

## BROKENNESS AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Text: Psalm 66:10-12, Genesis 25:22

Chapel, September 13, 2000

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*And she [Rebekah] said, "If all is well, why am I like this?" (Gen. 25:22)*

*For you, O God, have tested us. You refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net. You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads. We went through fire and through water, but you brought us out to rich fulfillment. (Psalm 66:10-12)*

### Introduction

1. I have been thinking recently about the relationship between brokenness, suffering, and the Christian life.
  - a. In several ways, this summer has been an outstanding one for me. I taught an intensive one week course in the Master of Ministry program. Anne and I traveled with a group of MVNC friends and alumni to Europe to attend the Year 2000 presentation of the Oberammergau, Germany, Passion Play. I participated in an international conference for Nazarene educators in Johannesburg, South Africa.
  - b. In several other ways, this summer has been "heavy" as I have tried to share the pain, suffering, and brokenness of spirit with our campus community.
    - 1) Many of you know that Luke Skon, the 9-year-old son of MVNC faculty members, Dr. and Mrs. Jim Skon, underwent critical surgery this summer at Johns Hopkins Hospital to try to correct a very severe curvature of his spine that is life-threatening. I spent the June day of surgery with the Skon family in Baltimore.

- 2) Anne and I have spent choice time with Dr. Bruce and Jackie Petersen this summer as Jackie is undergoing chemotherapy treatments for cancer.
  - 3) Many of us in the MVNC family shared with Mike Cunningham in the passing of his father.
  - 4) Professor Strayer's baby daughter has recently been diagnosed with leukemia.
  - 5) And I have talked at length with some students who are dealing with "heavy" personal issues.
- c. Anne and I have also been preoccupied this summer with a family in Pennsylvania—friends of ours dating back twenty-five years. We received an early Monday morning (3:00 a.m.) phone call in June from Kathy, who with her husband, Tom, have been long-time friends of ours. Kathy told us, "Tom had a massive heart attack last night and died several hours later." Tom was 57 years old. Their teenage daughter was on the phone with Kathy. We talked and prayed with each of them. Anne and I try to contact Kathy every week.
2. It is one thing to sing on Sunday, "It is Well With My Soul."
    - a. But what a shock to return home after a Sunday evening service to find your companion lifeless from a heart attack?
    - b. Doesn't Rebekah's words regarding the twins she was carrying come to mind? "If all is well, why am I like this?"
    - c. Modern day versions could be:

If I have faith in You, why is this happening to me? Or,

If I am living for You, why am I having so many problems?

- 1) How can we live as Christians through these times of pain, suffering, disappointment, illness, or death of a loved one? What about other times when we feel abused, manipulated, undermined, and ignored?
  - 2) What about the inner turmoil that is experienced by some MVNC students as they seek to make the transition from home to college, and from high school familiarity to the uncertainty and even loneliness of a college campus where they know very few classmates?
  - 3) And why does God permit some words to be spoken or deeds done against us by family members, so-called friends, fellow employees or employers?
3. Back to the burning question within me:
- What is the relationship between brokenness, suffering, and living the Christian life?

Let me share two biblical insights I have received this summer about the question.

**I. Insight #1: Brokenness can draw us closer to God.**

*Psalms 51:16-17 tells us that A broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart is the sacrifice to God that He desires from us.*

- A. Brokenness is one of those things that is easier to recognize when it is experienced, but often difficult to describe.

1. Yet we know some contributors to a broken spirit—circumstances overwhelm us; suffering overtakes us; personal sin defeats us; words spoken that cut us and deeds done that hurt us; so-called friends use and abuse us; family members misunderstand us.
  2. God uses our brokenness of spirit to get our attention, wherever we happen to be in our walk with Him.
  3. In these times of brokenness, God teaches us lessons, painful as they may be, about others, ourselves, and Him that we need to learn in order for us to grow and mature in our faith.
- B. In the book, *Broken in the Right Place: How God Tames the Soul*, the author makes some powerful statements regarding brokenness:
1. “Brokenness purifies our ambitions.”
  2. “Brokenness allows us to see our own blind spots. We cast stones at others,” he says, “out of our blind spots.”
  3. He quotes Korean pastor Paul Cho, “I’ve yet to see a leader God has used tremendously who has not been broken.”
- C. As strong as we think we are, with a brokenness of spirit we recognize how weak we really are, and how much we need our heavenly Father if we are to live in the way He wants us to live.
1. In these moments, we are driven to our knees with the words of II Corinthians 12:9: “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*”
  2. The contemporary song reminds us of the truth of this passage.

*His strength is perfect when our strength is gone,  
He'll carry us when we can't carry on,  
Raised in His power, the weak become strong,  
His strength is perfect, His strength is perfect.*

3. Upper class students have fond memories of Lora Hernandez and Lisa Roberts. Lora and Lisa were killed in Columbus three hours following the 1999 Baccalaureate Service. I was surprised to see Lora's mother, Jan, several weeks ago at the viewing of Mike Cunningham's father. Listen to the e-mail message Jan wrote near the end of her recent visit to Columbus and Mount Vernon.

