there is great comfort in Romans 2:28: *For we know that God can use all things for our good.*” In the previous chapter we already learned that this good is actually to become more like Jesus. And indeed, God can use all things as means to bring about brokenness and conformity to Christ in our lives.

Looking back at the illustration of the vase, we realize that this vase can be rendered worthless in the world's eyes by a number of means. It can be dropped or struck with any number of objects, have pressure applied from outside, or have objects thrown at it to cause cracking, chipping, and even breakage.

In this chapter, we will look at some common “tools,” various means and methods, that God employs in the breaking process. He also has a different timing and intensity for the breaking process in the life of each individual. We have already seen in the lives of different men what this process might look like.

In the life of Joseph, God used different people mistreating him (his brothers, Potiphar and his wife, Pharaoh's cupbearer), time serving as a slave, misunderstandings, and imprisonment to make him that man God would be able to use. With Moses, God also used different people, failure, times of hiding out in the desert, rejection, suffering, and hardships to make him into the man He could use.

For David, God used many different people—both family, friends, and foes—times on the run for his life, disparity, betrayal, loneliness, and all other kinds of hardships to prepare him for the service God had for him. In the life of Peter, Jesus worked as an example, teaching and correcting him. Apart from all the amazing work and ministry of Jesus that Peter got to witness, God used different people, circumstances and the realization of his utter failure to break him of his pride and

self to make him into the man Christ wanted him to become. In the case of the Apostle Paul, God used a divine revelation, sickness, times of solitude, times in prison, suspicion, persecution and much hardship to bring him to, and keep him in, the place of usability.

And then, among all these different tools and methods, there is one like no other, a most unlikely instrument: His Love.

God, out of His deep love for us, will employ whatever means or methods necessary to bring us to that desired place of brokenness, usefulness, and blessing.

It might not feel good, in fact it might hurt a lot, just like the word “breaking” itself suggests, but you need to remember what a tremendous blessing it is that God is willing to work and invest in your life in order to make you useful, instead of simply letting your life be wasted. Oh, how unfathomable is the love of God for us to do whatever is necessary to bring us to that place of great blessing.

Satan and the Sifting Process

We do need to remember that there is another entity who is also trying to affect your life, but not for your good. Satan, the enemy of old, has been defeated by Jesus’ death and resurrection and his eternal judgment is sure.

Until that time, though, he is currently the ruler of this sinful world and out for destruction of as many souls as he can get a hold of. Even though Satan has no power over the believer, God does allow him at times to try a Christian’s faith.

One of the most famous examples of this is Job, who suffered greatly at the loss of his children, his possessions, and his health as Satan was trying to ruin his faith. God allowed Satan to do many things to Job, but also gave clear boundaries as to what Satan was not allowed to do.

Satan attempted to prove that Job would deny God if he suffered, but all his fiery darts managed to do was bring Job even closer to the Lord. All that Satan was able to achieve was to bring Job before the Lord in brokenness and humility, admitting that he not only did not have any of the answers, but that he also did not need any of the answers.

Now, of course things did not have to go this way for Job. Satan could have achieved his goal if Job had allowed his doubt to overcome him, but instead he cleaved to the Lord, and the Lord saved him. Job's faith was tested, purified, and deepened, and so he was rewarded with more blessings than he had before.

And most of all, God was glorified. Job showed that what the enemy means for our harm, God can mean for our good. You can read more about this remarkable story in Job 1, 2 and 42.

In the New Testament, Jesus also speaks about Satan's desire to destroy a believer. At the Last Supper, Jesus told the disciples that they would all abandon Him soon. The disciples, led by Peter like so many other times, all objected to this.

Then Jesus addressed Peter directly, saying: *"Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren"* (Luke 22:31-32).

There are some important truths here we need to lay hold of. First, Jesus informs Peter of Satan's desire for him. Jesus was absolutely aware of what was going on, and Satan had to get permission first before he could do anything to Peter and the other ten. Satan can only do to us what the Lord permits, like with Job and all others who belong to God.

This should bring great comfort to us, as we realize that we are under God's covering and Satan is not permitted to have at us as he likes.

Second, what Satan desired to do with Peter was to “sift as wheat.” After wheat has matured and is harvested, the outer protective covering known as chaff needs to be removed. If unremoved from the kernel, chaff will ruin the quality of the wheat. In my travels to many parts of the world, I have been able to witness firsthand the various sifting processes that farmers use at harvest time.

I have witnessed farmers in the Philippines lay their crop of rice on a mat on the ground to dry it, then take a wooden tool like a large shovel and beat the rice for hours in order to separate the chaff from the kernel. Next, they take a winnowing fork and, as the wind is blowing, throw the rice up into the air so the chaff blows away and the kernel falls to the ground.

While in China, I witnessed farmers laying their dry corn that was still on the cob onto the road for cars and trucks to run over, separating the corn from the cob. This, of course, creates hazardous driving, but the people in the country adapt to it. In the absence of traffic, the kernels are gathered into sacks while the husks are thrown into the gutter.

Now that you have had your short lesson in this aspect of horticulture, you can better understand what it was that Satan wanted to do with the disciples. As sifting is for the purpose of separating, Satan desired to beat the disciples down with condemnation for their failure and separate them from the love of God.

He was the one who told Judas that he was beyond salvation, and that the only end was to kill himself for the terrible sin he had committed. No doubt, Satan was in the ears of the rest of the disciples and apostles as well, reminding them of how they fled from Jesus, how they denied Him and treated Him pridefully while Jesus was with them.

Satan plants doubts in people’s minds or bombards them with lies, which seems especially effective on people who are facing difficulties. Satan uses these same tactics on God’s children today, which is why it is so important for Christians to know the Word of God and use it against the enemy, just like Jesus did during his temptations in the wilderness. Refer to such verses as:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. —Romans 8:1

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. —1 John 1:8-9

Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices. —2 Corinthians 2:11

Satan is the one who stands to condemn the saints. He stands when we ignore or refuse to acknowledge our sins before the Lord, when we are unforgiving toward others, and when we take our life into our own hands and believe it is ours to do with it as we please.

These sins, and many others (all indicative of pride), give a foothold to Satan in the life of a believer. It is impossible for Satan to possess a believer, but he can and does wreak havoc in our lives when we believe his lies and live in disobedience to God and His Word.

Being sifted can sometimes be as brutal as those trucks driving over the corn on Chinese roads, and therefore it is vital for the children of God to understand and remember that God also uses the sifting process of Satan to fulfill His purposes in their life. Not to separate us from Him, but to separate the worthless chaff of pride, self-sufficiency, self-reliance and all the rest of what is known as the “self” from our life. This was the case in Peter’s life, and it was the case in the lives of countless others like him.

An old Puritan preacher once wrote:

“Jesus uses the fan to sift and get rid of the chaff while Satan uses the fan to sift in order to get rid of the wheat.”

Peter had the “natural” ability to be brave, courageous, and bold. After all, which of the other disciples walked on water? Who else drew a sword and came to Jesus’ defense while lopping off the ear of the servant Malcus? But these were of the flesh, and thus God would have to sift them out of Peter’s life if he was to become a vessel fit to be used by God the way He intended.

So remember that while Satan intends your pain to draw you away from God, God intends it to bring you closer to Him. Whenever you are presented with suffering or tribulation, allow God to purify you further for His use, rather than allowing Satan to use it to sift you away from the Lord. Now, let’s look at the tools the Lord will use to break you for His will.

The Word of God

While some of the means and methods were similar between the men we looked at before, and others varied, there was one constant for all: the Word of God.

The Word of God was used (and will always be used) in God’s breaking process, as it accompanies any number of other “tools.” God had spoken clearly to Joseph, Moses, David, Paul, and Peter, and He still speaks today. As we have already established in chapter four, it is of utmost importance that we have a proper understanding of the Bible—God’s written Word—that He uses every day to speak to His children.

