

# The Life of Brokenness

by William MacDonald

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*William MacDonald's sermon emphasizes the importance of embracing brokenness as a pathway to spiritual growth and deeper reliance on God.*

**Duration:** 37:44

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Matthew 14:19, Matthew 18:23-35, Mark 14:3, Luke 17:4, 1 Corinthians 11:24, 1 Peter 2:23

**Topics:** "Brokenness"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the concept of brokenness and its significance in the Christian faith. He references various biblical stories to illustrate the power of brokenness, such as the breaking of bread to feed the multitude and the breaking of a jar to release the fragrance of ointment. The speaker also shares personal anecdotes about individuals who experienced brokenness in their lives and how it led to a deeper relationship with God and others. He emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's word and the need to make amends when we have wronged others.

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## Transcript

Years ago, I was in a prayer meeting with some young people. It was an all-night prayer meeting, as a matter of fact. We had broken up into groups, and I was with a group of young men kneeling on the floor there.

I looked at the floor, and I saw tears on the floor. And in that in that prayer session, one of the young men prayed, Lord, break me. And a shiver went down my spine.

Do you know why? Because I had never prayed that prayer, and I wasn't sure I was ready to pray it yet, either. I had never heard such a thing before. Lived all my life in the assemblies, and never heard the subject of brokenness discussed.

Shortly after that, I read a book called The Calvary Road by Roy Hession. And I admit to my shame, it didn't do a thing for me. Do you know why? I wasn't ready for it.

Years later, I read it, and it had tremendous impact upon my life. You won't agree with everything in it. It's the case of eating the orange and spitting out the seed.

So, we want to think about that today. We want to think about the life of brokenness. Men have little value for broken things.

When something is broken, men want to throw it away. Broken dishes, broken furniture, torn clothing, and all the rest. But God values broken things, and especially values broken people.

Psalm 34, 18, The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken spirit. Psalm 51, 17, The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. James 4, 6, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

That really touches my heart, that the great, omnipotent God who can resist the proud can't resist the humble. We have special access to him if our hearts are low. Broken things are honored by the word of God.

Judges 7, verses 18 and 19. The pictures, the earthenware vessels in Gideon's army were broken, and the light shone out. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, and as those earthen vessels are broken, the light of the gospel of the glory of God and the faith of Jesus Christ shines out.

Matthew 14, 19. The bread was broken, and the multitude was fed. Somebody says it was springtime when he blessed the loaves for harvest, when he broke.

And so it was. Mark 14, 3. The jar was broken, and the ointment poured out. The house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment.

1 Corinthians 11, 24. His body was broken, and multitudes were redeemed. He's calling us to that life of brokenness.

Conversion is really the beginning of brokenness, isn't it? The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. He brings us to the place where we confess our wretchedness. Up until that time, we've been fighting against the God who built the sky.

Against the God who built the sky, I fought with hands up, lifted high, despised the mention of his grace, too proud to seek a hiding place. We were running away from God. We were in rebellion against God.

The hound of heaven chased us down, and finally we lay panting at the feet of Jesus. But I want to tell you that's a form of brokenness, isn't it? And the deeper the brokenness, I think, the better for us. It's like a colt being broken.

That colt is out there in the pasture, jumping around, frisky, full of life, but unusable for service. And it's a painful process for that young animal to be brought under the harness, to be brought to the place of submission. But finally, the colt is broken, the shrew is tamed, the sinner is mastered.

In Matthew Chapter 11, the Lord Jesus calls us to take his yoke upon him and learn of him, and yokes are for broken animals. Yokes are for broken people. Now, what are the elements of brokenness in the Christian life? Well, first of all, repentance, confession, and apology.

The readiness to confess to God and to others. And incidentally, it's easier to confess to God than it is to one another, isn't it? It is. Most of our pride never recovers when we have to confess to somebody else down here on earth.

But I've often thought that the hardest words to speak in any language are these words, I was wrong, I am sorry, please forgive me. I believe that's what it means when Paul writes concerning the qualifications of elders, he must be blameless. Glad he didn't say sinless, he said blameless.

What's a blameless man? A blameless man makes mistakes, but when he does, he's quick to confess and make the thing right. That's what keeps us in a blameless condition. The broken man doesn't sweep the matter under the carpet or wait for time to heal it.

First he goes to God, then he goes to those whom he has wronged, and says, I was wrong, I'm really sorry, please forgive me. In true confession, a person does not gloss over his sins. He does not say, if I have done something wrong, I am willing to be forgiven.

