HEART BREAKS

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Introduction

It is virtually impossible (if not *totally* impossible) to make it through life without having your heart broken. Our little worlds can get turned upside-down very quickly. When that happens, our emotions are scrambled, and our thoughts are foggy. We have difficulty concentrating. It is hard to sit still. We are jittery, nervous, and anxious. It is difficult to sleep. We lose our appetites. We are unable to relax, and we wonder if we'll always feel this way.

There are countless things that can break a human heart. It could be your boyfriend or girlfriend breaking up with you. It could be your spouse saying they no longer want to be married to you. It could be a doctor informing you of a serious diagnosis. It could be the sudden death of a loved one. It could be your supervisor telling you that you are no longer needed with the company. These and similar situations are more than enough to break the strongest of human hearts.

The first time my heart was broken was when I was about eight years old. Our family had a little poodle named "Starsky." He was named after one of the stars of the 1970s television show "Starsky and Hutch." Starsky was full of

energy and love. He was always excited to see us come home, and he was always sad when we left. My brother and I treated him like our little brother. He watched ballgames on television with us, played outside with us, celebrated special occasions with us, sat under the table when we ate, and was always as excited as we were when school (or church) got snowed out. (An occasional church service getting snowed out was one of the perks of living in East Tennessee!) One year, though, during a holiday celebration, Starsky got a little too excited. Evidently, he had a heart attack. His life ended in front of our eyes. It was the worst Christmas I ever had. Without Starsky there, it just wasn't the same. For the first time in my young life, I knew how it felt to have a broken heart.

I wish I could say that was the only time my heart has ever been broken, but that's not the case. There have been other times since then when, for one reason or another, my heart broke. And I've got to say that it never gets any easier. It doesn't matter how strong a person is...broken hearts still hurt. And sometimes the pain can be excruciating.

Not only do broken hearts *hurt*, but they also take time to *heal*. Broken bones heal faster than broken hearts. Give that broken arm about six weeks and you should be as good as new again,

but broken hearts take longer to heal. healing of a broken heart is a process, and the process simply takes time. The good news, though, is that with God as our Physician the process eventually works, and the healing really does take place. That doesn't necessarily mean that we will ever "get over" whatever it was that broke our heart. It doesn't mean that we will get to a place where we "don't care." But it does mean that we will "get through" the painful situation and that we will get to a place where the pain is gone. In time, the wound will become a scar. We will, by God's grace, get to a place where we feel like ourselves again. emotions will settle down. Our minds will clear. Our appetites will return. We will relax. We will be able to once again sleep soundly. We will heal. The Bible says that God "heals the brokenhearted" (Psalm 147:3). wonderful promise to claim even before the healing takes place. Let that promise resonate in your mind: God "heals the brokenhearted." Do you believe that? If you do, your healing has already begun...even if you can't sense it yet.

The purpose of this booklet is to walk with you through "the process" of healing that God will use to put your life back together again. As I have reflected on different seasons in my own life when my heart has been broken, these are the steps God has led me to take that have helped me immensely. This is "the process" God has used through the years to heal my broken heart.

In the world of sports, we often hear a coach or an athlete talk about "the process." What they mean by that is that while all teams want to win championships, they don't win championships by talking about winning championships. Instead, teams win championships by going through a "process" that results in the winning of championships. The "process" includes preparation, running, lifting weights, proper rest, a healthy diet, a disciplined lifestyle, and a positive attitude. Championships are the result; "the process" is the means to that end.

Similarly, when our hearts have been broken and our nerves are frayed, we just want to "get back to normal again." But we must understand that "getting back to normal" is the result of going through a "process" of healing. If we try to bypass or short-circuit "the process," we will never be completely healed. If, though, we will do the work required of us, if we will submit to "God's process" of healing, it is only a matter of time until we "get back to normal" (or as my friend, Don Piper, says, we will get to "a new normal"). The "new normal" will be different than life as we knew it before our hearts were broken, but we will be better. We will be stronger. And we will be closer to Jesus and

more like Him than we were before our hearts were broken in the first place.

So, with all of that said, let's walk through "the process" of healing together...one step at a time. Healing will begin to take place. In fact, healing has already begun if you truly believe that God "heals the brokenhearted."

Twelve Steps to Take as We Go Through "The Process" of Healing

1. Don't panic...God is still in control.

Panic is a natural human response to something frightening. It is a sudden feeling of anxiety and fear that comes upon us when we find ourselves in what appears to be a dangerous or devastating situation. The feeling of panic is one of the worst feelings in the world.

Someone has wisely said, "Faith is refusing to panic." Think about that for a moment. Panic says, "Look what's happening!!! I can't survive this!!!" Faith, however, says, "God is in control of this situation, and I choose to trust Him." Faith is the antidote to panic. Faith stops panic in its tracks. Faith prevents panic from setting up camp in our minds and in our hearts. Faith is

the supernatural response to the natural feeling of panic. And understand this: Faith is greater than panic. The Bible says: "And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (I John 5:4). Faith overcomes everything we will ever face in this world…and that includes feelings of panic.

