

Brokenness[™]

**There is a holy purpose in
breaking things and being broken.**

**Our loving Father uses the breaking
process and what is broken
to transform, strengthen and bless.**

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INTRODUCTION

“Some years ago... I heard an earnest young believer pray, ‘Lord, break me!’
The request jarred me. Up to that time in my life, I had never prayed that prayer.

And I wasn’t sure I was ready to pray it even then.

But those words, flowing hissing hot from the heart of that young disciple,
awakened me to the tremendous need of brokenness in my own life.

They created an awareness that this was a fantastically vital area in the spiritual realm.
And now they have become the constant prayer of an aspiring heart: ‘Lord, break me!’.”

- William MacDonald

If we find out something is broken, we take it back to the shop. We want it changed for a ‘good one.’ We associate ‘broken’ and ‘brokenness’ with disadvantage, frailty, weakness, imperfection, deficiency, even failure. But God values brokenness.

Our society rewards the self confident, the assertive, and the dominant. But our God is attracted to and blesses the weak, the broken-hearted, the humble in spirit. Employers and work agencies seek and recruit the visionary, the goal setters and the driven. But the Lord of the universe seeks and recruits those who, because something ‘broke’ inside them, are now aware of the shallowness and futility of their own dreams, are painfully persuaded of their own sinfulness, weakness or inadequacy. Their breaking experience has slowed them down to the point where they are willing to take the time to listen, to follow, to obey.

Action and faithfulness are important and necessary Christian qualities. But it is brokenness that renders both useful. There are those lovely Christians who suggest we should dream big, plan carefully and work hard – without forgetting to ask the Lord to bless our project. There are also those lovely Christians who suggest we should read more, stand firm and change nothing – without forgetting to thank the Lord for peace and comfortableness. Those who have not been broken will hold on to their own noble plans. Their sense of success depends on productivity - or at least some good statistics. Those who have not been broken will fight to remain in to their comfort zone. Their sense of success depends on feeling they are faithful, that they hold ‘the truth’ - or at least some evidence to show that they have not changed. We are all like wild horses. Our usefulness to our Owner requires that something break within us.

Scriptures contain examples of our loving Father breaking controlling ambitions, misplaced affections, unhealthy dependencies and strong wills. Sometimes He breaks something we cherish in order to break a harmful dependence or expose a sinful behaviour. Other times we are called to do the breaking ourselves. We also find in the Bible a number of interesting pictures or figures that illustrate how our loving Father breaks and uses what is broken to achieve His good and perfect purposes.

PERSONAL FOREWORD

As we look back on life's journey, we see a number of mile-stones. Sometimes these milestones point to new insights, satisfying achievements and joyful moments. But there are also those mile-stones with blood on them, where the Lord has broken something we valued and in doing so has broken something within us. When I look back, five such milestones come easily to my mind.

(1) In 1984, as a university student in London, I felt the Lord calling me to the mission field. I was willing to go, but under certain conditions. After a painful struggle, the Lord changed my heart. He made me willing to go without placing conditions. Something broke. There is no such thing as surrender without brokenness. After years of preparation, we resigned secular employment and left for Colombia in 1992.

(2) In 2003 an international division polarized the Christian congregations we were seeking to serve in Colombia. I became disillusioned with brothers I used to value and respect. It was my first close encounter with religious politics. It destroyed my 'romantic' or 'idealistic' view of Christian fellowship. A comfortable and supportive network was broken. I could no longer lean on it. I felt unprotected, lost and lonely. That painful breaking process exposed a weakness in my heart: I wanted to serve the Lord and depend only on Him, I thought I was, but through this painful crisis I discovered that my heart was not really true to that goal. Unconsciously I was relying 'on flesh.' Again and again we must learn what Jeremiah affirmed: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength... But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him" (Jer. 17:5-7).

(3) In 2007 we moved from Colombia to Holland. During some 15 years we had served the Lord as full time missionaries in Colombia. We had given ourselves completely and with all our heart to the task of evangelism, Bible teaching, coaching, training leadership, counselling, problem solving and helping in the formation of new Christian assemblies. The unsettling time came to 'let go' of the work and say goodbye to our Colombian friends. Then followed the re-entry challenge. We discovered that it is easier to go to the mission field than it is to return. We no longer felt useful. We no longer felt needed. We no longer felt productive. We knew that our self-worth does not depend on what we can do but on who we are – children of God. And yet, the transition was so painful. As our external sources of 'worth' broke, we discovered that our sense of self-worth was not so Christ centred as we had thought.

(4) At the beginning of 2009 my dear wife experienced a burnout. My enthusiastic partner in life's adventures simply stopped. "I just cannot go on any more," she said. A few weeks rest did not help. I began to cancel ministry commitments and travel arrangements to provide more support to my wife and four children at home. What is the Lord doing with us? When some things break, we have no alternative but to stop! During the months that followed, my Scripture meditations focussed often on broken things and 'Brokenness.' I noticed that our loving Father breaks and uses what is broken to achieve His good and perfect purposes. Most of what you are about to read I wrote during that time - about a year ago.

(5) On Tuesday, 20 April 2010, our 15 year old son underwent complex heart surgery. His heart was opened and reconstructed. His recovery has not gone as smoothly as expected. There have been frustrating setbacks and complications. I write this preface as I sit next to his bed in the Intensive Care unit, where he has been for over 5 weeks. A few days ago I read and reflected on my draft notes on 'Brokenness' and realized again that the Lord is busy in my heart, breaking something.

Perhaps now is the right time to organize these draft thoughts and make them available to you and others. I share them from a context of weakness and reflexion, as one who is still chewing on them and trying to swallow and digest. It is good to know that it is our loving and gracious heavenly Father who places the milestones along our life's journey.

Although our son is slowly improving, he continues to be fed through a pipe through his nose. He receives food slowly usually during the night, between 8pm and 4am. We were told that he is fed slowly so that the stomach can better assimilate the nutrients. I have arranged these thoughts in 8 short chapters. You will probably benefit more from them if you read them over a couple of days, taking time between chapters to add, dismiss, chew, swallow and digest. Perhaps the Lord has also something to say to *you*.

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Broken in order to Transform

“Anyone who serves God will discover sooner or later
that the great hindrance to his work is not others but himself.”

- Watchman Nee

“God creates out of nothing.
Therefore until a man is nothing,
God can make nothing out of him.”

- Martin Luther

“I had to be healed of my desire to be healed.”

