

“DYING TO SELF”

by Dr. D. W. Ekstrand

The essence of a being’s “existence” has to do with the fact that he is a “living reality” — if one no longer has life or the functions of vitality, they are said to “no longer exist.” So, the essence of “death” is the absence of “life” — therefore when one dies “one ceases to exist.” To carry the argument into the spiritual realm, when someone “spiritually dies to self,” self ceases to exist — that is, SELF IS NO LONGER THE REASON FOR ONE’S EXISTENCE. As such, the individual is no longer concerned with “his own will or happiness,” because he is no longer in the picture... he is no longer the center of his own little universe... he no longer continues to arrange the world around himself.

The individual who “dies to self” understands that God created him for a reason; that he is a part of God’s plan for the world. To be used of God one must understand the “essence of who he now really is,” and how it is that God can use him. Every genuine child of God wants to be used by God to accomplish His purposes in the world — Jesus said, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (Jn 15:8). That is the essence of God’s plan — we are saved to bear fruit; created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph 2:10). We bear fruit when Christ lives His life in and through us (Jn 15:5; Gal 2:20). The apostle Paul said, “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). The Lord wants us to live a godly and spiritually productive happy life.

The world’s philosophy says LIVE FOR SELF... but God’s Word says DIE TO SELF! Many people came to Jesus and asked to be His disciples, but most of them turned away because they were not willing to give themselves to Christ; i.e., make themselves a “slave of Christ” (Lk 14:26, 33; 16:13; Rom 12:1; 1 Cor 6:19-20; 1 Pet 1:18-19). Jesus said, “He who loves his father or mother or himself more than Me, he is not worthy of Me” (Mt 10:37-39). Thus Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

C. S. Lewis’ literary demon “Screwtape” has something insightful to say. He tells his young nephew that humans rarely pray for the thing God wants them to pray for — they simply want enough grace to see them through some moment or time of trouble... they conjure up a vision of the future they want and appeal for that outcome. They persist in wrapping their anxious hands around life’s steering wheel as if “it’s going to work this time if only they clutch it more tightly.” The most difficult prayer for us to voice is, “Not my will, but Thine be done.” Our conversations with God regularly leapfrog over our intellectual resolve not to “ask for stuff,” and land squarely on the bargaining and pleading table. The best we seem to be able to do is arrive at a compromise between what we know to be right intellectually and the howl of protest that lies within us.

Obedience isn’t easy. Sometimes our carnal mind doesn’t like the idea of God having His way and us obeying it — it is the nature of man to “want things to go his way.” When things don’t go as we planned... when it rains on our parade... when someone says something unbecoming to us... when our world turns upside down... when difficulties and circumstances tax us too much... when we get turned down for a promotion... when we don’t get what we worked so hard to acquire — the long and short of it all is, “it bothers us!” “it rubs us wrong!” “it makes

us angry!” Here’s the real rub: Just because we are living a life of obedience doesn’t automatically make our situation better. Most believers think that by being obedient the clouds will go away and skies will turn blue... their financial problems will disappear and their little nest egg will grow again... their physical infirmities will go away and their health will once again return. Sometimes these things may happen, but at other times they don’t. Is God still good? Absolutely. This we will also conclude: being in God’s will is far better than being outside His will. The secret to a “joy-filled life” doesn’t lie in the absence of pain or in demanding our own way, but in “dying to self” and embracing God’s will. Submission to the will of God in your prayer-life may be expressed in words like this:

“Father, You understand my heart, my needs and my prayer better than I understand them myself. You know that my spiritual needs far outweigh any physical or temporal needs that I may have, and I know that Your will being done in my life will give meaning, purpose and fulfillment beyond anything I could ask or understand.”

What Does it Mean to Die to Self?

Jesus described the “dying to self” process (“denying self”) as part of following Him — “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mt 16:24); He then went on to say that “dying to self” is actually a positive, not a negative: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it!” (Mt 16:25). In dying to the self-life, we discover an “abundant life” by depending on God, who provides much more than we can imagine. Jesus put it this way: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24; Gal 5:22-23). Part of the life we discover when we give our lives to Christ, is freedom from a life of self-obsession; as such, we experience the joy of Christ, and we become more accepting, generous and loving of others. So when we die to self we set aside “our wants and desires” and instead focus on loving God and valuing others as highly as we value ourselves (Mt 22:37-39). This moves us away from “self-centeredness” and more open to being a follower of Christ who cares deeply for others – it’s much easier to pay attention to the concerns, interests and needs of other people (Phil 2:3-4) when we are no longer obsessed with our own interests.