When we think about faith, though, we have to remember that faith requires an object. We must have faith "in" something. And when tragedy strikes or some other type of devastating news comes our way, we must have faith in the fact that God is absolutely in control of everything we face in life. The Bible says: "The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all" (Psalm 103:19). The New American Standard translation says, "His sovereignty rules over all" (Psalm 103:19, NASB). What does that mean? Well, it simply means that God is seated on His throne in heaven and that He is totally in control of everything that happens on earth. He is ruling, and He is reigning. (You can see the word "reign" in the word "sovereign.")

The biblical truth that God is in control admittedly creates some difficult questions: Did God cause me to lose my job? Did God cause the terrorist attack? Did God cause my loved one to die? Did God cause me to get sick? The

answer to these and similar questions is this: God doesn't *cause* tragedies to happen, but sometimes He *allows* them. If God is truly in control, and He is, then He could have *prevented* the pain you are currently experiencing. But He didn't. He *allowed* it. He allowed it, first of all, because we live in a fallen world. Sin has literally messed everything up. Without sin in the world, there would be no disasters, no divisions, no diseases, and no death. All of those things are the results of sin. That doesn't mean they are the results of your individual sins. It means they are the results of the fact that we live in a sinful, fallen, imperfect world.

Sometimes God allows bad things to happen simply because we have a free will. You can't blame a drunk-driving accident on God. You have to blame the drunk driver. And yet, God still *allowed* it. There's a mystery to that.

Sometimes God allows tragedies and other heartbreaking situations for reasons we'll never understand on this side of heaven. But whatever happens and whatever the cause, a proper view of the sovereignty of God teaches us that since God is in control, He sometimes allows us to go through difficult circumstances in life. But we must remember that we're not the victims of our circumstances, or of someone else's sin, or even of Satan himself. We're not at *their* mercy.

We're at the mercy of God. He's in control of our lives.

This truth has been an anchor for my faith for many years. During a heartbreaking experience, God whispered to me: "I'm in control." Those words gave me peace. Those words calmed me down. Those words counteracted the feelings of panic I was feeling. Those words literally changed my perspective on the situation I was facing.

My prayer is that those simple words from our Father in heaven would change your perspective and calm your nerves as well: "I'm in control." Those are God's words to you today. Do you believe them? Do you believe that God is sovereign? Do you believe that He is ruling and reigning in the details of our lives? Or do you just think things randomly happen?

Some people believe that God is distant and detached from the details of our lives. I don't know where they got that idea, but they didn't get it from the Bible. The Bible clearly teaches that God is involved in the details of our lives. Before anything comes into our lives, it has to first pass through God's fingers because we are in His hand. In fact, we are in Jesus' hand first, and then God the Father places His hand over the hand of Jesus (see John 10:28-30). So, in

order for any disease, any tragedy, or any devastating event to come into our lives, it first has to pass through the loving, powerful hand of God the Father and then through the strong hand of Jesus. Pain cannot touch us without first coming through Him. He sometimes allows our hearts to be broken, but it's never random. It's never needless. It's never accidental; it's always providential. If He allows difficulty into our lives, there's a divine purpose for it. If I didn't believe that, I would have lost my faith and my mind a long time ago. He allows heartaches so we will turn to Him, trust Him, grow closer to Him, and experience His presence and His peace in ways we never would have before.

Friend, God is in control. Believe that. Claim that. Apply that to your situation. And build your faith upon that truth. It's the first step in "the process" of healing, and it will keep you from panicking.

2. Don't forget that God is good.

When we think about the fact that God is *in control*, we are focusing on His *sovereignty*. But when we think about the fact that God is *good*, we are focusing on His *heart*. A biblically balanced theology focuses on both. Yes, the Bible teaches the *greatness* of God's *power*, but it also teaches the *goodness* of His *heart*. Let me

say it even simpler: The Bible not only teaches the *greatness* of God, but it also teaches the *goodness* of God. One of my favorite Bible verses begins this way: "The LORD is good" (Nahum 1:7). When our hearts break, we need to remember that while God is awesome, powerful, and in control, He is also loving, tender, and good at heart. If we focus only on His *greatness* and forget His *goodness*, we will develop a distorted, warped, negative view of God when bad things happen.

In John 11, we read the story of one of Jesus' friends, a man named Lazarus, who became sick. Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, sent word to Jesus asking Him to come and heal their brother. They knew He had the power. They knew He could heal the disease. But instead of going immediately to heal Lazarus, we read that when Jesus heard about His friend's illness, "He stayed two more days in the place where He was" (John 11:6). When He finally arrived in the town where Lazarus lived, Lazarus had died. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). She never questioned Jesus' power. She knew that He was in control and that He could do anything. But as her heart was broken, she was confused as to why He hadn't arrived earlier and healed Lazarus. Perhaps she thought that He didn't care

Jesus' delay, though, wasn't because He didn't care. It wasn't because He wasn't good. Instead, it was because He had something better in mind. Had Jesus shown up immediately, He could have healed a sick man. By waiting longer, though, He ended up raising a dead man back to life! His delay wasn't because He didn't care; His delay was because He did care and because He had a greater plan in mind. delay, although not obvious at the ultimately *proved* His goodness and tenderness of His heart. After all, we read that when He arrived at the tomb where Lazarus had been buried that His heart was broken, too. The Bible simply and tenderly says, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). While that verse only contains two words, it communicates a great deal about the heart of our Lord. When we hurt. He hurts. When we are sad. He is sad. He is touched with our infirmities, and He is moved by our pain. The point I am making is that while God is powerful, He is also compassionate. God has a tender heart, and He always has a good plan in mind. When our hearts are broken, it helps to remember that.

