

### CHAPTER 3. THE HEART BREAKS

#### *Grief*

As I said earlier, when Barbara broke up with me, I watched my dreams fade away. When going through a break-up, some of us might be tempted to tell ourselves that we really didn't love that person after all. If we could stop the love, then we could stop the hurt in our soul.

When tragedy strikes and we encounter grief, we should acknowledge that we have experienced a loss of love and dreams. Why pretend we're above grieving our losses? Refusal to acknowledge our grief could be nothing more than our prideful hearts saying we are too strong to feel the hurt inflicted on us.

Consider what Job said in 7:1-11:

Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, "How long before I get up?" The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again. The eye that now sees me will see me no longer; you will look for me, but I will be no more. As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return. He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more. Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

Job was responding to his friends, who served more as accusers than ministers. Though we need to be careful what we say in prayer, especially when we write in pain, we can nonetheless speak to God from our broken condition. Jeremiah spoke words to God that we probably feel too spiritual to say: "Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame" (Jeremiah 20:18)?

The Psalms provide examples of people crying out to God in their brokenness and sin. Just one example is found in Psalm 13:1-2, where David spoke words close to his hurting heart, "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

God's holiness and our sinfulness give ample reason why we should revere God, for he is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), but there is no reason why we can't express our sorrow to him. After all, who else will we go to with our pain?

Norman Wright speaks to the issue of grieving about a break-up:

During this time, you're hit by seasons of sadness, depression, anger, calm, fear, and eventually hope, but they don't follow one another progressively. They overlap, often chaotically. Just when you think you're over one emotion, it comes barging through your door again. You finally smile, but then the tears return. You laugh, but the cloud of depression drifts in once again. This is normal. This is necessary. This is healing. (*Let's Just be Friends*, 87)

As I moved through this period after my break-up, I realized that I had to go on with life, even if with tears. Seeing myself as too manly for tears seemed only harmful. I strove to be honest with myself and God. *"Lord, this pain hurts like I've never known pain before. O Lord, receive the pain and the tears as offerings to you."*

June 19: I've felt lonely today but it's not been as intense. I've been more active today, that's why it's been better.

Here two weeks after the break-up, at one level I'm moving on. I can cut up and joke with friends. Yet at another level, I'm still grieving. So, on the surface, I'm fine, but inside I'm not.

I feel trapped in my silent sorrow. I feel like my culture and society expect me to be over her by now. After all, she wasn't my wife. It wasn't a death or a divorce, she was only a girlfriend, not even a fiancée.

But it is a big deal to me. My heart is still grieving the loss. And although my friends would probably be more compassionate than I'm imagining, I still feel pressured (by myself) to hurry up and heal. My feelings of embarrassment for not being over her yet are nothing more than pride, but they're still there anyway.

June 24: The hardest part of dealing with this break-up is not memories of hatred and fights between us, for our relationship was filled mostly with love. Rather, the hardest part is remembering all the good times we had together. It's those things that cause me to ask, "Why did it have to end?" But it is on this harsh reality--the questions with no answers--that I must admit my ignorance and leap into the arms of God.

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### *Shame*

Just minutes after our break-up, I felt ashamed of my predicament. What would I tell my friends? What would they think of me? What was wrong with me that made her breakup?

Some of the questions that came to my mind were worth thinking about. There are things about me that need to change.

Nonetheless, shame seems like a natural response to a break-up. We don't have to act as though we're fine. Like grief, we can acknowledge shame to God and to our friends.

Yet at other times, our sinfulness lies behind our shame. Not that all shame stinks with sin, but shame can sometimes be sinful. If I fall down the stairs, with friends watching, my red face will beam my embarrassment. The shame itself is not sinful, but if I begin to identify myself by it ("you dumb klutz"), then it is wrong because pride has entered in--or should I say, has come out!

Maybe God placed the capacity for shame in us so that we won't intentionally do vile and offensive things. So we need not be ashamed of our shame; we need only to lift it up to God as part of our confession that we are broken people living in a broken world.