Is not My word like a fire?” says the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? —Jeremiah 23:29

Now it came to pass, as He [Jesus] sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us? —Luke 24:30-32

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. —John 6:63

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. —John 17:17

Take for example two instances in which, after a long time without the Word of God, the people of Israel heard it once again. In 2 Kings 22, while Josiah was king, we read that the priest Hilkiah found the Book of the Law, which had been lost for many years. Hear of their response when they heard the words of God:

Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes. —2 Kings 22:11

Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant. —2 Kings 23:3

Just by hearing the Word of the Lord, the king's heart was broken, and the people recommitted their lives to the Lord once again. What a powerful testimony of the convicting power of Moses' law, leading us to repentance and redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Another testimony of the power of God's Word is found in the Book of Nehemiah. After the people of Israel returned from bondage in Babylon and lived in Jerusalem, Nehemiah ordered Ezra the priest to read from the Book of the Law. And as the people heard it, they answered "Amen" in agreement, lifted their hands and bowed their heads in worship—and they wept: *"for all the people wept when they heard the words of the Law"* (Nehemiah 8:6-9).

They realized just how far they were from living the way God wanted them to. The people were deeply touched by God's Word and their praise and weeping wasn't just a short-lived emotional response. If we read on, we see how they acted upon their conviction and started to walk in obedience to God.

In both of these cases, simply hearing the Word of God brought about repentance and change in action.

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.—Hebrews 4:12-13

And you, dear ones, do you still feel the brokenness of God when you read the Bible? Or have you grown dull to the Word? Have you hardened your heart so that it hardly even affects you any more? Or have you stopped reading it altogether? Have you lost your daily devotion time, and instead given it to some idol?

Turn back to the Lord, soften your heart, and allow the Word of the Lord to do its part in the breaking process that it needs to do. Open your heart to the sword of the Spirit, and you will see how well the Word can be used by God in His breaking process.

People as God's Tools

Apart from the Bible, God sometimes also uses other people to speak to us. Whether they are aware of it or not, led by the Holy Spirit, their words can be God's message to us. In fact, that was what all the prophets would do. through their exhortations, they pointed people directly to God. Your pastors and elders, when led by the Holy Spirit, do the same for you today, and of course listening to their words (while making sure they agree with the Word) is a vital part of God's breaking process.

However, this is not the only way in which God uses people as instruments in our journey of sanctification. Proverbs 27:17 tells us that "*as iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.*" There are many ways—by example, through advice, differences, conflicts, and much more—in which godly friends make each other

“sharper,” shaping character and spirituality, and thus becoming more useful in service to God. But it’s not just Christians that God uses, either. Any person we have contact with can be a tool that God uses in our life. And the difficult ones seem to be an especially powerful tool, as they quickly bring the sinful nature of our heart to light.

As we are confronted with it, it is a perfect opportunity for God to “remove the chaff” of impatience, lack of love, selfishness, anger and more. Just think about how massively God used Joseph’s brothers to break and humble him. Or think about Peter’s life.

“Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came. And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, “You also were with Jesus of Nazareth.”

But he denied it, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you are saying.” And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, “This is one of them.”

But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, “Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it.”

Then he began to curse and swear, “I do not know this Man of whom you speak!” A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.” And when he thought about it, he wept.” —Mark 14:66-72

Here we see the big, strong, proud, and self-sufficient Peter, who hours earlier had proclaimed that he would not deny Jesus even if he had to die with Him. But now he’s not so strong anymore, as he, cursing and swearing, repeatedly denies even knowing Jesus.

When he realized what he had done, it broke him and he cried bitterly. But what was the instrument that God used to bring this about? A little servant girl. What an unlikely instrument to break someone like Peter,

who had been resistant to much harder blows. But God knows exactly what instrument to use for each individual, and in each situation, to bring about what He desires to do. After all, He might even use a speaking dokey, if that is what is necessary (read the story of Balaam in Numbers 22).

We have seen the same happen with David and Nabal. Whereas David could withstand the unrighteous tribulation from the king of Israel with all humility and brokenness, when he was insulted by Nabal, a mere landowner, suddenly the pride that was hiding inside him came boiling over. God used Nabal, a prideful and foolish man, to show David's pride within Himself so that he would give to the Lord and allow Him to remove it.

Do not think that the Lord cannot use even sinners for His will. They can be His tools, but they gain nothing from glorifying Him, and are unwilling in His plan. Their use as tools also doesn't exempt them from the consequences of their actions, as Nabal was slain by the Lord soon after his confrontation with David.

When you are beset by a prideful and evil person, do not neglect the possibility that the Lord is using him or her to show you what is in your own heart.

Of course, the tool that God uses in our lives does not always have to be something grave and powerful, like an outstanding event or experience. Sometimes it is something as simple as our regular day job. Both Moses and David spent a considerable amount of time working as shepherds.

God used these times to prepare them for the calling He had on their lives. David's Psalms give us insight into how his time as a shepherd shaped and deepened his relationship with God. Moses and David were called to eventually lead God's people, who were no less stubborn, or probably worse, than any herd of goat or sheep. The lessons learned were no doubt useful. Joseph's job as a servant slave

was a powerful tool that God used to break and humble him, and the character it produced and his faithfulness in his work paved the way for greater tasks that God had in store for him.

I always find that gardening teaches powerful spiritual lessons. Jesus used gardening analogies in His teachings several times, such as the pruning and cleansing of the vines to bring about fruitfulness. So if you are a gardener, or whatever other job you are working in, do not forget that God can use anything to work in you towards brokenness. God can use the easy times just as well as the hard times to teach us brokenness.

Storms of Life

For most of us, it is in the difficult times, the “storms of life,” that God gets our attention. It is when we are faced with hard things that we cry out to Jesus for help. Of course, God has an even greater goal for these circumstances than to merely get our attention. He uses them to work in our lives and to bring us to a place of brokenness that is closer to Him.

Jesus even used literal storms when He walked with the disciples in order to break them of their unbelief and stubbornness and to mold and shape them into the men He wanted them to be. We can read about one of these instances in Mark 4:35-41.

On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us cross over to the other side.” Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling.

But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?”

Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have

no faith?” And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!”
— Mark 4:35-41

As the storm arose, it became apparent what was in the disciples’ hearts. There was fear and a lack of faith. They questioned Jesus’ words, Who had already told them that they would cross over to the other side, and they also questioned His love and care for them.

In the same way, the storms of our lives have this tendency to bring to light what is in our hearts. In another account, when Jesus came walking on the water to the disciples who were struggling with the winds, we learn that the disciples “*marveled. For they had not understood [...] because their heart was hardened*” (Mark 6:52).

Like the children of Israel, the disciples suffered from the same problem that filled their heart with unbelief: a hard heart. Jesus attempted to drive this out of the disciples by way of a rough time on the sea of Galilee. This was an attempt of Jesus’ to accomplish His good and perfect will of purifying their faith, bringing them to realize that life as a disciple is total and complete dependence on and faith in the Word of God. By God’s grace and mercy, He would continue to work in their lives through His Word and circumstances.

Now we might never come into an actual storm on sea, but there are plenty of other circumstances that seem as fretful and dangerous. Losing one’s job, broken marriages, rebellious children, accidents, financial burdens, sickness, calamities—the list goes on and on.

When faced with such storms, we realize how little power or control we have over anything. We then can either hold on to our hard hearts and condemn God for not preventing those events, or we can allow ourselves to be broken and rely on and trust completely in Him and His sovereignty to get us through them.

It is my hope that any storm of life you might face would lead you to be broken before God, seeking Him, above all else. That you would allow Him to purify your heart and faith from whatever sinful things that come to light in these times of trial.

Suffering

I am sure that you have noticed a theme in many of the previous examples. Probably the most effective tools in terms of leading to brokenness, yet often one of the hardest to bear, is suffering. Naturally, we are averse to any kind of pain and suffering, but the child of God must remember that it is one of God's methods of preparation for His service.

We have seen this in the lives of Joseph and David, and there have been countless other men and women—during and since Bible times—who were brought to the place of sweet brokenness by means of pain and suffering.

While many Christians today do not want to hear about suffering, and many churches do not teach on the subject except maybe in an unbiblical and perverted way, the Bible talks about suffering a lot. And I really mean a lot.

When we consider the subject of suffering, we need to understand that not all suffering occurs for the same reason. Suffering, sickness, and hardships entered the world and people's lives with the fall in Eden (Genesis 3), and have been part of humanity ever since.

"The whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Romans 8:22), waiting to be delivered when Jesus comes back and restores life as it was meant to be.

Suffering is simply part of life on earth, and I encourage you not to listen to anyone who is promising you a life without it.

