

Brokenness Study #5 - the Promise

by Charles Stanley

God's breaking process is a loving discipline that breaks down our resistance and rebellion, and brings us into submission to Him, ultimately making us useful for His purpose.

Duration: 48:16

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7

Topics: "Brokenness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the grace of God and expresses wonder at how God could love, be patient, forgiving, forbearing, good, gracious, and kind to him despite his flaws and sins. The preacher emphasizes that going through a process of brokenness can deepen one's understanding of God's grace and love. This process involves laying down a critical spirit and experiencing a new perspective on the cross, the blood of Jesus, and the power of sin being broken. The preacher also highlights that God never deserts believers in their seasons of brokenness, and in their weakest moments, they can experience a surge of supernatural power, strength, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.

Transcript

Brokenness is God's method of dealing with the self-life, which is that part of us that desires to act independently of God. He targets those areas that are hindering His purpose and will for our life. Then, having targeted them, He arranges the circumstances for our brokenness.

He chooses the tools by which we are to be broken, and then He controls the pressure as we are broken, and each facet of our life is brought into submission to His will. One of the reasons that brokenness is a painful experience, oftentimes causing suffering, is simply that God begins to deal with us in brokenness on a level that is very deep. He deals with us on a deep emotional level, He deals with us on a deep spiritual level, and as a result, He is after what most of us do not want to give up.

God is ultimately after the control of our life, and the last thing we want to surrender is control of ourselves to anybody, God included. So this is part of our series on Brokenness, the Way to Blessing, and the title of this message is Brokenness, the Promise, and in each message we have taken a biblical character to illustrate the principle, so today we choose the Apostle Paul. So if you will turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 11 for a moment, 11 and 12, and these chapters deal with what we want to consider here in the life of the Apostle Paul.

In chapter 11, the latter part of that, all the suffering he had been through, in chapter 12 you will recall that God had given him some wonderful revelations about himself and about the body of Christ, so exciting, so wonderful, so awesome that even the Apostle Paul could not speak of them, and he says in this 12th chapter that because God had done this, beginning in verse 7, and because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, and remember we said that ultimately God zeroes in on pride in this whole area of brokenness, that he keeps me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, to keep me from exalting myself or becoming proud and arrogant. Concerning this thing, that is this thorn, I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me, and he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong. Now let's think about the Apostle Paul for just a moment. Remember his name was Saul, Saul of Tarsus, and he had a great heritage and a great background, and when God finally got him, he was on his way to Damascus to persecute, to imprison, and maybe even to kill Christians, because his goal was to eliminate those followers of Jesus from disturbing Jehovah's way.

And so, therefore, when he fell on the Damascus road, God spoke to him, God saved him. Now remember, here is a man who is very strong in his will, a man who is strong in his personality, a man who is very aggressive in his ways, very committed to whatever he's doing, and very determined to get it done. So when the Lord Jesus Christ saved him, what did he have? He didn't have a jewel all polished, he had a jewel in the rough, a rock in the rough, and so God had to begin to work in this man's life in order to perfect him, to prepare him for the work that God had called him to do, and oftentimes when we read the epistles, the idea we have sometimes without thinking about it is that Paul got saved, then he started writing.

No, Paul was saved, and then the Bible says that in Galatians chapter 1, instead of going to the apostles and speaking with them, he went to Arabia alone to be alone with God and let God explain to him what in the world had happened to him. Here he was moving in one direction, absolutely persuaded and convinced that he was being obedient to the Jehovah God whom he knew and whom he had worshipped and whose law he knew so well, and all of a sudden he's struck down, he hears the voice of the Lord, he's blinded, he's saved, he's filled with the Spirit of God, and this is a dramatic, life-changing, transforming, miraculous experience in his life, totally beyond his understanding. So he goes away to be alone with God.

More than likely it's in those times when God revealed to him truths that he never revealed to anyone else. Nobody understood Jesus like the apostle Paul. No one understood God like the apostle Paul.

No one had the insights, the revelation, the illumination, the inspiration of this man. And yet when you look at his life, you'll see what God did, that all of his ministry, he was harassed by his enemies. All of his ministry, he was going through one valley experience after the other.