This doesn't mean that shame will just disappear when we pray, but it does acknowledge to our sinful souls that Christ is our sustainer and the one who can deal with such issues (See Dan Allender's book, *The Wounded Heart*, 57-89).[1] (See page 52)

### *Self-Pity*

One of the dangers associated with the shame of a break-up is self-pity. Self-pity could be loosely defined as the feeling we get when we begin to identify ourselves by the calamity in our lives--*Barbara dumped me, so I must be a loser*. We put the spotlight on us instead of on Christ. We lose sight of God's divine plan, thinking that we're the lone sufferer in the world.

But Jesus was a man of sorrows, and can relate to our pain and suffering. He doesn't demand that we cease feeling loss. Surely, in Jesus' dying moment, when he turned his mother over to the care of John, the Lord felt the pain of separation, knowing that his relationship with his mother would no longer be the same (John 19:26-27). Just because he was coming back to life in three days didn't mean he felt no grief.

However, knowing that Jesus also suffered loss doesn't always keep us from seeing ourselves as victims. When God brings sin to our attention, we must confess it to him and, by his grace, change our behavior. *"God, you know how I want all my friends to focus on me now that Barbara's gone. I want their pity. Help me receive their sympathy but not demand it."*

As the youngest in my family, it was easy to take my place as the victim. Why is my brother beating up on me? He always picks on me. Why did my parents say that to me? They always do that.

And when I got older, I took that thinking into other areas: Why do I always get caught in traffic? Why do I never get the great jobs? Why does my car always break down?

Well, as I said earlier, some questions need to be answered, but it's easy to subtly move into the arena of self. Why is the world ganging up on me? Why don't things ever go the way I planned? Why did she break up with me?

Self-pity is pride wearing a sad face. And God hates pride: 1 Peter 5:5, "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" We have to be honest with ourselves about the pain in our hearts, but we also have to be honest with God about the sin that's there too. *"God, you know that I like people to feel sorry for me. You know that I often see myself as a victim so I don't have to face my own sin. Forgive me, Lord."*

June 18: If there's ever been a time when I am open to the temptations of the evil one, it is during these times when my wounds are gapping, aching and greatly wanting something to numb the pain, something to make me feel alive again. Beware, weary soul, these are dangerous days!

August 6: I went to the post office to mail a letter. I checked my box while I was there; it was covered with cobwebs. This made me sad. I used to receive so many packages from her, and I sent her so many postcards. I'd

begun to associate the post office with her. Now, the post office mocks my pain, a cruel reminder of love gone sour.

I'm feeling sorry for myself. I feel strongly pulled in areas of temptation, and I miss knowing that there's a woman out there who loves me and likes the smell of my shirt. I miss being loved. I'm not talking about sex. What I miss is a simple love, a growing oneness.

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### *Fear and Worry*

There are many of us who have a bevy of fears troubling our souls. When Barbara broke up with me, so many fears immediately greeted me. Who would I marry? When would I marry? What if I never marry? Who would be with me through the years? Would I have to go through life without the simple pleasures of hugs and kisses and sex?

These are very real fears, and not just for me, but for many. Those who are married have other fears: What if she leaves me? What if I get fired? What if we lose the house? What if he cheats on me? What if my spouse dies suddenly? What if I get sick? What if I get fat? What if my children get injured?

God has called us to live by faith, not fear. Can we not entrust our lives to an all-wise, all-knowing, all-caring triune God? What are our options? Live a life of fear or a life of faith.

I have a long way to go in this area. God woos me unto himself, saying, "Son, be at peace, I have control of it all." God has not given us a spirit of fear but of a sound mind in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:7). Quoting that verse doesn't take away all of my fears, but if I will ask in faith, God will use this truth to work for his good pleasure. I could fret all day about my future relationships, money, health, and a host of other things. God said that he has all of it in his hands (Job 13:15, Isaiah 14:24-27, Matthew 6:25-34, Acts 17:26). God lives self-sufficient and we can do nothing for him (Deuteronomy 32:6, Job 41:11, Psalm 50:12; Acts 17:25). We are called to trust him, as Hebrews 11:6 says: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

God has also called us to fear him (Psalm 130:4, Luke 12:5). We should fear him because he has the power of life and death in his hands. He forgives those who trust Christ for salvation. God doesn't owe any of us salvation, so God must be honored and feared (Romans 11:22). Who wouldn't fear one with the ability to save or condemn?

