

Broken Is Good

After my first breakup in high school, I cried myself to sleep every night, lost ten pounds, and started reading books about Zen Buddhism. I remember that bleak time well, particularly one scene: I went to my ex-boyfriend's house one day to return something. His little brother answered the door. "Where were you?" he cried. "I missed you!" Skinny eight-year-old arms wrapped around my waist, and his sweet face buried itself into the folds of my coat. I caught the irony; the flicker of a child's love endured past the point where the hot fire of romance had died. At the time, I hated my broken heart as one would a chronic illness or a tax penalty. I did not know God or His love, and without Him, my woundedness meant nothing.

But things have changed. Day after day, I sit in my office listening to the cries of brokenhearted people, and I thank God for every, I mean *every*, hurt I have known. God has healed me (mostly) and given me wisdom through my experiences, and as a result I am more effective as a communicator and as a counselor.

It is likely that you are reading this book because of relationship brokenness. Somewhere along the line, a bond fractured, or at least twisted into a malfunctioning tangle. You regret it, but cannot seem to fix it. A sense of need has driven you to bear the discomfort of vulnerability, to bypass natural pride and admit your pain. And you are desperate enough to reach out for help from a book written by a person you probably don't know. Insight and admission are often the first steps of change. May God bless you for your honesty. And may He bless your healing journey through this book.

Brokenness becomes strength

God knows how to help us. He is not disoriented, frustrated, or impatient. He is, well, God—the all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful God. But let us realize that His ability to help springs from more than His infinite power. It flows out of His own traumatic experience, His story. The Almighty God, the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent Potentate of time and space could not exempt Himself from the experience of a broken heart. Not in terms of character, He could not. For God is love, and love always runs the risk of hurt.

God's story also reveals the principle that through love, brokenness becomes strength. The Cross itself reveals this: through a broken God on a tree, saving power flows. Look everywhere, and you see this principle.

Nature speaks of it. If nature were perfect, it would mock us. Instead, it bears sufficient evidence of trauma to connect with us traumatized humans. The mournful leafless tree against a gray sky, the mighty waves shattering on rocks, the despairing song of the loon, all speak of the brokenness sin has brought to the natural world. But metaphors of redemption abound: seeds fall from their parent plants and splinter into life; newly broken and tilled ground pours forth microorganisms that provide nourishment to new growth; wind-battered trees form infallible trunks, and osteoblasts rush to repair a broken bone. As David prayed, “Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice” (Psalm 51:8).

Human relationships reveal it. Observe an old couple still in love. Even their wrinkles seem to swirl into the same design. They care for each other with clearly defined, uncontested roles, easing in and out of conversation as feet into old shoes. Is that love the result of good chemistry, or did they painstakingly forge it out of thousands of rifts and repairs as their relationship struggled along through the years?

A wayward child, loved unrelentingly through her rebellion, trusts her parents in a way the good child cannot. The good child has never tested the limits of the parents' love. Perhaps they love her because of her goodness; she is not sure. But the wayward one has removed every conceivable self-interested incentive for love by becoming an emotional, spiritual, and financial burden on her parents, such that the only possible love remaining is sacrificial. She comes away with every question mark blotted out. Her parents love her no matter what.

Friendships likewise flourish through rift repair. A new friend never knows whether his

buddy will only linger while the rush of energy and good feelings last. Once ugliness has surfaced and feelings have soured, the friends have an opportunity to know each other's ability to forgive, rebuild trust, and move on. Then their scars become a badge of honor, a

For a worksheet to help you understand your own past, see "Relationship Wound Inventory" in the toolbox.

bragging point almost: *We felt like killing each other, man, but we got through it.* Next to the quality of their survivor bond, untested friendships look lightweight. They say, "Familiarity breeds contempt," but it can also breed respect if familiar friends will endure the rebuilding process.

The Word of God clearly reveals brokenness to strength.

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would come to give "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3). God's own story reveals the beauty of salvation exchanged for the ashes of sin. We sometimes refer to this as "the great controversy" because God's story is fraught with conflict and drama.