Late last night I was reminded of the importance of having a biblically balanced theology. I had the privilege of talking on the phone with one of our church members who is in the hospital with Covid-19. He is twenty-

eight years old and the picture of health. At least he was the picture of health until Covid infected his body. Now he has Covid pneumonia. Fifty percent of his lungs are currently impaired. His wife and baby daughter also have Covid, but they are doing better than he is. He texted me last night and asked if we could talk. So I called him. As he told me about his oxygen level and how, after a week in the hospital, they are now giving him more oxygen instead of less, I noticed that he shared his serious medical report with optimism, positivity, and faith. He talked about the peace God had given him and conveyed to me how real Jesus has been to him during this ordeal. Towards the end of our conversation, he said, "Jon, several years ago I heard a song that greatly impacted my life." He went on to say that from that song he learned three things about God that were sustaining him during his battle with Covid-19. He said it to me like this: "If God answers your prayer immediately, He's increasing your faith. If God delays, He's increasing your patience. If God says no, He has something better in mind." Those were the truths he was clinging to with all of his heart. He knew that God was in control. and he was certain that God is always good. His focus was on the presence of God with him in that hospital room. As we finished our conversation, I thought to myself: "Wow, that's amazing. What a testimony. His faith is real. Whatever happens, he's going to be okay."

Friend, the same is true for you. If you will focus not only on the *greatness* of God but also on the *goodness* of God, your perspective will change. Remember His *power*, but don't forget His *love*. Whatever He has *allowed* into your life, I can assure you that He has a good reason for doing so. Trust Him. Trust His plan. Trust His heart. And know beyond the shadow of any doubt that God is *always* good...even when circumstances make us think He isn't. This is the second step in "the process" of healing.

3. Don't think for a moment that you are alone on this journey...God is right there with you, every step of the way.

Loneliness is a horrible thing. When our hearts break, it is often because we have lost someone whom we dearly love. I think of people who have been married for many, many years and then their mate dies. For forty, fifty, or sixty years they have never known life without their spouse next to them. And then, all of a sudden, their spouse is gone. That can be a devastating loss accompanied not only by extreme sadness and grief but also by intense loneliness. Those who have been through a breakup or a divorce often struggle with similar

feelings of loneliness. One often feels like a single person in a married person's world.

After my grandmother's funeral in Georgia many years ago, we were back grandparents' house having a family meal. The phone rang, but since we were eating, we let the answering machine take the call. The recording had been made by my grandfather, and this is what he had said: "This is the Redmond's house. I'm sorry we missed your call. Leave a message, and we'll call you back." When my grandfather heard that recording, he said: "That message will have to be changed. There's no we here anymore; it's just me." Just a few hours after my grandmother's funeral, the reality of being alone was almost more than my grandfather could bear.

As I look back on seasons in my own life when my heart has hurt the most, it has been during those times when I felt incredibly lonely. I felt isolated, cut off, and like I was on an island. For some people, loneliness of this magnitude changes everything about their lives. They stop eating out in restaurants because they don't want to eat in public alone. They stop going to movies, the mall, and sporting events. They no longer take vacations because, after all, who wants to take a vacation by yourself. Loneliness

can become a debilitating condition. But let me say as plainly as I know how: It doesn't have to.

In one of the loneliness seasons of my life, one of the things the Lord revealed to me was that I was not alone. His presence was, and still is, with me wherever I may be. The wonderful thing about being a Christian is that we are never alone. Jesus is *always* with us...in our homes, in our cars, in the office, in the restaurant, at the mall, and as we travel. We may appear to others to be alone, but we aren't. We are *indwelt* and *accompanied* by none other than Jesus Christ Himself. He is Proverbs' "friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). He is *always* with us.

One of the most important things you can do when your heart is broken and when loneliness overwhelms you is to remind yourself that you aren't alone...that Jesus is right there with you. Talk to Him like you would if you could see Him. Tell Him you love Him. Tell Him you trust Him. Ask Him to guide you. And thank Him for never leaving you.

I have three Bible verses I read each day before I leave my house. The first of those verses is from the Old Testament Book of Joshua. After Moses had died and Joshua had become the new leader of the Israelites, God gave Joshua a command and a promise. God said these words: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). Certainly those words bolstered Joshua's faith and helped him with his loneliness as he obviously missed Moses. Friend, God hasn't changed. He was with Moses. He was with Joshua. And He is with you. You are never alone. Believing that is the third step in "the process" of being emotionally healed.