As Elisabeth Elliot wrote, "Fear God and nothing else." If we are believers, nothing can shake the reality of being the children of God. Nothing can take us away from God. His love draws us near even in the face of persecution (Romans 8:25-29). Yet, with all of this said, we still have fears. So what do we do?

We can cry out to God, acknowledging our sin. *"God, I fear the future more than I trust you. I often fear others more than I fear you. Forgive my sin."* Not that this chases away all our fears, but it's a start.

July 9: I came home and was seriously depressed about Barbara. Having talked about her earlier today with a friend, I was so discouraged. It's been a month and 5 days since the break-up, yet I'm still down.

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### *Prayer*

God has calmed my heart on many occasions with Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." This passage helps me lift my eyes from my situation. Not only do I find me, my brokenness, and my sin in these words, but I also find God, his holiness, and his strength.

Fear can cause us to turn away from God. By faith, we can lift those fears to him, acknowledging our sin, and our need for his mercy to continue its work in our lives. He wants us to come to him with thanksgiving, not as victims without hope. We don't have to deny our problems, but we can thank God, as Paul did, even in affliction (Philippians 1:3, 4:10). We can thank God for something while we suffer the wounds of a break-up. I have found this difficult, but not impossible.

And, as I lift my requests to God with thanksgiving, he gives me peace--that inner calm which finds its comfort in God's strength. *"O, God, I thank you for yet another opportunity to cry out to you. I'm weak Lord. I'm fearful of being alone. God, please, minister to me now in my fear and pain. Be close to me and hear my request, in Christ's name."*

God gave us (believers) all that we need in Christ Jesus for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). He equipped us through his Spirit to accomplish what he gifted us to do (1 Corinthians 12). After all, he will never forsake us. The Lord stands as our helper, and we need not wither in fear. What can people do to us (Hebrews 13:5-6)?

### *Searching, Longing, and Loneliness*

Many will say, "Yes, I agree that I should trust God, but I still feel lonely after my break-up." And this desire for companionship is nothing to be ashamed of. I felt the same way trying to imagine life without Barbara. God has placed in our hearts the desire to be with one another. The problem dwells not with our desire or loneliness, but with our distortion of what we really need and how we will fill those desires.

As I lay in bed shortly after my break-up, with my wounds still open and hurting, I remember fearing the future. I thought of what it would be like to live the rest of life alone. I became angry at Barbara, thinking that she was to blame for those fears, because if she hadn't broken up with me, then I wouldn't be experiencing those emotions. Then, it was like the Spirit spoke words of gentle rebuke: "You can't blame Barbara for your fears. You must take responsibility and confess them to me. Your real fears--death, loneliness, and abandonment--aren't things that she can take away. Only I, God, can touch you in those areas."

My life contains a hole only Jesus can reach. Often times I think I know what I need--a wife, a Coke, a meal, a movie--and I try to sooth that aching. And even though God has blessed me with things, only God can really deal with my loneliness.

Henri Nouwen, the late Catholic priest and author, had much to tell us about facing our fears and insecurities:

The awareness of loneliness might be a gift we must protect and guard, because our loneliness reveals to us an inner emptiness that can be destructive when misunderstood, but filled with promise for him who can tolerate its sweet pain.

When we are impatient, when we want to give up our loneliness and try to overcome the separation and incompleteness we feel . . . . We ignore what we already know with a deep-seated, intuitive knowledge--that no love or friendship, no intimate embrace or tender kiss, no community, commune or collective, no man or woman, will ever be able to satisfy our desire to be released from our lonely condition. This truth is so disconcerting and painful that we are more prone to play games with our fantasies than to face the truth of our existence. Thus we keep hoping that one day we will find the man who really understands our experiences, the woman who will bring peace to our restless life, the job where we can fulfill our potentials, the book which will explain everything, and the place where we can feel at home. Such false hope leads us to make exhausting demands and prepares us for bitterness and dangerous hostility when we start discovering that nobody, and nothing, can live up to our absolutistic expectations. (*The Wounded Healer*, 84-85)