The Bible says that he was beaten many times, beaten not only with a whip but with rods, and he was jailed often, and then he was on the sea, shipwrecked often, and he went through one harassing experience after the other, one troublesome time. Wherever he went to preach, before he arrived, the Judaizers were already there to mount an opposition toward him. If he beat them there, they were soon there again mounting opposition toward him, so that everywhere he went, he found himself facing all types

of opposition.

Somebody might ask, why in the world would God call a man like this whom he himself said he was a chosen vessel, call from his mother's womb, give him the greatest responsibility any man who's ever walked on earth has ever had except the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and then allow him to go through such suffering and pain and harassment and persecution continuously from the very beginning of his ministry to the very end? And if you'll think about it, when he was saved, those who had been his companions and friends rejected him, and those who were already Christians, they rejected him because they suspected him as a spy and that God really had not saved a man as awful as Saul of Tarsus. And so here he is. As I look at the life of the Apostle Paul, I see two areas in his life that I believe God had to break.

It is the same two areas he has had to break in my life and that he intends to break in every person's life. One of those you will find in Romans chapter 7. Look there for a moment, if you will. And what God is in the process of doing here is breaking the Apostle Paul in this area to bring him to the realization that he cannot live the Christian life in his own strength, that he cannot live the Christian life in his own strength.

So he brought him to that end because you see in verse 14, for we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, soul in the bondage to sin. For that which I am doing, I do not understand, for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. The Apostle Paul had to come to the conclusion in his life that he couldn't live the Christian life.

Otherwise, he would have depended upon his own strength, upon his own flesh, upon his own background, upon his own heritage, upon his own education, upon his own determination, upon his own aggressive spirit, upon his own determined will, his own depth of commitment. He would have done the same thing everybody else does until God drives us through brokenness of the helpless end of ourselves in despair to say to him, God, I cannot, I am a failure when it comes to living the Christian life. The second area in which he had to be broken is found in 2 Corinthians 12, that God says that he had given them this tremendous revelation, but with it came a thorn in the flesh, something that Paul suffered tremendously for, for he says in three periods of time, this does not mean three nights before he went to bed, but three seasons more than likely of fasting and praying, pleading, begging, beseeching God to deliver him from this.

He says, God sent it to him, verse 7, in order to protect him, to keep him from exalting himself, there was given to him a thorn in the flesh, to keep me from exalting myself. In treating him three times, he says, God says my grace is sufficient. Therefore, his conclusion was, after pleading before God to deliver him from what appeared to be a hindrance in his life and a hindrance in his ministry, he said, verse 9, most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Therefore, now I am well content with weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties for Christ's sake, but when I am weak, I have learned this awesome, important lesson that when I'm at my weakest, that's when the power of God is released through me with its greatest intensity. Now, my friend, these are two lessons that the body of Christ desperately needs to learn, that you and I cannot live the Christian life in our own strength, for every single one of us will have to admit, if we are honest, living it in our own strength only brings us to humiliating failure. Trying to serve the Lord in their own strength, depending upon anything other than the Holy Spirit, brings us to fruitlessness, waste, and simply uselessness.

Two lessons God wants us to learn. And so he broke the apostle Paul until he came to the place and crying in desperation, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death? Brought

him to utter desperation, utter weakness, utter brokenness, to say, now I have discovered, it is in my weakness that the power of God is released with greatest power. And so that's where he wants all of us, depending upon absolutely nothing and no one, both for our life and also for our service.

Now, as I said before, the process of brokenness is painful, and you'll see that in the life of the apostle Paul, very painful at times, depending upon what God is breaking us of, what he's wrenching us from, what he's releasing and liberating us from, how long it has been a part of our thinking, our actions, our attitudes, and our conduct, God sets out to deliver us. Remember, his ultimate objective, if I can wrap it up in two simple phrases of these. First of all, he shatters this old self-made life of ours in order that you and I may walk in, listen, that you and I may walk in intimate oneness with him.

Secondly, that we may serve him effectively. Therefore, the whole Christian life is going to be involved in the breaking process. Now, God gives us some wonderful assurance when we go through valleys of pain and suffering, when God is stripping us of anything and everything upon which we would depend so that pride and arrogance may be removed from our life.

So if you'll jot these down, because the first thing I want you to notice here is this, and that is that God only breaks us in love. God never breaks us in anger. God never breaks us in wrath.

God's breaking process, that is, when he chooses an area of our life and he targets it to break, when he arranges the circumstances, when he chooses the tools, and as he controls the pressure, it's never out of anger. It is always out of love. Somebody may look at the life of Apostle Paul and say, well, the reason God broke him was look at all the sin he committed and all the people, all of God's people that he had harmed and punished.