- Joni Eareckson Tada

Evidences of transformation

We feel often attracted to the spontaneity, sincerity and energetic enthusiasm of the apostle Peter. From the beginning the Lord had great plans for his life but to reach them, Peter had to be broken. Notice Peter's change from a young energetic disciple who followed Jesus in Judea, to a more Christ-like Peter that writes his first letter three decades later. The impulsive Peter now encourages believers to be sober and self-controlled (1:13), the one who argued about who was the greatest, now urges others to “live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble” (3:8) and “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand” (5:6). The one who was somewhat independent and rebellious, now urges others to “submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men” (2:13). The one who carried a sword and used it, now says “do not repay evil with evil... but with blessing” (3:9) and “show proper respect to everyone” and encourages others to act with “gentleness and respect” (2:17; 3:15). The one who when afraid or frustrated would swear and curse, now encourages careful talk (2:1). The one who was afraid and ashamed of being identified with Jesus, the one who denied the Lord in order to avoid suffering, now says “rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ... if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed” (4:13,16). The self-confident “yes, I can!” man, now encourages others not to rely on their own soul power but to operate “with the strength God provides” (4:11). Peter's transformation is undeniable. But how did the Lord achieve this?

Breaking confidence in talents and skills

When the Lord first called Peter, He challenged and broke Peter's professional pride. He had been fishing all night and caught nothing. But after following Jesus' instructions they rapidly filled two boats with fish. What did this do to Peter's strong and carefully cultivated “Yes, I can!” image? Peter's strange reaction suggests that something inside him had begun to break. He did not say “Thank you, Jesus, for blessing my fishing trip.” He looked at Jesus and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (Lk. 5:8). Later Peter's creative suggestion on the mount of transfiguration was rapidly

dismissed. His various attempts to defend the Lord were ineffective, in fact, on one occasion, after the Lord Jesus listened privately to Peter's well thought-out strategy to advance the kingdom, He turned to Peter and said: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Matt. 16:33). Can you imagine how such words must have cut through Peter? What those words must have done to his visionary leadership skills? One day, Peter disagreed with what the Lord Jesus was doing. "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Peter's strong ideas were getting in the way of the Master's plans. Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me" (Jn. 13:8). He was offered no room for negotiation. Peter's well-intended strong will had to break.

Breaking confidence in will power

Hours before Jesus was crucified, Peter was afraid and denied his Lord three times. When he became aware of what he had done, something inside him broke. He became deeply disappointed with himself. He had thought he was stronger. It hurt. "And he went outside and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62). The resurrected Christ met Peter and wanted to restore him and entrust him with the care of His sheep. He looked at Peter in the eye and asked: "Do you truly love me?" The answer was a genuine and nearly automatic: "Yes, Lord." But when he was asked the same question for the third time, something inside Peter broke. It hurt. He replied, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you" (Jn. 21:17). As we look into the book Acts and Paul's letters, we see that this painful breaking process continued. Peter is threatened (Acts 4:21), flogged (Acts 5:40), chained and imprisoned (Acts 12:3-5). The apostle Paul publically opposed and corrected him (Gal. 2:11). What do you think that did to Peter's ego as a respected church leader? All these painful events, and I am sure there were many more, were used by the loving Lord to transform Peter, to turn him from a normal fisherman into a fisher of men, and then into a gentle shepherd of men. Do you sense the Lord is breaking something in your life? How are you responding?

Scriptures describe many more situations where men and women of God are broken by Him. Sometimes the breaking is short lived. Sometimes our brokenness is to remain with us. Rather than healing, rather than mending, rather than fixing or repairing, our Lord may choose to keep us in a broken condition. The reality of His work is magnified when it comes through broken vessels.

Broken in order to Use

“When I invited Jesus into my life,
I thought He was going to put up some wallpaper and hang a few pictures.
But He started *knocking out walls* and adding on rooms.
I said, ‘I was expecting a nice cottage.’
But He said, ‘I’m making a palace in which to live.’”
- C.S. Lewis

“It is doubtful whether God can greatly use a man
until He has deeply hurt him.”
- A.W. Tozer

In Scripture we find a number of examples of men and women that were broken in order to correct, humble or purify their motives, to make them more Christ-like or more useful in the Lord’s hands. Sometimes the breaking is an event; more commonly it is a series of events, a breaking process. Sometimes a particular breaking experience is stopped, sometimes it is healed, but sometimes what was broken must remain broken. It is the Lord who determines what we need in order to grow, to deepen, to mature. Our wills, our self-confidence, our affections, our dreams... they all require breaking and re-breaking, so that increasingly the Sovereign Lord may have His rightful place in our heart and lives. Consider the following real-life examples:

Abraham

After years of waiting, Abraham and Sarah at last had their own son. They were both very old and delighted. God’s promise and their dreams had at last reached fulfilment. Then God said to Abraham, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love... Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering” (Gen. 22:2). The Lord wanted to break and purify Abraham’s affections. Do your affections need purifying? Do you have a dream or a hope that needs breaking?

Hanna

She also deeply longed for a child, but she was barren, “the Lord had closed her womb” (1 Sam. 1:5). During those painful years of hoping, praying and weeping, the Lord broke something in her heart. What mother would be willing to distance herself from her young son? What mother would be prepared to hand over her young boy for a life of service in the temple? The temple was no safe place. The ark was a dangerous box (1 Sam. 6:19). Eli’s son’s were there and they were immoral and “wicked men” (1 Sam. 2:12; 22). Because the Lord had broken something inside her, she was happy to hand over her cute little boy. She said to Eli: “So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he shall be given over to the LORD” (1 Sam. 1:28). Did she change her mind later? To remain happy, she had to remain broken.

Moses

He was educated at the best of Egypt's universities. He was trained by Pharaoh's staff in political science, conflict management, negotiating skills, warfare, the setting and implementing of macro-goals, and more. But before God could use him, the Lord arranged for Moses to spend 40 years in the desert, caring for dumb sheep. Can you imagine what this would do to an ambitious educated intellectual? It would break him. It did. We later read that, "Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). It worked! But to remain humble, he had to remain broken.

Paul

From his youth he was a theological high flyer. He knew well the Scriptures, he was trained by prestigious professors, he had good contacts among the religious elite in Jerusalem, he was disciplined, he was an action man and he sincerely wanted to please God. God loved him and desired to use him. But he first had to be broken. He started by publically knocking him to the ground. He was then forced to wait, blind, for a low profile Ananias to give him the Lord's instructions. Then the Lord ensured that he would spend a few years in Arabia, away from activities, mission and service, away from ministry and the public eye, away from the opinions, expectations and congratulations of others. During those painful years of loneliness something broke. Later he writes, "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8). Status no longer had a hold on him. Paul's life of service was riddled with breaking experiences. Sometimes he felt he could no longer continue and pleaded with the Lord to take the problem away. The Lord did not do what Paul prayed for. Instead He answered, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." On reflexion Paul concluded: "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10). To remain strong, he had to remain broken.