That sounds very pious, but it's a pious fraud. If I have done something wrong, I am willing, that's not confession. This is not confession.

I will forgive you if you forgive me. We have to watch out for those conditional forgivenesses, don't we? I will forgive you if you forgive me. This is not true confession.

A man confessed that he had stolen a length of rope. He neglected to say there was a cow at the other end of the rope. Recently in our daily bread, I read about a man who was terminally ill, and he realized that he had committed a wrong against another brother.

And he called the brother in, and he said, look, I'm just short time more in this life, I want to get this settled. He said, I want you to forgive me. And so they had a wonderful time of rapport there, brokenness.

And then as the brother was leaving the room, he said, but remember, if I get better, it doesn't count. That is not true forgiveness. A true confession.

I think you find true confession on David's part in Psalms 32 and 51. It's really wonderful to read those. When I read those psalms, I think I can tell why God loved David.

None of us is perfect. We all have enough faults and failures to think about it, but God loves it when we're broken before him, and come and make it right. And I admire Paul, the Apostle Paul, for how ready he was to break.

He's there before the council, isn't he? And he's smitten on the face of the order of the high priest, and he says, God will smite you, you whited wall. They said, you speak to the high priest that way? He said, I didn't know he was the high priest. He broke just like that.

Hard, because it seemed that justice was on Paul's side at that time, but he remembered that it was written, thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people. Brokenness involves repentance, confession, apology, and it doesn't come naturally to any of us. And I know when God is barbecuing me about this in my own life, I know that all my stomach juices turn to hydrochloric acid, and I don't get any relief to let go and make the thing right.

But I know that it's when it's not made right that the blessing is hindered. Think of the church, the evangelical church today, and what would happen in the way of revival if these wrongs were all made right? Secondly, brokenness involves restitution, making right financially oftentimes, and we should teach this as we're moving in and out among God's people. And restitution should always be done in the name of the Lord Jesus.

It should never be done in such a way as to attract the credit to ourselves, but only to attract the credit to him. When I worked for you, I stole the office, the pieces of office equipment. I've been saved by the grace

of God, and God has been speaking to me, and now I want to make it right.

Years ago, a man named W. P. Nicholson was preaching in Belfast, Ireland, and the Spirit of God was poured out in power, and souls were saved, and they started making restitution to the machine works there in Belfast. It was such a moving of the Spirit of God that those machine companies had to build sheds to house the equipment that was returned, and finally they had to send out the message, don't return anymore, we can't accommodate it. It'd be nice to see that in North Carolina and other places in the United States.

Brokenness involves restitution. It involves my willingness to forgive someone else, but I believe this is the order in forgiveness. I believe if some wrong has been done against me, immediately I should forgive in my heart, in my heart.

Somebody said to Clara Barton, who was the founder of the American Red Cross, don't you remember that mean thing she said about you? She said, not only do I not remember, I distinctly remember forgetting. She had already forgiven in her heart, she distinctly remembered forgetting, but then when a man repents and comes to me, I administer forgiveness to him. I don't think it's righteous to administer forgiveness if a man is not repentant.

I can forgive in my own heart. That takes it off my shoulders, that takes the monkey off my back between myself and the Lord, but I administer forgiveness to him when he comes and repents. Luke chapter 17 verse 4. And then I tell him that I have forgiven him.

Incidentally, when people come to us and confess something, they don't want us to say, oh well, it was nothing at all. They don't want to hear that. They want to hear us say, look, I forgive you, and the relationship is cemented.

God hates an unforgiving spirit, but I don't blame him. Matthew 18, 23 through 35. Brokenness is enduring wrong without retaliation.

This is really divine. It can only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord set the example for this, didn't he? First Peter 2, 23.

When he was reviled, he reviled not again. Thy foes might hate, despise, revile thy friends unfaithful, cruel, unwearied. In forgiveness still thy heart could only love.

Oh, give us love to love like thee, like thee, O Lord, to grieve far more for other sins than all the wrongs that we receive. And we're called to this as children of God, to endure wrong without retaliation. Two bizarre illustrations of that.

John Wesley, if you read the biography of John Wesley, had a very unhappy married life. His wife actually dragged him around by the hair of his head. He showed nothing but love and kindness toward her.