*This is a difficult email to write--I don't know how to capture everything I saw, felt, and heard during my visit with Iva Jane Morris, Lora's heart recipient. God blessed us both so much on my one day visit yesterday with her. I barely know how to start.*

*First of all, Iva Jane has become a Christian within the last couple of years, so she is a "newbie" to the faith (and VERY eager to learn all she can about the Lord Jesus and the Bible)...*

*Iva's youngest son took our picture together for me. While I was sitting next to Iva on the couch, she suddenly pulled my head down to her chest to listen to the heart---I started bawling... Iva started crying... Dino said, "Does that heartbeat sound familiar?" I looked up and he was crying too.*

*Later that night, Iva's sister Debbie came over--and I told them the story of "that day"--of how I heard about the accident, of getting to the airport and calling the hospital only to hear she hadn't made it, of seeing her at Grant Medical Center, of making the decision alone to donate Lora's organs--we were all weeping--but after getting the worst said, Debbie and Iva were able to tell me about how the whole family had grieved for the one who gave Iva her new heart. Apparently, Iva's doctors told her she wouldn't have made it more than 2 or 3 months more without a transplant.*

*On the drive home this morning, I kept thinking about how Lora must love it that someone with very limited finances was able to get her heart. I kept thinking about how she reached out to those in need whenever she could. I thought about the fact that Iva and Debbie both are new Christians, and when they discovered (during our long visit last night) that I'm knowledgeable and able to teach them about the Lord they were as excited as little children...*

*As I drove along, I KNOW that I heard Lora saying to me, "Mom--I gave her MY heart--now you give her YOURS." I plan to do just that.*

- a. Jan could have responded like Rebekah in Genesis 25:22 in crying out to God, “If all is well with my soul, then why did this happen to my daughter whom I loved so very much?”
- b. But Jan is responding to God’s faithful work in her life. He is patiently, but surely, teaching her the power of the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi—a prayer that also embodies the brokenness in Psalm 66.

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pard’ning that we are pardoned;  
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

- D. Remember, brokenness of spirit—a recognition of utter dependence on God—draws us closer to Him.

## **II. Biblical insight #2: Our brokenness can develop Christ-like character qualities in us.**

- A. The paragraph heading for Philippians 2:1-11 is “Imitating Christ’s Humility.”

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

- B. God's process of helping us develop character involves being broken before Him. (I Peter 1:5-9) *For this reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.*
1. Sounds like Ephesians 4:1, 2: *I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love.*
  2. Brokenness of spirit can produce in us Christlike character qualities, especially the character quality of humility.
  3. Humility is another word difficult to define but necessary for effective Christian living.
- C. In biblical perspective, humility is a prerequisite to the things we, as Christians, seek most in our lives.
1. Humility exudes an attitude of service.
  2. Humility forgives when offended, but is hard to offend.
  3. Humility produces a teachable spirit.
  4. Humility is gracious and thankful. In fact, one of the most Godlike attributes we can express is a gracious spirit—a spirit of mercy and thanksgiving.

5. Humble servants overcome evil with good.
- D. We can respond in one of two ways to the brokenness in our lives.
1. We can resent the situation, person, circumstance, or God, and grow bitter, become angry, withdraw, and give up.
  2. Or, we can go to our knees to ask God what He is wanting to teach us through the “dark night of the soul,” things we need to know about ourselves and Him if we are to grow and mature in the faith and our calling.
    - a. What really hurts is that God sometimes uses people who are different from us, often people with whom we have problems, to teach us these lessons we need to know about ourselves.
    - b. Satan often pounds us at our weak points, creates doubt within us, and raises questions within us regarding God’s grace in our lives.
    - c. And, we sometimes experience the “silence of God” when our family members or close friends are suffering.
- E. In these times, we need to remember the text: *For you, O God, have tested us. You refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net. You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads. We went through fire and through water, but you brought us out to rich fulfillment.*

This kind of living and dying is only possible by grace alone.

*Grace alone, which God supplies,  
Strength unknown, He will provide.  
Christ in us, our cornerstone;  
We will go forth in grace alone.*

## F. Remember:

1. God uses brokenness to draw us closer to Himself.
2. Our brokenness can develop Christ-like character qualities in us.

**Conclusion**

1. In conclusion, let's return to Wesley's Covenant Prayer.
2. Did you hear the descriptors of a broken heart in the Covenant Prayer?
  - ✓ suffering
  - ✓ laid aside for you
  - ✓ brought low by you
  - ✓ have nothing
  - ✓ I yield to your disposal
3. At the beginning of a new school year, let's renew this covenant—this promise with God and before God.
  - a. Never forget, we renew this covenant with the God who has made an everlasting covenant with us—a promise never to leave us or forsake us!
  - b. At the end of the prayer, please affirm a second “Amen” with me if indeed you have made this covenant prayer your own.
4. Please stand. (Re-read prayer--# 484)

*I am no longer my own, but Yours.*

*Put me to what You will,*

*Rank me with whom You will.*

*Put me to doing, put me to suffering.*

*Let me be employed by You or laid aside for You.*

*Exalted for You or brought low by You.*

*Let me have all things, let me have nothing.*

*I freely and heartily yield all things to Your pleasure and disposal.*

*And now, O glorious and blessed God,*

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,*

*You are mine, and I am Yours.*

*So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.*

5. Closing chorus: *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*