4. <u>Don't forget that your identity doesn't come</u> from your job or from another person... your identity comes from your relationship with Jesus Christ.

When we have been through a devastating loss, not only do we grieve and struggle with those feelings of *loneliness*, but we also often struggle with our own *identity*. For example, if your spouse of many years has died, you may no longer feel like a "whole" person. You were "their" spouse. You were "their" other half. And now, with them gone, you don't have them to help "define" you. Similarly, if you lose your job of many years, the same type of thing can happen. You were known to others (and to yourself) as a teacher, a coach, an executive, or an athlete. But now you aren't that anymore.

This type of thing often happens to parents when their kids grow up and move out of the house. Their identity has been as a parent, and while they still are, it isn't the same anymore. Their children no longer "need them" like they did when they were young. As a result, for some parents the "empty nest" is not only a *lonely* place to be, but it is also an *insecure* place. If a parent's identity is wrapped up exclusively in being a parent, that parent will probably develop a low self-esteem as their children move on and develop their own lives. If that parent doesn't feel "needed" then he or she probably doesn't feel "important." Sadly, that often happens.

I can remember when Tom Landry was fired as the head coach of the Dallas Cowboys. For twenty-nine years, he had led "America's Team." They had played in five Super Bowls and won two of them. And then, suddenly, he was fired. While that obviously hurt Coach Landry, it didn't destroy him. He moved on in life and continued to serve the Lord and minister to others. His identity wasn't wrapped up in his job; it was wrapped up in his relationship with Jesus Christ. And since he still had Jesus, he was more than able to move forward in life.

The same is true for you. You may be a spouse, a parent, a coach, a teacher, a pastor, or an executive. Those are wonderful roles to have,

but don't let those roles define you. Any of those things could change overnight. But there is one role you have that will never change, and that is your role as a child of God. Your identity, your sense of self-worth, your self-esteem comes from your relationship with Jesus Christ, not from anyone or anything else. The apostle Paul said that "you are complete in Him" (Colossians 2:10). Let Jesus not only be the solution to your loneliness, but let Him also define you as a person. Find your identity in Him, and no matter what happens, you will still be standing...confident, complete, and secure. This is the fourth step in "the process" of healing.

5. <u>Don't isolate yourself...let God's people and God's church help you.</u>

When we've been hurt, we tend to withdraw from others and isolate ourselves. This is certainly true if we've been hurt by the actions of another person. Common sense would tell us that if another person broke our heart then we would naturally want to avoid a similar experience in the future. So isolation is really a way to protect ourselves from pain. We conclude that if we don't let ourselves get too close to people then there's no way they can hurt us. So we keep people at a distance, and we build a fortress around our wounded hearts.

While that logic is certainly understandable, isolation is not a wise approach to life. God made us for relationships...first with Himself and then with others. Throughout the New Testament, we are admonished to "love one another" (John 15:12), "be kind to one another" (Ephesians 4:32), "encourage one another" (I Thessalonians 5:11, NASB), "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2), and "serve one another" (Galatians 5:13). We're supposed to go through life with "one another." But how can we do any of those things for others if we are isolated from them? The reality is that we can't.

The Bible says, "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire" (Proverbs 18:1, ESV). In other words, if we isolate ourselves from others it only proves that we don't really care about them. It proves that we are selfish.

One of the challenges in life is to let ourselves *love* again, to let ourselves *trust* again, and to let ourselves *possibly get hurt* again. There is no such thing as *love* without *risk*, but the risk we take by allowing ourselves to get close to others is far better than the selfishness we exhibit when we isolate ourselves.

The devil would encourage us to "shelter in place." He would convince us that we're better

off going through life as a lone ranger. God, though, says the opposite. God knows that when we put ourselves in a position to help and encourage others that we ourselves are blessed. That's why we need friends, especially Christian friends, who can build up our faith. That's also why we need the church. What exactly is the church anyway? Is it merely a building? Is it just a sanctuary? No, the church is the people. The Greek word for church is ekklesia, and it refers to those of us who have been called out of the world's way of living so we can follow Christ. The church is the body of Christ. That's why the Bible says that we should not be "giving up meeting together...but encouraging one another" (Hebrews 10:25, NIV). When you go to church, not only do you have an opportunity to encourage others, but others also have an opportunity to encourage you. When we go to church, we worship God, but we also have a chance to be blessed by others and to be a blessing to others.

I don't know where I would be in life today without my family, my friends, and my church. They pour life into me. They encourage me. They hold me accountable. They help me fulfill God's purpose for my life. Whatever I may have ever done for them, it's not a drop in the bucket to what they've done for me. I owe my life to

God, but I owe a great debt to my family, my friends, and my church.

So I encourage you to pick up the phone and call a friend. Go have lunch with somebody. Go workout with somebody. And whatever you do, be sure to go to church next Sunday. It's the fifth step in "the process" of experiencing the healing that you need. No person is an island. We need each other.