Cloud and Townsend in their book, *Boundaries Before Marriage*, discuss two types of loneliness. One reflects the normal longing for relationships, and the second type indicates a problem:

This [second] type of loneliness is a chronic, longstanding sense of emptiness in life, no matter what the circumstances. The person can be around many loving, caring people, and still feel isolated. She may either feel that others don't care, or that she is unable to receive what they give. This loneliness is an indication that something is broken in one's soul, and needs to be repaired in God's healing process. (123-24)

Whatever I try to fill that gap with may numb me for a bit, but it doesn't bring lasting satisfaction. Only God's life overflowing into mine will bring true satisfaction. Note what Jesus said in John 10:10: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." And even then, we're bound to find ourselves one day longing again for another filling. Only when we see Jesus face to face, will the gap finally be filled once and for all (1 John 3:2).

June 11: Tonight, I remembered that I still have Barbara's coat. It's the small things like this that make it so painful, the little reminders of a time-no-more.

June 13: Dear Lord, today I write to you about my secret life of emptiness. It's the issue of loneliness, that feeling of despair, that sense of longing and incompleteness. Yes, to be alone and to be lonely are two different things. But I sometimes feel lonely even when I'm with others.

I suppose some would prescribe ready-made cures for such an ill: find a hobby, make more friends, buy a pet, get a wife, work harder. But I have a suspicion that what I struggle with is not so different than what others face, the old and young, Christian and pagan, married and single alike. It is that odd sensation of being dissatisfied,

incomplete, somehow empty and broken, yet hungry and yearning to be filled.

Maybe in the heart of every human lies this void, spoken of by saints of old, that only you, God, can fill, something that no mere human, no activity, not even a spiritual discipline can actually satisfy. It is that place that only you yourself can dwell and appease, Lord. It is the untamed soulfulness that only you can befriend, the storm that only Jesus can soothe.

This is the part of my character that doesn't have a face; it's allusive and hard to put my finger on. It hides itself somewhere inside of me, yet occasionally makes itself known in the still and steady moments of life. It's the silent-self that fears the light of exposure.

Many, as do I, seek to fill that emptiness with things and people and events only to find in the calmer moments of life that something is still missing, still astir and restless in the soul. Could it be my soul longing for a better place, a better world, a God that I can see, and a heaven that is real beneath my feet? Yes, I suppose it is. Could it be evidence of my lack of perfection? Yes, I'm sure of it.

Admitting I'm lonely shames me because it means I'm needy, that I still lack something, even as a Christian. I'd rather pretend that I'm whole and fully self-sufficient, admitting nothing of my own weakness. What would others think? They might feel sorry for me. But that's not what I want. I want wholeness as it is found in Christ. And so, I will admit my neediness, my loneliness, my un-fulfilled-ness. For in truthful, humble surrender and confession, God, you are here to show yourself strong.

I offer up my brokenness to you, Lord. I declare that you are enough, that you are here, among me, among my friends, among my stains, bruises, shame, and beauty. It is in this rubble of a fallen world that you, the king of glory, walk. You are here among the pieces, bringing forth gold where there was only ash, bringing forth water where there was only desert. And, my soul, struggling though it may be, will taste bits of your joy now, while still longing for its true home, a home not found in this world. Amen.

Loneliness can feel unbearable, and if we add in the discomfort of a break-up, then we've got some serious misery on our hands. The pain of a break-up and the ensuing loneliness can be so overwhelming that people who were otherwise stable sometimes turn to drugs or alcohol. This, of course, only makes matters worse. Yet some people will dull their pain at any cost. If you're abusing drugs or alcohol, food or TV, pornography or sex, etc., please seek help from a Christian pastor. You don't have to suffer alone.

