

“BROKENNESS vs. WHOLENESS”

by Dr. D. W. Ekstrand

Introduction

Brokenness abounds in our dark, broken world. We see it everywhere — in society, culture, business, government, education; even in churches, synagogues, and mosques. It also exists among individuals called to noble conduct — judges, lawmakers, law enforcement officials, medical practitioners, military leaders, religious personages, teachers and more. No level of society or occupation is exempt. How does one define brokenness? It is the fundamental disorder that exists in creation that affects a person's relationships and behavior. We experience it inwardly in a way that the apostle Paul described as that pull between right and wrong where we know what is good but choose the opposite (cf. Rom 7:14-19)... outwardly it is expressed by the scandals of greed, sexual abuse, and other crimes that seemingly are becoming ever more prevalent year by year.

Where does brokenness come from? The source of brokenness did not begin with Adam and Eve as many presume, or even with God speaking the world into existence... rather, it has its source in another creature of God — the angel who at one time was chief of the angelic hosts: Satan and his cohorts. For a more detailed understanding of this subject, read my study titled “*Sin & Man’s Eternal Purpose*,” you can find it under the “Additional Studies” link on my website: www.thetransformedsoul.com — you will find it quite a provocative read. Incidentally, one does not need to believe in a personal God to hold to the precept of an ordered moral universe; essentially all humanity functions with a presumption of such a universe (cf. modern science, the great philosophers of antiquity, and Scripture: Rom 1:19; Acts 17:22-31). How they perceive that the world came to be “ordered” is the fundamental issue, and their presuppositions are unavoidably religious even if they shun or eschew a genuine faith in God.

The skeptic will dismiss the scriptural account as nothing but a myth or fairy tale, not worthy of any serious deliberation... that it is simply too removed from everyday experience. The problem is that in rejecting any supernatural source, the brokenness that exists must necessarily be seen as “*intrinsic to the created order*” (that which exists)... as such, this disordered world reflects a disordered god. The book of Genesis, however, claims that disorder proceeds from a source outside and apart from the material universe, and asserts that disorder is not intrinsic to creation. The ancient world was rocked to its foundations once this fundamental Judaic precept was comprehended through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. Their pantheon of gods had no recourse but to fall, taking their rightful place as mere projections of the imagination, and thus lost all cultural power. Further, if disorder is not intrinsic to creation, the world can be seen as good despite the brokenness that exists within it. Genesis tells us that the world was created good, therefore if disorder was intrinsic to creation, disorder would be *natural* to the created order and the categories of good and evil would not apply. Moreover, man, as a creation of the God who is good (and creates only good things), was also deemed good. This is revealed in the passages that assert man is created in the *image and likeness of God* — “God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27); the “Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath

of life; and man became a living being (Gen 2:7)... and God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31; Lk 18:19).

The devil, on the other hand, is the source of disorder — he is a liar and destroyer; he distorts God's truth and violently deconstructs God's created order. John tells us, "the devil has sinned from the beginning" (1 Jn 3:8). In a conversation Jesus had with the Pharisees, He said: "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (Jn 8:44). We need to be reminded of the horrific consequences of brokenness — here is a list that makes up only a miniscule number in the galaxy of possible sins. Ponder them to see how far we have fallen.

Adultery, abortion, alcoholism, anger, bearing grudges, blasphemy (profane, impious reference or utterance about God), child abuse (physical, psychological, sexual or neglect), contempt, disobedience (to Christ, His Church, legitimate authority), deceit, drug addiction, envy, evil speaking (talking about someone even if true), failure to forgive, failure to thank God for all things, fornication (acting out or imagining or entertaining the thought of sex outside of marriage), wearing bikinis and provocative clothing, significant increase in cohabitation before marriage, bisexuality and homosexuality, R & X-rated movies and television shows, gay marriage, gossip, harshness, hating others, hypocrisy, idolatry (worship of self, others or objects), insider trading, kidnapping, kickbacks (many politicians' favorite way of running government), lust, lying, negligence, not caring for the environment, not praying for those who have reviled us, pride, pre-emptive unjust warfare, rash judgment, smoking, spousal abuse, torturing or belittling prisoners, unforgiveness, using others for money, power or sex. Incidentally, profanity is no longer the exception in our culture, it is now the "norm," and sex sells in our society (though every business & product does not choose to use it, many do). And then there is the "porn industry" — consider these numbers: 79% of men ages 18-30 visit a porn sight at least once a month; 67% of men ages 31-49; and 49% of men ages 50-68 — of those numbers, 18% of men (21,000,000) believe they are addicted to porn. Regarding women and porn, 48% of young women visit a porn sight at least once every month. These are astounding numbers — go online and check them out for yourself. Sadly, the foregoing numbers apply not only to unbelievers, but to believers as well; even significant numbers of clergymen and pastors have become victims of online porn (it is rated as "the number one problem of congregations" by pastors) — sinful flesh is a part of the entire human family, and we are all subject to the same culture. Either we can acknowledge these realities or simply try to ignore them and close our eyes to them.

The Prophet Isaiah spoke in stark terms of the people who should have chosen God but decided to chose sin instead — "Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him" (Is 1: 3-4). And Jeremiah the Prophet said: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9). Likewise Paul and the prophets describe all mankind this way, including you and me (cf. Deut 32:1-10; Acts 2: 40; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 4:17-19; Phil 2:15; 3:6; 2 Th 2:3-12; 2 Tim 3:2-5). The world rejects the truth and embraces darkness because her deeds are evil (that is, God is not the ultimate determinant in their thinking

or their living; cf. Jn 3:19); as such, she exerts a corrupting influence that is diabolical and opposed to the truth (cf. Rom 1:18-32; 2:5-9). Though we can blame Adam for the brokenness of creation, it does us no good to do so because we all sin and thereby contribute our share of corruption to the world. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: "It is no longer I who commits evil, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want to do; instead I do the evil I do not want to do" (cf. Rom 7:18-19).