There is, however, suffering that we bring upon ourselves or others by our own actions. King David is an example, but unfortunately not a good one. The Psalms describe very vividly some of the things he suffered, mentally and physically, when he had not yet repented of his sin with Bathsheba.

Furthermore, his sin would lead to the death of his child, many broken relationships, and continual conflict and bloodshed in his family. All this suffering in his own life, and in that of those around him, was caused by his own actions.

Paul addresses this problem with the church in Corinth, where believers were suffering and the reason Paul gives for that is remarkable:

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep [have died]. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”
—1 Corinthians 11:28-32

Some believers’ sinful disregard of the Lord’s Supper had led not only to weakness and sickness, but in some cases even to death. This was a serious matter. Paul explains the correlation between their sin and suffering and encourages the Christians to each examine their own lives, if that might be the reason why they suffer.

James also points out this connection between suffering and sin. *“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven”* (James 5:14-15).

Probably one of the most infamous examples of suffering brought upon oneself by sin are Ananias and his wife Sapphira. They were two believers of the early church who were struck dead on the spot for lying to Peter—and ultimately to the Holy Spirit—about money (Acts 5). Dear ones, if anyone is trying to tell you that there will be no consequences to sin, whether it be man or the devil, do not believe them for a second.

Both Paul and James in their writings also remind us of the hope we have in Christ. If we, as Christians, suffer because of our own sin, and

God is chastising us, then if we repent we will receive forgiveness and not be condemned with the world. However, not all suffering is caused by sin.

In Jesus' days that was a common misconception among Jews. One day, *"His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'"* Jesus answered, *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him"* (John 9:2-3).

We cannot pass quick judgment on someone who is suffering and blame it on sin. The right approach is explained to us in the passage from 1 Corinthians above, that each man examines himself. Because a Christian might also suffer simply for doing what is right. We have seen that in the life of Joseph, who ran away from Potiphar's wife trying to force herself on him and ended up falsely accused in prison.

Daniel was faithful in praying to God, which led to him being thrown in the lion's den, and his three friends were cast in a fiery furnace because they would not bow to worship Nebuchadnezzar's statue out of faithfulness to God. Jesus Himself suffered much for speaking and doing what was right, and He told us very straightforwardly that the same would happen to those who follow Him.

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. —John 15: 18-20

But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise

up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. —Matthew 10:17-22

The lives of the Apostles were witness of these words of Jesus, as they suffered many things, and as far as we know, all but one died martyrs. Over the centuries, millions of Christians have suffered all kinds of suffering imaginable for the sake of Christ, and it continues even today.

If you are suffering for the Lord, know that not only will He bless you for it in the life to come, but He will also bless you in this life by using that suffering to make you more like Him and conform you to His image. There is perhaps no better way to achieve our goal condition of brokenness than through suffering for doing God's will.

Finally, there is also suffering that is being brought into our lives “just” to try us, test our faith, purify us, and bring us to a place of brokenness, or to keep us there. We already mentioned Job and how he suffered for nothing that he did, but simply in order for his faith to be tested.

The Apostle Paul once had a vision of heaven and saw inexpressible things. As there would be an obvious temptation to become boastful about such an experience, God allowed Paul to suffer preventatively, so to speak, to keep him humble.

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. —2 Corinthians 12:7-10

This is beautiful. When Paul understood that Christ and all of His power would be with him in his weakness and suffering, he started to take pleasure in them, because it would mean being closer to

God. While God can, and will, use all kinds of suffering to sanctify us and break us, no matter what the cause, it can be helpful for us to understand why bad things happen. Even though we are in no place to demand of God to explain the “why” of any circumstance, we do need to examine ourselves to see if there is sin in our hearts and lives that might cause this suffering. If there is, we can repent and turn away from it. If we suffer for what is right, we have much encouragement and many promises in the Scriptures to help us stay strong and retain an eternal perspective.

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.
—1 Peter 4:12-16

The believers are blessed if they suffer for the name of Christ. But, just because a Christian suffers, does not mean he suffers because of Christ.

What credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God —1 Peter 2:20

Let us look at another passage on suffering, written by Paul, who can be considered an expert on the topic, as he had quite extensive experience with it.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are

in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many. —2 Corinthians 1:3-11

There are some things in this passage that I would like you to take note of. The suffering Paul went through was heavy. In 2 Corinthians 11:22-33, he gives us a sample list of what he has been through, and in the verses we just read, we see that he was burdened beyond measure, more than he could take. He came to the point of despair of life and on the verge of death.

Dear ones, whatever it is you might be suffering from right now, remember that while it might be more than you can bear, it is not too much for God to deal with. Your suffering is not outside of His control, and He can get you through it.

The lesson Paul learned, and I hope you and I will learn as well:

Do not put trust in ourselves. Completely trust in God, who can deliver us and raise us from the dead.

And how wonderfully God's character is displayed in His dealing with us in the midst of suffering: The Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all tribulation. —2 Corinthians 1:3-4

What a beautiful promise that is! As God shows Himself mighty on behalf of His children, His name is glorified, and many believers are encouraged by the testimony of His power. Furthermore, we are being made more useful in a very practical way, which is that having been comforted, we are now able to better comfort those around us who are suffering as well.

Peter, who had experienced the breaking process of God himself, would explain to us that a believer should not only accept suffering, but rather rejoice in it. We have read something similar from Paul before, and at first that might seem very strange. In fact, it is impossible to understand for the unbeliever, but it makes much sense if we have a spiritual, eternal perspective.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love.

Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. —1 Peter 1:6-9

This is a wonderful passage. Take note of the mention of the testing by fire. This is referring to the way in which a mixed metal can be purified through flames to separate the impurities and then, when considered pure, would be put through the flames again in order to make sure no impurities were left.

This is the same thing that happens to our faith when it is being tested by trials—only that our faith is much more precious than any gold of this world. If we realize what the result of the trial is—how much we gain spiritually and for eternal glory—then the suffering

we experience now will fade in comparison. We must understand and keep in mind that the breaking and chastening are but for a time, though while enduring them they may seem like lifetimes.

During these times of breaking, the grace of God will abound to us, enabling us to persevere and come out on the other side changed more into the image of Jesus Christ our Lord. Don't forget that God has promised you even more grace and mercy than He has tribulation. While the suffering He has in store for you may be great, like such as He had for Paul, He promised provisions to preserve you through that suffering.

As God walks with us through times of trials, the things we know to be true intellectually, as of *eidō* (with the eyes), become things we know experientially, as of *ginōskō* (mental perception). See chapter four for more detail).

We will gain the kind of knowledge that rests in God no matter what it is that we may go through in life—that allows us to live a life free of fear, worry, doubt, and a myriad of other things that plague us and rob us of the joy that Christ promises.

During God's breaking process, the question often arises: "Why? Why is God doing this to me? Why is He allowing me to go through such painful experiences and suffering?" And the taunt of the enemy is right there chiming in, as he was with David in one of his times of great trial:

My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, "Where is your God?" [. . .] I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" [. . .] As with a breaking of my bones, my enemies reproach me, while they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" —Psalm 42:3-II

The Love of God

We then need to remember what God's motivation is for leading us into brokenness—love. And at times His all-consuming, all-encompassing love is the very tool He uses to break us. It may seem that the love of God would appear to be a most unlikely element during the breaking process, especially given the more painful nature of the previous tools we looked at, but it is a very powerful and necessary element. Let me explain.

As I come to know (really know) who God is—His holiness, righteousness, justice, mercy, patience, kindness, longsuffering, compassion, tenderness, and many more attributes—then I see myself for who and what I am in comparison: wretched, wicked, unfair, unmerciful, filled with rage, cruel, self-serving, judgemental, harsh, and every other evil thing under the sun.

We talked about our sinful nature in chapter five already. The realization that God would love such a one as me leads me to a place of awe, wonder, humility, and brokenness. As John Newton, who used to be the captain of a slave ship, famously wrote after becoming a Christian: *“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.”*

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that

not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. —Ephesians 2:1-9

How wonderful and marvelous is the love of God to use a murderer called Moses. How extensive the loving patience that would bear with David, an adulterer, murderer and more. How amazing the love of God to call a Christian-persecuting Paul, the self-titled chief of sinners, to turn him upside down, save and sanctify him and use him for God's kingdom in powerful ways, even allowing him to be a tool to write precious Scripture.