6. Don't turn to alcohol, drugs, or immorality to calm your frayed nerves...turn to God instead.

Anxiety is a terrible thing. There's nothing good about a racing mind and a restless heart. The uneasiness that anxiety brings on people is the cause of much drinking, much substance abuse, and much immorality. And while I certainly don't recommend any of those things, I understand why people do them. The alcohol and drugs become a sedative. immorality becomes a temporary escape. For a few minutes, a person can redirect his or her mind away from the sadness, stress, and anxiety they are battling by engaging in sexual passion. The problem, though, is on many levels. First, the experience itself is short-lived. Second, it creates guilt that can be long-lived. Third, it hurts a lot of other people. And fourth, the sin drives a wedge between the person and God. There's nothing good about sexual sin. And honestly, there's nothing good about alcohol and drugs. Surely God's people shouldn't have to turn to them to find calmness and peace.

King David said, "Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul" (Psalm 131:2). He was talking about the fact that he had "calmed and quieted" his soul by turning to God in prayer and in faith. David, of course, was a man of passion. That passion led him to commit sexual sin on another occasion, and that sin caused all kinds of problems. But, in this instance, David didn't turn to a woman or to anything else. He turned to the Lord, and the Lord calmed his heart, his soul, and his mind.

Perhaps in the past you have turned to alcohol, drugs, or immorality to help you escape reality and calm down. Listen, friend, we've all sinned. So you did that in the past...what can you do about it now? The only thing you *can* do is to confess that sin to God, receive His forgiveness, and don't continue on that path. Turn to God. Sit in His presence. Meditate on Him.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible pertaining to David says this: "Then King David went in and sat before the LORD" (II Samuel

7:18). Have you ever done that? Have you ever just sat before the Lord in silence for a few minutes? At various times in my life I have done In fact, during one especially stressful season in my life I did that for thirty minutes a day, five or six days a week. No spoken words. No requests. No complaints. Instead, I just sat in His presence in silence for thirty minutes. And my testimony is this: God became like a sedative to me. He relaxed my mind and stilled my heart. He calmed me down in real and lasting ways. He settled my frayed nerves. So forget the alcohol, the drugs, and the immorality. Turn to God instead. Sit silently in His presence. It's the sixth step in "the process" of being emotionally healed.

7. <u>Don't stop having your "quiet time"...you</u> need it now more than ever.

I guess it's just human nature, but it seems as though we often stop having our "quiet time" with God when our hearts break. We just feel so "off" that our "Bible reading" and "prayer time" seem to be the first things we set aside. The irony of that is that when our hearts are broken, when our world is shattered, and when our nerves are shot, that's when we need to spend *more* time in God's presence than we normally would, not *less*. The Bible says that "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in

trouble" (Psalm 46:1). If ever we need a refuge, if ever we need God's strength, it's when our hearts are broken. For that reason, we must continue to spend time in His presence through Bible reading and prayer when our lives have been rocked by overwhelming, painful circumstances.

Billy Graham observed something about having a "quiet time" that has stuck with me for a long time. He said, "I am never lonely when I am reading the Bible. Nothing dissolves loneliness like a session with God's Word." That's an interesting observation Dr. Graham made. When I first read that quote, I started thinking about my own life. As I reflected on what happens when I read the Bible, I agreed with what he said. I, too, never feel lonely when I'm reading the Bible. I feel the presence of God with me anytime I open His written Word. After all, "When the Bible speaks, God speaks." And if God is speaking to me then I'm not alone.

So I encourage you to keep on opening God's Word each and every day...especially when your heart is hurting. Don't try to read too much. If you don't currently have a Bible reading plan, maybe you could begin by reading one psalm each day along with one chapter from the New Testament. Someone has said that the psalms are the "deep waters" of the Bible. It is

as though we meet ourselves in the psalms. We read about loneliness, fear, overwhelming circumstances, hopelessness, depression, and so many of the emotions we often experience. But we also read about how the writers of the psalms learned to trust God in life's valleys and praise Him in life's storms. I can't recommend the Book of Psalms strongly enough. And then the New Testament, of course, tells us all about the life of Jesus, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the application of basic theology to our daily lives. A chapter a day in the New Testament will do wonders for your soul.

Of course, there is no such thing as a "bad" Bible reading plan. Any approach that puts you in God's Word each day is a good and beneficial approach. Many years ago, I was preaching a revival for a pastor friend in Georgia. accepted the revival under one condition. wanted to be left alone in the mornings. breakfast meetings, no visits, no conversations, nothing at all until early afternoon. He agreed. I knew I needed to spend my mornings sleeping an hour or two later than normal because of the late-night revival services. And I knew I needed to spend my mornings reading my Bible and praying. One morning during my "quiet time," I read a verse from the Old Testament that got my attention and spoke to my heart in a powerful way. Of all places, I was reading that morning

out of II Chronicles when I came across these words: "The Lord will stay with you as long as you stay with Him!" (II Chronicles 15:2, TLB). As I was contemplating my own circumstances at that time, as well as how those circumstances might affect my future, I knew that God had given me an instructive word. If I would stay with Him, He would stay with me. In other words, He would keep guiding me, leading me, using me, and blessing me. Certainly, there is a sense in which God will stay with us no matter what we do. He never leaves us. But there is another sense in which His anointing, His favor, and His blessings only stay with us if we make a commitment to stay with Him...in faith, in obedience, in faithfulness, in service, and in spending time in His presence. That was just the word I needed at a critical time in my life. That's the type of word God will give to you at critical times in your life, too. So whatever you do, don't stop having your daily "quiet time" just because your heart is broken. Keep having it. It's the seventh step in "the process" of being healed, and it's an extremely important step that you simply must take.