A highland minister one day, sitting by the fire reading his Bible, his wife came and snatched the Bible out of his hand and threw it in the fire, and he said gently, I don't think I've ever sat by a warmer fire. And, you know, his thorn became a rose, and his Jezebel became a Lydia. She was broken by his broken spirit.

I don't think I've ever sat by a warmer fire. Brokenness is repaying evil with good. It's rewarding every wrong with a kindness.

Romans 12, filled with exhortations like that. E. Stanley Jones tells of a man in India driving the elephant down the road, and he has a metal goad in his hand, and he's pricking the elephant along. Move, move.

All of a sudden, the goad falls to the ground with a loud, resounding crash, and the elephant turns around and, with its trunk, lifts up the goad and gives it back to the master. Brokenness, and it's brokenness in my life when I can reward every discourtesy with a kindness. That's when men see Jesus in us.

Brokenness is honoring others above self. I used to bother me that verse, esteem others better than yourself, and I think of Tony Accardo and some of these mafia men in River Forest, Illinois, and I think of their character, and I think, how can I honor them? It doesn't have anything to do with character, does it? It doesn't mean that his character is greater than yours or mine. It still means I can esteem them above myself in the sense of pouring out my life in loving service for others.

I think Abraham esteemed Lot and his men above himself. Lot looked and saw the well-watered plains of the Jordan. He said, that's for us.

That's the pastureland we wanted. Abraham said, be my guest. Be my guest.

He said, did you take what you want, and I'll take what's left. Great, huh? No wonder God said to him, I am thy shield, Abraham, and thy exceeding great reward. And when God said that to Abraham, he made him fabulously wealthy.

He got more than all of the well-watered plains of the Jordan that day. He honored Lot above himself. I think dear Dr. Ironside had that same spirit of brokenness.

He was a very gracious man, you know, and I don't know why people like to pick quarrels with him, but almost invariably, after one of his messages, some would come up, and on some secondary matter, on some trivial matter, they would start an argument with Dr. Ironside, and he used to say, well brother, when we get to heaven, one of us is going to be wrong, and perhaps it'll be me. You know, you can't fight with a man like that. That took all the wind out of the opposition's sails.

When we get to heaven, one of us is going to be wrong, and perhaps it will be me. Brokenness is prompt obedience, prompt obedience in accepting and obeying the will of God. Jonah wasn't broken at first, was he? He was far from broken.

I can identify with him. He had his own idea of what should take place, and of all the cities in the world he didn't want to go to, Nineveh was number one. God has ways of breaking us, and he has very novel ways of breaking us, even in the belly of a great fish.

I love that quote that carried Jesus into Jerusalem. No one had ever, no person had ever written on that quote before. Was there a divine perception there? The life of that quote, that this one who was now getting on him was different.

He took him obediently into the city. Prompt obedience. Where is the clay? God is the potter.

We should be movable according to his will. Brokenness is death to public opinion. I mentioned W. P. Nicholson a little while ago.

When he was first saved, he got in with the Salvation Army, and one of the officers said to him, do you mean business? They were rugged individuals in those days. They didn't pamper the baby Christians. He

said, do you mean business? And he said, I think so, and so they made a sandwich board for him, and they said go and walk around Belfast for two hours with this sandwich board, and on it it said dead to public opinion, and he said it was one of the great formative influences in his life.

And I think that's true. I think that the same grace that enables us to walk with God enables us to think lightly of the opinions of others. If we're really walking in the center of his will, we don't have to worry.

Brokenness is keeping cool in the crises of life. That's a wonderful thing. I remember years ago traveling with young people in Italy, and we had some very old vans.

We had some vans that were really dedicated to deepening a person's prayer life, and here we'd be passing through this rugged terrain, and the van would collapse, you know. I really admired those young people. A couple of them would stick their heads under the hood and see if they could put it together with hairpins and coat hangers, and then the rest of them would just grab their literature bags and go off into the adjoining village to get out the gospel.

Not a word to that. Boy, that's brokenness. Instead of sitting around and stewing over a broken-down van, they saw it as an opportunity to witness for Jesus.

We need poise and equanimity in the crises of life. We need to accept delays and interruptions and flat tires and mechanical breakdowns and accidents and schedule changes. Schedule changes.

Disappointment without frenzy, without panic, without hysteria, and without ruffled feathers. A flat tire could be one of greatest blessings in disguise, couldn't it? And brokenness is reacting calmly in these circumstances instead of impatient. Brokenness does not mean that a man is a milquetoast.