No, the day Jesus Christ met the Apostle Paul on the Damascus Road, he saved him, and at that moment and from that moment all the way back to the beginning, God forgave his sin once and once and for all, and he never suffered as a result of that sin. God breaks us out of love. That is, he sends into our life thorns.

He sends into our life those experiences that break down our resistance and our rebellion and our self-will in order to bring every area of our body, soul, and spirit in submission to him so that our walk will be holy and our work will be effective. Now let me distinguish between three words that are very significant. I want you to be sure to understand this.

Brokenness is God's discipline in the life of the believer in which he is dealing usually with attitudes in our life that he must change, but what he has primarily in mind is future service. It will deal with us presently, but what he has in mind is future use of us. So brokenness is God's discipline in our life in which to bring about a change so that future usefulness is God's priority.

In chastisement, God again disciplines the believer, but what he has primarily in mind at that point is the immediate change in order to correct something wrong in that person's life to walk wholly before God now, though of course always the future is in mind, but primarily now. God chastens us now in order we might walk wholly before him. He breaks us.

What he has in mind primarily is future usefulness. Now the word punishment that oftentimes we confuse with brokenness, chastisement, and punishment. Discipline, that is chastisement and brokenness for believers.

Punishment for unbelievers only. Punishment is an expression of God's wrath upon unbelievers because the unbeliever has rejected the only sin bearer who can take his wrath. Therefore when the unbeliever sins against God, the unbeliever must realize he's going to be the object of God's wrath because the blood of Jesus Christ has been rejected, the cross has been rejected, no one else to bear his sins, so the unbeliever must bear his own sins.

So therefore the unbeliever is punished, the believer is chastised, and the believer is broken for future usefulness before God. Very important you look at chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians and look, if you will, in the 16th, 17th, 18th verses, you ought to underline these if you never have because they are an explanation and a solution to much frustration and confusion when we don't understand what God is doing in our life. Verse 16, therefore, he's spoken about difficulties they've had, therefore we do not lose heart, we don't get discouraged and give up in the conflict, but though our outer man is decaying, this physical body, it suffers disease and sickness and it's getting older, yet our inner man, that is our spirit, is being renewed day by day and strengthened, resurrection, for momentary light affliction, things that we're going through is producing for us something.

What is it producing? It's producing something that cannot be seen. He says it's producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, building character, forming Christ-likeness in our spirit, shaping us into the mold that God wants us to be in, preparing us for future service for Him. While we look not at the things which are seen, that's what the world accepts, the believer is to look at what cannot be seen with the naked eye, but the things which are not seen with the naked eye.

For the things which are seen with the eye are temporal, passing away, but the things which are not seen are eternal, so that when God takes us through a breaking process, we're not to focus on what we see happening to us, but we're to ask God, Lord, what do you have in mind? What do you see? What is it that you're looking at? All I can see and feel is hurt, pain, suffering, rejection, persecution, or harassment, or separation, or whatever it might be, but God, what do you see? God sees through all the fog and the haze of those things, and He sees what His great objective is in that given incident, in that given period of time, in that daily experience, God sees exactly what He's up to. And therefore, brokenness is always an expression of God's love, and that is the key to understanding. Secondly, God sets limitations on our brokenness.

That is, when God begins to target something in your life, He doesn't just turn you over to Satan and let Satan have a heyday in your life. God sets limitations upon our periods of brokenness. Now let me explain, and it's very important you understand what I'm going to say at this time.

When we say that God sets limitations, He sets limitations on the time, how long you will have to experience brokenness. He sets limitations on the intensity of the pain you and I suffer. He sets limitations on the hurt that you and I experience.

Now, here is rule one with God in breaking us. Rule one is this, God's process of brokenness ceases at the point in which our spirit will be broken. God is in the process of breaking our spirit.

He wants to break our will. When our will is broken, stubborn, rebellious, have it my way will is broken, then what happens? Body, soul, and spirit are offered in submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. So rule number one with God is the breaking process of sending into our life whatever is necessary to bring body, soul, and spirit in submission to Him.

That breaking process ceases at the moment or before the spirit is broken. The will is to be broken, yes, but God would never break your spirit. That would render you lifeless and useless and hopeless and utter despair and despondency and could ultimately have an awesome effect upon you as far as your whole right thinking about things.