Dying to ourselves is something that we Christians find hard to do. In this world where there is pressure on all sides to replace the love of God for something lesser, to die to oneself is something that nearly every believer is adversed to doing; since we live in a world of instant gratification, dying to oneself is a concept that is both foreign and unacceptable. Yet this is one thing that Jesus insisted upon. Essentially, the Christian life is an ongoing process of dying to self and living for Christ – seeking His will and kingdom and righteousness, rather than our own. But, as fallen humans, we are hard-wired to seek *our own will* above anyone else’s... we want *our way* in life... and we all have a tendency to see things from *our point of view*, and define the world by how we see it. Though most people deny their own self-centeredness, man by nature is very much self-centered and self-interested. We were not born good or “others oriented.” Our fall stemmed from “wanting to be like God” (Gen 3:5); thus a lot of the aspects of pride that characterized the first man, also characterize us. And “pride” keeps us from receiving God’s love —

we are so full of ourselves that we are inclined to think that our need for God is not that great. Because we are proud, we chase after other lovers in an effort to please ourselves – and that is the essence of idolatry. Idolatry takes many forms – a relationship we value more than God; the desire for material wealth that is greater than our love for God; the desire to draw attention to ourselves rather than directing the attention of others toward God. The world is full of idols that dethrone God from our hearts. Anything that causes one to have a “self-focus” rather than a “God-focus” is a form of pride and is abhorrent to God. The two things that keep us from God, and the two main reasons why we need to die to ourselves are: PRIDE (Self) and IDOLATRY (Desires).

The would-be disciple must “deny himself;” that is, he must disregard his own interests, and die to the willful, selfish, sinful parts of himself... he must let go of his plans and what he wants to do. The issue of dying to self is a process of stripping away layers of sin encrusted with selfishness – it is an integral part of the process of sanctification. It was the disciples natural instinct to preserve their own lives that caused them to flee from Christ at His arrest; but self-preservation results in spiritual loss (Lk 9:24-25). The disciples learned that the Christian life is not about us – it’s all about Christ... it’s about putting God’s will over our will... it’s about putting Christ first above everything else, no matter what it costs us... it’s the realization that we are His servants, and as such, our goal is to live for Him and glorify Him in everything we do. When we came to Christ, we chose to make Him our Lord, and invited Him to come live in us – in doing so we chose to give up our will for His. Since we chose to become His child and servant, then we must die to ourselves every day, every hour, every minute, every second — the greatest hope for each of us as believers is to die to self that we might live for Christ.

Dying to self is never portrayed in Scripture as something “optional” in the Christian life. As believers we are to “take up our cross daily” and follow Christ. It is our “daily cross” that makes us weep more than any other thing... that makes us cry out like Jesus, “Father, why is this?”... that causes us to run to Christ and put our arms around Him... that makes us sick of earth and self... and that gives us a longing for heaven. Said Paul: “I die every day!” (1 Cor 15:31).

The goal of death to self and daily cross-bearing is “fellowship with Christ.” The goal of life for the believer is to “seek God” and make Him their all in all, their last end. Jeff Alexander suggests the following five ways that we embrace the cross (www.cause-of-god.com) —

1. **Humiliation** – This is the essence of the Christ-life. Here God uses reproaches, abuse, poverty, loneliness, persecution, distress, seeming failure, disappointments, and the like. These things succeed when they cause us to lose our own will and let God take charge.
2. **Rejecting the praise of men** – Self thrives on praise and adulation; self-esteem is the hotbed of the self-life.
3. **Embracing simplicity and child-likeness** – Self feeds on things grand and glorious; Christ-likeness is child-like and simple.
4. **Living by pure faith** – Self depends on outward assurances; living by pure faith trusts the Word of God even when there is no indication of God’s presence or blessing.
5. **Seeking our nothingness and His all-ness** – We must make a daily habit to distrust ourselves, our own wisdom, and our strength, and look to Christ alone for what we need.

How Does One Die to Self?

Dying to self is no easy task. Since we are embracing ethics that are foreign to our very nature and are not of our own making (they belong to Jesus), dying to self more often than not involves a real fight when we try to surrender our will to the will of God (Gal 5:17; Eph 5:12)... but God gives sufficient grace to those who fight the good fight (Jn 15:7; 1 Cor 10:13; 2 Cor 12:9; Eph 3:16; Phil 4:13; Col 1:9-11; 1 Tim 1:18; Heb 4:15-16; 1 Jn 5:4). By the way, we will never be able to die to ourselves unless we are convinced that serving the flesh (our sin nature) is totally unprofitable. We have to see that it has absolutely no worth. We need to come to detest its very presence. On the other hand, we must come to love the Spirit's ways – we are to see the glorious work of the Spirit in contrast to the flesh. By seeing their contrasting ways, we will hate one and love the other (Mt 6:24). We refuse to serve our own self preferences and become wholly loyal to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. In your quiet moments, talk to God and ask Him to reveal those areas of your life that you need to submit to Him... ask Him for the grace to help you surrender those areas of your life... and ask Him for the grace to help you believe and deliver you from your unbelief (Mk 9:24).