How unfathomable the love of God for you and me:

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. —Romans 5:5-8

God's love for us is enduring and strong, even amidst our failures and rebellion.

God used the life of Hosea to show us just how deep His love for His own is. Hosea married his wife, well aware of her adulterous nature. His love was steadfast and deep, so that he would not only keep taking her back after she had been with other men, but he would even buy her out of slavery, into which she had sold herself through her unfaithfulness and sin towards him.

Just thinking about that kind of love should break our hearts. This is what we do to God, and yet He loves and purchases us by His own blood.

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? —Romans 2:4

God is so good, so good to us, and so patient. I pray that your eyes would be opened to this precious truth and it would lead you to sweet brokenness and surrender.

As I realize His great love and my deep depravity, how can I be anything but broken and humbled before the One who suffered and died for me! And in deep humility and contrition surrender myself without condition or hesitation to Him to do with me as He pleases. To do as the Apostle Paul begged the Christians at Rome to do in response to all that God had done for them:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. —Romans 12:1-2

Conclusion

Are you suffering right now? If you are, ask yourself this question: am I suffering because of my own sin, or for the glory of the Lord? If you are suffering for your own sin, praise the Lord that He loves you enough to chastise you, repent, and turn back to Him.

If you are suffering for the glory of the Lord, either because He is making you into the person He wants you to be, or because you are suffering for being obedient to Him when all of the world says not to. Praise the Lord! You are counted worthy to suffer for His name. Either way, pray for patience to endure the suffering until the time God deems it sufficient.

Suffering is painful, and sometimes it can seem as though we simply cannot go on or that it is too much.

The thing is, God will be with you through it, and will supply you with everything you need as long as you stay broken before Him.

Are you going through a storm? Is it hard to catch your breath because you're being thrown back and forth by the crashing waves of this life? Does it feel as though you'll capsize at any moment, and it's all you can do to just hold on? Rest and wait on the Lord, and depend on Him to see you through it.

He is faithful, and He will reward those who have faith in Him. And when you have clear skies again, you'll look back and see all the good God used that storm for, and all of the blessings that came as a result of it.

Are you living in the peace and love of the Lord at the moment, in His Word daily and closer to Him than ever?

Be broken now by the love of the Lord and by His goodness.

Let the unknowable measure of His grace and mercy make you humble, as your complete inadequacy becomes more and more clear.

Let your love for Him outshine any other love in your life, and give up anything He asks from you, and anything you know isn't pleasing to Him. Far better to be broken by the love of God, in obedience and humility, than to be broken by suffering or storms. God would prefer to break you this way—softly and tenderly—than any other way. Cling to the Lord, and chase after Him every single day.

Don't become complacent or prideful in the knowledge that you're in His will, but stay in awe that He loves you, and eternally grateful for His grace. Obey Him out of love, and never leave that place of broken humility. Whatever the method or the instrument God is using in your life to lead you to a place of brokenness, be sure to respond to it in the right way. What is the right way, you may ask? Read on in the next chapter, where we will explore this very subject.

The Correct Response to the Breaking Process

From the lives we have examined in this book—Joseph, Moses, David, Paul, and Peter—and the breaking process they went through, we understand how easy it would have been for them to become discouraged, grow weary, and want to give up.

They could have tried to run away from God, or in anger and bitterness harden their hearts. Though they may have had moments of feeling this way, and were tempted to give in to these things, by the grace of God they did not. Because of their faithfulness, they were able to come through the process and be used by God for His glorious purposes.

We also have seen in this book those who did not respond well to the breaking and chastening of the Lord: the children of Israel, King Saul, and King Uzziah. In some, we saw anger and resentment growing, and unbelief settling in to harden their hearts.

In others, we were able to observe how pride claimed its ground in their hearts and gave way to all other sorts of sin. Then, as the Lord attempted to break them further, they refused and hardened their hearts.

We see two groups of people here. Both went through the same process, but the outcome was vastly different, and the consequences quite grave. The difference was in how they responded to the ways God was working in their lives towards brokenness.

When Jesus had yet another serious confrontation with the religious leaders of His time who refused to accept Him and His teachings, He made this point very clear, referring to Himself as the cornerstone: *“And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder”* (Matthew 21:44).

Your response to Jesus determines whether you will be broken before Him or if you will end up receiving judgment—being ground to powder. Choose your response today very carefully.

To be honest, with everything we have learned in the previous chapters about our own depraved state and God's holy greatness and love for us, it sounds silly to even consider rejecting or resisting God's work in our lives. Just as silly as imagining a lump of clay complaining to the potter as he is working on it because it does not like the touch that forms it or the shape it is being molded into.

God uses this picture of the potter and the clay in Jeremiah 18, and Paul uses it as well in Romans 9, to show that we are in no place to talk back to God and question His sovereignty. Rather, we should pray in surrender: *"O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand."* —Isaiah 64:8

Surrender

Dear ones, I know it is not easy to go through the breaking process. I myself have gone through much breaking and discipline in my own life, and have been privileged to be able to minister to many who have been through it as well. Believe me, God knows it's not easy.

He knows it so well, because He knows every detail of your heart. He knows the weeping that comes at night, but already sees the joy that comes in the morning (Psalms 30:5).

If there is one thing you need to do in response to God's breaking in your life, it is to look to Jesus.

Always, always keep your eyes on Jesus and His Word. In Matthew 7, Jesus tells the parable of two men who each build a house, one built on the rock and the other on sand. When the storm came, the house that was built on the sand collapsed, but the one that was built on

the rock stood firm. Jesus is our Rock and His Word endures; if we stand on Him, we will be able to prevail. If we look to Jesus, we will be broken, but if we turn from Him, we will be ground to powder.

This is the correct response to breaking: allowing God to work His will in us, and surrendering ourselves to His process. If you've been carefully reading thus far, this statement should come as no surprise to you.

Let us take a look at a wonderfully encouraging passage that Paul wrote to the Hebrews, who were facing trials and persecution from all sides which God used to purify their faith.

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. —Hebrews 12:1b-11

There is so much in this wonderful passage, but let me point out just a few things. As mentioned already, we are told to look to Jesus, both to see Him as an example and also to gain the right perspective on our circumstances.

Jesus endured so much as He went to the cross, looking forward to the end result, which was God's glory and our salvation. He was not shortsighted, trying to avoid the pain of the moment, but considered the bigger picture of it all. And in this He is our great example of how we should not try to avoid the painful breaking process, but consider "*the peaceable fruit of righteousness*" that is produced in our lives as we are chastened and trained by God.

Asaph, the worship leader under King David, also learned the important lesson of keeping His eyes on the Lord, as well as the right perspective that comes with that. In Psalms 73, he shares how he went through a time of difficulty and had almost "slipped," as he put it. He looked at the wicked people around him and started to envy them.

It seemed to him that those people were strong, happy and prospering, despite all the sin they committed and without any repercussions for their evil deeds. He felt like these blasphemers had nothing to worry about, not even death.

He thought: "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning. [...] When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me." —Psalm 73:13-16

Whatever it was that Asaph was going through at the time, it caused him to get his eyes off of the Lord and onto himself and others. This led him to arrive at some erroneous conclusions about the wicked men and himself, as he was trying to live righteously.

He felt he had wasted his life serving the Lord, thus leading him to nearly turn away from Him. Then by His grace, God brought him into His presence and he was able to see things right again:

Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their

end. Surely You set them in slippery places; you cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! [. . .] Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.

Nevertheless I am continually with You; you hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; you have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works.
—Psalm 73:17-28

When his eyes were back on the Lord, Asaph's perspective and vision were restored and he was able to see things again for what they were. Looking at God helped him to look further, past the temporary circumstances to the end of things. He learned to not trust what his eyes told him, but what the Lord had promised him.

He stopped allowing the suffering in his life—and the seeming lack of it in the lives of others—to keep him from worshipping the Lord. He returned to his place of brokenness, and was humble in the sight of the Lord so he could continue to glorify His name through praise.

He finally found the proper response to God's breaking process: loving obedience. Over the years of ministry, I have been able to relate to Asaph's dilemma, and at the same time, I have taken great comfort and counsel from his experience.