Weakness is not weakness. A broken man is not a fineless jellyfish. He's the strongest of men.

Broken people are the most influential, and incidentally we can preach brokenness more by our lives than we can by standing up here and talking about it today. People read our lives, and they mustn't think that because we're, quote, in the work of the Lord that we're above that sort of thing and looking to see it in our lives. Brokenness is capable of anger.

The Lord Jesus was angry there in the temple when he went in with a scourge of small cords and drove out the money changers. I'd like to give you some illustrations, and I hope that these will speak powerfully to our hearts this morning. A few years ago, I was in London, and I met a gentleman named Canon Bill Butler.

He was a cleric in the Church of England. A canon to us is a big gun, but I want to tell you Bill Butler is not a big gun. Years ago, the Church of England sent him out to Rwanda to train men for the ministry in the Church of England.

Rwanda at that time, East Africa at that time, was experiencing revival. The revival wasn't particularly among the clergy, it was among the nationals who were believers, and Bill Butler was sent into that scene. He started to teach, and he started to drift into liberal theology.

He started to teach modernism there in the training school. There were a group of men in that school. They called them the Abolakeli, something like that.

It meant the saved ones, it meant the born-again ones, and they began to pray for Bill Butler, and he heard about it. They were praying for his spiritual recovery, and he was most incensed to think that some of his students would be praying for him, a cleric in the Church of England. And so, he finally found the leader of this band of born-again ones, and he called him into his office one day, and he spoke to him very severely.

The man, this African national, listened patiently to him, and when he got through, all he said to Canon Bill Butler was, but you really do need help. That's all he said, and they continued to pray for Bill Butler. As he went on teaching this liberal theology, the spirit of God began to work in his heart.

Why? Because those men were praying. They were praying for their teacher, and he began to realize that the things that he was teaching were not according to the word of God. And one day, he went to the bishop there, and he made a confession to him.

He said, I've been teaching liberal theology to these men, and he said it's not true. He said it's not true to the word of God, and the bishop buried his head in his hands, and he said, oh Bill, he said, now you can never become a bishop. And Bill said, praise the Lord.

Actually, what was happening in Bill's life was exactly what had been happening in the lives of the dear national believers there. Then he realized that he had to go and make things right with that man. That national believer, and it was very hard, he said, very demeaning, that I, a member of the clergy, would go to an African national to apologize to him.

Very difficult, but I tell you, when the Lord has his finger on you, you know he's speaking. When he's dealing with you, you know he's dealing with you. You have to go.

And he got in this car one day to drive to the home of this dear African national. He pulled up the car in front of his house, the African national came to the door, and all he did was look at the face of Bill Butler, and he said, hallelujah. Bill had his speech all prepared, just like the prodigal son.

He didn't even get the words out before that dear man had said, hallelujah. But as Bill Butler sat in his home there in London, he said to me, it was the first time I ever embraced an African national. They threw their arms around one another and hugged one another.

He said it was the first time I ever wanted to do it. Dear friends, that brokenness. After that, those dear born-again ones came to Bill Butler, and they said, look, we meet every morning at four o'clock for prayer.

Wouldn't you like to meet four o'clock for prayer? Had never got up to pray at four o'clock, and he was filled with excuses, and he presented all his strong reasons why he couldn't meet with him at four o'clock, and they said graciously, would you try it for a week? And all opposition was broken down, and he started meeting with them every morning for prayer. The administration found out about it. They passed a rule that there would be no meetings of any kind on the campus before seven o'clock in the morning, and they transferred Bill Butler to another school.

Those dear nationals had to face it. Shall we stop praying? They decided that they ought to obey God rather than men. They kept on praying, and they were dismissed from the school just a few weeks short of graduation.

They bitter? No, they weren't bitter. They came, they came to Bill Butler. They sought him out, and they came to him.

They said, brother, we feel that you still have feelings of bitterness towards the bishop, and we feel you should go and make those things right, and he had to do it. He had to do it. Dear friends, that's broken.

That's broken. That revival is still going on in some sense in eastern Africa, and it's largely based on this whole principle of brokenness. Some years ago, I was in a home in Chicago, and there were two elder brothers there.