We must also remember that we cannot rid ourselves of the flesh on this earth – it is still with us, and if we do not exercise extreme care, we will serve it... but we don't have to. By voiding our allegiance to the flesh, we can, by God's grace, be set free to serve Christ. How do we void our former allegiance to our flesh? Paul says "death" is the only means – he explains it carefully in Romans 7:1-6 (study that passage carefully). The point is that unless we are absolutely convinced the flesh is a destroyer, we will continue to listen to it, follow it, and serve it. As Christians we are technically free from its ruling over us, but we can still serve the old self. The real question is: Do we really hate the flesh? Are you really convinced of such? Paul convincingly set forth this case in the last part of Romans 7 and in the early part of Romans 8. Whenever Paul would go by the old nature, he would serve his own self and bear evil results. But he wanted to serve Christ (Romans 7) which brings forth the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5). The flesh always brings about death (worthless, destructive consequences that have no eternal value) because it is hostile to God (Romans 8). We do not need to live "self-centered" lives.

We need to "humble" ourselves by stating that serving ourselves is not good. In a sense this is what "dying to self" essentially means. In order to be able to be in God's will, we have to be out of our own. We recognize that "serving self" is not good, so we choose to "serve the Spirit." Our commitment to saying "no" to the old nature comes only to the degree that we are *sure* of the old nature's total rebellion against God, and we *desire* to serve the Spirit. The Christian life is based on "humble living" – when we are willing to humble ourselves by looking at the facts of what self-service does, then we are willing to walk in the ways of God. Our spiritual growth comes as we recognize the complete rebellious nature of the flesh, and the power of the new life through the life of Christ. The Christian needs to acknowledge the flesh, declare its lousy nature, rejects its promptings, acknowledge the Lord's presence and the beautiful nature of the Spirit, and surrender one's total heart and will to the Spirit's leading. Here is a possible prayer one might pray while having an early morning meditation —

"Dear Lord, my allegiance to You will be tested today. Right now, I am stating my faithfulness to you. You are the One I love forever. At the same time, I will clearly state that I want nothing to do with serving my self. I have had enough to do with

that selfish ego of mine that tries to get all the attention it can. Your principles of love and giving are what I want. Radiate in my life through acts and words of kindness. Forgive me of my sin and cleanse me. I make myself totally empty of self so that You can fill me with Your humble paths of love.” (wwwFOUNDATIONSforFREEDOM.net)

How do we get to the place where we can say to God, “Not my will, but Thy will be done?”

Jesus had a “consistent prayer life” that kept Him in tune with God. Let’s recount the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness – the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matt 4:1-16; Heb 4:15-16). After Jesus “fasted” for forty days and nights the tempter approached Him. Jesus knew the only way to combat the enemy of God was thru Prayer, Fasting & Scripture. These same three ingredients will keep a child of God in tune with Him – Prayer, Fasting, and the Study of the Word are the key ingredients to crucifying the flesh that the spirit within might live. When we pray, fast, and study God’s Word then “our will” and “God’s will” will line up together. God’s Word opens blind eyes and reveals to us what God’s will is for our lives, and gives us the ability to deny the flesh and obey His Spirit. The problem with most believers today is that they are committed to this world and not the things of God – everything is about “what we want” and not about “what God wants.” The flesh is running rampant in the Christian world today. The devil was not successful in getting Jesus to succumb to temptation, because Jesus was strengthened in His resolve to withstand through prayer and fasting. This is the essence of “spiritual warfare” – Jesus fought it when He was on earth, and we are fighting it today. And the “weapons” He used are the same ones we must use (Eph 6:10-18).