A special word of caution also needs to be spoken here about rebound or "revenge dating." The most natural response after a break-up is to go looking for someone else to

sooth the pain of rejection. Finding someone else quickly also seems like it will punish our ex-girlfriend. There's a time and place to move on with romance, but just after our break-up is not likely the right occasion. We may find someone else to partially fill the gap, but it'll probably not be a lasting relationship. If we're not careful, we'll end up causing ourselves more pain, and that isn't what we need. It's not worth the pain just to spite our ex, nor will it heal our hearts.

One counselor quotes his patient on this issue:

I feel as though I'm on a merry-go-round, bumper car, and roller coaster all at the same time. I have to be on the go constantly or I think I'll go bananas. I'm always doing something and jumping into one relationship after another--and unfortunately, one bed after another. I don't like myself for doing this, and it makes me feel even worse about the relationship I lost. I've decided to find some more constructive things to do with my time and to stay home on Thursday and Friday night each week to prove that I'm able to do it. (Wright, *Let's Just be Friends*, 149)

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### *The Gift and The Giver*

God wants us to enjoy his creation as a gift--in fact, we are a part of his creation--but we frequently confuse the gift with the giver. Romans chapter one speaks to our leanings toward idolatry: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men . . . . For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him . . . . They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen" (vv. 18-25). We must always guard our hearts against idolatry.

Barbara and I cared deeply for each other. We both acknowledged times of finding ourselves daydreaming about what the other was doing. She once told me of a time that she sat praying with several other people, and caught herself daydreaming about me. On more than one occasion, I was deep in thought about her, rather than doing what I was supposed to be doing (learning a new language, meeting new people, etc). Whether you call it puppy love or childishness, we cared for each other. There were times when I thought that I wouldn't be able to live if she ever broke up with me. And then she broke up with me, and I had to test whether I actually could live without her. I'm not going to speculate that God took Barbara away from me because I liked her so much. I think God smiles at love and devotion; he isn't bent on beating up his children when they find themselves loving someone else. He's jealous for our love, but he isn't neurotic.

Yet for something so horrible, idolatry creeps up subtly. Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it" (17:9)? God has a passion for his glory, deserves all the attention, and will not share that with anyone else (Isaiah 6:3, 40:5, 9-11, 42:8, 45:18-23, 48:11, Romans 3:4, 1 Corinthians 1:29, Philippians 2:10-11). He has saved us for his own sake, and stands alone as the only true God (Isaiah 43:25, 44:6, 8).

God warned the Jews back in Exodus 20 about worshipping other gods. The Ten Commandments are an attempt to help people find their satisfaction in God. Man's tendency to look to himself has always been a problem in the human heart. But God longs for glory.

God is not prideful for wanting all the glory. When we want glory, it's repulsive to God because we don't deserve glory. God deserves all praise because he is perfect and has created this world to love him.

When we look at a girlfriend or spouse and declare that we need that person to make us happy, we have lost sight of the glory of God. And let's be honest, it happens more than we'd like to admit. There's nothing wrong with wanting to be happy. The problem arises when we try to fill that longing with something other than God.

I cared deeply for Barbara, but I don't think my idolatry really showed itself until after we broke up. Before we broke up, I was just loving my girlfriend. Granted, my love wasn't perfect . . . it was likely mixed with idolatry, too, but I was at least putting the needs of another above that of my own (or at least, that's what I was trying to do). It was after the break-up that I felt desperate for her, that I'd die if she didn't come back. It was at moments like that, when I wondered if I'd crossed from love to idolatry.

As John Piper says, while building on one of C. S. Lewis' ideas, the problem is that we often never get around to being filled with God because we're so busy filling ourselves with trite things that don't last (*Desiring God*, 9, 16-17). Piper frequently says, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him" (*Future Grace*, 7, 385-86; *Desiring God*, 238). What could bring more glory to God than going to him, to be filled up by him, with him? I hungered to fill up on Barbara rather than on God. I wanted to call her, or e-mail her, and find out what she was doing, to see if she missed me, if she realized yet she'd made a mistake.

It's too easy to run to the TV or the Internet or even to friends while neglecting our hope in Christ. "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" (Isaiah 40:28-29). Oh, that God give us eyes to see that only the true living water--Christ--can quench our thirsty souls (John 4:10-15).