When man turned his back on God in the Garden of Eden, he alienated himself from God and suffered spiritual separation from God (spiritual death) — God was no longer his Master and Confidant in life; as such, he no longer walked in the light with Him; his paradigm for living was now "darkness" (cf. Jn 3:19); he was now dead in his trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). As fallen human beings who live in darkness (i.e., outside of the light of the Living Word), essentially "we pervert reality;" that is, we live as if "our standards" reflect a level of inherent goodness, because they are acceptable to our fellow man — and we believe we only occasionally violate that goodness; that is the paradigm of darkness by which humanity lives. Little does the human family know, the ultimate foundation by which they buy into a "moral code," is the fact that God has placed a "degree of light" in their soul to convict them of right and wrong (Rom 1:18-32; Ecc 3:11), and this degree of light influences their moral judgment; but because they are all "children of darkness" they pervert that light by establishing their own standards in order to make themselves not only acceptable to themselves, but to their fellow man as well.

The entire mission of Christ in this world was a conflict between light and darkness (cf. Jn 1:5; 8:12; 12:46) — He is the light of men (cf. Jn 1:4) who provides the guidance, direction and understanding that men need. It is one thing to simply exist (in darkness)... it is quite another to comprehend the true purpose of life, and know how to live. So for the believer, Christ is "our light," and as our light He reveals the truth whereby we are to live. The very nature of light is to "reveal" — so Christ is the source (revelation) of knowledge, wisdom and salvation. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (cf. Jn 8:12). Likewise said Jesus, "I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness" (cf. Jn 12:46). In order to no longer walk in darkness we must "follow Christ" (the Light of life). Obviously, light is foreign to darkness... therefore it is an offense to the souls of men because it condemns them — essentially it says to them, "the paradigm of darkness that rules in your soul is evil... the reason you love darkness rather than light, is that your deeds are evil" (cf. Jn 3:19). Darkness is the MO (*modus operandi*) for humanity, the paradigm by which unregenerate men live. Fallen man is simply occupied with "self-centered living" — that's the essence of living according to the "paradigm of darkness" — since the light reveals the error of his way, he rebels against it, because it is an indictment against him and does not coincide with the paradigm of darkness by which he sees reality. Let me illustrate it this way: If I were to say to you as an unbeliever in front of others, "You are a degenerate, selfish fool!" (cf. Ps 14:1) If you are honest with yourself, you would admit that such a judgment makes you angry. Why? Because you adamantly believe in the dark paradigm that governs your life, and simply do believe your life corresponds to such a degrading injunction.

The truth is, people cannot handle being exposed for who they really are, because it does not coincide with who they really think they are. Therefore unregenerate men are satisfied to live a life of pretense (pretending to be what they are not — relatively good). Since our flesh loves the

dark rather than light... we disparage the light, or reinterpret it so that it fits our paradigm for living. This truism applies to every single human being. Though all people don't necessarily "dress" provocatively, they all wrestle with degenerate, provocative "thoughts." Years ago I shared this thought with my mentor in ministry — "I used to think that women were a cut above men in debasement; that is, that they were inherently more pure than men; not sure why I had thought that since I was a child, but my understanding now is 'that is really not the reality'." I think most of us 30-40 years ago thought women were actually better than men; but the truth is, we're all made of the same stuff (sinful flesh). That was a real eye-opener for me; one I simply did not anticipate. It is only when God graciously reveals our sinfulness to us, and extends love and forgiveness, that we humbly accept who we are and run into His arms. To the person who is not open to God's gracious and loving words because of the hardness of his heart (cf. Mt 13:13-17; Jn 9:39-41; Rom 1:18-23), the light is extremely offensive to him... and understandably so.

The Immoral Nature of Man

In Europe at the start of the twentieth century most people accepted the "authority of morality;" they believed there was a moral law that needed to be obeyed. But the collapse of the authority of religion and a decline in belief in God is the reason for it now being such a widespread problem. Man now looks for answers to reconcile what the Turks did in Bulgaria, where they burnt, killed and raped women and children; they hanged prisoners after first making them spend their last night nailed by the ear to a fence; they used daggers to cut babies out of women's wombs; they tossed nursing infants in the air, catching them on bayonets — their main delight came from doing it before their mothers' eyes. Twentieth-century history of large-scale cruelty and killing is only too familiar — the mutual slaughter that took place during the First World War, the terror-famine of the Ukraine, the Gulag, Auschwitz, Dresden, the Burma Railway, Hiroshima, Vietnam, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Cambodia, Rwanda, the collapse of Yugoslavia. Each of these names conjure up numerous other atrocities. A kinder and more generous conception would include changes in the family, the relations between men and women, attitudes toward poverty, religious changes, the impact of science on our thinking about how to live, attitudes toward sex and death, the relations between different cultures, and attitudes towards animals, the natural world, and the environment.

To talk of just twentieth-century atrocities is in one way misleading, because it is a myth that barbarism is unique to the twentieth century. The truth is the whole of human history includes wars, massacres, and every kind of torture and cruelty imaginable. There are actually grounds for thinking that over much of the world the changes of the last hundred years or so have been towards a psychological climate "more humane" than at any previous time. But much that transpired during twentieth-century history has been a bewildering unpleasant surprise — one hundred years of largely unbroken European peace between the defeat of Napoleon and the First World War made it plausible to think that the human race was growing out of its warlike past. But recent history gives us an opportunity to weigh this century's events from an appropriate human perspective. The bloody massacre in Bangladesh quickly covered the memory of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia; the assassination of Allende drowned out the groans of Bangladesh; the war in the Sinai desert made people forget Allende; the Cambodian massacre made people forget Sinai, and so on and so forth until everyone ultimately let everything be forgotten.

At the start of the twentieth century there was optimism, coming from the Enlightenment, that the spread of a humane and scientific outlook would lead to the fading away, not only of war, but also of other forms of cruelty and barbarism. They would fill the chamber of horrors in the museum of our primitive past. In the light of these expectations, the century of Hitler, Stalin, Pop Pot and Saddam Hussein was likely to be a surprise. Volcanoes thought extinct turned out not to be. There has been much philosophical discussion about what factors restrain people from ruthlessly selfish treatment of others, and what reasons there are for accepting moral restraints on conduct. These “*moral resources*” raise questions about what happened to them when the First World War started, when the atomic bomb was dropped, when Stalin’s Russia murdered millions, when Nazi Germany attempted to destroy the entire Jewish world, and more recently, what happened in Bosnia and Kosovo. The aim in using ethics to interrogate history is to help us understand a side of human nature often left in darkness. One problem about trying to see these events in a proper perspective comes from us not having experienced them — most of us living here in America should be acutely aware and extremely fortunate because of where and when we have been privileged to live... but it has also partially blinded us to some extremely ugly realities. In truth, there are more things, darker things, to understand about ourselves and the human condition than those who share this hope have generally allowed; as such, we must look hard and clearly at some monsters inside us.