Broken in order to Purify

“I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God’s law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts...

We must be emptied before we can be filled.”

- D.L Moody

“In all areas of our life the Lord wants us to be broken.

He will wrestle with us as He wrestled with Jacob at Peniel.

He will try to break us of pride, of self-will, of an unforgiving spirit, of stubbornness, of gossip, of backbiting, of worldliness, of impurity, of temper, of every work of the flesh...

He will wrestle with us till the breaking of the day and put our thigh out of joint.

Then we will go through the rest of our life with the limp of a broken man whom God can use.”

- William MacDonald

There are various reasons why God breaks, allows or commands things to be broken. Sometimes this breaking is in order to protect His people, at other times it is as a sign of judgement and punishment. Consider the following three Old Testament examples.

(a) Break bad things – altars and idols

As the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the Lord was concerned that their hearts would not be turned from following Him to serve other gods. His command was clear and radical: “Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession” (Deut. 7:4-6). We also, as holy people, are called to destroy that which is bad and wicked. We are called to be radical in our treatment of sin and what is evil. In explaining how we should deal with sin, the Lord Jesus painted a very radical picture: “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away” (Matt. 5:29-30). Do you still play with what you know is sin? Break it! Throw it away! Be radical!

(b) Break wrongly used good things – the bronze snake

Venomous snakes were destroying the people of God. In response to their repentance and the intercessory prayer of Moses, the Lord said, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live” (Num. 21:6-9). Moses obeyed and those who believed and looked on the bronze snake were saved. The bronze snake was a God-given solution. Many of the Israelites looked at the bronze snake and were healed. They were thankful to the Lord and His provision. But in appreciating and

respecting God's chosen symbolic instrument, they went too far. Later they gave the bronze snake a name. They attributed special powers to it. Their eyes and hearts became attached to the method, the secondary, the external. Years later, King Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord: "He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it" (2 Kings 18:3-4).

We can wrongly use God-given good things. In His kindness, the Lord can provide us with needed employment. But in time our job not only provides for our needs, but it has become the source of our self-worth and security. We may be blessed with a loving partner and wonderful children. But in time we can become more concerned about pleasing them than the Lord who gave them. We may be blessed with an invigorating sport or an interesting hobby. But in time our priorities change and they begin to master us. Even correct and good God-given things like your effective ministry, your favourite hymn book, that helpful Bible teacher or your own knowledge of Scripture can become damaging both to yourself and to others. Unless we soon repent and put these gifts back in their proper place, the Lord will work at 'breaking' those wrongly used good things.

(c) Break contaminated good things – clay cooking pots

Like all people groups, the Israelites had their own favourite dishes. To prepare them, kitchen utensils were good and necessary. In order to protect the health of the nation, the Lord gave them instructions on what they could and could not eat. If any part of a dead unclean animal, like a rat or a chameleon, touched a clay pot in their kitchen, the pot had to be destroyed. He said, "Anything that one of their carcasses falls on becomes unclean; an oven or cooking pot must be broken up. They are unclean, and you are to regard them as unclean" (Lev. 11:35). Similarly, if a sick person entered their kitchen: "A clay pot that the man touches must be broken..." (Lev. 15:11-12). These are part of a set of simple and effective hygiene rules, practices that would stop the spread of a possible disease. Can we draw some lessons for today?

Moral infection advances quietly, like cancer among body cells. Romantic love is good and God-given, but if we direct it towards an unbeliever or towards someone other than our marriage partner, it becomes contaminated love. That "clay pot," those day-dreams, that relationship must be recognized as sin and it must be broken (Col. 3:5). God made us social beings and we need friends. But some friendships are not good for us, they infect and downgrade our passion for Christ (1 Cor.15:33). A healthy view of self can be perverted by pride, envy or self pity (Rom. 12:3). Our thought patterns, our values, our tastes, our sense of right and wrong can become corrupted. We can become 'religious.' We can become 'worldly.' We are to identify what has become defiled and smash it. Our contaminated 'clay pots' are broken as we (a) submit to Christ, (b) consciously reject what we know is wrong and (c) choose to believe, to obey and live in line with the principles laid out in God's Word. Is there an area in your life that has become defiled? Is there a contaminated 'clay pot' hiding in your kitchen that should be broken?

Broken in order to Expose

“The plowed life is the life that has, in the act of repentance,
thrown down the protecting fences and sent the plow of confession into the soul.
The urge of the Spirit, the pressure of circumstances and the distress of fruitless living
have combined thoroughly to humble the heart.

Such a life has put away defence,
and has forsaken the safety of death for the peril of life.”

- A W Tozer

“A true worshiping life is a life of brokenness and contrition,
a life that sees sin and confesses continually.”

- John MacArthur

Our wrong beliefs hinder what the Lord would like to do with us. Our holding fast on to dreams and the illusory, rock us to sleep or drive us to chase after worthless goals. In order to awaken us, to stop us and set our feet firmly on solid ground, the Lord may choose to break something. By breaking what we lean on, He breaks our misplaced confidence.

(a) Broken city walls expose false security

It became natural to build walls around cities to protect families against wild animals, thieves and enemies. With thick walls, sentinels and closed gates, those inside felt secure and could sleep at peace. We humans long for peace and security. We also build protective walls. Nehemiah wept when he heard that “the wall of Jerusalem is broken down.” Without those walls, the nation lacked something vital. “Come” he said, “let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace” (Neh. 1:3, 2:17). Peace and security are good and necessary. What God opposes is false peace and false security. We may sleep at peace because we have surrounded ourselves with health insurance policies, with good investments, long term contracts or with loving and influential friends. Our self-made walls do not allow us to see danger, to see life as it really is. We are content as long as we *feel* secure. The Lord sometimes breaks that which makes us *feel* secure to expose our precarious condition. Without this breaking we shall never hunger for reality.

Tyre was a secure and prosperous city, surrounded by walls and towers. They relied on their walls and towers and not on the Lord. They offended the Lord and He set out to expose their weakness: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring many nations against you, like the sea casting up its waves. They will destroy the walls of Tyre and pull down her towers... Your walls will tremble at the noise of the war horses, wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city whose walls have been broken through.” (Ezek. 26:3-4,10). Bankruptcy, unemployment, divorce, unexpected tumours and cancer, death of loved ones, church divisions and the like, are used by the Lord to break down our walls, to expose false

peace and false security. Why? As long as our own walls stand, we do not feel the need to fully trust the Lord. Like Jerusalem in Zechariah's vision. Because it no longer had a wall, the Lord himself was needed: "I myself will be a wall of fire around it" (Zech. 2:5). What causes you to feel secure and at peace? Isaiah thanked the Lord for His faithful promise: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you" (Is. 26:3). Is our confidence really rooted in Him?