His story

In His story, God loved. Have you ever enjoyed a relationship so immensely that time and space seemed to disappear? Felt so close that you seemed joined to eternity, heart beating in perfect time with God's heart? God knows that feeling because it originated with Him. We often talk of intimacy *with* God but rarely consider the intimacy *within* God. Yet this intra-Deity intimacy serves as the source-spring for every bond in the universe. "God is love" means, among other things, that love exists within God Himself.

Beginning with the Old Testament, we see Three Persons in One Divine Being. The "Holy, holy, holy" of the angels suggests a Divine Trio (Isaiah 6:3) as do the triadic references to "The Lord," as in "The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24–26; see also Isaiah 33:22 and Daniel 9:19). The New Testament increases in precision and clarity with passages such as 2 Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of the *Lord Jesus Christ*, and the love of *God*, and the communion of the *Holy Spirit* be with you all. Amen" (emphasis added).

The Lord Jesus Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit are the original Family. God has designed our families on earth to reflect a love that has existed from eternity. And they reflect it in this way: while the individuals in a relationship have a separate identity, the bond they

form takes on its own identity. For instance, when a couple such as Tom and Julia Clark marries, they then become “the Clarks.” Their bond has become an entity in itself—but (ideally) not an entity that threatens the individuality of Tom or Julia. In fact, relationships done right develop and support individuality rather than impinging upon it. In the same way, the Father, Son, and Spirit are three individual Persons in One Divine Being. You do no violence to Them and cause no jealousy or strife between Them when you address Them individually, crying, “Jesus, save me!” or “Father, send Your Holy Spirit.” Their purposes, plans, and principles are one. They think, feel, and work in utter, complete, profound, enthusiastic, and loving union.

Unselfish love is best demonstrated in a triadic relationship. There is no room for jealousy or possessiveness, or ultimately selfishness, in a healthy triad. Person one beholds the love between person two and person three with utter delight. Person two does the same with the love between person one and person three. Person three delights in the love between one and two! Of course a single individual cannot love at all; and with a dyad we never know whether the two parties love each other in an I-love-you-so-you-love-me-back kind of way. But when we see love, harmony, and giving in a threesome, we know it must be of an unselfish character. Notice that in our human life cycle, dyads typically open up to include new members. For instance, married couples often open their hearts to include a baby and a mother-child relationship often opens up to include another child.



In His story, God was betrayed. There in eternity, God enjoyed the fellowship of the angelic host. When God “laid the foundations of the earth . . . all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:4, 7). For more eons than we can conceive, all was perfect harmony. Then into that perfection and peace came a strange phenomenon—the honored and beloved

angel Lucifer, “son of the morning,” a member of God’s circle of privilege, utterly betrayed Him. Because of competition with the Son, Lucifer lashed out at God, backbiting, criticizing, and blackballing His character. God watched many of His angels defect. Torn between the roles of loving Benefactor and just Protector, God stood His ground. War broke out. On the authority of heaven, but no doubt with tears of loss, God threw Lucifer and the apostate angels down “to the earth.” Now Lucifer became “the Devil and Satan,” a friend turned foreign enemy (Revelation 12:7–10). God’s own dear creatures, the angels, severed themselves from Him by an irreversible rebellion.

In His story, God dealt with devastating consequences. He might have mourned for eons, but He couldn’t rest to count His losses. Deep in the hearts of the remaining angels brewed a conflict: “Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe.”¹ While the loyal angels accepted the justice of God, they could not penetrate the blackness of Lucifer’s motives nor understand the sinfulness of his pride. Such is the power of affection to create bias and blindness to evil. We want to believe those with whom we bond. Bonding facilitates trust. The angels loved Lucifer and his fellow detractors! The pulse of affection continued to beat even after the war. And God worked gently with this confusion. “The true character of the usurper and his real object must be understood by all. He must have time to manifest himself by his wicked works.”²