The truth of the matter is, *anger and hatred are very powerful emotions*. Both the Old and New Testament terms for “hatred” (Hebrew & Greek) mean strong opposition to love... so the direct opposite of hating is loving. God is said to “*hate all sin*,” because He is absolutely holy... the world “*loves darkness*” because it is totally unholy. God hates false worship (cf. Deut 12:31; 16:22; Jer 44:4); conversely, idolatry is an abomination to God (Hos 9:15). In addition, those who claim God as theirs are said to “*hate evil*” also (cf. Ps 97:10), because of their love for God (cf. Ex 18:21; Ps 119:104; Is 33:15). Throughout Scripture the *unrighteous* love evil (that which is not of God) and hate the good (that which is of God), and the *righteous* love good (that which is of God) and hate the evil (that which is not of God). Christ often reminded His own disciples of the hatred which would come to the people of God (cf. Jn 15:18-23). The one who does evil “*hates the light*” and refuses to come to it for fear that his evil deeds will be revealed (Jn 3:20)... yet the Lord Jesus exhorted His disciples to “*love all men*,” even those who hate them (Lk 6:27). So the people of God are to have a strong dislike (hatred) for evil, but a deep, abiding love for God, humanity, and righteousness. Hatred, as a malicious attitude, is never to characterize the believer, because this is not compatible with the Christ-like spirit; rather, it is one of the works of the flesh (cf. Gal 5:20). The crusades and the inquisition were actions grounded in strong, spiteful emotions, and not at all within the constraints of God’s will — in short, they were diabolical in nature.

The root problem of “*anger*” and “*hatred*” is that they are simply powerful negative emotions, and as such are extremely difficult to quell — they essentially rule much of our world. Revenge and hatred are the main reasons for the violence in our world today. Anger and hatred towards others can lead to vicious thoughts of revenge within; as believers, once we recognize it, we must take steps to restrain ourselves so as not to let sin run its full course. The reality is, the more we think about things that make us angry, the more intense the debate becomes in our soul. Righteous anger (Eph 4:26) becomes unrighteous anger when we ventilate it or internalize it. When emotional energies take over and we blow up, we are ventilating it, and not exercising self-control (Gal 5:23). Scripture is explicit about our not ventilating anger (cf. Prov 29:11; 25:28; 19:11; 29:22; 14:17; 15:18; 14:29). James exhorts us to be “*slow to anger*” (Jam 1:19-20). By the way, we control our anger when we

become “solution oriented” rather than “problem oriented” — when we indulge our minds in the problem, self-control quickly exits. In order to successfully deal with any temptation, once it is recognized for what it is, **immediate action must taken to shut it down or sin will result** (Jam 1:14-15); one cannot entertain sinful thoughts and not sin... as fallen men we simply do not have that capacity; any thinking to the contrary is delusional. The reality is this, the energies of negative emotion must be directed toward the solution rather than the problem as soon as it is recognized for what it really is — again, if we fail to immediately redirect our anger, sin is inevitable. Anger is a problem for every human being on this planet, including you and me. **Dr. Jay Adams** in his book “*The Christian Counselor’s Manual*” (Baker Books, 1979, p. 359) says, “Sinful anger probably is involved in ninety percent of all counseling problems.” Paul and Peter both exhort us to learn to live without bitterness, wrath, guile, anger, clamor, slander and malice (cf. Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; 1 Pet 2:1); again, they are destructive, powerful, negative emotions. The list probably goes on indefinitely, but here are a few subjects that can cause strong negative emotions within us — politics, culture, government, painful circumstances, the experience of loss, rejection, arguing, unfriendliness, ill-treatment, arrogance, lack of respect, disregard for others, long lines, lousy driving... even sports! All of us seem to have a list of the “top five” things that quickly stir up anger in our soul.

The key for all of us is to learn to “shut down anger” the moment we recognize it for what it is — a diabolical provocation! The process for conquering unpleasantries begins by first identifying the issue that makes you angry; the next step involves talking to God about it, and not insisting that He simply remove the problem — this is “the crossroads” for overcoming anger; if you don’t move toward righteousness at this point, the sin of this powerful negative emotion will boil over in your soul. The question is whether or not you are willing to “live with the irritant for awhile” without feeding your anger? If the irritant is simply too much for you to endure, it will explode into a very strong negative emotion. Beloved, blowing up and getting angry isn’t the answer... even though you may be able to “justify being angry in the court of your mind!” You are aware, are you not, that GOD is superintending the course of events in your life? and that the primary instruments He uses to grow your faith are suffering, painful trials and difficult circumstances? So they are not without divine purpose (read Gen 50:20; Rom 8:28; 1 Pet 1:6-7; 4:12; 5:10). At some point, every believer must “learn to live with ‘unpleasantries’ without going bonkers!” Therefore, rather than just asking God in the moment to “take away your problem” (which is the norm), try telling the Lord the following in the midst of the storm: “Lord, though I hate this irritation, I’m okay with Your not removing it and Your helping me work through it. Thank You for what you are doing to grow my faith... as much as I dislike this particular problem, give me the grace to endure it without going off the deep end and letting it boil in my soul... give me the grace to wrestle with it right now in a way that honors Your will for my life.” By choosing to respond in this manner, you will fairly soon get to the point where most unpleasant circumstances will no longer dominate your emotions (you’ll actually develop a tolerance for pain).