(b) Broken bows expose weakness

The "sword and bow," weapons for close and distant warfare, represented military strength and power. Jacob gave his son Joseph some "land I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow" (Gen. 48:22). Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar, the father of the Arab race, is the first in the Bible to be called an archer (Gen. 21:20). He was strong. The Bible contains a number of stories where God leads to victory while making use of man's sword and bow. But frequently, the credit for such victories was taken by the holder of the weapon rather than given to the Lord. The Lord may choose to use our talents, abilities and skills, but how easy it is for us to seek to take the credit. Experience is useful and yet so dangerous. We have done it well before, so we expect to be successful again. Of course we want the Lord to bless our efforts, but unconsciously we believe we can do it without Him.

The Lord used Joshua in many battles as the nation of Israel took possession of the Promised Land. Many Israelite warriors must have felt quite satisfied with their own military achievements. Towards the end of his life, Joshua felt it necessary to remind them of some historical facts: "The citizens of Jericho fought against you... but I [God] gave them into your hands. I sent the hornet [wasps] ahead of you, which drove them out before you, also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow" (Josh. 24:11-12). The credit should, in a real way, be given to the Lord. When this does not happen, the Lord sometimes chooses to "break the bow" (Hosea 1:5-7). He breaks that which feeds and bolsters our self-confidence. He breaks what we consider to be the tool of our success. The exposure of our own weakness can be very painful, but as long as our bow provides visible results, we hold on to it with both hands. The Lord knows that something has to break. It may take time, but it will happen. The apostle Paul, a hard-working and intelligent communicator, learned that success did not depend on his talents. He was only a channel, a willing instrument, a clean tube, through which Christ could bless others (Rom. 15:18; 2 Tim. 4:17). Paul learnt by painful experience that sometimes God must break a bow before He can manifest His power: "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

(c) Broken cisterns expose thirst

The Lord God was deeply disappointed with the children of Israel. Through Jeremiah, he described their problem as follows: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jer. 2:13). It is evident that we humans thirst. Being thirsty is not the problem. God has created us humans with legitimate needs. Our natural hunger and thirst move us to seek food and drink. We have been made with a thirst for companionship, for sexual intimacy, for significance. We have also been made with a thirst for God himself. This thirst is vividly pictured in a Hebrew song: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for

God, for the Living God” (Ps. 42:1-2). Does your soul sometimes experience that thirst? The problem arises in how, where and with what we seek to satisfy our legitimate thirst.

Chewing the leaves of cocaine bushes is a common sight among poor indians in Peru. It takes away their hunger and renews their strength. Many gimmicks are on offer to alleviate your longing for sexual intimacy. It is clear that legitimate needs can be wrongly satisfied. Cisterns are large cavities cut into the rock. If a crack is present, the collected rain water will soon vanish. Cisterns represent those ‘other things’ we use to seek fulfilment, happiness and satisfaction. They can be good things, like a good job, a marriage partner, a motorbike, music, sport or gardening. But God has ensured that all material cisterns are broken. They can only provide limited and temporal satisfaction. Even your service for the Lord, your ministry, and your local church are broken cisterns. If you need them to satisfy your thirst for acceptance, worth or significance, you will soon thirst again. In time you will demand water from your dry broken cistern – and usually hurt others in the process, or you will dig another cistern. It is not that the Lord goes around breaking cisterns. He simply informs us that all cisterns are broken. At best, they can only hold water for a short time. What the Lord wants to do is break our dependence on cisterns. Why? That we may genuinely turn to Him.

What should we do when we thirst for love, significance or acceptance? The invitation still stands today: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink” (Jn. 7:37). His promise remains true: “He who believes in me will never be thirsty” (Jn. 6:35). Why then do we Christians thirst? Because we get distracted, dig cisterns and forget to return to the fountain and ‘drink.’ We can read the Scriptures without ‘drinking.’ We can enjoy a good church meeting without ‘drinking.’ To quench our thirst, water must be drunk. It must be made our own. What are you drinking? What is quenching your thirst? Moses shared his secret in a song: “Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days” (Ps 90:14). You know that the Lord’s love is great, tender and unfailing, but do you ‘drink’ this fact? Has it reached your soul? Does it satisfy your thirst?

Broken in order to Communicate

“God whispers in our pleasures,
speaks in our conscience,
but shouts in our pain.

It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world”

- C.S. Lewis

“God deliberately chooses weak, suffering
and unlikely candidates to get His work done,
so that in the end, the glory goes to God and not to the person.”

- Joni Eareckson Tada

Much is taught in Scripture through pictures, figures and illustrations. Although doctrines should not be based on illustrations, pictures, figures and illustrations are useful since they add flavour, colour and texture to ideas. They are not so easy to forget! In the next three chapters we shall consider six situations where something breaks in order that something good may follow.

(1) Broken seals allow a scroll to be read

The use of a seal has been common practice for many years. It is used for various purposes. Haman developed wicked plans to eliminate the Jews. “These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and *sealed* with his own ring” (Est. 3:12). Here the seal was used to prove the communication was genuine and to discourage possible alterations. After the Lord Jesus was buried, the chief priests and Pharisees “went and made the tomb secure by putting a *seal* on the stone and posting the guard” (Matt. 27:66). Here a seal helped make something secure. The seal is also used in figurative language to suggest unchangeableness, ownership and security. The Lord made a covenant with Israel and sealed it “with an oath” (Deut. 29:12). As Christians, the Lord has “set his seal of ownership on us” (2 Cor. 1:22), and that seal is the Holy Spirit which guarantees our eternal destiny (Eph. 1:13-14). This seal can never be broken!

But there are some seals that hinder revelation and need to be broken. As Isaiah explained, “if you give the scroll to someone who can read, and say to him, ‘Read this, please,’ he will answer, ‘I can’t; it is sealed’” (Is. 29:11). The apostle John saw a scroll with seven seals. Scrolls have a message, a revelation. But no one can benefit from its content until the seals are broken. Therefore a mighty angel proclaimed in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” (Rev. 5:2). The Lord Himself, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, broke the seals, one by one, and God’s revelation became public.

The apostle Paul refers to you and me, and every Christian, as “a letter from Christ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor. 3:3). Why do people write letters? Why are we called

“letters of Christ”? Because there is something the Lord would like to communicate through us to others. How? Through our words and our actions. It is in this context that our ‘seals’ become a hindrance to Christ working through us.

