2. THE BREAKDOWN
You’re Broken, and Jesus Wants to Fix It

“For everybody has a past, and every past spawns fierce and fiery emotions about what it means. Nobody can be autonomous in making choices today unless she grasps how she’s being internally yanked around by stuff that came before.” — Mary Karr, *The Art of Memoir*

“You dream of resurrection
But you’re too scared to die” — the Collection, *Birds*

We’re broken people. This world can be a harsh place. Bad things happen. People do wrong things. We sin again and again. From the moment we’re conceived, we can get hurt. Because life is dangerous, we figure out ways to survive. We come up with tricks to avoid pain, and find comforts that give us a false sense of security for a while. We distract ourselves. We can even try to hurt others before they can hurt us. We spend a lot of energy building up protective shields and personality quirks on our surface to cover up who we really are on the inside; we’re afraid of what people will see. Much of what we present to the world isn’t really us at all; it’s a hustle.

Whether it’s performance, relationships, or religion, we’re looking to measure up. Jesus steps in and offers us a new way. You are not what you do. You are *who you are.* You’re a child of God. Jesus doesn’t just want to help you survive, he wants you to thrive. We’re not born into the family of God so we can white-knuckle it through life, waiting to die. Jesus promises us the good stuff right now, even in the midst of all the pain in the world. We should take him up on that. God doesn’t author brokenness, but he is happy to redeem it.

In the Old Testament, God dwelled with his people and gave them instructions on how to stay safe and healthy. He wanted them to live disciplined lives of holy devotion to him. In the New Testament, we see the fulfillment of the law in Christ (Matthew 5:17, Romans 13:10). Wherever Jesus went, people were healed physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It seems that healing is a natural side effect of being with Jesus and taking what he’s got to give. It should be a side effect for you and me, too. We should constantly get healthier ourselves, and that should naturally help other people get healthy too.

If you broke your leg today, you’d go to the ER, get the break realigned, and then get a cast. If you didn’t, your body would still go to work to fuse the bone back together— but it wouldn’t be perfect. You’d find something to use as a crutch. You’d make sure no one touched that leg. You’d probably walk with a limp the rest of your life. Our spiritual and emotional wounds function the same way our physical ones do; if something gets broken, it needs to get re-set right in the place where it happened. That’s the only way to heal all the way. Unresolved pain doesn’t disappear, even if we move on. *Time does not heal all wounds; Jesus does.*
THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE

When we get saved, we’re immediately forgiven, reconciled, and adopted. Our slate is wiped clean. That’s called justification (Romans 3:23-34). As we live with Jesus, he changes us. We start to look and act like him. We want what he wants, and do what he’s doing. Broken things start to heal. Got something broken down in your life? Unresolved sin? Old resentments? Pain you’ve been trying to forget? Mark my words, Jesus is coming for it. Jesus is cleaning you out and making you whole. That’s called sanctification. You can’t spend time with Jesus and stay the same. You’ll either gradually turn into someone who looks just like him, or avoid him, and perhaps eventually reject him altogether. You don’t have to let Jesus make you right. It’s your choice.

Even devoted Christians can be tempted to rest on being justified, but resist being sanctified. Perhaps we see a pattern of sin in our lives and keep asking God for forgiveness, without actually letting him change us. What’s the difference?

The enemy can’t change the fact that you’re saved, so instead, he fights to keep you broken. He brings resistance into your walk with God and people. He wants to keep as many things wrong as possible. It’s probably simpler to combat that resistance than you realize, but we just have to be ready to follow Jesus. That’s the deal. If we want him to help us win that battle, we’ll have to hand over our rights to run our lives the way we want to. We’ve got to be willing to see, do, and say everything God asks of us. That’s how it works. Easy, right? Of course not. But, that’s probably why many of us aren’t living as free and full as Jesus promises us we can. We’re giving the enemy power and settling for less because the alternative requires so much humility and submission on our part. Neither of these things come naturally to us. We’ve got to choose them.