The foregoing strategy must be on the front burner of your life, ready to be used at a moment’s notice. You can’t live the Christian life victoriously without having a “game plan” ready to be instantly implemented when the enemy strikes... Satan doesn’t wait for us to put on our armor before tempting us. And one thing is certain, we will all be tempted numerous times every day for the rest of our lives! So expect temptation, and not respond to it like “some strange thing is happening to you” (cf. 1 Pet 4:12). It is also very helpful to remember, that whatever kind of “pain or anger” you may be experiencing right now, God isn’t going to let that particular problem rule in your life for a seemingly endless period of time without Him shutting it down. He sympathizes

with your weaknesses and is mindful that you are but dust (cf. Heb 4:15; Ps 103:14). In the final analysis, the issue is this — “Rejoice in your trial, even though it is distressing (cf. 1 Pet 1:6), knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance and maturity, and will ultimately result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (cf. Jam 1:2-4, 12; 1 Pet 1:6-7). In the passages listed here, the issue at hand is “our faith,” which is God’s “reason” for trials... He wants us to learn to trust Him even when our world is falling apart. Does God want us happy? Absolutely. He is a loving Father. But more than your experiencing happiness, He wants you to trust Him when your little boat is filling up with water. Incidentally, none of us get a special exemption from the tumultuous waves of affliction — sorry to ruin your day. ☺

Remember, anger is a monumental issue in many people’s lives — even believers. This powerful negative emotion can dominate a person’s mind and lead to severe depression. As **Paul Meier** and **Frink Minirth** say in their book, “*Introduction to Psychology & Counseling*” (Baker Books, 1982, pp. 274-279), depressed individuals seldom realize how angry they are; it is not uncommon for them to actually insist they are not angry, even though their fists are clenched and their faces are stern. Without recognizing and admitting one’s anger, one cannot gain insight into its cause and get oneself on the road to recovery. Sinful anger arises from the following four sources — 1) Sinful anger results when someone violates our selfish demands; selfish people are often angry frequently have serious problems with depression. 2) Sinful anger results when someone violates our perfectionistic demands; perfectionists expect too much of themselves, others and even God; as a result they are frequently angry, and mostly toward themselves. 3) Sinful anger results from suspicion; people often become angry toward individuals most like themselves; since some people lie to themselves so much about their own faults, they are suspicious of any other person possessing those same qualities. 4) Anger toward God is always a sin and needs to be confessed and laid at the foot of the cross. Some important principles for helping conquer one’s anger are these: Try to understand why you have become angry; identify the source of the problem... Verbalize your anger; it keeps one from repressing it and feeling frustrated and depressed... Forgive the offender; forgiving is a choice that starts with an act of the will; though it doesn’t erase all recall, it means you no longer hold something against another person... last, Leave all vengeance to God; He will exercise vengeance on all who deserve it (cf. Rom 12:17-21), or will Himself bear the punishment for the wrong done and extend grace to the offender.

Essentially, fallen man lives his life according to the flesh; that is, he predominantly lives life according to what he “feels.” It has been said, the dynamic of the flesh is “feeling”... and the dynamic of the spirit is “faith” — the two principles often run counter to each other. When we let our feelings dictate the moment, we will inevitably find ourselves living life in ways that are not in agreement with God’s Law (Faith & Scripture). When negative emotions arise within us, our “feelings” cry out to be heard and control the discourse and the day... and sin results. Paul says, “that which is not of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23)... so any thoughts that are incongruous to the divine will are sinful. That’s why we are told to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5); but because our “feelings” are so strong, stubborn and persistent, we often capitulate and defer to them. When we are confronted with matters that raise our “ire,” it is difficult to reject such issues because of the intensity with which they are presented... but that is precisely what we are called to do. As Paul says, “We are to consider the members of our earthly body as being dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed... and are to put aside all anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech” (cf. Col 3:5, 8; Eph 4:31; 1 Pet 2:1);

when we let such things reign in our members, we are using our bodies as instruments of unrighteousness... and unrighteousness is not to be our master (cf. Rom 6:13-14).

The Brokenness of Man

In this world, broken things are despised and thrown out; damaged goods are rejected, and that includes people. In marriage, when relationships break down, the tendency is to walk away and find someone new rather than work at reconciliation. The world is full of people with broken hearts, broken spirits and broken relationships. The psalmist David said, “The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (cf. Ps 34:18). *There is something about reaching a breaking point that causes the believer to seek the Lord more sincerely.* King David was once a broken man, and he prayed, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Ps 51:10, 17). There are some things in our lives that need to be broken: pride, self-will, stubbornness, and sinful habits, for example. God responds to those who experience brokenness, saying: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit” (Is 57:15).

The Bible says that God breaks those who are proud and rebellious. The mighty **Pharaoh** set himself against God, but God broke him and freed His people from bondage and shame, saying: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high” (Lev 26:13). God punishes all those who proudly resist Him. **Nechadnezzar**, the infamous king of Babylon who took the Jewish people into captivity between 605-586 BC, gloried in himself and in his accomplishments (Dan 4:30), so the Lord removed his sovereignty from him “until he recognized that the Most High alone is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes” (cf. Dan 4:32; Rom 13:1; Eph 1:21)... to accomplish His eternal purposes (cf. Is 55:11; Eph 1:11b). Says the Lord, “My servants [at the end of time] will sing joyfully with a glad heart... but you [who are unbelievers] shall cry out with a heavy heart, and wail with a broken spirit” (Is 65:14); notice the contrast between the believer and the unbeliever — the believer sings and is blessed, whereas the unbeliever cries and is cursed.

To us, broken things are despised as worthless, but God can take what has been broken and remake it into something better, something that He can use for His glory. Broken things and broken people are the result of sin, yet God sent his Son in His eternal purity to be broken so that we might be healed. The night before He died, Jesus established the Eucharist when He broke the bread and said, “*This is my body, which is **broken** for you*” (cf. Lk 22:19); He went all the way to the cross to die that we might live. His death has made it possible for broken, sinful humanity to be reconciled to God, be healed and made whole. Without the broken body of Jesus, however, we could not be made whole: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed” (Is 53:5). Only when we surrender to Christ can we be restored, transformed, and made whole. Such surrender requires a brokenness on our part (cf. Lk 9:23). The Bible describes how a man who is dead in his sin can be made whole and alive in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom 6:1-14; Eph 2:1-5). The psalmist David writes, “The Lord redeems His servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in Him” (Ps 34:22). Jesus viewed all things in the light of eternity, and so should we:

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (cf. Heb 12:2-3). God draws us and calls us. He longs for us to come to Him, and turn from our sins, so He can heal us. Often, we are unable to hear His call because we are so consumed with other things – our lives, our families, our work, our own problems and unhappiness. Therefore we must be broken before we realize our need, and our deepest need is to be reconciled to God. Only then can we be made whole (Mt 5:5).