God isn't, He isn't trying to destroy you as a person. God respects you as a person, and so at the point in which your spirit would be broken, God always stops, halts the breaking process. Rule number two is this, that the process of brokenness ceases at the point in which it would damage God's great purpose for your life.

It ceases at the moment at which it would damage God's great purpose for your life. That is, if God allowed you to be broken and shattered and the pain and suffering be such that it would absolutely destroy God's purpose for your life, then He would have wasted the opportunity, and that wouldn't be in God's nature. So there is a limitation to all brokenness, and that limitation is under the control of God.

You remember we said the process, He targets the area, He arranges the circumstances, He chooses the tools, and He controls the process, so that the limitation is where my spirit might be broken. The limitation is where God's great purpose might be damaged in some fashion. So when you think about how God worked in the life of the Apostle Paul, He says He was beaten with rods.

Now you know what, we can't even imagine that, beaten with rods. God stopped every one of His whippings before He knew that He would kill Saul of Tarsus and Apostle Paul. The times He sat in stocks, His hands and His feet, His back bleeding and stinging and burning from the rods with which He had been beaten, there was always a limitation of time of how long He would be in those stocks.

When He was thrown in jail, there's always a time limit as to how long He would stay there. When He was shipwrecked at sea, there was always a time limit that God would let Him flounder there in the sea in a great storm. When He was harassed and accused and persecuted, and oftentimes they did their very best to kill, to assassinate the Apostle Paul, always limitations as to what they could do.

Surrounded by the grace of God, God's protective care, my friends, God has assembled that same degree of protection around every one of His children, so that even in brokenness there's a limitation. Limited in Paul's life, limited in your life and my life, never to destroy our spirit, never to damage God's great purpose. So when you and I weep, when we cry out, when we say, God, what in the world are you doing? Why are you doing these things to me? We say what Paul is saying here, Lord, I have learned in this period of brokenness to understand that in my weakest, most desperate, helpless moment, that's when I experience the greatest surge of supernatural power and strength and wisdom and knowledge and understanding.

And someone has put this whole idea in a poem that I want to read to you, and I want you to listen carefully because what he's written about here is how God puts us in the crucible of fire in order to do something in our life. Listen to this. He sat by a fire of sevenfold heat, as he watched by the precious ore.

Now, the ore is us and God's put us in the crucible of heat. He sat by a fire of sevenfold heat, as he watched by the precious ore, and closer he bent with a turning gaze, as he heated it more and more. He knew that he had ore that could stand the test, and he wanted the finest gold to mold as a crown for the king to wear, set with gems with price untold.

So he laid our gold in the burning fire, though we fain would have said nay. And he watched the dross, that we said that we had not seen, and melted and passed it away. And the gold grew brighter and yet more bright, but our eyes were filled with tears.

We saw but the fire, not the master's hand, and questioned with anxious fears. Yet our gold shone out with a richer glow, as it mirrored a form, Christ, as it mirrored a form above, that bent o'er the fire, though unseen by us, with a look of ineffable love. Can we think that it pleases his loving heart that causes moments of pain? No, but he saw through the present cross the bliss of eternal gain.

So he waited there with a watchful eye, with a love that is strong and sure, and his gold did not suffer a bit more heat than was needed to make it pure. God has a limitation on all of our suffering, all of our hurt, and all of our brokenness. And then I want you to notice the third thing, and that is God will deepen our understanding when we are broken.

And he deepens that understanding in three directions. First of all, as God takes us to the breaking process and stripping us of those things that we've depended upon before, the first thing that he does, we get a whole different perspective on who God is. Does he not say, my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts? My ways are not your ways, nor my thoughts your thoughts? In the process of being broken and stripped of all those things that we depend upon rather than him, what does he do? But he opens their eyes to see the working, the ways of God.

Not just reading scriptures, but we see the ways of God, how he works in our life. We get a deeper understanding of his love, what it means to accept us on the basis of nothing within ourselves, but just the fact that he's a loving father. We understand how he accepts us on the basis of the cross.

We understand his patience and love and kindness and forbearance to us, that he puts up with us while he's in the process of breaking us. But there's a second direction in which we begin to understand, that's ourselves. Once the process of brokenness takes place in our life and he begins to strip us of all those things that would hinder his great purpose in our life, we begin to see things about ourselves that we've never seen before.