### *Betrayal and Bitterness*

Our minds easily tell us that God owes us better than the way life is treating us. Within hours, if not minutes, of Barbara breaking up with me, I began thinking my situation unfair--*this shouldn't be happening to me, especially considering that I've gone through a break-up before.*

Barbara and I were remaining pure in our relationship, we were seeking to get married, we both wanted to serve the Lord in some sort of vocational ministry, and I'd prayed for many years that God would send me a wife. I thought God was answering my prayers by giving me what I'd asked for--a spouse. So when it fell apart, I felt not only betrayed by Barbara, but by God. After all, he was the one who had allowed us to ever meet in the first place. All I could think after the break-up was, "God, this just isn't fair . . . she's mine!"

I was asserting that God owed me something better. "God, what sort of screwed up world are you running anyway? Hand me the wheel, and King Kevin will show you a thing or two about controlling the universe." I had accused him of being unfair and I confessed my pride.

We can ask God honest questions, but we shouldn't forget that he doesn't owe us an answer. We must also keep in mind that God is holy and perfect (Matthew 6:9). He

cares for us, and desires to answer our prayers (Matthew 7:7-11), but he is not an underling to our commands.

Admittedly, though, it's easy to feel betrayed by God. After all, he reigns with all power. So why did he allow this to happen?

The devil wants us to believe that God isn't good but we need to resist that lie with faith. We must cry out to God--"*Lord, I'm angry and perplexed about this situation, but I confess my ignorance. I can't see the whole picture. I confess my sin of being angry with you. I confess that my anger is due to my own pride. I'm angry because I've misunderstood something about you and my situation. Maybe I've even chosen to ignore something you've said, and rebellion has led to my pain in this situation. But, I turn from my sin and put my hope in you, according to the mercies poured on me through your Son Christ Jesus. Please help me deal rightly with my anger and ignorance.*"

August 19: Today's been interesting. This morning and afternoon I experienced such a great deal of anger. Some of it is directed at, maybe provoked by, those around me. But I've also been aware of anger over being abandoned by Barbara. I was rejected. She did all the rejecting and I did all the receiving. This seems so unfair. I'm devastated at the thought of not being able to spend the rest of my life with her. And, I'm also mad at her for leaving me. I'm so sad and angry at being rejected. I'm angry at myself for having been rejected. I think I'm even angry at God, too, for allowing it. I'm feeling so shattered inside. All that seems to lurk in me is a large amount of rage. Rage at her, at myself, at the world, and at what my heart perceives as an unfair system, a system God created.

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### *Forgiveness*

I'm probably not the best one to talk about forgiveness. I'm not very good at it . . . but then again, maybe that's why I should talk about it. Many of you may not be good at it, either. And if that's the case, you're in good company (or should I say bad company?). It truly takes the grace of Christ to love others well.

I started growing fangs and producing venom when Barbara broke up with me. I ached at losing her, but also wanted to tell her off with a full assortment of expletives. I was ready to cast good religion aside to have my say. No words were off limit, either. I wanted to vent. In the following months, I dealt with rage at some pretty deep and shallow levels. I'm ashamed to say that on one occasion, I was riding my motorcycle in my country, and a guy barely nicked my bike with his. I immediately yelled out a harsh word in English. He couldn't understand it, but it wasn't kind. I don't know how related this one instance was with my break-up, but I had a few of these surprising outbursts after the break-up. The more I dealt with my hatred toward her, the less such things happened.

It's easy to remain angry at the one who ended the relationship. It's not necessarily sinful to be angry with him or her. Maybe we were truly wronged. We may need to confront the person about how he or she sinned against us. But we sin when we stay angry. Ephesians 4:31 makes this clear: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." We can acknowledge such

anger before God, ask for his justice, and then call upon his mercy that we might forgive that person. After all, Jesus, while being accused, ". . . did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). If the sinless Son of God forgave the injustice enacted upon him, how can we stay angry? If we nurture our anger, it will turn to bitterness, which will rot our souls (Hebrews 12:15).