It should be remembered, our being made whole never comes from our own efforts or striving, but comes only from God. Only when we recognize our need for God are we able to take our eyes off ourselves and focus them on God and Jesus Christ. Only when we stop thinking about ourselves and start thinking about what Jesus did for us can we begin to heal. Only when we admit our need and ask God into our life, can God begin to make us whole. Only when we confess that we are broken can God make us into what He wants us to be. Once we let go of self and place God at the center of our lives, everything else falls into place (cf. Mt 6:33). Jesus was “broken” on the cross, and all who follow Him must be willing to be “broken” as well. Surrender to God and allow Him to make you whole, to give your life meaning, purpose and joy. Trust Him knowing that “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him (i.e., His children), and are called according to His purpose (cf. Rom 8:28). Throughout the remainder of this study, much of what I discuss was inspired in part by **Kim Gaines Eckert** and her book “*Stronger Than You Think*” (InterVarsity Press, 2007). Recently I searched for a book that I could forward to a friend to help her navigate through some of the painful realities of life she is wrestling with... after reading it myself I felt led to incorporate some of what she wrote into this study on “*Brokenness & Wholeness*.” You’ll notice after every major heading I have listed “the pages of Eckert’s book” from which some of her thoughts were gleaned, should you care to reference it.

The Believer’s Experience of Brokenness (Eckert, pages 15-31)

All of us at times feel a sense of “brokenness” rather than a sense of “wholeness” in life, and generally our relationships with others or with God, is the primary source of the pain within; undoubtedly this brokenness is probably due to a deep abiding pain that we are experiencing. In addition to that, we may often feel deficient because of an underlying sense of inadequacy, because we are simply not what we think we should be. We may have grown up hearing critical comments from our parents, siblings and peers, and as adults we discover that we have internalized those harsh statements and we have become our own biggest critics; as such, we are often plagued by a sense of guilt that all our striving is never quite enough. Though we may appear to be successful on the outside, we feel conflicted because of the inconsistency of the “I-have-it-all-together-image” that we portray to the world, and the “I’m-barely-holding-it-together-reality” that we live with on the inside. The reality is, many people, even with their greatest efforts, cannot portray the “I-have-it-all-together-image” to the world. In truth, they feel damaged all the way through. Some may feel defeated in their depression, anger or anxiety, while others simply feel incomplete in themselves and distant from God and others.

Ultimately, every human being wants to experience “wholeness in life,” and that can be a daunting task. It is in church where God’s love and relational nature are best reflected. Just as God the

Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are in constant fellowship with each other, so God's people are called to reflect that fellowship and love. In such a God-reflecting community, the church provides a place of healing and restoration for us. In an ideal Christ-empowered community, the hurting can find comfort, the rejected can find acceptance and love, and each individual's unique gifts are embraced and utilized in service of Christ and His kingdom. The church is not just a place to go — but a place to *“be”* — a place to live out our callings and identities in a *“community of the broken”* (i.e., the church). We are called to walk alongside other believers as we receive God's grace individually and corporately for all the challenges of life. However, since the church is filled with imperfect people (just like you and me), this supportive community of love and respect is not always what we broken human beings offer or experience; therefore, a local church can sometimes be a disconnecting place as well as a healing place.

Identifying what wholeness *“is not”* seems fairly easy... it is a bit more challenging to define what wholeness really *“is.”* Wholeness is often defined by people as being something like perfection, but many anxiety disorders can be understood as a consequence of a pathological pursuit of perfection. Whereas perfection implies an emphasis on performance and doing, wholeness encompasses all of our being. The truth is, if wholeness is equivalent to perfection, then we are all destined for failure, because we will never experience wholeness through sheer will and hard work. Our hope is that, despite our messy lives and our inability to live perfectly, *“we have a Savior who has already made us whole.”* Even though we may not *feel* whole, we must understand that wholeness is ultimately not about our feelings. If we rely on our feelings to tell us whether or not we are whole, then our *“wholeness”* will change through all the ups and downs of life. The spiritual reality is this: *“wholeness is not based on our own subjective feelings; rather, it begins and ends with our hope in Christ and who we are in Him.”* Should our feelings lead us to believe otherwise, we must first understand that Christ has already restored and healed us in relationship to Himself — so at the root of our very being He has already made us whole, and *who we really are is who we are fully becoming in Christ.* Even when we are inconsistent in our relationship with God and our pursuit of Him, He is forever faithful to us, regardless of our often lack of faith, and we can rest in that truth (cf. Rom 8:28, 35-39; Phil 1:6; 2 Tim 2:13).

Since becoming whole does not mean being a perfectionist, there are still things *“we can do”* to improve our emotional and relational health. Empowered by the reality that Christ has already made us whole in relationship to Him (we are now children of God), we can be agents of change in our own lives and the lives of others. We can actively pursue emotional, relational and spiritual health, *“trusting that it is God who is at work in us to will and to do His good pleasure”* (Phil 2:13). When Jesus healed the paralytic, He told him to get up and take his mat and go home (Lk 5:24). Jesus did the healing, but He also called the man to accept the gift, believe it and act upon it. *We too all called to believe and act on God's gift of wholeness and healing complete in Christ.* So “wholeness” is already underway in us through Christ's redemptive work, even though there is also something that is not yet complete (cf. Eph 4:11-16; Col 1:28-29) — the reality is, God is moving us as His children toward both growth and healing in this life. Wholeness is a gift from God to be received by faith (which we do at conversion), yet we are to be actively involved in the working out of that gift (cf. Phil 2:12). Wholeness is not some kind of self-help program that we can achieve on our own; neither is it something we passively absorb by osmosis. Just as we are reconciled to God by grace through faith alone, we are also called to *“live holy lives by faith”* (cf. Col 2:6; Rom 1:16-17; 6:4; 2 Cor 5:7; Eph 4:22-24; Col 1:10); we are called to *“work out”* what God has *“worked in”* to our lives (cf. Phil 2:12-13). It is when we live responsively and responsibly in God's kingdom, that we

experience wholeness. *Living responsively* means that we trust in the foundational truth that we are “*a new creation in Christ*” by a gift of God’s grace (cf. Jn 3:3; Rom 6:4, 11; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:8-10), and we experience wholeness by *living responsibly* when we practice walking in the light and take an active role in being good stewards of the gifts God has entrusted to us. Empowered by Christ and rooted in the knowledge of who we are as children made in God’s image, we can make practical changes in our thoughts, behaviors and relationships to move toward health and wholeness. Just as intense exercise is essential for becoming strong physically, so the exercise of faith in difficult situations is necessary to grow strong spiritually (cf. Rom 8:13; 1 Cor 9:27; Jam 1:2-4; 1 Pet 1:6-7; 4:12-13; 5:10).