So what are some of the practical implications of “dying to self” – what does it look like in practice? Reflect upon the following —

- 1. Dying to oneself does not involve sacrifice** – Though it may seem like it, it actually involves more of “seeking God’s will” (which reflects the attitude of the heart), rather than “obeying His will” over our own (Is 1:18-20; Mt 9:13; 12:7).
- 2. Dying to oneself involves being motivated by love** – You can obey God out of fear (as opposed to love), and though you obey Him it will not result in lasting, life-giving benefits. The obedience of the believer needs to be motivated by “love” – we must strive to obey God because we “love Him,” and don’t want to grieve Him or cause Him pain. We must not make “our wanting to avoid pain” our chief motivation.
- 3. Dying to oneself involves mercy** – When someone cuts us off in traffic and makes us angry, we must choose to be merciful; not just because it’s the right thing to do, but also to keep us from getting ourselves stuck in a foxhole of anger and bitterness. Common sense tells us that “sinful responses” produce “painful consequences” – the more we practice doing the right thing, the less we will suffer from doing the wrong thing. Therefore, chose mercy and experience God’s blessing instead (Mt 5:7, 44; 18:33; 22:39; Heb 10:30).

Humility is the path to death – The essence of “humility,” is the giving up of self and taking the place of perfect nothingness before God. “Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient unto death” (Phil 2:8) – in death He fully surrendered His will to the will of the Father; in death He gave up His self, with its natural reluctance to drink the cup... He gave up His life. If it had not been

for His boundless humility, counting Himself as nothing except as a servant to do and suffer the will of God, He never would have gone to the cross... and we would still be in our sins.

How do we die to ourselves? Andrew Murray puts it this way: “the death itself is actually not our work – it is God’s work.” In Christ we are “dead to sin” (Rom 6:3, 11) – the life that is in us has already gone through the process of death and resurrection; thus, we can be sure that we are indeed dead to sin. If we are to enter into full fellowship with Christ in His death, and know full deliverance from self, we must “humble ourselves.” This is our one duty. We must stand before God in utter helplessness, and consent heartily to the fact that we are impotent to slay ourselves – we must sink down into our own nothingness, in a spirit of meek and patient surrender to God. God accepts such humbling of ourselves as the proof that our whole heart truly desires it, thus preparing us for His mighty work of grace that transforms us into His likeness. It is the “path of humility” that ultimately leads us to the full realization that we indeed are “dead in Christ.” The death of self has no surer mark than a humility which makes itself of no reputation... which empties out itself... and which takes the form of a servant. What a hopeless task it would be if we had to do the work ourselves! We must simply claim in faith the death and the life of Jesus as being ours – and humble ourselves every day into that perfect, helpless dependence upon God. As we sink every morning into the deep, deep nothingness of the grave of Jesus, every day the life of Jesus will be manifested in us. States Murray: “The souls that enter into ‘His humiliation’ will find in Him the power to see and count self dead, and... to walk with all lowliness and meekness.” (www.worldinvisible.com/library/murray)

Ultimately, only God can make us grow. The apostle Paul helps us keep this in perspective when he said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth” (1 Cor 3:6). God causes the growth, but we need to do the planting and the watering. We have a vital role in how much we grow in the Lord. Our part is to cooperate with Him by planting the truth in our hearts and watering it. *Directing our hearts toward God*, through the prayerful study of His Word, must be at the core of how we live the Christian life. Scripture gives us the following injunctions: “train yourself to be godly” (1 Tim 4:7)... and “sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart” (1 Pet 3:15). It is vital that we *direct our hearts and desire back to God*, and away from earthly sources – this is the essence of “dying to self.” It is because our hearts are so prone to wander that directing our heart toward God must become an essential part of our every day life. Remember what God told His people Israel, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron 7:14). Scripture is very clear on our need to *direct our hearts toward God* – spiritual growth will result when we apply discipline to maintain our faith, hope and love toward God. If we apply these disciplines out of a “sense of duty,” we will continue to languish spiritually (we are not under the law) – *our discipline must be a discipline of delight toward God*. Remember, “dying to self” isn’t the goal – “life” is the goal! Carrying our cross is not an end in itself – *dying is the path to real living*. (www.tasteheavennow.net). By dying to our earthly ways, we exit the darkness and enter into the light, and there is where we experience times of refreshing and life to the full – in the presence of God! Remember, God dwells in the light! not darkness!

George Muller, known for his great faith and ministry to orphans in 19th century England, was asked the secret of his fruitful service for the Lord. He said, “There was a day when I died... utterly died.” As he spoke, he bent lower and lower until he almost touched the floor. “I died to

George Muller — his opinions, his preferences, his tastes, and his will — died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends — and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God.”