Sometimes we need to say to God, "*Lord, I feel wronged in this situation. I feel misunderstood and abandoned by someone I truly loved. The pain is immense. And so is the anger and my desire for justice. God, I trust that you will right all wrongs. I also realize that I am sinful, too, and I place myself before your mercies. I forgive my perpetrator, not because she deserves it, but because you have forgiven me when I didn't deserve it. By your grace, I forgive her and choose not to use her offense against her.*"

We step out in faith and forgive, especially when we don't feel like it. If the anger resurfaces, then we go back to God acknowledging that we are having trouble letting go. We must continue with our commitment to forgive. This isn't self determination, it'll take Christ working out his love in us.

Forgiving another may often have an actual moment of climatic transition, similar to conversion when a person goes from death to life, but it is naïve to believe forgiving another for any one failure or for a lifetime of harm is ever entirely finished. The fact seems to be that as any harm is more fully faced, then it requires the deepening of forgiveness to overcome. To forgive another is always an ongoing, deepening, quickening process, rather than a once-and-for-all event. (Allender, *Bold Love*, 158)

Perhaps by the goodness of Christ, some acts of forgiveness can be once-and-for-all events, but I like Allender's idea that some offenses can take significant time to work through.

### *Confession*

God never tires of hearing our honest confessions. Psalm 51:17 says: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." He warms to a heart crying out to him. Actually, Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."

We need to confess our pride and other sins to God. Sometimes we only need to confess our sins to God in private, while at other times, we need to go to another Christian friend and confess to him (James 5:16). This does a lot to keep our hearts vulnerable before God. When we confess to others, we are ultimately confessing to God. It helps our pride to tell trustworthy Christians the sins we're struggling with. Confession helps make us vulnerable, needy, and humble. "*God, I hate Barbara. But how can I hate her for doing to me once what I've done to you a thousand times? She may have acted immaturely or sinful in some of her reactions, but I confess my pride and bitterness.*"

I've confessed my secret sins to other men many times, and it usually humbled them, too. I've experienced healing in a few areas as I've brought sins into the light of Christian confession and fellowship. After they've prayed for me, I've sensed God's

presence like never before. Confessing my hatred of Barbara to friends was especially helpful as I was healing from our break-up.

June 21: I shouldn't feel that I have to deny her sins in the break-up. But I can't hold on to that idea, either. I must forgive. Also, I must consider that God could be using this break-up as a corrective in my life.

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### *Sin and Redemption*

We must look into God's word for an accurate picture of our human predicament. We really are sinners. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins." (Ecclesiastes 7:20). These are heavy words. Who can hear them? "*Lord, we ask that you take into account that we are made of dust. We have frail frames and are weak.*"

But the good news for those of us in Christ is that we are declared righteous through the work that Jesus did on the cross (Romans 4). Christ put his Spirit in us and gave us a new nature (Romans 8:9, Galatians 5:16-26, Colossians 3:9-10). Yes, we are able to sin, but God the Father is working through us in Christ (Philippians 1:6, Jude 24-25).

Listen to what Paul said in Titus 3:4-7,

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Now that's profound. God provided true life through his Son Christ. Yet, pain can cloud the brightness of God's glory. There were times after my break-up that I couldn't rejoice, that I didn't have hope or joy. I was unsure the misery would end anytime soon. Sorrow in life just can't be avoided. Yet, we should remember that pain and disappointment are a part of God's plan to bring us into the righteous life now and heaven later. This may not be what we want to hear; it certainly wasn't what I wanted to hear in the aftermath of my break-up, but it is true.

God remains with us in our sufferings. He knows pain, death, and sorrow:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

As Hebrews goes on to tell us, Christ endured far more suffering than we'll ever know. He never sinned; instead, he fought sin to the grave and did so with joy (12:1-3). As believers, we can draw strength from Jesus' example. We're not God, but we do have his Spirit dwelling within us, providing joy unspeakable.

My question to the reader at this point, is, do you know Christ? While I've addressed you, the reader, as though you're a Christian, you might not really be one. The

promises of God's presence and hope during hard times only apply to those who have trusted Christ's death and resurrection as sufficient payment for their sin and as sufficient to turn away God's wrath against their sin. If you're not a believer, the Bible says you're God's enemy and will one day face his wrath in hell (Ephesians 2:1-3). If you want trust him, confess your sin to him, ask him to forgive you, and make you a new person.