8. <u>Don't expect to be emotionally healed</u> overnight...the grieving process takes time.

Some healings take place more quickly than others. In the first half of 2015, my sister-in-law

was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, and I was diagnosed with kidney cancer. We both had surgery, and thankfully, we were healed. Our healings were quick. Four years later, my mom was diagnosed with lymphoma. She went through six rounds of chemotherapy spread out over several months. Thankfully, she was healed, too. But her healing came more slowly.

What is true *physically* is also true *emotionally*. Sometimes healing comes quickly. At other times, though, healing takes longer. So I would encourage you not to put any "time pressures" on yourself when it comes to the healing of your broken heart.

Experts tell us that there are multiple stages people work themselves through in the grieving process. There is shock, denial, bargaining, guilt, anger, depression, and finally acceptance. That doesn't mean that every grieving person in the world goes through all seven stages. Everyone is different. But it does mean that when we've experienced a major loss of some kind that we can expect to go through some form of grieving, and that obviously involves a certain amount of time. You can't rush through, or try to bypass, the grieving process.

In Old Testament times, when a person died their loved ones would set aside a certain amount of time to grieve. When Jacob died, for example, his family members spent seven days mourning for him (see Genesis 50:10). When Moses died, the Israelites spent thirty days mourning for him (see Deuteronomy 34:8). That doesn't mean their sadness was gone that quickly...only that their intense grieving was over. Their hearts were still broken. The point, though, is that the amount of time the grieving process takes can vary. Sometimes it takes longer than we would have thought it would. Don't expect too much too fast. Emotional pain is the price we pay for having loved someone. Your sadness, though, won't last forever. The Bible says that "the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended" (Deuteronomy 34:8). Your days of weeping will come to an end, too. "Weeping may endure for a night," the Scriptures tell us, "but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). Your weeping will end. Your morning will come. The sun will rise. One thing about the sunrise, though, is that we can't speed it up. But, neither can we slow it down. The sun rises at the appointed time. It is a fact of nature, though, that it will rise. And it is a promise of God that the sun will rise on your season of sadness. Morning is coming. Until it gets here, though, remember that a time of grieving is normal and even healthy. Scientists tell us that tears of grief, as opposed to tears of joy, contain toxins. When we cry, those toxins

are released from our bodies thus promoting emotional healing. God has designed grieving as a way for us to heal.⁵ So be patient. Patience is the eighth step in "the process" of healing.

9. <u>Don't assume that you'll always feel like you</u> <u>feel right now...in time, you'll feel like your</u> <u>old self again.</u>

One of the most concerning and even frightening things about going through a season of grief is that our emotions are so scrambled and our minds are so flooded with thoughts that we can't think clearly...we don't "feel" right...we are in a mental and emotional fog in which we feel more like spectators of the world around us rather than active participants in it. If you've ever had your heart broken, you know what I'm talking about. Grief causes stress. Stress, in turn, activates our "sympathetic nervous system" which is that part of us designed for intense physical activities and even dangerous situations. Our muscles tense up, our heart rate increases, our digestion is affected, and our blood pressure goes up. All of this naturally affects the way we think and feel. We are on "high alert." We are tense and intense.6

As we learn to spend time in quiet meditation and relaxation, our "parasympathetic nervous system" is activated and it, by divine design, balances off our "sympathetic nervous system." Our "parasympathetic nervous system" helps us to relax and calm down. When that happens, our thinking clarifies.⁷ This is why I said earlier that when we skip our "quiet time" with God we hurt ourselves. When we draw aside and get still in His presence, He relaxes us. He calms us down.

You can't live on "high alert" at all times. You have to decompress. You have to breathe. You have to unwind. Again, prayer and meditation are very helpful here, as is physical exercise. As you work through the grieving process, don't forget to take time to relax and meditate. Clear your head through exercise. Relax yourself by spending time in nature. Fill your mind with the promises of God. As you do, your "parasympathetic nervous system" will activate, and you will begin to feel "normal" again.⁸ Taking time to decompress is the ninth step in "the process" of healing.

10. Don't miss an opportunity to grow from this experience...faith is strengthened in times of adversity. And don't fail to write down the things God teaches you on the journey.