BULLSEYE

Because the enemy wants to keep you down, he targets your wounds; the places in your life where something got broken down and never got fully resolved. That’s the path of least resistance for Satan’s end goal. He’ll press on those old bruises and speak lies into the places you’re hurting. Satan hopes you’ll start to agree with those lies, and begin living them out. Ever heard of footholds and strongholds? This is how they start. Remember: we hate hanging out with our pain! We love to get distracted, and we love to pretend we’re fine. We also hate asking for help. When we avoid pain, and don’t admit we’re tired of handling things on our own, we’re a perfect target for the enemy. We give him so much great material to work with.

Look back at your responses from Part 1. What are the top three ways the enemy tries to throw you off? How might those lies be connected to your past experiences? You don’t have to answer right now; just pause to consider it before moving on.
It’s hard to ask for help, but it’s easy to get addicted to helping others. Why is that? If we keep ourselves in the position of “helper”, but never place ourselves in the position of “helped”, what does that do to us? How does it impact ministry?

KNOWING AND DOING

One way to locate our unresolved issues is to identify the areas where we “know” what’s right, but we keep acting in contradiction to that knowledge. The space between what we know to be true and what we actually do is the place where Jesus wants to restore us. The enemy wants to keep us preoccupied with things on the surface, and he works hard to cover up the root of the problem; the wound that needs to get healed. Certain things trip us up again and again; parts of life where we can’t seem to grow as easily as other people, or we feel ashamed we can’t “get it together”. The enemy loves that. Satan hopes we’ll exhaust ourselves with behavior modification and keeping up appearances. He wants us preoccupied with those embarrassing habits we can’t seem to drop. If you’ve got an addiction, he wants you focused on managing it, and he’ll put a lot of energy into distracting you from the root place where the behavior got started.

Satan wants you preoccupied with your faults, almost like backwards worship; always meditating on yourself instead of Jesus. That way you live like someone trimming dandelions with a pair of scissors. You might make some progress on the surface, but it’s all just going to grow back. The enemy is terrified you’ll find out how easy it is to break free once you ask Jesus to show you the pain under the oppression, and let him work from there. Don’t focus on your repeat sins and your addictions. Ask Jesus to show you why those things are struggles in the first place. Then it can get resolved.

The space between what we know to be true and what we actually do is the place where Jesus wants to restore us. Stop and consider the last week, month, and year. Ask Jesus to help you see how this invitation is at play in your own life. Take notes.

Remember: the enemy can’t do anything about your salvation, but he will fight to keep you broken. Our wounds (past and present) are targets for the enemy. That’s where we’re weak, confused, and bound up. And let’s face it: these are often things we want to keep hidden, or just don’t want to talk about. That’s why the enemy loves to use our wounds so much. If we won’t talk about it, the root source of our issue never gets resolved. This is where the garbage of life collects. This is where we harbor resentment, unforgiveness, and confusion. We’ve got to clean that stuff out. We forfeit the freedom Jesus is waiting to give us because we’re ashamed, afraid, or just blind to what is really going on.

When we’ve been hurt, we often try to convince ourselves that we’ve moved on, but we haven’t. Not really. It’s the areas of life where we “know better” but we aren’t doing better that God wants to restore. When we’re experiencing that frustration, there’s probably a wound in our past.
connected to it; some part of us is broken down, and just can’t catch up with where we are today. When we’re ready to finally slay that dragon for good, and we’re willing to pray through anything God brings up, it’s a huge relief to finally get to the bottom of things.

DON’T ESCAPE. ENGAGE.

Most Christians have no idea how much power they’re giving the enemy to work in their lives. The fact of the matter is, the enemy can really only “stick” to the parts of our lives we’re holding back from Jesus, whether we know it or not. Remember: we hate feeling pain, so we avoid going there at all costs. When hard things happen, we want to move past it and press on. When we can’t avoid the ache, we want to numb it, not face it. We also like feeling in control, because it seems safe. So we hold grudges, refuse to forgive, and hold on to resentments. That’s what we do to survive. But remember, Jesus wants us to thrive. Wherever you’re broken down and hurting, you’ve got to face it. You’re not as fine as you think you are. Again, you’re not as fine as you think you are. One more time: you are not as fine as you think you are. If you do feel pain, don’t rush to escape it. Engage. It might be the last thing you want to do, but do it anyway.