What could these seals represent? Fear is a strong seal that needs to be broken. And we can be plagued by many fears. Fear of failure can stop us from following the Lord’s lead in some new adventure. Fear of rejection can stop us from being open, transparent and making ourselves vulnerable – which are necessary if we are to be connected with others. Fear of confrontation can stop the Lord from using us as peacemakers. Fear of poverty or bankruptcy can limit our sharing and giving. Controlling fears evidence our lack of trust in the Lord and should be recognized and confessed as sin. In the name of Christ each fear must be renounced. It must be broken.

Sometimes we allow others to place seals on us. The unrealistic expectations of fellow believers (or what we think they expect from us), the well-meaning religious rules of a Christian community, the social conventions of our culture, even long-standing family traditions can all become ‘seals’ that hinder you and me, letters of Christ, to be opened and read by those Christ wishes to touch. Are you aware of some ‘seal’ that is hindering your communication? Perhaps we should ask the Lord to bring to our mind that which is obstructing His working through us. Broken seals allow others to ‘read us,’ they allow Christ to speak to others through us.

(2) Broken jars allow light to shine

The apostle John liked to use the word ‘light.’ He said, “God *is light*; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5). Describing the birth of the Lord Jesus he wrote, “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (Jn. 1:9). He quotes Jesus saying, “I *am* the *light* of the world” (Jn. 8:12; 9:5). Paul later explained that God “made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). This shining of God’s light in our hearts has changed our identity: “You *are* the *light* of the world.” And it has changed the way that we should live: “let your light *shine* before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14, 16).

This relationship between our identity and our behaviour is picked up again by the apostle Paul, “For you were once darkness, but now you *are light* in the Lord. *Live* as children of light.” He then goes on to explain what it looks like when the light shines, “the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth” (Eph. 5:8-9). The Bible never calls on the Christian to behave differently from who he is. We are given a new nature, we are made children of God, we are made light, and then we are simply urged to be ourselves, to live what we are. But sadly, sometimes things hinder our light from shining.

The story when Gideon defeats the Midianites provides us with a useful illustration (Judges 7). Gideon’s army was reduced to three hundred. “Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside” (7:16). At the critical moment, they all followed Gideon’s lead. “The three companies blew the trumpets and *smashed the jars*. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, ‘A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!’” (7:20). The light of the

torches was not seen until the jars were broken. When the Midianites awoke, saw the lights and heard the noise, they panicked. “The LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords” (7:22). God began to work once the jars were broken. Maybe something in our behaviour hinders the light from shining out. Worldliness and a desire to be popular among non-Christians can reduce our shining capacity. On the other side of the spectrum, excessive shyness, seclusion or fear of contact with non-Christians may also make it difficult for others to see Christ in us. Is there something in your behaviour that needs to be broken to improve your shining potential?

The Lord Jesus said, “No-one lights a lamp and hides it *in a jar* or puts it *under a bed*.” (Luke 8:16). “Neither do people light a lamp and put it *under a bowl* [dry measuring utensil]. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house” (Matt. 5:14). Some think that these texts suggest that too much attention to the home (in a jar), passivity or laziness (under a bed) and excessive dedication to work (under a bowl) hinder our light from shining. It is true that wrong priorities diminish our shining. What is clear from the text is that He who lit our lamp, who made us light, intends that we should shine for the benefit of others. Our homes and lives should be open enough to others so that friends, family, work colleagues, neighbours and others “may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Is your light shining where it can be of benefit to others?

A city is a collection of lights. Jesus said that “a city on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matt. 5:14). During the World War II, cities were blacked out to avoid detection by enemy pilots. Unfortunately, local churches (collection of lights) can also ‘black out’ by losing their points of contact with the lost world. It is easy to surround ourselves with meetings, administration and ‘inward’ activities to such an extent that the unsaved don’t see our light. Our comfortable ‘jars’ of odd traditions and isolation have to be broken if our Christian assembly is to allow its light to shine on others.

John the Baptist lived an open, public and shamelessly radical life. The Lord Jesus said that John “was a lamp that burned and gave light” (Jn. 5:35). What can the Lord Jesus say of you and me?

Broken in order to Bless

“A wise sufferer will not look inward, but outward.
There is no more effective healer than a wounded healer.”
- Philip Yancey

“All gracious affections that are a sweet odour to Christ,
and that fill the soul of a Christian with a heavenly sweetness and fragrance,
are broken hearted affections. A truly Christian love, either to God or men,
is a humble broken hearted love.”
- Jonathan Edwards

“If you allow physical selfishness, mental carelessness, moral insensitivity,
or spiritual weakness, everyone in contact with you will suffer.”
- Oswald Chambers

(3) Broken rocks become fountains of water

It must have been a difficult task to lead the whole nation of Israel, young and old, with their possessions and live-stock “through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land” (Deut. 8:15). At times the people became desperate and demanded water. The Lord agreed to meet Moses by the rock at Horeb. His task was simple: “*Strike* the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink” (Ex. 17:6). Nearly 40 years later, a new generation of Israelites also became desperate and demanded water. The Lord agreed to meet Moses by a rock at Kadesh, the same place from where their fathers had sent 12 spies to explore the Promised Land. His task was simple: “*Speak* to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water” (Num. 20:8). In later writings we are told what happened to these rocks: Isaiah explained, “he *split* the rock and water gushed out” (Is. 48:21). In the Psalms we read: “He *split* the rocks in the desert and gave them water” (Ps. 78:15) and “He *opened* the rock, and water gushed out” (Ps. 105:41). Notice that the rocks were broken so that the people could be blessed. This thought was probably in the Apostle Paul’s mind when he compared Christ with a rock (1 Cor. 10:4). Christ had to die (be broken) so that we could be blessed. Because of this interesting similarity, some refer to these rocks as a *type* of Christ.

But perhaps we can also see that the breaking of the rock illustrates a general spiritual principle that we find elsewhere in Scripture, that God uses broken things and broken people to bless others. Notice three interesting details:

1. Unequal team work: God broke the rocks. Although Moses had to do something in each case, strike and speak, these actions of themselves did not break the rocks. Even his frustrated double-strike did not break the rock at Kadesh. We are dependent on God’s intervention in the breaking of rocks. This finding encourages us to pray prayers such as “Lord, break my selfish hard heart and

help me to feel the pain of others,” “Lord, break my pride and arrogance and help me to be humble and gentle,” “Lord, break my know-it-all and I-know-better attitude and help me listen and learn from others,” “Lord, break my urge to control, to defend and to manipulate, and turn me into a calm humble servant.” Breaking may require our obedience but requires more than simple will-power. Something spiritual must take place.