Looking to Jesus, we also understand that being chastised by God is not something to be discouraged about; but rather, something to welcome into our lives. Hebrews 12 explains to us that God's chastisement shows that we are truly His children and He cares to work in our lives for our good. I know that the concept of the discipline or chastisement of

the Lord is almost nonexistent in much of the “modern church” today. However, it is clearly portrayed in both the Old and New Testament, and God does not change. If you struggle to accept this concept, go back to chapter four and review the very important truths we have established there.

When we consider the Lord disciplining His children, of which I hope you are one, we learned that God always has His glory and our good in mind. The following verses attest to this as well: *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope”* (Jeremiah 29:11).

This was written to the exiled Jews who had been carried off to Babylon. They thought that God had forsaken them and was punishing them, when in reality their exile from the Land of Israel was their salvation. A few years later, Babylon attacked Jerusalem and utterly destroyed it, murdering hundreds of thousands of Jews; but those in exile survived.

And when the people of Judah came back to their country years later, they were finally ready to obey the Lord in His will. Their years of bondage away from home had broken them, and they were humble before the Lord to follow His Word.

God had to chastise them through exile and the destruction of Jerusalem, but it was ultimately for their good, because through these things, He finally freed them of their sin of idolatry. Finally, after centuries of rebellion, the people of Israel were ready to respond correctly.

Some people who do not understand the concept of God’s chastisement as portrayed in the above passage from Hebrews, might consider it a good thing when “life is going well” and there are no trials or brokenness in their lives.

They might have a dreadfully twisted idea of the grace of God and the freedom that He gives. They might think that they are “getting away” with sin, or that they have a special understanding with God that makes Him wink at it and let it slide by. But in reality, this is a very scary place to be in, since the absence of chastisement is a sign of not

being a child of God. If we are living in habitual sin and God is not correcting us for it, then we should be afraid for our souls. Therefore, find joy in the chastening of the Lord, dear ones, because with it comes the knowledge that we are saved, that our spot in heaven is secure, and that the Lord loves us like sons and daughters and is willing to work in us.

Bitterness

As a last note on the passage from Hebrews, I want you to see the warning about bitterness a little later on: *“Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled”* (Hebrews 5:15).

We need to be very careful to not allow bitterness towards God or people to creep into our hearts.

Anger towards God is a sinful response when He breaks us, which must be avoided at all cost.

We also need to beware of the temptation to get upset with the tools that He is using. Whatever tool the Lord uses to shape us, let us not blame the tool, becoming angry or bitter with it. Rather, let us see the invisible hand of God behind the situation, and allow Him to do the work that He wants to do.

This is especially important when God uses people. Oftentimes, we can accept God’s will a bit easier when it is shown to us through some sort of event or circumstance, but when flawed, sinful humans are used to humble us, it can stir up much more resistance in us.

We start to be angry with these people, criticize them, and point out their flaws and mistakes in return. We tell ourselves that they are doing whatever they are doing because of their own sin and pride, and we do not see the hand of God in it. Now, just because God is

using someone does not mean that they are flawless or do not have their own sin to deal with. But this is not the time for you to point out others' sins or what God should do in their life, but rather for you to examine yourself and "pluck out the plank from your eye first" (see Matthew 7:1-5).

This is exactly what happened to many of God's prophets that He sent to Israel—being hated for the message they brought. In 1 Kings 22, we read the story of the prophet Micaiah, who ministered during the time of King Ahab.

Ahab knew Micaiah was faithful to deliver God's word no matter how uncomfortable—contrary to the false prophets of the time, who would just tell the king what he wanted to hear. But because Micaiah's messages spoke of repentance and judgment, Ahab hated him. However, the day came that King Ahab wanted to hear a "real" prophet before going to war alongside King Jehosaphat, so they summoned Micaiah.

"Then he came to the king; and the king said to him, 'Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall we refrain?' And he answered him, 'Go and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king!' So the king said to him, 'How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?'"

Then he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.'" And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?" —1 Kings 22:15-18

Micaiah was the tool God wanted to use in the life of Ahab, but Ahab rejected not only the Lord, but Micaiah as well. He got angry with him, hated him, and put him into prison before he went to war (in which he ended up being killed). However there are also good examples of how to react to a tool. Such as King Josiah, as we can read in 2 Chronicles 34. After re-discovering the book of the law of the Lord after it was lost many years, he sent for Huldah the priestess. Huldah told him that

Israel would be judged for their sins, and Josiah was reproved, which no one enjoys. He could have balked at the idea that he was to blame for the sins of his fathers and defended himself before Huldah.

Even worse, he could have blamed her for these words, and punished her for bringing him the Word of the Lord like Ahab did. Instead, Josiah accepted the chastening of the Lord, repented, and made serious changes in Israel concerning their spiritual life.

It was one of the last revivals of Judah before they were completely destroyed, and it was a blessed time in which they were able to live before the Lord in obedience and dedication. Josiah showed humility towards Huldah the tool and became broken before God the Potter, so that he was able to bring countless blessings upon both himself and his people.

King David was also a powerful example in regards to how he treated King Saul. God used Saul as a tool to break and humble David; and Saul was quite a painful tool. Saul took David's wife Michal away from him, sought his life on numerous occasions, and was always suspicious of the good David did.

From a human perspective, David would have had every right to hate Saul, or at least see and treat him as an enemy. However, David never allowed himself to act in anger toward Saul or seek revenge, because he knew that Saul was the Lord's anointed king, and he honored that.

David had already been promised the kingdom, but still he respected the Lord's sovereignty and timing, and he blessed Saul and his children wherever he could. Let us be like David and respond in humility towards the tool God is using in our lives.

If we fail to respond with humility to the breaking process, and if we fail to receive and extend to others the grace of God, we are in danger of becoming bitter in our hearts.

This bitterness is like a root that can grow deep before being seen on the outside.

If it isn't removed, it will keep growing and eventually cause trouble, defiling us and those around us.

In the previous chapter, we have already touched on the topic of self-examination. I encouraged you to prayerfully consider if there could be any sins in your life that are the reason for the trial you are facing.

In our dealing with the people God is using as tools in our lives, we also need to make sure we look at our own issues, and not at theirs.

Examine yourself for bitterness, and ask God to take it away. How can we be bitter when we've been so blessed by the Lord? He has saved us from our rightfully earned eternal damnation, and we will be with Him in Heaven. What earthly trial could compare to such a merciful and gracious blessing? What right do we have to allow bitterness to reign in our lives? Pray that God would show you that bitterness and remove it.

Additionally, here is another important question that becomes very relevant when we are in the process of being broken.

How much are you willing to give to follow Jesus?"

This question might be easy for some to answer when life is going well, but it becomes real and pressing in new ways when we face trials. Prior to becoming a Christian, I thought that if I had to lose the use of any of my bodily functions, I did not want it to be my sight. I cherished my sight, as we all should. If I lost the use of my hands, feet, hearing, anything but my eyesight, life would be doable.

Then, early on in my pastorate, I remember the Lord asking me a question. It was quite an ominous question, and one that really caused me to think about my life and what I was living for. "What price are

you willing to pay so that I, the Lord, will be glorified in your life?” This was a tough question. What was I willing to lose in order for Him to be glorified in my life? What if He chose to take my sight, that I held so dear?

What was an important question for me to answer then became even more relevant later on in life, when I actually almost lost my sight. As I mentioned before, I had a severe problem with my eyes, which almost caused complete blindness.

Though my sight was saved through several surgeries, there were irreversible effects that I still live with today. Would I get angry with God for taking something from me that was so dear to me, out of all other bodily functions?

Would I draw the line and say “this much I have done for you, I have given up so much, but this is enough? I could not be angry with God. So, instead I offered my sight, along with the rest of my life, to Him once again.

When God touches something that is dear to us, it can really drive the point home and cause us to examine ourselves. When God asked me back then, it caused me to conduct an honest, deep inventory of my heart and motives. How serious was I really in my relationship with Jesus? What was my life really all about?