In His story, God tried again. That is where we come in. God created an order of being “in His own image” (Genesis 1:27). “Image” is the Hebrew *tselem*, meaning “representation.” God created human beings to represent, project, and shine forth His love. In looking upon us, the angels would receive a revelation of God Himself. Through us, His brightness would reveal the malevolence of Satan. This revelation would sever the final strings of affection between heaven and Lucifer. And God’s loss would ultimately become gain as humans filled the void left by the apostate angels. “Heaven will triumph, for the vacancies made in heaven by the fall of Satan and his angels will be filled by the redeemed of the Lord.”³

In His story, God was hurt again. We ourselves fell prey to the devil’s lies when the human race fell into sin. And we ourselves needed to see God’s character. We ourselves, because of the tainting of the Fall, acquired a bias toward Satan and sin. We took on an inclination to follow its logic and feel its longings. Again, disappointment and broken dreams tore at God’s heart.

In His story, God gave Himself to heal us. Undeterred, God set in motion the “counsel

of peace,” sending His Son to reveal to us a kind of love we had never known. Yes, Adam and Eve loved each other with an innocent, pure love; but it was untested. As kiln fires bring forth the color of the potter’s glaze, true love shows its colors in the fire of sacrifice and pain. Jesus’ every step from birth to death showed suffering, steadfast, unfailing *agape* until it finally led Him to take upon Himself our alienation at the Cross. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” He cried. The dyadic “My God, My God” presents an interesting contrast to the triadic “holy, holy, holy” passages. Jesus no longer saw Himself as part of the Holy Trinity. Why had He, God’s own Son, been left out of that Family? He had identified Himself with the fallen family of earth. The Godhead itself suffered a fracture. The perfect, sinless, heavenly Family broke itself open so that it could encircle us.

Rarely do humans die of emotional stress, but it happens. Elderly couples often die in rapid succession. Babies can develop “failure to thrive” due to lack of touch. In extreme grief, stress hormones attack the heart, creating a stunning effect called “broken heart syndrome.” Jesus, fully human, tried to carry God-sized grief in His man-heart. It killed Him.

In His story, God finally succeeded. After resting on the Sabbath, He came forth when His Father called. Grief gave way to reunion as He ascended to God’s side, asking the Father to accept His death in our behalf. He did. As a result of heaven’s sacrifice, the rift between heaven and earth is closed forever. But our relationship with God is better than healed—it is stronger, more bonded, and more intimate than ever.

“By His life and His death, Christ has achieved *even more than recovery* from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan’s purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen.”⁴

In the “bone” of our relationship with God, the devil wanted a complete, eternal fracture. He succeeded, for a time; but then Jesus sent in the celestial osteoblasts. Now we are closer to God than if our bond had never been broken. Through God we can have *even more than recovery*. God does not just patch us up; He turns the very things requiring patches into implements of strength.

Because God’s calling is “irrevocable” (see Romans 11:29), His purpose that we represent Him remained steadfast. Men and angels watch us to see a witness of the character of God. Those who serve Jesus “have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men” (1 Corinthians 4:9). “Spectacle,” the Greek *theatron*, means “theater,” giving a sense that a large audience watches us.

Acceptance

Whatever relationship problems you have endured, you are in good company. God Himself, the Author of love and relationship, has suffered before you and now suffers alongside you. Rather than fault yourself or others for the failures, embrace them as an opportunity to journey with God toward understanding and experiencing this mysterious thing called love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Has this chapter helped you to have a more optimistic view of how God can use your brokenness?
2. Name one of the most important lessons your failed relationships have taught you.
3. How has God used that brokenness?
4. Recount a time when a relational dyad had to expand into a triad.
5. How does it affect you to contemplate the story of God's broken relationships?
6. Do you feel safer with people who admit their failures?
7. How do you feel about being the kind of person who is willing to be vulnerable with others?
8. Are you inclined to compare your own mistakes and failures with other people who seem to have a prettier life?
9. Recount a time when you were able to help someone by admitting your own failure.
10. Recount a time when you learned what love is by learning what it is not.

1. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1958), 42.

2. Ibid.

3. Ellen G. White, "Christ's Ambassadors," *Review and Herald*, May 29, 1900.

4. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1940), 25; emphasis added.