

Revival in the Heart: Choosing Brokenness

by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

In order to experience revival, we must first experience brokenness, a lifestyle of humility and surrender to God's mercy.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 34:18, Psalm 51:17, Proverbs 3:34, Isaiah 57:15, Matthew 5:3, Luke 18:13, Philippians 2:3, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6

Topics: "Personal Revival", "Brokenness"

Description

Nancy Leigh DeMoss preaches about the importance of personal revival as a prerequisite for experiencing revival in homes, churches, and nations. She emphasizes that true revival starts with brokenness and humility, acknowledging our desperate need for God's mercy. DeMoss highlights that brokenness is a continuous lifestyle of surrendering our will to God, agreeing with His assessment of our hearts, and responding with humility and obedience to His Word and Spirit. She explains that brokenness brings blessings such as increased capacity for love and worship, fruitfulness, and the release of God's Spirit in revival.

Transcript

The small band of church leaders had been praying earnestly for revival in their community--a village on the Isle of Lewis, the largest isle of the Outer Hebrides, just off the coast of Scotland. They were particularly burdened for the young people of the island who had no interest in spiritual matters and scorned the things of God.

For eighteen months they met--three nights a week, praying through the night, right on into the early hours of the morning, beseeching God to come and visit in revival. But there was no evidence of any change.

Then one night, a young deacon rose to his feet, opened his Bible, and read from Psalm 24: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and who shall dwell in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart He shall receive the blessing from the Lord."

Facing the men around him, this young man said, "Brethren, it seems to me to be just so much 'humbug' to be waiting and praying as we are, if we ourselves are not rightly related to God."

There in the straw, the men knelt and humbly confessed their sins to the Lord. Within a short period of time, God had begun to pour out His Spirit in an extraordinary awakening that shook the entire island.

Before its impact can be felt in a home, a church, or a nation, revival must first be experienced on a personal level in the hearts of men and women who have encountered God in a fresh way.

And the single greatest hindrance to our experiencing personal revival is our unwillingness to humble ourselves and confess our desperate need for His mercy.

Our generation has been programmed to pursue happiness, wholeness, good feelings about ourselves, positive self-image, affirmation, and cures for our hurt feelings and damaged psyches. But God is not as interested in these ends as we are. He is more committed to making us holy than making us happy. And there is only one pathway to holiness--one road to genuine revival--and that is the pathway of humility or brokenness.

The Scripture makes it clear that this is the number one prerequisite to meeting God in revival. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15).

"The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

We often think of revival as a time of great joy, blessing, fullness, and celebration. And so it will be in its fullness. But the problem is that we want a painless Pentecost

. . . a "laughing" revival. We forget that God's ways are not our ways, that the way up is down.

Peterus Octavianus, a man greatly used by God in the 1973 revival in Borneo, reminds us, "Revivals do not begin happily with everyone having a good time. They start with a broken and contrite heart."

You and I will never meet God in revival, until we first meet Him in brokenness. At first hearing, "brokenness" does not sound like something to be sought after. After all, it seems so negative! We may even be afraid of the concept. Perhaps that is because we have a misconception about the meaning of brokenness. Our idea of brokenness may be quite different from God's idea.

Brokenness does not mean, as some think, having a sad, gloomy, downcast countenance--never smiling or laughing. It does not mean always being morbidly introspective. Nor can it be equated with deeply emotional experiences. It is possible to shed buckets full of tears, without ever experiencing a moment of brokenness. Further, brokenness is not the same as being deeply hurt by tragic circumstances. A person may have experienced many deep hurts and tragedies, but never have been broken.

Brokenness is not a feeling; rather, it is a choice, an act of the will. It is not primarily a one-time experience or crisis (though there may be crisis points in the process of brokenness); rather, it is an ongoing, continual lifestyle.

Brokenness is a lifestyle of agreeing with God about the true condition of my heart and life, as He sees it. It is a lifestyle of unconditional, absolute surrender of my will to the will of God--a heart attitude that says, "Yes, Lord!" to whatever God says. Brokenness means the shattering of my self-will, so that the life and Spirit of the Lord Jesus may be released through me. Brokenness is my response of humility and obedience to the conviction of the Word and the Spirit of God. And as the conviction is continuous, so must the brokenness be continuous.

True brokenness has both a vertical and a horizontal dimension: it is demonstrated in a willingness to live with the "roof off" in my relationship with God, and the "walls down" in my relationships with others.

Scripture provides us with numerous examples of broken people. Interestingly, these examples are often set in contrast to people who were not broken. In every case, both individuals had sinned. The difference was not so much in the nature or magnitude of their sin, but in their response when confronted with their sin.

For example, two kings sat on a throne. One king, in a fit of passion, committed adultery with his neighbor's wife, and then plotted to have his neighbor killed. Yet, when the story of his life was told, this man was called "a man after God's own heart." By contrast, his predecessor's sin was relatively insignificant--he was only guilty of incomplete obedience. But it cost him his kingdom, his life, and his family. What was the difference?

When King Saul was confronted with his sin, he defended, justified, and excused himself, blamed others, and tried to cover up both the sin and its consequences. In short, his response revealed a proud, unbroken heart. On the other hand, when King David was faced with his sin, he was willing to acknowledge his failure, to take personal responsibility for his wrongdoing, and to repent of his sin. His response was that of a humble, broken man. And his was the heart that God honored.