Like Peter, I had no problem with proclaiming, “Lord, I will die with you,” but was that what the Lord wanted? He had not wanted it with Peter at that time, and I am sure He did not want it with me either. Rather, what He did want was for me to die to self and to all my worldly desires, wants, and ambitions. He wanted me to do as Jesus had bidden His disciples in the first century and every day since then:

If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? —Luke 9:23-25

As we will all sooner or later experience circumstances that God wants to use to break us, I encourage you not to waste that time by simply trying to get through or endure. Rather, make good use of it by examining your heart and asking yourself these important questions:

- Will I submit myself to God to be broken?
- Will I allow God to choose the time, place, method, and means by which I will be broken?
- Will I trust Him implicitly, His judgment, His love?
- How much am I willing to give or endure for Christ's sake?
- Do I want Christ to be glorified regardless of the cost to me?

Prayer

Consider these questions prayerfully and ask the Lord to reveal to you if there is anything in your heart that stands in His way in your life. And you probably have guessed already that prayer is also one of the most important and appropriate responses to God's breaking process. Prayer will help us to focus on Jesus. It is in prayer that we communicate with God, pour our hearts out before Him, and ask to hear from Him. There is much to learn for us on how to pray—and what not to pray.

I want you to remember the scene at the Last Supper, when Jesus spoke to Peter about his coming denial. Jesus assured Peter that He had prayed for him and it is interesting to see that Jesus' prayer was simply "*that your faith should not fail*" (Luke 22:32).

Many of the things that we would probably pray for someone who is about to be utterly broken are not mentioned by Jesus at all. Jesus did not pray that Peter's courage would not fail, or that Satan would stay away from Peter.

Jesus did not pray for Peter to be delivered from this time of testing, or that Peter would have it easy with no pain or suffering. Jesus knew all that was necessary to make Peter useful for God, so He did not pray against these things. He prayed for Peter's faith to stand the test. And

so should we not pray for our trials to just pass by speedily, but instead for our faith to be sustained through it.

When Jesus himself faced the greatest trial of all times in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will”* (Matthew 26:39).

This is how we should pray, completely surrendering our own will to God, no matter the costs to us. And to His disciples, Jesus said *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* (Matthew 26:41).

The temptations are real, and our weakness is also real.

We need to stay in constant prayer, especially in times of trials, in order to be able to stand.

When we pray, we need to pray according to God’s Word and will. Think of the dangers that exist when we pray contrary to the will of God and He gives us what we ask for. Where would you and I be had the Father granted Jesus’ prayer to let the cup pass from Him? We would have no hope of salvation.

What if Jesus had answered Peter’s prayer that he uttered in his boat when Jesus worked the miracle of the fish? *“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord”* (Luke 5:8). Or what if Jesus had answered Paul’s prayer to remove his infirmity, when it was given to keep Paul humble?

We must examine ourselves, and the intentions behind our prayers, to make sure that they are in God’s will.

We must also make sure, like Jesus, to remind ourselves that it is not our will, but the will of the Father that should be done.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. —1 John 5:14-15

Lastly, remember the most encouraging fact is that Jesus did not pray for Peter only, or the twelve disciples. He's prayed for all of His children through the ages and even today. We read this in Hebrews 7:25: "Therefore He [Jesus] is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. —John 17:9-11

I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. —John 17:15-19

If Jesus is praying for us, then what do we have to fear from the world or the life therein?

If he intercedes for us, then we know that His will is going to prevail. With Him on our side, who can stand against us? If Jesus prays for our faith not to fail and for the Father to keep us, what trial is there that could overcome our faith, as long as we keep abiding in Him?

As we go through the breaking process, and as we go through God's chastening, never forget that Jesus is right there next to the Father, interceding on our behalf. He never leaves us, nor forsakes us, and we can rest in that promise, even through the worst of suffering.

As we have explored in this chapter, our response to God's work towards brokenness in our lives is crucial to the outcome and relevant in light of eternity. We have learned that we need to respond in humble surrender, and guard our hearts from anger and bitterness.

Keeping our eyes on Jesus, we do not only have a great example of enduring suffering for a greater end, but we see the One who intercedes for us and keeps us through the trial. Keeping the right perspective, we see how much God loves us and how precious brokenness is, as it produces much fruit in our lives and brings glory to God. Drawing close to God in prayer, we examine our own hearts and seek God's will for our lives, whatever it may be.

I want you to take some time and ask yourself these questions, being honest with yourself and God, in regards to trials and your response to them:

- How have you responded to the most recent trials in your life? Have you tried to resist what God wanted to do, or have you received it with humility?
- Is there someone in your life that you are angry or bitter with? Could it be that this person has been used by God to break you?
- How is your prayer life during times of trial? Is what you are praying for in line with what Jesus is praying, or in line with your own wants and desires?

Is your desire to bring glory to God no matter the cost? How much are you willing to go through for Jesus?

It is my prayer that we would all grow and mature in the way we respond to God's gracious work towards our brokenness, and that we would learn to trustfully surrender to God's will and seek His glory above all else.

Continual Brokenness

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.
—1 Corinthians 10:12

Perhaps brokenness has finally been achieved. Maybe you have come to the place where you, in experiential knowledge of the Lord, admit that you can do nothing without Him. And more than that, you do not want to do anything without Him. Maybe you have finally realized the depths of your pride, and have given it to the Lord to take it from you. Maybe you have sacrificed your old man on the altar of the Lord, and have left him there to die.

In your humility, you have given your plans and desires to Him, to follow whatever He says and go wherever He leads. This is wonderful news! The Lord has worked within you what few allow Him to work within them. The question now is: what is next? The answer to that may not be what you would like to hear.

You see, brokenness is not a one-time thing. You might have noticed in the biblical examples I've illustrated that men like David, Peter and Paul continued to experience being humbled and broken even late into their lives in service to God—well after what we might consider breakthrough experiences of brokenness.

Our flesh has this irritating nature of trying to get back in control of us, even after we have crucified it. Pride, in particular, does not give up easily. If we are not careful, pride will always sneak in and rebuild itself. If left unchecked, it will reform right back to its former glory despite all of the work God has done in our lives previously.

It is for this reason that Jesus has called those who follow Him to deny themselves and pick up their crosses daily (Luke 9:23). To remain broken before God, and thus useful to God, we have to face this struggle

each day anew, choosing humility and obedience to Christ, again and again. God may use any of the tools that He used to break us in the first place once again at any time, and as He knows it to be necessary to do so in order to keep us in this beautiful place of brokenness. And we should thank and praise Him for the loving care He puts into that process. So what is next after brokenness? Continual brokenness.

When the Lord is working greatly in the life of someone, we might think it strange that such a person needs to beware of pride. After all, it is obviously God who is at work and not the person. But do not be fooled, there is great temptation in being “spiritually successful” and used by God.

It is a glorious thing to be used by God in any capacity. In my years in ministry, I have cleaned the bathrooms at the church, worked outside gardening, taught Sunday School to children or adults, and led the youth group, prayer meetings, and worship services. I have worn every hat imaginable in the church, and each of them held their own blessings. There is no kind of ministry that is more important to the Lord than any other ministry, though often we tend to think so, do we not?

We look at the teachers and the worship leaders, and we think that there must be more value in what they do than in what those who clean the church after the service do.

While God values obedience and faithfulness and not positions, men have the tendency to look up to and give praise to those who stand in the spotlight.

And when this happens, pride is lurking around the corner, trying to plant thoughts in our mind that somehow we must be something special for God to choose us to do this ministry. I remember a worship leader once teaching a young group of Bible college students, admonishing them: “Remember that when the people lift their hands in praise, they do so to worship God, not you.”

We see the dangers of unchecked pride everywhere, and people being elevated or elevating themselves in the church all over the world. We cannot think that we are exempt from that just because we once were in a place of brokenness. So sometimes there is perhaps no better place for someone struggling with pride than in a service where he or she receives little praise.

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.
—1 Corinthians 10:12

I remember how in our early years of ministry, my wife Sue and I offered a senior home ministry every Monday. One night, after what I thought was a great message that I had just delivered to the people, a little old lady came up to me and complimented me on the message. She said that she was so blessed by the message because it reminded her of a popular preacher of that day. The thing is, he just so happened to be a false teacher. Talk about being humbled!

Paul's Example of Continual Brokenness

Let us now look at the Apostle Paul, who serves as an example of the ongoing work of God to keep us in a place of brokenness so that our lives may continue to bring honor and glory to Him. Paul was no doubt one of the greatest men of the early church, a key person in bringing the gospel to the nations, and author of the majority of the New Testament.