Though you may be inclined to think that reading this study on wholeness will ultimately answer all of your questions, and that you will henceforth lead a happy, pain-free life, is simply living in a world of unreality. Instead, this study is meant to be a reminder of the truth of the situation in which we find ourselves. The reality is, in spite of our good intentions and genuine desire for wholeness, we mess up all the time and bad things happen to us or to those we love. It is tempting to think of wholeness as “*the absence of brokenness*,” but brokenness is part of the human condition. We live in a fallen world where things are not the way God intended them to be, and part of experiencing wholeness is accepting that truth. Remember, Jesus is the perfect example of wholeness (even though His life was characterized by much suffering). True wholeness comes when we join with Christ in His suffering and find healing in them. God has redeemed our brokenness through the redemptive work of the cross. His intent is not to help us avoid pain and maximize pleasure... but to grow us up in Christ (cf. Eph 4:13; Col 1:28; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18).

It is also important to remember that God has created us in His image for “*relationships*,” and much of the healing offered by God is only possible in and through a “*community of believers*.” There is no such thing as being a vibrant, growing “*lone ranger Christian*.” As believers, we need to ask God to help us be vulnerable and join with other believers on this journey. God’s Spirit dwells in the heart of every believer, and a significant part of His ministry is done in and through each one of us in the context and community of “the church” (the “called-out ones”). Though most of our emotional problems are either rooted or affected by personal relationships, incredible as it may seem, *healing from emotional pain is also most effective when it is done in the context of interpersonal relationships*. As relational beings made in God’s image, we grow best in relationship with others — relationships are the context in which spiritual growth and change takes place. God has called us to be “*a part of a community*” where healing and growth are effectuated by the Holy Spirit. Though true wholeness is found in Christ alone, God uses human care and ministry to assist us on our journey. God speaks to us through His Word, through prayer and worship, and through other believers in Christ.

The Believer’s True Identity (Eckert, pages 32-44)

We are all fallen people, and that reality has brought with it innumerable problems, but we are still made in the image of God... even more, we can be restored and healed and “*made whole*” again through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. As believers, the “*image of God*” is not only who we are, but who we are becoming — it is where our journey toward wholeness begins and where it ends. Our whole personhood (be us male or female) and our whole self are made in God’s image (Gen 1:26-27), not just a part of us. *Although we are fallen and broken creatures, we were created whole, and Christ has renewed that wholeness in us through the cross*. Because

of the fall, however, we often do not *feel* whole — and here is where we err — we try to make ourselves whole through a flurry of futile activities that only end up leaving us frustrated and exhausted. Instead, Jesus calls us to *rest* in the work He has already completed in us (Mt 11:28-29; Heb 4:10-11). As creatures made in God's image means we have been made whole. The way we experience wholeness takes place in the context of relationships with God and others. Just as God is inherently a "*relational being*," so we are relational beings as well. God, within the trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is in perfect, constant fellowship with Himself; though the trinity is one in essence, they are three distinct persons in relationship with each other. In the same way, as human beings, we were made to be persons in relationship with God and other human beings. *God has wired us so intensely for "relationships" that we discover our being in and through relationships.* Therefore, relationships are not just a good thing to have in life, but are essential to the life we do have. So first and foremost we have been created for a relationship with God — "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) — and it is in our relationship with our Creator and Redeemer that we discover both who God is and who we really are; so in our relationship with God we not only encounter the living God, but we become most fully ourselves. If we were made "*for*" Him (cf. Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16), then it stands to reason that we can only experience wholeness "*in*" Him.

Each of us are "*unique creations of God*" with special gifts, capacities, abilities, preferences and talents. Incredible as it may seem, no two of us are even close to being the same. The gifts God has given to us are for a particular purpose — to participate in right relationships with God and others. If we should fail to use these gifts and capacities, they will become dormant, hidden and undeveloped... and we will not discover who God created us to be. As relational beings, God created us for "*community*" (read the following passages: Jn 13:34; 15:17; Rom 12:5, 10; 13:8; 14:19; Gal 5:13; Eph 4:25, 32; Phil 2:3; 1 Th 3:12; 5:11; Heb 10:24; Jam 5:16; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:10; 1 Jn 4:7, 12). It is critical to remember that it is in the context of *relationships* where we discover both others and ourselves. Because of sin, however, we often twist and distort this relational need, so that we are not free to be who we are or allow others to be who they are. *Intimate relationships that reflect God's character should preserve and protect our individuality and differences, not smother or ignore them.* To be a human being in relationship is "to be given space to be who you are, and let others be who they are." We are all special children of God, and we come to see and understand our value and uniqueness only in relation to God and other people (reflect upon the significance of that truth). So in the context of relationship, we discover God, others and ourselves. Beloved, don't stubbornly ignore "*the need to live in community*" with others — it's the way God has wired you.

God's purpose is for us to *be* and *become* more than what we are by ourselves, and He helps us achieve this in and through our relationships with Him and others — thus our relationship with God and others is the context whereby we are changed and transformed... and is the context in which our journeys toward wholeness and healing take place. In Jesus, we find the perfect example of what it means to "*live in community*" (He was one with God and one with humanity). As believers, we have been united with God and are to experience this unity (genuine fellowship) with other believers as well (cf. 1 Jn 1:3; Jn 17:3, 21; 1 Cor 1:9). God calls us to live in community with other believers — not just with our family members and friends. If "*other believers*" aren't a significant part of your life, take the initiative to get into a "*small group*" in your church where relationships are easily nurtured — though it may take a little time to develop good close relationships, it won't take an interminable amount of time if you are committed to making it an integral part of your weekly worship experience... be kind and generous with your time, and

give others the “space” they need (don’t be demanding or be an imposition to others), and God will open a door for you to experience powerful fellowship in the context of a believing community. As you study the Word together, pray together, fellowship together and serve one another, the Holy Spirit will do a transforming work in and through your life.