Bill Bright, founder of “Campus Crusade for Christ,” had this to say about “dying to self”: “Everyone I know who has been greatly used by God has gone through an experience of ‘dying to self’ as described in Galatians 2:20” — “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” He goes on to say that it is not until we know the reality of “death to self” that we can live for Christ, allowing God to truly use and bless us. “My Galatians 2:20 experience,” writes Bright, “happened in the spring of 1951 when Vonette (his wife) and I signed a contract to become ‘slaves of Christ’ – I daily reaffirm this contract.” Holy living involves a daily decision to surrender to the “lordship of Christ.” It involves yielding our will to God and adopting His perspective. If you want to see what it looks like to live a holy life, examine the life of Jesus – He is the visible expression of God’s holiness. God wants our minds and hearts to be filled with His holy qualities. As our lives are transformed, we will project the light of His holiness into the darkness of our evil world. Real life – abundant life – begins with dying to self. “Dying to self” is a liberating action that produces joy and peace.

Other Noteworthy Quotes

Dietrich Bonhoeffer — When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

Charles Spurgeon — I have now concentrated all my prayers into one... that I may die to self, and live wholly to Him.

Martin Luther — Until a man is nothing, God can make nothing out of him.

J. I. Packer — Jesus Christ demands self-denial, that is, self-negation, as a necessary condition of discipleship. Self-denial is a summons to submit to the authority of God as Father and of Jesus as Lord... Accepting death to everything that carnal self wants to possess is what Christ’s summons to self-denial is all about.

Thomas a Kempis — The more a man dies to himself, the more he begins to live unto God.

D. L. Moody — Let God have your life; He can do more with it than you can.

Arthur Pink — Growth in grace... is the forming of a lower estimate of ourselves. It is a deepening realization of our nothingness.

Ignatius — Few souls understand what God would accomplish in them if they were to abandon themselves unreservedly to Him.

Richard Sibbes — Self-emptiness prepares us for spiritual fullness.

Richard Baxter — Self is the most treacherous enemy, and the most insinuating deceiver in the world. Of all other vices, it is both the hardest to find out, and the hardest to cure.

Vance Havner — Some missionaries bound for Africa were laughed at by the boat captain who said, “You’ll only die over there!” Replied a missionary: “Captain, we died before we started.”

FOLLOWING ARE SOME RELATED STUDIES ON “SPIRITUAL BROKENNESS”

(A collection of studies from a select group of authors)

The Wholeness of Brokenness

<http://uncompromisedchristianity.com/2009/09/11/the-wholeness-of-brokenness.aspx>

The word "broken" generally conjures up a negative image in our minds. Something that is broken is usually not wanted and is considered useless to us. When talking about a person, someone who is described as broken is usually in dire straits and at a precarious point in his or her life. No one wants to be "broken".

In God's dictionary, however, brokenness is a crucial characteristic for a Christian. In David's psalm of repentance after he was confronted by the prophet Nathan for his adulterous liaison with Bathsheba and his successfully murderous plan of her husband Uriah, David said to the Lord: "You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; nor are You pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Ps 51:16-17). In another psalm David expresses the joy of God's forgiveness: "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps 34:18). Additionally, the prophet Isaiah said: "For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy. 'I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Is 57:15). And finally, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3) – the "poor in spirit" are those who are spiritually broken.

Scripture makes it very clear that “spiritual brokenness” is very important to the Lord. So what exactly is spiritual brokenness? Well one thing that it is not – it is not walking around with a gloomy face wailing "woe is me," because you've been getting the short end of the stick in life. No, brokenness is understanding the fact that without God you are spiritually bankrupt – it is totally giving up on yourself (dying to self) and giving Him the reigns of your life. Surrender and brokenness go hand-in-hand – spiritual brokenness is surrendering your will to God. Spiritual brokenness is knowing that, without God, you are, and can do, nothing. It is a total, desperate dependence on Him in every aspect of life. It is a cry from the depths of your soul that shouts: "God, I need You! I want You! I can't live without You! You are everything to me!"

The concept of “spiritual brokenness” is not a popular topic in most Christian circles, and it is pretty much ignored in most churches because it sounds so negative. However, brokenness is anything but negative! It is the way to the heart of God. Think for a moment about a wild stallion that a rancher buys. It is strong, beautiful, and wild! It calls the shots and does what it wants. It has enormous potential to the rancher but in it's wild state it is not useful to him. So the master must "break" the horse of it's will. To be sure, the horse doesn't like the breaking process and fights the rancher with all his strength. But, after a long and tedious process, the beautiful,

wild horse is finally broken and fully surrendered to his master, and can now fulfill the purpose for which the rancher purchased him. Also, before it is broken, the wild stallion will not sit still long enough to experience the gentle caress and loving care of his master. But after it is broken, it now understands just how much his master loves him, and experiences his warm embrace and gentle care.