2. Refreshing living waters: God made the water flow. It is not normal for broken rocks to become fountains of water. Breaking experiences can lead to anger, self-pity or “worldly sorrow” (2 Cor. 7:10). If we are to be a blessing and refresh those around us, we need more than broken rocks. We need God to work through what is broken.
3. Blessing in spite of disobedience: Our obedience in the breaking process is important. When God says speak to the rock, we should speak to it and not strike it. God’s grace ensured that water flowed, but He was not pleased with Moses’ spontaneous, creative, well-intended disobedience. The Lord’s blessing in ministry should never be taken as proof of His approval. It is a fact that some people are genuinely converted through the ministry of an immoral evangelist, the preaching of a doctrinally deviant teacher and the viewing of pirate copies of Christian videos. Correct theology and moral principles are to be derived from His Word and not from experience. Our heavenly Father longs for obedient children, and obedience based on holiness and revealed truth. But His blessings are always acts of grace.

The annual Feast of Tabernacles lasted 7 days. On the last day, “Jesus stood and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him’” (Jn. 7:37-38). As our hard, fleshly crust breaks, the Holy Spirit manifests Himself, by blessing, encouraging and refreshing others through us. Those who have been broken seek to give rather than acquire, to build others up rather than discredit their work, to help and serve others rather than give instructions and control. Those who have been broken are very aware that, without the working of the Holy Spirit through them, they are as useless to those around them as is a hard and dry rock in a “thirsty and waterless land.” Are you being used in some way to bless others? Do you sense that the Lord is trying to break something in you? Our Lord still wants to turn “the rock into a pool, the hard rock into springs of water” (Ps. 114:8).

(4) Broken pottery soothes discomfort

Broken clay pots usually end up on the rubbish bin. A broken pot is associated with something “despised... an object no-one wants” (Jer. 22:28). In the middle of crushing difficulties, King David calls on the Lord: “Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress... my strength fails because of my affliction.” And how did his friends see him? “I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery” (Ps. 31:9-12). But, as we shall see, ‘broken pottery’ can be very useful.

You may recall reading about the string of disasters experienced by Job. He lost his wealth and children. Then the Lord allowed Satan to afflict Job “with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head” (Job 2:7). As he sat among the ashes, his wife suggested he should “Curse God and die!” (2:9). His three friends arrived (2:11).

After a period of prudential silence, they shared with him their theology, their analysis of his situation and proposed an action plan. With pain, Job referred to them as “miserable comforters” (Job 16:2). What soothed his pain as he waited for the Lord to reveal himself? “Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes” (Job 2:8).

Does your life include bits of broken pottery? Our sovereign Lord can use your scars, your mistakes, your failures, even your ongoing painful experience. He can use them to deepen your understanding and appreciation of His grace, but He can also use them to teach, comfort and encourage others. God’s grace combined with your broken experience makes you more accessible to others.

As I write this chapter, my wife is in her fourth month of a burnout. In our 22 years of marriage we have lived many happy adventures together in England, Canada, Colombia and now in Holland. I have never known her so weak and emotionally unstable. She is in pain. She is exhausted and wants to sleep but she can’t. She wants to trust the Lord but continues to worry even over the most insignificant details of life. She loves people but now avoids them. With our 4 children still at home and having to limit and cancel travel engagements, life is somewhat slow, heavy and complicated. I am very aware that some dear saints are called to live much deeper pain than ours, and yet one wonders: how is the kingdom of God advanced through this painful and frustrating limitation? Can’t our Lord achieve His goal, whatever that may be, another way? Religion and faith are not natural themes of conversation here in the south of Holland. In fact, they are usually tactfully avoided. Knowing that my wife has a burnout, our neighbour came round to visit with some flowers. During the visit, she took the initiative and asked my wife about the church we go to. She had never done this before! Why now? When broken and weak, we are not seen as a threat.

Most of us are weary of ‘artificial evangelical success stories,’ where some pretend to be always happy, spiritual, healthy and successful, where their ‘success’ is claimed to be the norm for all, where everything that happens can be explained and put into comfortable theological boxes. Those who carry scars and bits of broken pots evidence reality. God loves to use real people. And we love to hear and be with real people. Their words carry weight. The Lord can use them to comfort others in pain. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Cor. 1:3-4). While broken we may receive something from the Lord that He would like us to share with others.

Recently we had a visit from a sister who a few years ago, also suffered a burnout. One of her ‘bits of broken pottery’ is that she still takes antidepressants. She would love to live without them. She has tried. But her weak constitution still requires them. Her testimony was an encouragement to us. A few weeks ago, a brother in our local church shared with me his experience with his own burnout at work. I am reading a book about Christians and depression, written by a Christian medical doctor who himself battled many years with depression. It would be a very different book if he had not suffered himself. Perhaps it would have never been written! Does your life contain scars and bits of broken pottery? If it does, don’t pretend it doesn’t. Don’t hide your broken pottery. God still uses broken pots to teach, comfort and encourage others.

Broken in order to Release

“God is looking for broken men
who have judged themselves in the light of the cross of Christ.
When He wants anything done,
He takes up men who have come to the end of themselves,
whose confidence is not in themselves, but in God.”
- H A Ironside

“Your most profound and intimate experiences of worship
will likely be in your darkest days - when your heart is broken,
when you feel abandoned, when you're out of options,
when the pain is great - and you turn to God alone.”
- Rick Warren

“This is God's universal purpose for all Christian suffering:
more contentment in God and less satisfaction in the world.”
- John Piper

(5) A broken yoke frees the ox

In time, humans have thought of ways to harness and exploit the strength of animals in transport and agriculture. A yoke is an “m” shaped piece of wood that was tied over the necks of two oxen. Their joint strength was useful in ploughing fields and moving carts. The yoke would limit their freedom. It would force the oxen to move together, at the same speed, in the same direction. The Lord God seemed to be happy with this arrangement, but warned: “Do not plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together” (Deut. 22:10). It should be avoided because the yoke was unequal. It was not good for the animals. It would not work well.

Scriptures use the yoke figuratively to illustrate positive ideas such as team work, support, assistance and responsibility. In this context, “It is good for a man to bear the *yoke* while he is young” (Lam. 3:27) But the yoke is also used to illustrate sinful or unhealthy attachments, bondage and slavery. These negative yokes may be ‘physical and visible,’ as described in Leviticus 26:13, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your *yoke* and enabled you to walk with heads held high.” But they also may be ‘spiritual and invisible’ as described in Psalm 106:28, “They *yoked* themselves to the Baal [an idol].” Since our natural urge may be to live free of all constraints, it is easy to view all yokes negatively. But the Christian will only grow if he learns to submit and cooperate under good yokes, and avoid or break the bad yokes.