Many of you would know them. Too embarrassed to mention their names, and I was at Emmaus at that time. In fact, I was a president of Emmaus for the last six years I was there, and I don't know why, but they started out against Emmaus, and Emmaus was my baby, and you don't like to have your baby criticized, you know, and I could feel the heat going up from here, getting red here up, and finally I just exploded, and I laid them out in lavender and lace, and I'm ashamed to admit it, but when I went away from the home that night, I thought, you know, that justice had been done, but the Lord didn't think so.

Weeks later, I was on a train going down to Waterloo, Iowa. I could take you to the seat on the train. It's so real.

The Spirit of God got a hold of me, said, yeah Bill, you're going down to tell people how to live the Christian life, and there's that wrong that you committed against those two elder brothers and the Lord, and you've never made it right. I want to tell you, you know when the Lord is barbecuing you, and I was barbecued that day, and I couldn't get up on the platform that weekend till I had sat down and written a letter to them, but apologized. You say, the end of a beautiful friendship? No, that was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

You know, God's way is set, and when we follow his word and are obedient to his word, we come into a closer relationship with one another than we could have ever known before. It's really true. Well, you'd think I would have learned a lesson, wouldn't you? No.

Some of us are more stubborn than others. I was sitting at my desk one day. Actually, it was the day of Harold Harper's funeral, and I was to have some part.

I think Brother Bramhall had the funeral that day, but I was to have some part in the funeral, and there's a brother visiting from Britain in the area, and he calls me on the phone, and this brother happens to believe in a post-tribulation rapture or something. I don't. I'm a very ardent pre-tribulation rapturous.

I believe Christ could come at any moment, and I don't know how it ever came up on the phone, but it came up, and we tangled on the phone, and it was terrible preparation for a funeral. Once again, you have a feeling of accomplishment, ditto, to think of once. Years later, I'm in London.

Once again, I think I could take you to the street. I'm walking down the street in London. The Lord is walking with me, too.

But Lord, I still believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. That's not the point. The way you talk to him, the way you talk to him, that's the point.

It's not a question of who was right on that prophetic matter, and wouldn't you know it, there was a telephone booth, red telephone booth, right ahead. I couldn't pass that telephone booth. I had to go in, and I had to call him on the phone and apologize.

You know what he said? He said, let's meet tomorrow and have lunch, and we met the next day and had lunch, and really had a wonderful time. And I still believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. That was not the issue.

Some of you have read some of the books of Alexander White, great man of God. One day, one of his parishioners came to him and said, there's a visiting preacher in town. He said, I heard about it.

The parishioner said to him, he said publicly that Dr. So-and-so, your ministerial colleague, is not a believer. And Dr. White was incensed to think that any such thing would ever be said about this man of God. And he really let off steam there in his office, to think that anyone would ever have the gall to say this about this dear man of God.

When he got through, the parishioner said, that's not the worst, Dr. White. This visiting preacher says that you're not a believer. You know what he said? He said, please leave my office, that I may get before the Lord and examine my heart.

That's broken, isn't it? He was a lion in somebody else's cause, but he was a lamb in his own. Brokenness before the Lord. What are the steps to brokenness? Well, I just think, I think I've already given you the first step.

I wonder, are we willing today to go before the Lord and say, Lord, break me? If you're not, I can't blame you, because it's a painful process. I really think that's where brokenness begins. When from the depth of my heart, I cry out to the rock that is higher than I, Lord, break me.

Then what? Then I ransack the path for wrongs that I might have committed, for things that I swept under the carpet, for things that I might have felt that time will heal, for unkind words, for things that were done or spoken in the flesh, and then I get down on my knees and I confess them to God, and as fast as possible go and confess them to the person whom I have wronged. And I'd like to just suggest one other thing in closing, and that is that when we do that, that we not hesitate to share the experience, humiliating as it is, with the saints of God. That's how it's prayed.

That's how brokenness is prayed. When they see it in our lives, they won't feel so intimidated. They won't feel so threatened.

They'll know that we're flesh and blood, too. And it'll be easier for them, and that will be the prelude to revival. Lord, break me.

I think we all this morning have heard ministry that should certainly cause us to search our hearts and to reflect upon our lives. Perhaps the reason that God's blessing has not been enjoyed in our home assemblies is the very thing our brother McDonald has brought before us. And perhaps it's been the span of the leadership in the assemblies that has been the greatest contributor to the lack of blessing.

Is that possible? I believe it is. And I just thank God for what we've heard, and I trust we will not just be hearers, but doers. The greatest desire of our hearts is God's blessing, but for God's blessing to come, we often must experience painful, painful situations.

May God deal with each of us.

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