You and I are like that “wild stallions” – created with lots of potential... nevertheless "wild!"

We call the shots and our will takes center stage. But when we trust Christ as Savior (i.e., we are purchased by our Master), He begins the long process of breaking us of our will so that He can be in control. Like the wild horse, we don't like the breaking process. It hurts and we fight against God with all our strength. After all, we want to be in charge! For some, unfortunately, they fight Him all their lives and never come to the point of being fully broken, and miss out on the most important thing in life – intimacy with God. However, for those of us who are finally broken of "self", we become useful to God, we bear much fruit, and fulfill the destiny He has planned for us in this life. Most importantly, we come into an intimate, loving relationship with our Master. We are each on a journey of brokenness – have you reached that point in life where you now fully understand that God is everything (absolutely everything) in your life? Have you surrendered your will to Him so that His will for you is all you desire? Brokenness is the only way to holiness and wholeness – it is God's purpose for your life.

The Valley of Spiritual Brokenness -- Toby Toburen, Christ Community Church, Sumter, SC

<http://exaltingtruth.com/2012/01/19/the-valley-of-spiritual-brokenness/>

Walk this Christian life long enough and God the Father, thru the ministry of the Holy Spirit, will graciously guide you thru the Valley of Brokenness. This valley is no easy journey. The fact is it's one of great paradox. On the one hand, the Valley of Brokenness is painful, humbling, and pride-crushing. On the other hand, this same valley is one of delight.

Let me explain. The pain springs forth from many things, none more excruciating than being confronted by the wicked and rebellious sin that still inhabits our redeemed but fallen hearts. It was the Apostle Paul himself who declared to Christians in Rome: “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Rom 7:18-19)

Admitting and confessing this reality is never easy for the very reason that we are terribly prideful people. Uprooting pride is one of God's great aims for our sanctification. God's crucible of brokenness invariably exposes such pride, which is the root of all sin and the cause of all falls – both kingdom and personal. Of course, the crucible of brokenness also brings pain in the form

suffering, both our own and sometimes that of precious others, as we endure God's gracious discipline.

The delight springs forth from knowing that God disciplines those He loves and uses the painful crucible of brokenness for purposes other than punitive judgment. After all, was it not our most glorious and beautiful Lord Jesus who became our sin and thus endured God's punitive wrath on the Cross of Calvary? (2 Cor 5:21). Is God's wrath toward our sin punitive? Absolutely! Yet, the Good News of the Gospel is that God's wrath has been satisfied thru the penal substitutionary death of His only begotten Son Jesus. Therefore, rather than being punitive, God's discipline is purposed for "yielding peaceful fruit of righteousness" in the Christian (Heb 12:5-11).

Unfortunately, most Christians have not embraced this Gospel paradox. And, when disciples fail to understand this Gospel paradox – that God's discipline is not *punitive*, but *sanctifying* – they inevitably reject God's discipline, resist His crucible of brokenness, and increase the wreckage in their lives and the lives of those they claim to love the most. Pain, discomfort, embarrassment, and shame blind us to the biblical truth that God's crucible of brokenness and discipline are one of the truest signs of His grace, mercy, and love for us as adopted children. When we choose to believe that God's discipline, rather than being punitive, is gracious and merciful, we will embrace His crucible of brokenness and know its satisfying delight — for we are being transformed into Christlikeness. Don't forget Christian, the process of being forged requires heat and sharp tools – both of which are painful, but necessary. As a pastor, I implore Christians to approach the painful season of brokenness believing that what God is doing is not punitive – it is sanctifying. It is Christ-exalting!

Your sin has been judged, punished, and forgiven once and for all when Christ "who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross and despised the shame" (Heb 12:1-2). As Christ hung bruised, beaten, and naked on the cross, He bore your sin with joy all the while enduring the horror of God's wrath, knowing that only His righteous blood could ever cleanse you of unrighteousness and declare you innocent before the holy God. Christian, instead of resisting God's crucible of brokenness, embrace it as a sanctifying measure that will ultimately result in you becoming more Christlike.

God the Father is for you – not against you. You are His beloved child, a royal priest in His heavenly kingdom. You were bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Your sins have been forgiven and your unrighteousness has been cleansed. God-sent brokenness and discipline are to be embraced by the believer, for they are glorious evidences of God's fatherly love and genuine salvation.

Are you walking thru the Valley of Brokenness? Are you experiencing the disciplining hand of God the Father? Instead of running and resisting – rejoice! God is proving to you that you are His legitimate son or daughter. This is a Gospel paradigm that should make the heart of every Christian leap with joy and worship with thanksgiving in their heart. Writes Paul, "I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).