How foolish it would be to go through a heartbreaking experience and miss the things God wanted to show you along the way. Why waste your pain? Why not learn the things God wants you to learn? Why not experience Him in deeper and more meaningful ways? Why not come through your adversity stronger than you were before you went through it? Why not get closer to God than ever before? Oswald Chambers said of heartbreaking experiences: "Through those doorways God is opening up ways of fellowship with His Son."9

In one of my favorite verses in the Bible, God said this: "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction" (Isaiah 48:10). It has always been helpful for me to view difficult circumstances and even heartbreaking experiences as "tests" that God has either sent into my life or at the very least allowed me to face. When we are tested, the impurities in our lives are intended to be burned off. The doubt, worry, fear, anxiety, selfishness, pride, and sin come to the surface so that we can deal with them and be free of them. That's why, if we will respond appropriately to the circumstances we face, we will come through them stronger, purer, and more like Jesus.

I would also encourage you to write down key truths that God reveals to you during your time of testing. In April of 1993, while I was a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, I well remember the night God led me to write some things down. For the four months or so leading up to that time, I had been going through a time of intense loneliness and sadness. It was the hardest part of my seminary experience. When I had been a student at Baylor, I lived with my brother, and I had a lot of friends. We were all young and had a lot in common. When I got to seminary, though, things were different. My friends from college, for the most part, were no longer with me, and most everybody at seminary, so it seemed, was married. It was difficult for me, as a single person, to fit in. I felt like I was on an island all by myself. I think I was depressed, at least to a degree. On a Thursday night, I was walking out of my apartment to go to the library to study. As I opened my apartment door, I felt a strong impression to go back inside and write down what I felt like God had been teaching me during the previous four months. I got a little blue notebook and a pen, and I wrote this:

Things to Remember in the Valley

- 1. God is still in control of my life.
- 2. Jesus is sufficient. In my valley, although I've lost so much, Jesus is all I need.
- 3. I must be patient and wait on God.

- 4. My identity comes from my relationship with Jesus, not from anyone or anything else.
- 5. I'll remember past valleys. God took care of me then, and He will take care of me now.
- 6. God will provide. He will either deliver me out of the valley or sustain me in the valley.

I had no idea of all that God had been in the process of teaching me until I took the time to listen, think, and write it down. That was the first time I had ever written down anything like that. Those six truths became anchors for my faith, and they have steadied me during the various storms of my life. Interestingly, after I wrote those things down that night and took a moment to process them and pray, the loneliness, sadness, and depression were immediately gone. Once I saw God in my situation, I was fine.

I would encourage you to begin to write down what God is teaching you. What we write down, we tend to remember. What we fail to write down, we tend to forget. So write down what God is teaching you. It will cement the truths in your own mind, and one day it might be a blessing to someone else. In the meantime, it's the tenth step in "the process" of being healed.

11. <u>Don't become obsessed with yourself and with your circumstances...help somebody</u> else instead.

There is something about helping another person that gets our minds off of ourselves. Remember, we are human beings with a human nature. Our human nature is sinful and most certainly selfish. If we only do what is natural, we will focus exclusively on ourselves, much to our detriment.

As a minister, I have a real advantage here. The nature of my calling and of my job is to try to help others. That helps me not to become overly obsessed with my own life and challenges (although I can assure you that sometimes I still am!). I guess what I'm saying is that it may be a little easier for a minister on a church staff to focus on other people than it would be for someone in another profession because the nature of our job demands it. It would be the same for doctors, nurses, teachers, and anyone who helps others. Opportunities present themselves daily that force us to get our minds off of ourselves. Depending on your profession, you may have to be a little more intentional to put yourself in a position to help others.

Quite a few years ago, I had become a little too self-absorbed, and my father (who is also my pastor and my boss) said to me: "You need to go visit a nursing home and get your mind off of yourself." He shared with me how visiting hospitals and nursing homes had always been a good way for him to think more about others and less about himself. That was tremendous advice.

Perhaps you need to do something similar. Maybe by visiting someone in the hospital, or calling and encouraging someone who is ill, or writing a letter to someone who is discouraged, you could not only be a blessing to someone else, but you could also be blessed yourself. The Bible says that "whoever refreshes others will be refreshed" (Proverbs 11:25, NIV).

The focus of our hearts and minds should be more *upward* and *outward* than *inward*. Certainly there is a place for reflection and self-analysis, but that should never be as important to us as focusing on God and trying our best to meet the needs of others. So here's your assignment: Within the next few days, look for a way to be a blessing to someone else. It's the eleventh step in "the process" of being healed.

12. <u>Don't just think about the past...begin to</u> think about the future.

When our hearts have been broken, it's easy to think about what we've lost. It's natural. It's

normal. And, as we have seen, there's certainly a place for grief, mourning, and introspection.

There comes a point in life, though, when we have to stop focusing on what we've lost and start focusing on what we still have left. We have to stop looking back and start looking forward. As a good friend reminded me one time: "The windshield is bigger than the rearview mirror." It's bigger for a reason, and that is this: Where you're going is more important than where you've been.