We begin to be able to trace the avenues of thought patterns that we've had since we were children growing up. Those thought patterns, they were placed there by our parents when they taught us things that they thought were right, but have devastated us. Placed there by our teachers who rejected us and didn't even realize that they were doing it.

Placed there by our friends who shut us out. Placed there by circumstances that caused great pain and upheaval and misunderstanding and frustration and anxiety and fears in our life. We begin to understand when God begins to break us away from all these things of why we've depended upon this instead of depending upon God and how these fears developed in our life and how this spirit developed in our life and why we are so intent in this area of our life and so negligent in the other.

As God begins to break us, remember that his goal is indeed spiritual material and supernatural ministry. Bringing us into an intimate oneness with him and bringing us into effective service for him. God in the process of doing that keeps opening ourselves up to ourselves and helping us to see what he sees and the more we see, the more we, listen, the more we see, the more we wonder about the grace of God.

God, how could you have loved me? How could you have been so patient all these years? How could you have been so forgiving? How could you have been so forbearing? How could you have been so good and gracious and kind to me when I am like this and I have been like this all these years? My friend, the break-in process will absolutely lift Almighty God, the cross, the grace, the blood to a higher level in your life than you've understood because you get a glimpse of yourself in the light of the grace and the goodness and the love and the tenderness and the mercy of God. But all of that leads to the third area of direction and that's this. We begin to look at other people differently.

You know what happens? My friend, when God breaks you and you begin to see God from a different light and you begin to look at yourself differently, what happens? You begin to see other people differently. Your critical spirit somehow just fades away. This aggressive criticism and negative attitude and nobody else is ever right and everybody's wrong and life has given you a bad show.

All of a sudden, you begin to look at other people differently. You know what happens? You begin to look upon them compassionately and you begin to say, Lord, I know why she's acting that way. God, I've been there and look what you did for me.

Lord, I know why he is the way he is. I've been there. You were patient with me.

I can be patient with him. You know what happens? Instead of being critical and judgmental, that love of Jesus which is within every single believer begins to be expressed and the process of having been broken and allowing him to express his life through is like he lets us get in on the blessing as he begins to love other people. You begin to understand, Lord, if I had grown up the way they grew up, I'd probably be worse than they are.

If I had the same circumstances in my life, God, I'd probably be worse. And what happens is you lay down that old critical spirit and the grace of God, friend, the grace of God, the love of God, the blessed cross of blood of Jesus, everything takes on a whole new different perspective. Your favorite hymns begin to change.

The songs you sing, your interest in life, the power of sin has been broken and you're free. Something good is going on inside of you which even you cannot explain. That's part of what happens when God shatters, breaks, melts, sand, sifts, prunes, you name it, friend.

I'm telling you it's all for our good. Then the fourth thing I want you to notice here, not only does he deepen our understanding, but you would expect this, God never deserts us in our seasons of brokenness. Now this is very important that you understand what I'm going to say.

Now you and I know he says in Hebrews chapter 13, I'll never leave you nor forsake you. But I can look back at some times in my life when God was breaking me, when the pain was so intense and the suffering so overwhelming, though I knew in my mind he was there, in my emotions and in my spirit I thought, God, you have deserted me. Now I knew better.

That's what I felt. In my mind I held on to the truth, but in my emotions I knew, I felt, God, where are you? Knowing at the very moment I asked where he was. But now why do we say that God will never desert you? Because when God carries us through certain experiences of brokenness depending upon the nature of the brokenness, the nature of the target that he's after, here's what he does.

All of us are attached either to some things in life, or to some person, or to some relationship. We all have our attachments. And so what God is in the process of doing in breaking us is pulling us away.

That is, he doesn't want us dependent upon anything but him, and we'll fight. We'll do anything in the world to keep, if we can just hang on a little bit, because we just can't face giving up control of our life, and we think, God, I'm willing to, but Lord, if I can just hang on. And God finally breaks, and when the brokenness comes, you know what happens? He separates us from what we have been dependent upon, and there may be moments or a season that you feel so alone, or you may feel so fearful because you're not sure what God is up to, and God's knocked all the props out.

You've said, okay, God, all the props are out. Can't depend on my finances. Can't depend on my education.

Can't depend on my vocation. Can't depend on my wife. Can't depend on my husband.