### *The Real Battle*

Satan would love to distract us with our own problems so that we lose sight of the real battle. It's OK for us to hurt over a break-up, and it's OK for us to cry out in pain to the Lord, but it's not OK for us to get so attached to our pain that we lose sight of God. Satan wants to convince us that God is cruel. We can become so consumed with our own hurts that we forget to guard against the enemy of our souls.

We aren't the only ones hurting; other people stand in need of our ministry (Romans 12:10-15). In Philippians 2:1-3 the Apostle Paul said,

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

"Yes," you may say, "but I'm hurting too badly right now to reach out." Well, all of us need ministering to sometimes. Or more accurately put, we are always in need of God's mercy through the care of other believers. But sometimes we need extra care, and there is a time for us to heal in Christ. Yet, we must be careful, for the evil one roams like a roaring lion seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). He wants to destroy us and those around us. We must keep in mind that this world is not about our own comfort. Yes, we must pursue our pleasure in God, but that doesn't always equal comfort (See Piper, *Desiring God*, 213-238; *Let the Nations be Glad*, 71-112). God calls us unto suffering and death for his sake (Luke 9:23, Philippians 3:10). Paul stated it clearly in 2 Timothy 3:12, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted . . ." (Just to put our suffering in context, approximately 150,000 Christians die for their faith every year around the world. A break-up may be painful, but it shrinks in comparison to dying for our faith.)

"Since the children have flesh and blood," Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "he [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Did we get that? God achieves glory, through Christ, by beating back his enemy. "He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). Let's allow our break-up to refocus our attention on God's larger plan. God's light is extinguishing the darkness, and he's getting glory through Christ as he defeats the devil through us, the broken and weak vessels that we are. Consider 1 Corinthians 1:25-31:

For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were

influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

God gets all the glory as he uses us, weak vessels, to defeat his enemy. Only an all-powerful God could use a defective weapon (us) to defeat his enemy (Satan). But ultimately God relies on himself, not us. "For my own name's sake I [God] delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you [Israel], so as not to cut you off. See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another" (Isaiah 48:9-11). God depends on himself and will bring us to perfection in the process (Ephesians 5:25-27). He has called us into this spiritual battle (Ephesians 6), yet the battle is his to win (Judges 7:20, 15:15, 1 Samuel 17:37, 45-47, Zechariah 4:6). The loss of a relationship with someone we love can bend our backs with its weight, but God hasn't left us in our pain.

We should not lose heart, though pain rages in our soul, though sins still trouble us, God is winning the war against Satan. God gains glory for himself in Christ through us, his needy children. The ultimate battle includes more than just romance, but heaven and hell, life and death, salvation and damnation. God cares about our romantic life, our heartaches and successes, but we must not forget his bigger plan--that he be honored in all things.

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). The battle may rage partly in our emotions, but those things only point us to a greater reality, a battle that rages for the hearts of men and women. God can use us to comfort others, even when loved ones break our hearts.

Our pain reminds us that we are not yet fully redeemed, and that the battle flares on. We are called to participate in spreading God's glory, rather than the expansion of our own kingdom. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). In the midst of sorrow from a break-up, we can't forget about the people who haven't yet tasted the morsels of life with Jesus.

In our pain, we are free to hurt before God and his people. But we need to be mindful that we are here for God's glory. Even through our suffering, he will make a great name for himself, while at the same time, ministering to us.

We must keep the big picture in mind especially during the pain of our break-up. God is spreading his light to all the world as he indicates in Isaiah 49:6 regarding his chosen people so long ago: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." God uses us in the process of reaching the nations. Paul declared, "However, I consider my life worth

nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24). Even with the pain from a broken relationship, we should pray as Jesus did to the Father, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

God will one day meet our every need with himself. After all, God turns deserts into pools of water, and transforms shame into joy (Psalm 107:35, Isaiah 61:7). So, if our tears from our present break-up don't stop any time soon, we can still move on, tears and all, toward God's perfect healing.

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