The church is meant to be a “community” in which we corporately reflect God’s holy, loving, relational nature. Through the cross, Jesus brought the good news that we have been whole again, that our relationship to God has been restored, and that our relationships with others have been given a whole new basis through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Remember the miracle of salvation — “God has preserved us in and through the Fall” — we are no longer a people without hope. Because of Christ’s redemptive work, wholeness is not something to just strive toward on our own; wholeness is a gift that has been accomplished in full through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (cf. Eph 2:1, 5). It is by grace that we have been saved, and it is by grace that we grow and heal and mature and bear fruit (cf. Eph 2:8-10; Jn 15:5; Gal 5:22, 25). As we share in Christ’s life and death, and His suffering and sacrifice, we experience His wholeness. The task of the Christian is to participate in the continuing life and ministry of Christ (cf. Gal 2:20; Phil 1:21; Col 3:4). By living responsibly, we take one wobbly step after another, and take hold of the life to which God has called us (cf. 1 Tim 6:12). As we stumble along, we find our confidence in the strong hand of our Redeemer, knowing that “He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (cf. Phil 1:6; 1 Pet 5:10). God is growing us and changing us as He prepares us to be His bride... though we now only “know in part,” there is coming a day when we shall “know Him fully” and see Him face to face (cf. 1 Cor 13:12)... so the image of God is not just who we are, it is who we are becoming. Though we are “image bearers” as believers, we are growing in our ability to receive God’s grace in order to “image Him more accurately to the world.”

Despite the fact that as believers “we are new creations in Christ” and are forever secure in Him, “the old man” (the flesh, the principle of sin) continues to reside within us, and therein lies the difficulty in living the Christian life. When we experienced salvation, we didn’t receive new bodies, nor was the old self taken out of us... rather “we received new life in Christ” and were made brand new creations... but “the old sinful self still abides in us,” and it is this old self with which we must contend every day. Many theologians properly refer to “the old self” as “their unredeemed humanness,” because the old sinful self was never made good or removed from us. Though Christ died for our sins and made us “new creations,” and has insured us of an eternal home in heaven... there is still a lot of living we must do down here on earth before He takes us up to glory. As new creations in Christ we are called to “no longer let sin reign in our members” (Rom 6:12), and “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). This is the “war” that brings the greatest glory to God and which we are called to fight (cf. Gal 5:16-17; 1 Pet 2:11; Rom 7:18; 2 Cor 10:3-5; 1 Tim 6:9-12) — and fight we must. The indwelling reality with which all of us must navigate the Christian life is the fact that “the flesh continues to live in us,” it is referred to as our sin nature, our sin disposition, the sin principle, the old man, the old self, and the flesh. The truth of the matter is, we are all predisposed to sinning (selfishly live for ourselves), because the temptation is so great. A part of God’s plan for us in this life is that “we learn to die to ourselves (i.e., our flesh) every moment of every day, and learn to walk with Christ every moment of every day,” thus there is “the old self” and “the new self” (cf. Eph 2:10; 4:22-24; Rom 6:4, 6; 13:14; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 3:9-10; Heb 12:1). Sadly, many preachers ignore significant aspects of this doctrine in their pulpits; hence, many believers are not well-grounded in their faith. As a result, many Christians simply ascribe to a kind of *Disneyland Christianity* where they just focus on trying to do their best and leave everything else to God — though there is some truth to that concept, it in no way is sufficient to

bring one to maturity in Christ; therefore it is simply a “half truth.” Learning to play any sport well involves a lot more than reading a few books and listening to inspiring messages from some superstars — you’ve got a lot of “hard work” to do if you want to become a good player!

A significant part of learning to live the Christian life with peace and joy is accepting the truth that “there is absolutely nothing good in your flesh” (Rom 7:18). Accepting the reality of this truth doesn’t happen over night — millions of us are living testimonies to this fact, including the greatest theologian who ever lived, the apostle Paul. It takes “time” to fully realize this truth, because it is “the experience of sin” in one’s life over time that ultimately convinces us of this humbling truth. Read Paul’s testimony in Romans chapter seven — it is here where the apostle Paul reminds us that our sin disposition (i.e., our flesh) is so strong that we often end up doing the very things we do not want to do (Rom 7:20)... that evil is a powerful presence within us (Rom 7:21)... that it is so dominant at times that it causes us to cry out, “Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24). Ultimately we must come to the realization that “Christ sets us free!” (Rom 7:25; 8:2)... that there is no longer “any condemnation” to those of us who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1)... the wonderful reality is this: Jesus fulfilled the Law for us! (Rom 8:4) because we are completely incapable of fulfilling it ourselves (because there is nothing good in us). Though our bodies are dead because of sin (i.e., the forces of death are already working in them), the spirit is alive in us because of the righteous work of the Lord Jesus in His death and resurrection (Rom 8:10). As believers we are now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13); and this we do “by setting our minds on the things of the Spirit” (Rom 8:5, 13), and no longer living to gratify the desires of the flesh. Whereas the unbeliever caters to the body and this life, the believer is to cater to the Spirit and those things that are eternal (cf. Col 3:1-10). Such a life calls for a significant level of “God consciousness” at every moment of life; that is, an ongoing awareness of God’s presence. Think of it this way, if you were “walking with a friend somewhere” you would always have an awareness of his presence; even though you might not be actively thinking about him every single moment, you would often be conversing with him and enjoying being with him. When we “walk with Christ” moment by moment throughout the course of a day, we are not only continually conscious of His presence, but we frequently find ourselves sharing our heart with Him, and reflecting upon His love for us and His will for our lives; and that means “wrestling with our flesh and fighting the good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12). It is important to remember the truth Paul articulated in this context — “If we indeed suffer with Christ (by dying to self we suffer with Christ), we shall be glorified with Him!” (Rom 8:17). By the way, “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). Beloved, remember, “in hope we have been saved” (Rom 8:24)... the eternal hope for which we wait is our complete deliverance from our sinful natures. Carefully reflect upon Paul’s line of reasoning throughout this paragraph.