Can't depend on my children. Can't depend on my parents. Can't depend on anything.

My friends, God is just you and me. Now, what we don't realize is all of us are far more dependent than we think we are. What does God want? He wants you to live in such, listen to this, oh, if you could just get this.

He wants you to live in such intimate oneness with him that everybody else in your life will take their place a level below your warm, intimate relationship with him. We all have an interdependence upon each other, but God wants our relationships to be healthy. And you see, the most healthy relationships are those in which a person understands that they are fully dependent upon God.

Now, listen, this is so very important that my dependence is totally upon God who is all sufficient to meet all my needs. Now, because I have him to meet all my needs, I can relate to this person without trying to suck out of them everything that I need, without trying to glean out of them all of my needs, without leaning on them and putting pressure on them. But now, because I'm a healthy emotional person, my needs are being met by God and therefore I don't have to lean and I don't have to find my security in a relationship.

I find my security in him. He's all sufficient for all things. Now, I can back off and have a wonderful, healthy relationship with somebody that releases them from pressure, releases me from pressure, and that's what builds wholesome, wonderful, holy relationships.

Now, when a person for years and years and years and years and years has leaned upon someone else and God starts this process, I'm telling you, it's painful. It's excruciatingly painful. It's fearsome.

You think, God, what are you doing? What he's doing is getting you into a wholesome, healthy relationship so that you and he can have this oneness of intimacy and at the same time you can have intimate relationships with other people on a wholesome, holy fashion. No emotional dependence, no leaning in an unhealthy fashion. That's what makes a marriage the way God wants it to be.

When both of those persons have their sufficiency in Christ and don't have to emotionally lean on each other but who are leaning on the Lord Jesus Christ, then there's a meeting of each other's needs, there's a wonderful fellowship, there's a wonderful relationship, and a wonderful, wholesome respect for one another. That's what he's up to. Now, what you and I have to ask is, am I willing to suffer the pain to get in that position? And I want to tell you, it is the most free, liberating, awesome experience to be free where

it's you and the Lord Jesus and then all relationships are healthy and strong.

Well, let's move on. He'll never desert us. Number five, God is always patient with us through our experience of brokenness.

Always patient with us through our experience of brokenness. You know why? He knows where we came from. He knows what's been going on in our life.

He knows how long you've been thinking the things you're thinking. That's your train of thought. That's the way you've been thinking for years and years and years.

And so God begins to work and he doesn't do it suddenly like that. Brokenness is usually a process and sometimes it is a process that lasts a very, very long time. Now, why is God so patient? Here's the reason he's so patient.

He already sees the end and God knows it's worth the wait. And so God waits and he breaks and he listens to our crying and our yelling and our screaming and our rebellion. And he listens to all of the excuses we give of why we can't surrender and how fearful we are and what in the world may happen next because he understands where we are.

As the apostle Paul says, he says, now I had to learn and didn't happen all of a sudden. He says there were seasons when I pleaded, pleaded with God to free me of this thorn in my side. He didn't do it, but there had to come a time when he said, all right, Lord, I'm willing to walk in weakness.

I'm willing to serve you out of absolute abject weakness, which must have been awful humiliating, awfully humiliating for a man of such strong will and character and personality and aggressiveness and determination and commitment as the apostle Paul. That's where God brought him to the end of himself, broken, shattered, and having to say, Lord, not my will, but thy will be done. Now, the length of time it'll take to break us is determined by several things.

One of them is by what it is God is trying to break us from. As I said before, if these are attitudes, strains of thought, root ideas that have been back there in all of our childhood all the way up to the present time, it takes a while for God to change those. Secondly, it is determined by our response to what God is doing.

If I'm upping and rebelling against the first little sight of what God is up to, it's going to take a while. You say, well, how long is God willing to wait? Well, nobody can answer that for anybody else. Very patient, very forbearing, willing to wait, but there is a point out there somewhere that if you continually to rebel and refuse to surrender yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, God will ultimately set you on the shelf.

When is that time? Nobody knows that time. It's just dangerous to rebel against God. And if you look how God worked in the life of the Apostle Paul, He put such awesome pressure upon him.

Listen, you see, the great, now think about this, the greater usefulness, the greater your potential for God, the greater your potential, the greater the pain and suffering and the intensity of the hurt, if necessary, to bring you to what God wants you to be because He has something for you to do. You say, what in the world could God do with me? You let Him answer that. Don't project upon God what you cannot do.