The Need for Brokenness – by Chris Terry

<http://crt010304.wordpress.com/2008/03/04/revive-2-the-need-for-brokenness/>

Have you ever suffered a broken bone? If you have, you know that it wasn't a very pleasant experience in your life. None of us want to relive those kinds of moments. Why? Because they are painful. Have you ever had a broken heart? A time of emotional distress where you really hurt? Some people would say that the broken heart was more painful than the broken bone. Most people have a real aversion to pain of any kind. Have you ever been spiritually broken? What I am referring to is this – when a believer becomes strongly convicted of sin in his life, and becomes so convicted that he mourns his present spiritual condition, he is humbled, and knows he must make a change. This is the essence of *spiritual brokenness*. The truth of the matter is *every* true believer, *every* true Christ-follower needs to be broken spiritually, and usually more than once, in fact repeatedly throughout his life. This describes for us, the *need for brokenness*.

In the Old Testament there is an incredible story of spiritual revival that took place. A *revival* is what happens when God's people, whether individually or corporately, are restored to a right relationship with God. As we see in Ezra chapter nine, *spiritual revival* begins with *spiritual brokenness*. It was brokenness over sin in the lives of God's people. This brokenness over sin began with one man, Ezra, a priest and servant of God. In Ezra 10:1, Ezra prayed and confessed guilt, and wept before God. While he was doing this a multitude of people showed up and also began to weep.

Jesus Also Wept (*Supplemental Thoughts*)

In Luke 19, we read about Jesus entering into Jerusalem riding on a young colt – Luke tells us that when He approached the city, He wept over it, saying, “If you had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes” (Lk 19:41-42). Though Jesus also wept at the tomb of Lazarus, the expression there carries with it the idea that He “*cried silently*” (Jn 11:35) whereas when He entered Jerusalem, the expression literally means that He “*wailed loudly*.” The reason for Jesus' agony was “their rejection of Him” (Jn 1:11) — Jesus was saying, “If only you had known what I wanted for your life. I wanted to shelter you, and spread My wings of comfort over you. If only you knew My love and mercy toward you. How much I wanted to give you My peace, My blessings, My hope, and My purpose for your lives. If only you would have listened.” Jesus saw the masses worn down, heaven in spirit, despairing over their lifelong efforts to please God with their empty rituals. Jesus had spent three years preaching to them throughout the land, but they would not listen. The same can be said of the countless millions of people today who are desperately trying to placate their gods; desperately trying to make some sacrifice that they hope will atone for the guilt of their sin. As Jesus looked around the temple, He saw people everywhere buying lambs and goats or pigeons to offer as sacrifices — and at that point He was overcome with great grief. “If only you knew how much I love you.”

In Luke 10:2-4, we learn that one of the men speaks up and says, “We have been unfaithful to God and married foreign women (non-Israelites), and yet we know, in spite of our wrongdoing, there is still hope for Israel.” Therefore the man proposed that the nation of Israel make an agreement with God to divorce their foreign wives and children, according to the counsel of God and His commandment. They now want to obey God’s commands. Thus the man tells Ezra, “be courageous and act.”

- The people knew that they had really blown it spiritually, and were now definitely repentant. The word *repent* means, “to feel or express sincere regret or remorse.” They needed to make things right, so they called upon Ezra to be their leader to guide them in the way that they should respond. Whatever Ezra told them to do, they would do. This willingness to change, this willingness to be led is a demonstration of humility. True humility is the result of spiritual brokenness. John Wesley once said, “Give me 100 men who hate nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I will shake this world.”

In verses 5-6 we learn that Ezra gets up and makes the religious leaders (the leading priests and the Levites) and all Israel (the people of God), make an agreement with God to divorce their wives and children, as the law commanded. After this agreement Ezra went into a Temple chamber — he didn’t eat or drink, because he was mourning over the sin of God’s people (the returnees from exile in Babylon). This brokenness over sin resulted in mourning over sin.

In verses 7-8 there was an announcement made that all Israelites come up to Jerusalem. Whoever would not come within 3 days, all his possessions would no longer be his and he would be an outcast among the people of God (the returnees from exile). Brokenness began when one man, Ezra, became aware of sin in the lives of God’s people. He was mourning over these wrong actions, this sin. This resulted in brokenness of a large group of God’s people. When these people were broken, they realized they needed to change, so they did. Not only that they called the rest of God’s people to brokenness and change, and if they refused to do so they would become outcasts among God’s people. That is how serious this group of God’s people were about brokenness and change.