Yokes that help and lead to blessing

Some 2700 years ago, the Lord said to Jeremiah to go and “make a yoke out of straps and crossbars and put it on your neck” (Jer. 27:2-6). Our Lord loves to teach through visual lessons. But Jeremiah’s message was not popular; it was not well received. Then came along a more popular prophet. “Hananiah took the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and broke it” and proclaimed a more acceptable message (Jer. 28:9-10). When yokes reflect the Lord’s design for our life, we should not run from them nor break them. Has the Lord called you to some ministry? “See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord” (Col. 4:17). We should lay off a ministry yoke only when we sense the Lord so directs and not because of boredom, fruitlessness, conflict or some other crisis. Are you going through a difficult time in your marriage? Are you considering breaking the marriage yoke and running away? “Guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth” (Mal. 2:15, 1 Cor. 7:10). Marriage is a God-designed yoke. Seek God’s grace to pull together, at the same speed, in the same direction.

The Lord Jesus extends a warm and practical invitation: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take *my yoke* upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For *my yoke* is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30). Have you responded to that invitation? Do you respond to it regularly? The happy and joyful Christian life consists in submitting only to the yoke of Christ, that is, accepting only those burdens that He gives, only those which we can carry together with Him. Has the raising up of your children, the looking after a sick relative or running of the Children’s Bible club become a heavy burden to you? From whom did you receive that burden? If you received it from the Lord, you should not carry it alone. If it is His ‘project,’ He invites you to take up ‘His yoke’ and work together with Him. It has never been the Lord’s intention that you should carry that load alone.

Yokes that hinder and lead to bondage

There are, however, some unwise, unhealthy and sinful yokes, bonds, commitments, relationships or attachments that must be vigorously avoided or definitely broken. The Scriptural warning is clear: “Do not be *yoked* together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14). Once we are tied to an unbeliever, our life is compromised; we are no longer free to follow the Lord’s guidance. Christian congregations and associations may also seek to bind their members to their own rules and religious legalisms. The apostle Paul warns against such yokes (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1). You may have “bound your soul” with a wicked oath or promise (Num. 30:2). It must be renounced and broken in the name of Christ.

Some harmful yokes can develop unconsciously. Excessive attachment to your parents or to a child can be very unhealthy (Gen. 2:24; 44:30-31). The umbilical cord must be cut. We may develop harmful dependence yokes with people, jobs, churches and places. In the name of Christ these yokes must be broken. You may feel dominated by resentment and bitterness. These yokes can be broken through forgiveness in the name of Christ. Some may experience demonic bondage (Ps 106:28; 1 Cor. 10:19-20; Luke 13:16). Others may feel tied to bad habits, unpleasant experiences or painful memories. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 Jn. 3:8). My dear reader, don’t become resigned to living in bondage. Christ wants to break every destructive yoke. He wants to release you. He wants you free to work

together with Him under His yoke. You may need the help and intercession of fellow believers. Ask for it! Go for it! Break that harmful yoke!

(6) Broken flask releases expensive perfume

In each one of the gospels we read an account of a woman pouring perfume on the Lord Jesus. The narratives in Matthew (26) and Mark (14) describe the same event in the house of Simon the Leper. The story told in John (12) contains a number of differences which could suggest a different event.

Luke's story (7:36-50) takes place in Galilee, in the house of a Pharisee named Simon, and the woman who anointed Jesus was a prostitute. Only in this story does the woman shed tears on the Lord's feet. Her tears and perfume expressed penitence and gratitude. The stories described in the other three gospels take place in Bethany. In each case a woman approached the Lord Jesus with nard, a very expensive perfume, and poured it on Jesus (Matt. 26:7; Mk. 14:3; Jn. 12:3). John tells us that after Mary poured the liquid on Jesus' feet, "the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (Jn. 12:3). The perfume of these women expressed love and devotion.

Mary and the woman mentioned by Matthew and Mark knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Their heart burned with awe and affection as they contemplated meeting him. Mary had prepared a pint of pure nard at home as she waited for Jesus and His disciples to arrive for a meal. The other woman heard that Jesus was to visit the house of Simon the Leper. On leaving her home to meet Him, she must have consciously carried with her that flask with perfume, probably her most expensive single possession. Like many others, she must have enjoyed listening to Jesus teach, but this time she did not go for the teaching. There must have been good food on the table at Simon's house, but this time she did not go for the food. I'm sure she must have had her own worries and needs, but this time she did not go to request a favour or a miracle. She may have enjoyed the stimulating company of Jesus' disciples, but this time she did not go to enjoy the fellowship. Her heart and mind were focused on the Lord Jesus. She wanted to worship Him. Do you sometimes feel that way?

Alabaster is a fine variety of marble, quarried in Egypt. It could be carved into delicate long necked jars to preserve expensive perfumes. Nard is a plant native to India. Both the flask and the perfume were expensive, worth about one year's wages of a labourer. Mark tells us that the woman broke the flask. The breaking of the flask shows that she had no intention of keeping some of the perfume for some other person or event. Did Jesus really need so much perfume? Worship is an expression of the heart. Something has to break inside of us before it can be fully released. The disciples loved Jesus too, but their hearts were still restricted. They were thinking in terms of good administration, efficiency, effective use of resources and how best to help a needy world. They were not yet broken. They viewed the action of this woman as a "waste." But what did Jesus say? "She has done a beautiful thing *to me*" (Mk. 14:6). He accepted it. He valued it. He considered that her extravagant act was well done.

Worship does not spring naturally from our human hearts. We find it difficult to make time to seek the Lord's presence. We prefer to do something useful. We easily become passive and distracted as we reflect on the life and death of the Lord Jesus. Like the disciples, we prefer to engage in action, to see something for our efforts. Sometimes this well-intended, rational activism has to be broken. Only then will we begin to

worship truly. Sometimes something has to break before we become convinced that God is not utilitarian – He has not chosen you and me because of our productivity potential. Nowhere in Scripture do we read of the Father seeking evangelists, pastors, preachers, musicians or missionaries. But we are told that the Father seeks true worshipers (Jn. 4:23-24). Maybe you have worked hard to keep your local church together, but it split anyway. Maybe you have shared the gospel with passion and given yourself fully to your ministry, but the results appear disappointing. You are tired. You feel a little disillusioned. Maybe the Lord is trying to break your useful and practical alabaster jar so that something very special may be released. He wants to enjoy *you* (Zeph. 3:17). He wants you to learn to enjoy *Him*. The Lord still longs for genuine, even ‘extravagant,’ expressions of worship.

The Broken Christian

“Deliverance can come to us only by the defeat of our old life.
Safety and peace come only after we have been forced to our knees.

*God rescues us by breaking us, by shattering our strength
and wiping out our resistance.”*

- A. W. Tozer

“The brokenness of spirit which makes no resistance to the Father’s hand
is a main element of fertility in souls wherein He works.