How can we know if our hearts are proud or broken?

Proud people focus on the failures of others; they have a critical, fault-finding spirit. They look at everyone else's faults with a microscope, but their own with a telescope. By contrast, broken people are overwhelmed with a sense of their own spiritual need. Therefore, they can esteem all others better than themselves.

Proud people have to prove that they are right; but broken people are willing to yield the right to be right.

Proud people are protective of their time, their rights, and their reputation. But broken people have yielded their rights.

Proud people want to be served and to be a success. But broken people desire to serve others and to make them a success.

Proud people have a drive to be recognized and appreciated. They get wounded when others are promoted and they are overlooked. But broken people have a sense of their own unworthiness and are thrilled that God would use them at all; they rejoice when others are lifted up.

Proud people are quick to blame others for their problems. And they are unapproachable or defensive when criticized. But broken people are quick to see where they were wrong in a situation; they receive criticism with a humble, teachable spirit.

Proud people are quick to take offense; but broken people are quick to forgive and overlook offenses.

Proud people wait for others to come and ask forgiveness when there is a misunderstanding or conflict in a relationship. Broken people take the initiative to be reconciled when there is a conflict; they race to the cross and see who can get there first, no matter how wrong the other may have been.

Proud people compare themselves to others and think they are doing all right. They don't think they have anything to repent of. But broken people compare themselves to the holiness of God; they feel a desperate need for His mercy and realize they have need of a continual heart attitude of repentance.

Proud people don't think they need revival--but they're sure that everyone else does! Broken people continually sense their need for a fresh encounter with God.

Why would anyone want to be broken, any more than someone would want to sign up for surgery or suffering? God's Word teaches that brokenness brings blessedness. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit"--i.e., the "broken ones," those who recognize that they are spiritually bankrupt and poverty-stricken.

What blessings does brokenness bring?

We've seen that God draws near to the broken ones; He lifts up those who are humble, but stiff arms those who are proud.

New life is released through our brokenness. On the eve of His crucifixion, as He broke the bread and distributed it to His disciples, Jesus declared, "This is My Body, which is broken for you." His death, on the cross, released eternal life for us. And so, when we are willing to be broken, His abundant life can flow through us to others.

Brokenness brings an increased capacity for love and worship. The "sinner woman," who anointed Jesus' feet with her tears and with the precious ointment, was a broken woman. As a result, she was free to lavish her love and worship on the Lord Jesus, without restraint, and without being bound by the opinions of those who watched. Some of us are not really free to love and worship the Lord Jesus with all our hearts. Perhaps that is because we are not broken. We are still more concerned about what others think and about protecting our reputation than about the object of our devotion.

Brokenness brings increased fruitfulness, for God uses things that are broken:

When Jacob's natural strength was broken down at Peniel, God was able to clothe him with spiritual power.

When the rock at Horeb was broken by the stroke of Moses' rod, cool waters came forth to quench the thirst of the people.

When Gideon's 300 soldiers broke their pitchers, the lanterns within shone forth and God gave a great victory.

When the young boy's five loaves were broken, they were supernaturally multiplied and became sufficient to feed a multitude.

When Mary's alabaster box was broken, the fragrance that was released filled the whole house.

And when Jesus' body was broken on Calvary, eternal life was released for the salvation of the world.

Finally, the fruit of brokenness is to be seen in revival--the release of God's Spirit through our personal and corporate brokenness. During the Welsh Revival of 1904-05, the song that was heard frequently from the lips of broken, contrite hearts was, "Bend me lower, lower, down at Jesus' feet."

Where do we start?

First, we must come to see God as He really is, for the closer we get to God, the more we will see our own need in the light of His holiness.

In the 5th chapter of Isaiah, the great prophet pronounces well-deserved woes on the materialistic, sensual, pleasure-seeking, proud, immoral people of his day. Over and over again, he cries out, "Woe to them" But then Isaiah comes face to face with the holiness of God. And his next words are not, "Woe to them," but "Woe to me"! The broken man or woman is more conscious of the corruption in his own breast than in the heart of his neighbor.

Having seen God for who He is, we must then cry out to God for mercy. Our attitude will no longer resemble that of the Pharisee whose prayers revealed that he thought he was in pretty good shape compared to those around him. Rather, we will find ourselves crying out with the publican, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

Then, learning to acknowledge and verbalize our spiritual need, first to God, is essential to a lifestyle of brokenness. The broken person does not blame others--there is no brokenness when the finger of blame is still pointed at another. His heart attitude is, "It's not my brother nor my sister, but it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer"!

The broken person is able to verbalize his needs to others, as well. There is no brokenness where there is no openness. Almost without exception, the greatest victories over sin and temptation that I have experienced have been won when I was willing to humble myself and confess my need to a mature believer who could pray for me and help hold me accountable to obey God.

Finally, do the very thing you know God wants you to do, but your flesh is telling you not to do! Ultimately, brokenness is a matter of surrendering control of my life to God, much as the horse that has been broken is sensitive and responsive to the wishes and direction of its rider.

The heart that has been emptied of itself and broken of its willfulness and resistance, is the heart that will experience the filling and the reviving of our glorious, holy God, Who humbled Himself, that He might lift us up.

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