However, in spite of the powerful ways God used him—or better, because of that—he needed continual breaking to stay humble. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul writes about his experience with a divine revelation he received and what God did next, to prevent pride in him.

It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the

body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

*And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
—2 Corinthians 12:1-10*

Paul rightfully states that not only is it not profitable for him to boast, but he would make himself a fool if he tried to boast in himself for something that God had done. He recognizes that the desire to boast is in him, but he chooses humility.

And God, in His gracious wisdom, knowing the temptation that can come with receiving a glorious revelation, gave Paul the “thorn in the flesh,” to ensure Paul would continue to humbly rely on God’s grace.

We do not know for certain what exactly this thorn was, but it seems likely to have been a physical illness. Regardless, we can trust it was the right tool at the right time for Paul.

Just as a little side note, I would like you to notice the reverence with which Paul speaks of his experience and how he knew that it was not right for him to share all he had seen and heard. What a stark contrast to some of the people who have recently sought publicity with books and movies and speaking events, where they tell all about their so

called “trips to heaven,” some even in such a manner deserving to be called blasphemous. I would encourage you to stay away from such sensationalism and practice discernment when you come across such stories.

It was not like Paul had completely drifted off when God chose to break him again. In fact, as he starts writing about the revelation, he doesn’t even say that it was him who received it at first, which is a sign of humility.

The thorn in the flesh almost seems like a preemptive step from God, before Paul started to exalt himself or be exalted by others. In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul already had to deal with sectarianism in the church, because people were arguing about which apostle or teacher they were following, elevating one or the other in inappropriate ways. Seeing Paul in weakness and suffering also helped them not to idolize him.

In theory, we all know that there is no place for pride or boasting in the life of a servant of Christ. Jesus explained it clearly to His disciples in Luke 10:17: *“So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’”*. And later Paul also would write *“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”* (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Pride does not always go the rational route into our hearts.

If Paul needed to continually be broken, then how much more so do we need it, dear ones? And for this end the part suffering plays in the life of the person who has already experienced brokenness and used by God must be understood.

God uses brokenness to keep the person in a place of usefulness. This may seem strange and unusual until we fully understand the propensity of man (even a man or woman of God).

Man's propensity is to glory in himself, to take some credit for what God has done or is doing in his life. Doing this is pride, it leads to our own demise, and renders us useless to God's kingdom. Even if once we were broken, that propensity will always be there, and we must struggle against it.

We have seen this in chapter three as we looked at the life of King Uzziah, who had a fabulous start as a king who sought God, and was brought to great success by the blessings of the Lord. However, when he was strong and established, he became proud and sinned against God.

Even more so, when a priest corrected him on his sin, Uzziah became furious with this tool God was using. His end was a sad one, as he spent the rest of his days in isolation as a leper. Let this be a sobering reminder that it is not enough to start well. It is not enough to be humbled by God once, but we must continue in humility to be able to finish well, whatever the cost.

On more than one occasion our life as Christians is described as a race that we must run, and we are admonished to keep running in order to finish well. Hebrews 12:1 spurs us to *"run with endurance the race that is set before us."* When Paul had faced all kinds of hardships on his way to Jerusalem, knowing his imprisonment was ahead of him, he still said: *"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God"* (Acts 2:24).

Paul had come to that place where no hardships or his own life mattered, as long as he was able to be faithful to Jesus and finish well. The eternal perspective on things that we have talked about was also what kept Paul going:

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Pride and its sinful companions are trying to get in the way of the believer finishing well.

Remember King David, who needed a lot of work toward brokenness in his life, even after he had already reached this place at times before. While the primary time of breaking in David's life came from his sojourn in the wilderness, pride kept trying to build itself back up in him. It told him that he did not need to go fighting with his army, and that he deserved any woman he wanted. It told him that he needed to know how large his army was, and that he could rely on that information, not on the promises of the Lord.

He needed both the death of his son and the death of seventy-thousand of his people to stay broken and humble before the Lord. Those were hard lessons to learn, but we see the fruit of it in the eternal kingdom God built from his descendant, and the Bible's memory of him as a man after God's own heart.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that it was just because David was a king that he had struggles with pride, or that we will never have the same. Like a mortal disease, pride infects all of us, and we all need to stay broken before the Lord or he will have to put us back in the breaking process to make us fit for proper use once again.

It is my desire for all of us to continue to stay humble before the Lord. Never forget that we are from dust, and that we will return to dust. If we stay humble, the Lord will raise us up and use us for His glory, which is our greatest purpose.

If we allow ourselves to become prideful again, then He will need to break us once again, and out of his gracious love He will keep breaking us as much and as often as is needed. While the process may not be enjoyable—and at times can be agonizing—the consequences of a prideful and sin-filled life are far worse. If we want to continue to be useful for the Lord, we need to remain in this beautiful place of brokenness. Please take some time to ask yourself these important questions:

- Are you allowing pride to take place in your heart once again?
- Are you starting to give up ground that the Holy Spirit fought so ferociously for in years passed?
- Are you in danger of becoming unbroken once again?

Cleave to the Lord, and take hold of His humility once again. Be broken before the Lord to avoid destruction, and to be useful to Him once more.

The Cross, the Holy Spirit, and the Grace of God

We have explored the beauty of brokenness before the Lord and the great blessing that lies in dying to self in order to be useful to the Lord. If you have never been taught these things, or God has just pointed out some serious matters in your life, you might feel overwhelmed by all of this. For this reason, the last chapter of this book will give you encouragement. You are not alone in this process, and God has provided the power you need to do the work He wants to do in your life.

There are three major elements that need to be understood and laid hold of by anyone who dares to follow Jesus with abandonment. They are the cross of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of God. Without these, there is no hope of becoming the man or woman that God will bless through His use. But if we hold on to them, we have everything we need to live a life that pleases God.

The Cross of Christ

The Cross in our day has lost much of its meaning to the typical believer. It has become merely a symbol, a piece of jewelry, something printed on a T-shirt, or a tattoo on one's body. The Cross meant so much more in Jesus' day.

It has been said of Jesus' day that if you saw someone carrying a cross you knew two things for certain. First, they were not coming back. Second, they were going to die the most horrible death known to mankind in that day and age. The Cross of Christ actually represents the ultimate denying of self: dying to self (while the strongest desire of man is for self-preservation). The cross represents God's wrath, stemming from His hatred of sin, being poured out upon His beloved

Son that we may be forgiven. It represents the unfathomable love of God. It is both this cross and its meaning that Christ demands to be taken up by everyone who would choose to be His disciple.

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."
—Luke 9:23-26

Just in case we think that this demand of Christ to die to self is only for a select few, we can read in His address to a multitude of "potential followers":

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish"?

Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. —Luke 14:25-33

Here Jesus demands three things of any and all that would follow Him. First, to love Him supremely. This is the greatest commandment of all. Second, to die to self by taking up the cross. Putting self upon the cross is the only way we can really love Christ supremely, because our natural inclination is to love self above all. Third, to forsake all for the cause of Christ. The cross needs to be applied again, for my nature is to hold onto everything I can get my hands on, and this will cause my life to be fruitless for Christ.

Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. —Mark 4:18-19

This is part of the explanation Jesus gives for His parable of the sower. Do you understand what this means? It may seem easy to believe that we can die to ourselves, love God, and put Him first, but the reality of it is so much more difficult than we could ever know.

In fact, it is so difficult that it is entirely impossible to do without the power of God through us. And even then, our natural instinct is to put ourselves back in front of God. How often do we make God's priorities secondary in our lives? How quick are we to cancel our plans with Him when something "more important" comes up?

Is God the first on our list of priorities, or is there something that holds dominion over Him in our lives?

Make no mistake, even something good can become a sin to us when it takes precedence over God in our lives. What can make you skip church? What can keep you from reading your Bible or praying because you "do not have enough time"? That thing is your idol, and it must be given to God so He can take his rightful place in your life.

Of course, idolatry is putting anything before God in our lives, and it comes from a place of pride. When we put something before God, we are not just saying "this thing is more important than You," but we are

also saying “I have a right to set my own priorities, as the lord of my own life.” How foolish and rebellious we are, to think that after having given our lives to Christ we can take them back.