In verse 9 we learn that this call to brokenness and change got the attention of the men and they showed up at Jerusalem within 3 days. All the people sat in front of the Temple, and they were trembling because of the reason they were there, and because of the heavy rain. In verses 10-11 Ezra stood up and spoke to the people. He told them that they had been unfaithful to God and married foreign wives, which added more guilt to God’s people. As a result, Ezra called them to brokenness and change. “Confess your sin to God and do His will.” Also, stop living like the non-believers (peoples of the land), and divorce your foreign wives and foreign children.

- Ezra who has already been broken over the sin of God’s people, now calls God’s people to brokenness over their sin and to change. Ezra says that it is not enough to just be broken or sorry, the people must choose to change. Evangelism, fine as it is, is not revival. After a very successful evangelistic gathering, Billy Graham was asked, “Is this revival?” Graham replied, “No. When revival comes, I expect to see two things which we have not seen yet. First, a new sense of the holiness of God on the part of Christians, and second, a new sense of the sinfulness of sin on the part of Christians.”

In verses 12-15 we are told that after Ezra called for brokenness and change, this huge group of men responded, “Ezra, you are right! We are wrong! All that you have said, it is the duty to do!” The people point out that for them to do what the law commanded could not be done immediately because there are so many people, and the weather is not conducive to do this immediately. Furthermore the task also could not be completed in one or two days because God’s people have transgressed so greatly in this matter; they had sinned severely and in great number. So they propose to make appointments with godly leaders to do as Ezra told them to do, until God’s anger over their sin is turned away — because they were broken and changed, God would forgive them. Four men tried to oppose the plan but were unsuccessful. The vast majority of people said they would change. The majority was convicted of their sin and were broken spiritually. They knew they had sinned greatly; as such, they would confess their sin to God and change.

The Battle for Brokenness

<http://ceruleansanctum.com/2004/10/battle-for-brokenness.html>

One of the current trends in many Christian circles is to confuse brokenness with... brokenness. The rise of inner healing ministries in the 1970s resulted in a modification of the definition of “brokenness.” What has occurred is that we now consider brokenness to be a reflection of all the painful events we’ve incurred in life rather than the traditional, Biblical meaning of brokenness. The Lord speaks through the prophet Isaiah:

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.
For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry;
for the spirit would grow faint before me, and the breath of life that I made.
Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry, I struck him;
I hid my face and was angry, but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart.
I have seen his ways, but I will heal him;
I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners, creating the fruit of the lips.
Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,” says the LORD, “and I will heal him.
But the wicked are like the troubled sea; it cannot rest, its waters cast up mire and dirt.
“There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”
—Isaiah 57:15-21

True spiritual brokenness is a reflection of a life given to humility, a contrite spirit, and an understanding that we are like brute beasts before God unless we allow Him to break us like the horseman breaks a stallion. Real brokenness is the man who acknowledges that he is no longer his own; he has been bought with a price. Such a man yields himself to God to be broken and formed into the image of Christ.

See how this plays out in the life of the prideful man who experiences true brokenness: All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” While the words were still in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws. At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and...

I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored Him who lives forever,
for His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and His kingdom endures from generation to generation;
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and He does according to His will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?”
At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty
and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established
in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise
and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are right and His ways are just; and
those who walk in pride He is able to humble.
—Daniel 4:28-37 ESV

Here is the natural man broken by God. His pride is broken, his position is broken, his self-worship is broken. And in the place of all these comes praise to God for being broken by Him.

Contrast this with the “brokenness” we so often hear spoken of today in Christian circles. We are fragile not because they are being broken by God, but because we dwell in the pain of our circumstances. This is not to say that God does not use circumstance to break prideful people, but too often we who revel in our pain exhibit a pride in displaying just how broken we are! No one has been as hurt as badly as we have been. No one has endured the tragedies we have endured. In short, we become immune to the very brokenness God desires to instill in us so long as we make an idol of our pain.

Acolytes of this “new” brokenness must always talk about it, wear it as a badge of honor, and retreat into it whenever anyone questions the need to dwell in the pain. Worse yet, we can use our pain as a way to assuage our guilt before the Lord. We make ourselves appear downtrodden when we are anything but, refusing true brokenness and holding instead to the mire of our own making.

Such is not God’s brokenness, but a counterfeit that leads us away from real healing and growth in Christ. Dying to self means abandoning even our pain, no matter how great, to take on the image of the Savior. Only then can the scales drop from our eyes and we be raised up to stand in true brokenness before God.