DISCIPLESHIP AND DELIVERANCE

Enemy oppression is just a side effect of brokenness, not the main cause. The answer to real healing is always Jesus. Therefore, the answer is always discipleship. Spend time with your master, Jesus, and let him change you. We want to look and act just like him. When we’re facing broken things in our own lives or in the lives of the people we serve, we can’t just focus on deliverance from the enemy alone, because that doesn’t address the root of the problem. Wherever there’s a wound, Jesus is ready to heal it. If we try to exercise authority to drive out the enemy without first addressing the wounds beneath the oppression, we do no lasting good.¹ We might even do more harm than good, because we’ve stirred things up, then theft the person with an open wound. But again, we’ve got to be all-in on the deal. If we want God’s help to make things right, we’ve got to go all the way. We can’t just ask Jesus to handle enemy opposition in our life for us, not if we want real change. If you want Jesus to deliver you, or the world, from evil, you need to realize that the oppression is working from a place that’s broken down. If you’re not ready to confront the brokenness beneath the enemy, don’t confront the enemy. It won’t work. You can’t get lasting spiritual freedom for yourself or others unless the oppressed person wants to heal what’s wrong at the source. You’ve got to commit to both. Jesus is working, but again, you don’t have to join him. You get to choose.

JESUS IS REAL.

Disciples walk and talk with Jesus. Disciples don’t just know Jesus is alive, but live like he is. Disciples are anchored in the person of Jesus and who they are in him. Disciples don’t simply thrive on what Jesus did for them, they thrive on what Jesus is doing right now. As ministers, we want every

¹ This applies to both personal restoration and the restoration of institutions, communities, families, etc. If you want to see restoration and reconciliation, find the deep wounds beneath the surface of what’s going on and pray into those. (The racial issues we have today are indeed still connected to myriad events of the past, like slavery, enforced zoning laws, etc.) Nothing is just “in the past”. Everything is connected. In true reconciling ministry, there is almost always deep work to do regarding the enemy, the pull of the world, and the sin of people. Reconciliation work is essentially about untangling complex knots one movement at a time; with Jesus, in the name of Jesus. It’s a slow, steady pursuit.
person to be certain Jesus is actually with them, a real person who is present and active in the room. That’s something many Christians have never really been able to grasp. Many don’t even think to wonder about it. It’s our everyday job to introduce people to some of the most elemental and out-of-this-world basics of the faith: God is talking, and you can talk with him. Jesus came to set you free, and you can be free today. The most critical thing you need to do as a leader is follow Jesus intimately, then invite other people to do the same thing. If you know someone who’s desperate for help from God, but isn’t changing, they probably know about Jesus, but don’t know Jesus yet. Perhaps you’ve been that person, too.

BATTLE ARMOR

Read this passage:

Ephesians 6:10-18 NIV

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 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. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.

When we talk about doing battle against the enemy, this passage often comes up. We imagine ourselves suiting up for battle, tough and ready. But while we live in the world, we don’t do battle like the world does (2 Cor. 10:3). Look over this passage with me and answer the following questions:

Where does our strength come from?

Whose armor should we put on?

What forces are we fighting against?

We put on truth, righteousness, peace, trust, salvation, and our one offensive weapon: the word of God. Paul uses imagery every person of the day would recognize: battle armor. But he entirely flips it around. Where does our truth, righteousness, peace, confidence, and salvation come from? Jesus. Our one fitting weapon against the enemy is to speak God’s words, Spirit words. And Paul’s directive for what to do in light of all this armor? Pray.
Do we actually need to put on anything new when we face adversity? No. We need to remember who we *already are*, and what we *already* have. Putting on the full armor of God isn’t about covering up; it’s about taking up who we already are in Christ, and actively remembering he is in us, and stands between us and any enemy.