It is not power He seeks from us, but weakness;
not resistant force, but ‘yieldingness’ to Him.

All power is His: His strength is perfected in weakness.”

- William MacDonald

“When we are consciously aware of being used as broken bread and poured out wine,
we have yet another level to reach - a level where all awareness of ourselves
and what God is doing through us is completely eliminated.

A saint is never consciously a saint - a saint is consciously dependent on God.”

- Oswald Chambers

Brokenness, laziness and passivity

God’s objective in leading us through breaking experiences is to transform our way of thinking and behaving, to make us more like the Lord Jesus. A broken Christian should not be thought of as some passive boneless worm! He or she is no insipid dejected hermit. In fact, it is the complete opposite. Brokenness leads to submission to the will of God. As the Lord works at breaking what is sinful in our life, the motives behind our acts are sanctified and our desire to obey the Lord grows. As the Lord works at breaking our unhealthy dependencies, we are freed to depend on Him as we engage in obedient action. There is no place for laziness or passivity in the broken Christian.

Brokenness, pain and sadness

The breaking process, as we have seen, is usually painful. But there is nothing good or noble in pain itself. Prior to His death, He told His disciples, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” Then He prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:28, 39). Even our Lord Jesus, who was willing to suffer, expressed His preference to avoid pain. Again and again, we find the Psalmist turning to God in times of sorrow and pain. “How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?” (Ps.13:2). “Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief” (Ps. 31:9). “My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word” (Ps. 119:28). The apostle Paul, who wrote much about joy, also had his painful periods in the exercise of his ministry. He wrote, “I have great

sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” (Rom. 9:2). Yet we must learn to distinguish between the pain and sorrow that is being used by the Lord to break us so that we may grow, and worldly sorrow. “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death” (2 Cor. 7:10). Worldly sorrow breeds self-pity, depression and even bitterness. The broken Christian will experience periods of pain and sadness, but the dominant tone of his life is one of gratitude and joy.

Brokenness, purpose and action

Brokenness involves a bold and active denial of our own ungodly desires. It involves deliberate surrender, sacrificial obedience, discipline and self-control. The broken Christian not only acts with purpose, his service and ministry are energized by a different source, Christ’s “power that is at work within us” (Eph. 3:20). Because this is so necessary, our loving Father patiently works at breaking everything that obstructs the flow of His power in our lives.

Brokenness, commitment and relationships

Are you a broken believer? How can you spot one? Brokenness affects all areas of our life. A broken believer takes God’s Word seriously, by devoting time to study, meditate and obey it. He values and is committed to church and ministry. He loves and worships the Lord. But perhaps there is no simpler place to notice the effects of brokenness than in the details of our interpersonal relationships. Broken saints tend to repay evil with good. They don’t try to retaliate. They seek and talk about what is good and Christ-like in others, even those they may disagree with. When they become aware that they have hurt another, they are prompt to repent, to confess, to apologise. When they have been hurt by another, they try hard to give the other the benefit of the doubt. Aware of their own sinful nature and how much they have been forgiven, they do not delay in forgiving others. They feel sad and sorry rather than irritated by stubborn and selfish people.

Brokenness, reality and influence

Having experienced God’s hand in their brokenness, they are more likely to see God’s hand in other difficult situations; they can remain calm and hopeful in times of crisis. Broken Christians may be found in important positions, but they do not need such positions. With grace and ease they can let go of status. The life of broken Christians is real. It is attractive because it is genuine. Others allow themselves to be influenced by it because it does not demand attention, it does not impose itself, it does not assume greatness. Because broken saints are not afraid of the opinion of others neither do they try to be popular, they can speak the truth in love. They do not seek conflict, but neither do they run away from it. They are willing and available to be used by the Lord as peacemakers. They can be helpful and firm, and also gentle and meek.

Healing the broken hearted

The Lord is not detached from the suffering of His people. He knows but also feels what He is doing. Jesus felt the pain of Mary and Martha at the graveside of their brother. He was moved to tears, even though He knew that Lazarus would soon come to life again. Our Lord shows that He felt the pain of the persecuted Christians when He said, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*?” (Acts 9:4). Our Lord well understands that “heartache crushes the spirit” (Pr. 15:13). Therefore we also read that “the LORD is *close* to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps.34:18), “He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3). Are you broken-

hearted? The Lord is *close* to you. He feels your pain. Believe Him. He desires to *heal* the broken-hearted. As to how and when, He surely knows best. We trust Him. We can then experience His peace during the breaking and the healing process. Surely the promise of the Lord Himself holds true: "I leave peace with you; I give [my] peace to you: not as the world gives do I give to you. *Let not* your heart be troubled, neither *let it fear*" (Jn. 14:27 DBY).

The goal: Christ-likeness

Sometimes we sense that we understand what He is trying to achieve in our life. Sometimes we simply "cannot understand the work of God" (Eccl. 11:5). In those moments, where pain and darkness combine, when everything in us demands relief, change or at least a good explanation, when we feel like giving up, running away or simply becoming hard, in those moments, more than ever, we must force ourselves to let go and trust His hand. He works calmly and lovingly with a glorious purpose, "until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). You and I have been "predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Rom. 8:28-19). Are we progressing? The apostle Paul was confident "that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). The Lord will not give up on you and me. He will not avoid using pain when pain is needed. But He will not allow more pain than what is necessary to achieve His goal. Deep inside we know that we need breaking. But only if we really trust Him will we ever pray, "Lord, break me!"

Conclusion

The secular world values the strong, the forceful, the ones that get things done. Our Lord values the humble, the gentle, the meek. Our strong opinions, preferences and traditions often hinder the development of God's plans for our life. He wants to see more of Jesus Christ in the life of every Christian, and therefore He sets out to break that which gets in the way. He wants to break that sin which threatens to enslave us, break the lies that distort our vision, break those fears that hold us back, break those earthly dreams and passions that will lessen our eternal impact.

Once wild horses are broken in, they wait, they listen, they follow instructions, they become useful to their Master. Such horses know when to run, how to run, and when to stop. Has your strong will been broken yet? Are you still trying to serve the Lord on your own terms? We all need to be broken. We all need to be made small.

“We may easily be too big for God to use,
But never too small.”
- D. L. Moody

It is when we feel weak, when we feel lost, when we feel lonely, when we feel broken... that we become really conscious of our need for God's grace. When we are broken, we will value and believe the Lord's words: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” In time we shall probably share the apostle Paul's experience and conclude: “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Perhaps a day will come when we shall look back and wonder why it took us so long to earnestly pray: “Lord, break me!”