You don't know that. And then the last thing I want you to jot down, and this is the only promise that has condition. God will lead you to victory through brokenness.

God will lead you to victory through brokenness. Now there is a condition, and that condition we just stated a few moments ago. That is, He will lead me to victory through brokenness if I'm willing to submit to His will.

It may be months, it may be years. When we rebel against God's breaking experience, we delay God in accomplishing all that He'd like to accomplish. It may be that we forfeit many of our opportunities, and we certainly forfeit some of our reward.

Because if you live to be 40, 50, 60, 70 years of age, and finally God finally gets you, look what you've missed. Look at the potential to be used of God that was there that you did not utilize. And when you stand before God to be rewarded, look what will not be your reward because you refused.

You see, the whole breaking process in itself is an expression of love. What is He doing? Bringing us into oneness. Look, if you will, in Philippians chapter 1 for a moment, and listen to what Paul says in this sixth verse.

He says, for I am confident of this very thing that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ. Now he's speaking primarily of salvation here. Once He saved you, God is going to keep you forever and ever and ever.

But I think it is also a statement of God's intensity of completing the works that He's begun within us. Now, did He complete that in the apostle Paul? Yes, He did. What about the struggle He had with the Christian life? Go back to Romans 7 for a moment.

Paul, in struggling in the Christian life, said, how is it that what I want to do, I can't do? I don't want to sin against God, but I find myself doing it. In this awesome struggle of defeat, but then, listen to what he says. When he finally reaches the victory, verse 24, Romans 7, wretched man that I am, who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So then on the one hand, I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh, the law of sin, when I allow it. And he speaks of the power of sin being broken in his life. He had the victory.

What is his victory statement about God's usefulness of him? Here it is in verse 10 of 2 Corinthians chapter 12. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses. I'm not fighting against them anymore.

Insults, I don't try to defend myself. Distresses, don't try to make God explain them. Persecutions, accept them from God.

Difficulties, know that God's working out something in my life. For Christ's sake, for when I'm weak, then I am strong. Let me ask you a question.

Do you want your Christian life to be a daily walk of intimate oneness in your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Warm, intimate, loving relationship as your friend? Listen, as your friend, meeting your needs, giving you a healthy, wholesome, emotional stability that you don't have to lean? Do you want God to bring you in such a relationship with him whereby your service for him will be effective and glorifying to God? Not glorifying to man, but glorifying to God. If you want intimacy in your walk, effectiveness in your service, brokenness is God's way to make that a reality. I ask you one last question.

Is your desire to walk in intimacy with him and your desire to be used of him in your business, in your home, with your children, among your friends, is it great enough for you to pray this prayer? Lord, more than I want anything in life or any other relationship, I want to walk in oneness with you, a deep intimacy. I want to be used of you effectively. And therefore, Lord Jesus, would you target whatever areas in my life that need to be dealt with and would you break me in those areas that that oneness and that service you might fulfill in my life? Would you be willing to pray that and then remember whatever God does, he will only do in love.

And when you're through the valley, you'll view the brightest sunshine and the most beautiful clouds and the brightest horizon you've ever known in your Christian life. Father, we praise you this morning. How loving, how tender, how gentle, how gracious, how good, how vast are your resources.

How I pray the Holy Spirit will sink this message in each one of our hearts and focus our attention not upon the message, but upon you. Oh God, upon you. With all of your love and all of your desire to do for us and within us and through us what you have designed even before we came into the world to accomplish in each one of our lives.

I pray that your Holy Spirit will gain great victory today. I pray for that person who's lost, wandering, floundering without purpose and a sense of direction. That today they may be able to walk this aisle to say, I want to trust Jesus Christ as my savior.

I do want a purpose for my life. Father, I pray for that person who's listening, that in his or her life, the hunger, the thirst, the yearning, that intimate oneness of spirit and that effectiveness in their daily walk and in their work, that they might be willing to pray that prayer. Oh Lord, in your love would you break their heart in order that I might be a blessing to others.

I pray father for those who ought to be a part of this fellowship, raising their families and the admonition, the nurtures of the Lord, growing up here, learning with us as you're teaching us and there's so much yet to learn. Would you speak to their heart and bring them today? And we'll thank you for what you're about to do in Jesus name. Amen.

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