We spend a lifetime constructing corrupted armor to survive in a harsh world. But in Christ, we are not just protected, but ultimately, we’re *invincible*. With Jesus, we can safely dismantle every piece of heavy armor we’ve put up to protect ourselves, because powerful, invincible, victorious life in Christ isn’t about suiting up; it’s about stripping down. The most dangerous warriors in the Kingdom of God stand before the enemy with nothing but Jesus to protect them, fuel them, guide them, and empower them. That is the life you were born for.

**CULTIVATE**

“A carefully cultivated heart will, assisted by the grace of God, foresee, forestall, or transform most of the painful situations before which others stand like helpless children saying, “Why?”—Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*

The enemy will never stop working to destroy you. If you want to experience powerful ministry in the name of Jesus, total health is your only option. You have to see your old personality crutches and choose to put them down to walk straight. You have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. You have to get familiar with vulnerability to the point that, difficult as it is, you *crave* real communion with God and people, especially when you’re aware of some kind of interior breakdown or resistance. You have to adopt a rule of life that is completely in opposition to what the world, and most of the church, teaches you and expects of you.

We have to commit to cultivating our hearts. We can’t do any of the work to heal ourselves or anyone else. God does that. What we do is choose to cultivate. Cultivation is about getting the ground ready; removing weeds and foreign objects. Cultivation is about plowing the soil. God sows the seeds, but a well-cultivated heart is open and ready for them. We avoid vulnerability because it could mean rejection or more pain. But vulnerability is also a means of grace. The practices of heart health put us in the perfect position to receive every kind of good thing God wants to give us. If you want to be a person ready for grace, and you want to cultivate a community ready for grace, you’ll need to commit to practices that keep you clean and open. We’ll talk about that next time.

**FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. You can’t get lasting spiritual freedom for yourself or others unless the oppressed person wants to heal what’s wrong at the source.

Have you ever encountered someone in who wants deliverance from oppression or pain, but doesn’t actually want Jesus to help them at the source of their need? How do you help them?
2. Christians often want to “put the past behind them” and just look ahead with Jesus. What they perhaps don’t realize is that salvation works in every direction. Jesus saved their *entire* life; not just their life from salvation forward. Redemption isn’t just possible now and in the future, but Jesus wants to redeem the past as well.

What’s the difference between “putting our past behind us” and putting our past in Jesus’ hands?

3. “To be a witness means to offer your own faith experience and to make your doubts and hopes, failures and successes, loneliness and woundedness, available to others as a context in which they can struggle with their own humanness and quest for meaning.” — Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith.*

We need to embrace and model vulnerable transparency, but we need to do it in a healthy way. Brene Brown often says vulnerability without boundaries is reckless. In other words, just as it’s unhealthy to live in a suit of armor, it can be just as unhealthy to be an “open book” anywhere and everywhere.

Do you agree? What’s the difference between practicing healthy vulnerability, and being a hot mess?

4. In her book *Daring Greatly,* Brene Brown writes, “[On stage] I only share stories or experiences that I’ve worked through and feel that I can share from solid ground. I don’t share what I define as “intimate” stories, nor do I share stories that are fresh wounds.” In other words, she doesn’t share unresolved, raw wounds or struggles from the stage.

That’s a helpful rule for all of us. The key is: Brown doesn’t share unresolved wounds from the stage (but that doesn’t mean she doesn’t share them at all). You may never get on a stage, but model vulnerability everywhere you go. Just make it a rule of life to share openly *and* appropriately.

What are some healthy boundaries you can put in place as you connect with others? How will you practice vulnerability in your closest relationships? With your church? With people outside the church?

Talk together and find two or three “rules” to live by that keep you open but not dangerously exposed.

5. Invincibility in Christ is not about suiting up; it’s about stripping down. Do you agree? Why or why not?