Did Jesus turn back after feeling the weight of the cross upon His shoulders? How can we attempt to take back the life he purchased with His blood, which we gave to Him of our own free will?

For this reason, the Lord admonishes His hearers to “count the costs.” Following Jesus, really following Him by His definition rather than my own, will cost. It will cost my everything, but when compared to gaining Christ, my everything is nothing. What you must understand is that choosing to either not follow Christ by His definition, or choosing not to follow Him at all, will cost you so much more.

The Apostle Paul had this to say concerning the place the cross is to play in our lives:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” —Galatians 2:20

And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires —Galatians 5:24

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world —Galatians 6:14.

Regarding this last verse you just read, here is something to think about: does the world and all its glamour, glitter, and trappings fascinate you, or can you do without it? Will you take up your cross? Will you deny yourself?

Will you truly put Him first in your life? Will you allow yourself to be broken completely before the Lord of your wills and desires, living only for Him and bearing your burden for Him?

The Power of the Holy Spirit

Any attempt to apply the Cross to your life apart from the power of the Holy Spirit will end in failure, frustration, and religiosity. For if dying to self is not done through the power of the Holy Spirit, it will result in a vain attempt to crucify the flesh by the power of the flesh, and the flesh will never put itself to death.

It was the Holy Spirit that came upon Jesus at His baptism and worked with Him to do all that He did during the three years of ministry. It was the Holy Spirit that came upon the disciples in the Book of Acts and empowered them to do all that was recorded—both the miracles and the life they lived, which was so much different than the life we see them living in the Gospels.

He is the same Holy Spirit that Jesus has promised to every child of God who surrenders himself or herself completely to the Lord, so that His will would be accomplished through them:

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. —Acts 1:8

This promise includes you and me. We also read of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the believer in John 14:26: *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”*

In regards to working the meaning and power of the Cross into our lives:

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba,

Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. —Romans 8:12-17

These verses hold the key to putting the self to death. It is only through and by the power of the Holy Spirit that the meaning and power of the cross can be correctly applied to our lives so we can lead a life well pleasing to God. It is important for us to understand the position and place of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is not there for us to “use Him” to our liking, no more than Jesus is.

The Holy Spirit is God, and we need to look at Him as such.

As we are called to surrender our lives to Jesus unconditionally, so are we to surrender ourselves completely to the Holy Spirit and His guidance.

I love the story Alan Redpath gave at a pastor’s conference many years ago about him and his two daughters. Alan was in his study one evening preparing for his Sunday message when his older daughter of eight years old entered the room and climbed up on his lap.

Soon afterward, her younger sister of four years old entered the room and came over to her father and sister. As older siblings have a tendency to do, the older sister looked down upon her younger sister as she wrapped her arms around daddy’s neck and said: “I have all there is to have of Daddy and you can not have any.”

At this, the younger sister’s bottom lip puffed out and tears formed in her eyes. Alan reached down and picked up her younger daughter and engulfed her with his arm as she sat upon his knee. The younger sister looked at her older sister and said, “You might have all there is to have of Daddy, but Daddy has all there is to have of me.”

This really illustrates my point well: it is not how much of the Holy Spirit you have, it is how much the Holy Spirit has of you. If you have

been saved, then the Holy Spirit dwells within you, but the level to which He can work within you depends entirely on how much you allow Him to work in your life.

The more we pray to God for the Holy Spirit, and ask the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, guide us, and work through us, the more He can and will change us. The more we turn away from sin, choosing purity and obedience instead, the more space we give Him in our lives. The goal is complete and total surrender, becoming perfect tools to be used by the Holy Spirit exactly as He wishes.

Have you surrendered your entire self to Him? For Him to do all that He desires in and through your life? Quit resisting, surrender yourself now completely to Him, and repeat that surrender every day.

The Grace of God

Grace is God's unmerited favor, which serves many purposes in the life of the follower of Jesus Christ.

We are saved by God's grace: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).*

We are dependent on God's grace: *Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:43).*

God's grace works in the ministry: *From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed (Acts 14:26).*

God's grace propels us to stand and rejoice, praising God in His joy and peace regardless of our circumstances: *Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:2).*

God's grace provides and enables humility: *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith (Romans 12:3).*

God's grace empowers us to speak boldly and be a servant: *Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:15-16).*

God's grace equips and strengthens us to labor and build up others for Christ: *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it (1 Corinthians 3:9-10).*

God's grace helps us realize that anything good in our lives is only because of the grace of God. *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me (1 Corinthians 15:10).*

God's grace empowers us to be a minister and proclaimer of the Gospel: *That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power (Ephesians 3:6-7).*

God's grace helps us to bear fruit: *Which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth. (Colossians 1:6).*

God's grace helps us to be saved and live life accordingly. *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13).*

God's grace helps us to testify and to stand firm in the faith: *By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand (1 Peter 5:12).*

God's grace helps during our suffering. As God works in our life, through discipline and chastening there are times of suffering and it is the grace of God that will enable us to go through it and maintain the proper perspective: *And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

Pray for more grace from the Lord every day. He wants to give you the grace to live in righteousness before Him each day of your life. He wants to give you the grace to forgive your enemies. He wants to give you the grace to turn from sin. He wants to give you the grace you need for every moment of your life, and all that you need to do is ask.

Every day, when you wake up, pray for grace sufficient for that day. Pray that the Lord would be your strength, and guide you through the trials and tribulations of the day. Every moment that we spend apart from the grace of the Lord is a moment wasted, in which we are living in our own flesh rather than God's will.

And of course, pray for God's grace to be broken before Him, and to stay broken before Him. We cannot break ourselves, as we have already discussed. God must do it, and it is His grace within us that works a part in it, providing us the strength to become broken before Him. Equally important, he provides daily grace to stay broken. Without that grace, we could never do so, and would quickly return to our regular pride-filled state. With a daily supply of His grace, not only is it possible for us to stay broken, but it is guaranteed by the Lord Himself.

This is the end of the matter: Pick up your cross, allow the Holy Spirit to guide you, and rest in the grace of the Lord. If you do these things daily, then you will continue in brokenness and humility for the rest of your life, and God will use you mightily.

| Closing |

It is my profound hope and prayer for you, dear one, that as you have made it this far through this book, you will realize your need to surrender yourself completely, without reservation, and unconditionally to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ask Him to do whatever is necessary in your life. I hope that you will no longer be conformed to this world, but rather be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That your life may prove—through how you now live it in Christ—what is good and acceptable, according to the Lord's will.

There is nothing to be feared in choosing the life of abandonment to Christ.

The life that He has planned for us is infinitely more worthwhile than the life we could scrape out for ourselves. But there is a great deal to be feared by not giving our lives to Him, as he who seeks to save his life will lose it, but he who seeks to lose his life for Jesus and His Word will find it.

Turn to the Lord right now in prayer and offer yourself to Him as a living sacrifice. Give no conditions or exceptions to your surrender to Him.

Simply say, *“Lord Jesus, here is my life, all of my life, and everything that has to do with my life: my past, present, and future. Take it and do with it whatever you want. Fill me with Your Spirit, change me, break me, and mold me so that you may be glorified in this life that is now no longer mine, but Yours.”*

Amen.

THE BEAUTY OF BROKENNESS

| About the Author |

In 1982, Pastor Drew Macintyre, became senior pastor of Calvary Chapel of Alpine. In 1986, along with pastoring CCOA, he began a ministry known as IBSLA (Inductive Bible Studies to Latin America) whose focus was on training pastors in Latin America the Inductive Bible Study Method. As the Lord broadened the scope and vision of this ministry, it took on a new name to better describe the scope and vision. Thus, The Word to the World (TWTW) was born.

As founder and director of TWTW, Pastor Drew has been traveling around the world to train thousands of pastors on how to study their Bibles through the Inductive Bible Study method (IBS). This Bible study method allows local pastors to learn to study the Bible themselves so they can fulfill the great commission and feed their flock, as seen in 1 Peter 5:1-4.

TWTW has also been actively involved in building pastoral training centers in Cuba, Uganda and Myanmar. TWTW also leads medical missions trips several times annually to Cambodia and Uganda and other parts of the world.

Pastor Drew also conducts a two-year discipleship program, during which students also learn the IBS Bible study method and read many classic Christian authors. They are challenged to learn to deny themselves, to really follow Jesus and go and disciple others.

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