One of the most well-known and well-loved verses in the Bible is found in the Old Testament Book of Jeremiah. In it, God is speaking, and He says these words: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). God spoke those words to the Jewish people who were living in Babylonian captivity. They had been removed from their homeland in Israel and carried away to Babylon. They were there because of their own sins. They were there because they were under the judgment of God. And yet, even there, even under those circumstances, God spoke of the future He had planned for them. Eventually, He brought them back to Jerusalem. God wasn't finished with the Jewish people, and He isn't

finished with you either. He still has plans for your future, and His plans are good!

One of the most touching books in the Bible is the little Book of Ruth. In it we read how Ruth, who lived in Moab, lost her husband. He died while Ruth was still young. She, no doubt, thought her life was over. She thought she had nothing to look forward to. But, after much thought, she decided to travel with her motherin-law, Naomi, to Israel (Naomi's homeland) and begin a new life there. She embraced Naomi's God (the only true God), and she started a new chapter in her life. In time, she met a man named Boaz. They fell in love, got married, and started their family. They had a son named Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse. Jesse had a son named David. And through that family line, many years later, Jesus Christ was born. Interestingly enough, when we come to Matthew 1 in the New Testament, we find Ruth's name in the genealogy of Jesus (see Matthew 1:5). She couldn't possibly have seen it when she was a young widow in Moab, but God had an amazing future in store for her.

The same is true for you. More than likely, you can't see it either at this time. That's okay. We don't walk by what we see, we walk by faith. We trust that God's good promise to the Israelites who were living in Babylon is just as

applicable to us today as it was to them. We believe that just as He had an exciting future planned for Ruth, He has an exciting future planned for us as well.

I encourage you not to be so consumed with the past that you fail to think about the future. Look forward. God's not finished with you yet. Your story isn't over. It's okay to occasionally glance at your rearview mirror. In fact, that's a healthy thing to do. But don't look at it all the time. It will impede and impair your progress going forward. Remember, the windshield is bigger than the rearview mirror. Spend most of your time looking through it. Your ride will be a lot smoother! And it's the twelfth and final step in "the process" of healing.

Don't be surprised, by the way, if God begins to give you opportunities to comfort others with the comfort you have received from Him in "the process" of healing. The Bible says that God "comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (II Corinthians 1:4). God often uses hearts which He has healed to help heal other hearts that are broken. Who better to help a hurting soul than someone who has also been hurt and found help and healing from God Himself?

Conclusion

As we come to the end of our time together, let me ask you a question: Have you ever invited Jesus Christ to come and live in your heart? We've talked about the fact that God "heals the brokenhearted" (Psalm 147:3). There's one thing, though, I've noticed about God's method of healing, and that is this: He heals from the inside. In other words, before He can heal our broken hearts, He has to first cleanse our sinful hearts and take up residence there. Have you ever asked Him to do that for you?

The bad news is that all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's perfect will for our lives. The worse news is that the penalty of our sins is death. The good news is that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins and that He rose again from the dead three days later. The best news is that if we will confess our sins, turn away from our sins, ask Jesus to save us, and trust Him to do so that He will. The Bible says, "For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved'" (Romans 10:13).

If you want to know for sure that Jesus Christ is living in your heart, pray this prayer now:

Dear Jesus,

As You know, my heart is broken. But I have a worse problem than that. My heart is sinful, and it needs to be cleansed.

I believe You died on the cross to pay for my sins. I believe You shed Your blood so I could be forgiven. I believe You rose from the dead thus conquering death, hell, and the grave.

I ask You now to forgive my sins, come into my heart, and make me a Christian. I ask You to save me, and I trust You to do it. Welcome to my heart. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be.

In Your Name I Pray, Amen.

Friend, if you prayed that prayer, congratulations! Jesus Christ just saved you! Today is your spiritual birthday. Your life will never be the same again. Share your decision with a friend and then make it public in a good Bible-believing church.

May God completely heal your broken heart. May He also use you to help others whose hearts have been broken. And may "the process" of healing that we have discussed here be a blessing to those whom you seek to help.

¹ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1985, p. 42.

² Franklin Graham With Donna Lee Toney, *Billy Graham in Quotes*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 2001, p. 225.

³ "John Calvin Quotations," *QuoteTab-John Calvin Quotes*, https://www.quotetab.com/quote/by-john-calvin/when-the-bible-speaks-god-speaks (accessed November 12, 2019).

⁴ Debbra Bronstad, "The 7 Stages of Grief Model," https://www.stages-of-grief-recovery.com/7-stages-of-grief.html (accessed February 7, 2022).

⁵ Charles Stanley, Charles Stanley's Handbook for Christian Living, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1996, p. 104.

⁶ "Stress Effects on the Body," *American Psychological Association-Stress*, https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/body (accessed February 8, 2022).

Olivia Guy-Evans, "Parasympathetic Nervous System Functions," *Simply Psychology*, May 18, 2021, www.simplypsychology.org/parasympathetic-nervoussystem.html (accessed February 8, 2022).

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids, 1992, November 1.

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- *How to be a Happy Christian
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- *Finding Freedom Through Forgiveness
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- *How to Make Heaven Your Home (Spanish)
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- *How to Have a Peaceful Heart
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- *How to Survive a Satanic Attack
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