With all of the foregoing in mind, take a moment and consider a number of other significant realities that Paul presents in Romans 8: “God is causing everything (it’s a causative verb in Greek) in the life of the believer to work together for his good” (Rom 8:28); even his failings & stumblings! It might be helpful to remember that God purchased our salvation through the worst sin ever committed (the crucifixion of His Son) — the truth is, God has the wherewithal to accomplish “good” out of anything, even evil! and that might be the most astounding truth in all of creation. Paul also goes on to say that, “God has predestined us to a sure and glorious future in heaven” (Rom 8:30); therefore, “if God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31). Carefully think of the ramification of that reality. Beloved, we’re talking about the God who spoke all things into

existence! Paul goes on to say, “He who did not spare His own Son for us, will He not also freely give us whatever else we need?” (Rom 8:32). The apostle then takes the argument to yet another step by asking the question, “Is there anything in all creation that can separate us from such a loving God? to which he responds, “Absolutely nothing!” He then exclaims, “Even though we are being put to death all day long (dying to our sinful flesh), we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us!” (Rom 8:35-39). Beloved, this is the incredible reality of what God’s Word teaches! Again, let’s go back to the very beginning of Paul’s argument — he starts his discourse with the idea that “there is nothing good in us, that is, in our sinful flesh” (cf. Rom 7:18). Until a believer “truly accepts that reality” he will simply end up living a “performance-based life” by the power of his own flesh, because he will live life with the understanding that “he” somehow has enough inherent goodness in him to make a difference in this life; reflect on the words of Jesus on this subject — “apart from Me you can do nothing!” (Jn 15:5). It’s our stubborn flesh that fights against the truth and sees itself in a more positive light. When a believer fully accepts the fact that he is sinful through and through (remember, God accepts all of us just as they are — sinful to the core — the question is, can we fully accept the reality of who we really are as redeemed sinners?), he will then learn to walk with Christ through all the ups & downs of life, and live to the praise of God’s glory. Ultimately, these truths are “extremely liberating.” (cf. Jn 8:31-32). When they are truly accepted they will bring peace and joy to your heart, because God Himself will place it there. In summary, if you do your part (accept these truths), God will do His part (give you His peace) — we can’t give ourselves peace, but we can believe the truth.

Let me make just a couple more points: If we insist on living life with the understanding that there is some inherent goodness in us, the Christian life for us will be “a life of pretense” — that is, we will pretend to be good — sadly, that is how most Christians live their lives... they simply want others to think that they are good, because they think that is what Christians are to be. The truth of the matter is, “No one is good — but God alone” (Mt 19:17). In order to bridge this hurdle, we must come to the point where we fully accept the truth of our inherent sinfulness, and make our focus in life the person of Christ and not ourselves (cf. Heb 12:2). When our focus in life is ourselves, we will live “a life of pretense” (pretending to be what we are not: good). The temptation for many believers is to think that they are really not that sinful, because they don’t commit acts of overt evil — so it is at this point where a biblical definition of “sin” is needed. Paul tells us in Rom 14:23, “that which is not of faith is sin!” — unless your thoughts, speech, and actions coincide with divine truth, they are sin; that is, unless your thoughts, speech, and actions reflect the will of God at any given moment, they are sinful in nature and reveal a fleshly orientation and a lack of trust. Therefore anytime we are experiencing anxiety, frustration, worry, discouragement, anger, or we are groaning over our circumstances, we are sinning. Sin is not just “overt evil” as the world and many believers are inclined to think; it is anything that does not coincide with the character and truth of God’s divine will. That’s why Paul exhorts Christians to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Beloved, when we accept the diabolical nature of our flesh, and the fact that God really loves us, those two non-conflicting monumental truths will “radically change your life!” Never forget, God’s love trumps our sinfulness; if it didn’t, then we would have cause for concern! I did a study called “The Game Changer!” that expands on these two realities — you can find on my website. I would strongly encourage you to read it. You can find it at: www.thetransformedsoul.com

The Challenge to Grow Within (Eckert, pages 47-78)

One of the distinguishing features of human beings is that we are “*thinking creatures*,” so we are “*rational beings in relationship*” with the ability to think, solve problems, make decisions, share our thoughts, and discern right from wrong. Our minds are gifts from God — some of us have underestimated or neglected our minds, perhaps because of the discouraging messages we picked up from our parents, teachers, peers, or other cultural influences... whereas others of us may have even exaggerated the importance and depth of our intellect. Since we are made in the image of God, our minds are a part of that image, whether we use it properly or not. The great commandment God has given to us is that “we love the LORD our God with all our *heart*... *soul*... *mind*... and *strength*” (cf. Mt 22:37; Deut 6:5). So in order to please God we must do some intentional thinking (cf. Heb 11:6) — God gave you a mind and He expects you to use it rightly.

Dr. Caroline Leaf, one of the world’s leading authorities on the “cognitive neuroscientific aspects of the brain,” has studied the brain and the “science of thought” for more than 30 years. She is a devout Christian with a PhD in “Communication Pathology” from the *University of Pretoria* in South Africa. Dr. Leaf says the average person thinks over 30,000 thoughts a day; the truth is, our minds never rest while we are awake. Think about that number with the understanding that many of our thoughts have a fleshly orientation and are evil in nature — since evil thoughts have an “ally” in our flesh, they can be extremely stubborn and difficult to overcome once they are firmly implanted in our minds. Sadly, our minds frequently travel on highways that are defined by psychologists as “*negative self-talk*,” essentially it is our own self-reflective thoughts, and they often replay over and over again. Self-talk is powerful and can be very destructive — we hear the words of our inner voice more than any other voice in our lives. Negative self-talk can block us from hearing the still, small voice of God speaking to us. If we speak the self-rejecting words of our inner voice to ourselves, we will fail to acknowledge our true identity as beloved children of God. Negative self-talk is problematic because it is so often a cognitive distortion and highly unrealistic. Men and women, young and old, struggle with negative self-talk. When our self-talk is negative and critical, it often contains thinking patterns that keep us from accurately seeing ourselves and others as whole persons created in God’s image. We will only grow in our ability to “image God” when we begin to see ourselves and others as who we really are and who we are becoming through Christ’s redemptive work. The five main roadblocks to right thinking are these:

1. **It’s All or Nothing.** The problem with this kind of thinking is that if we make one mistake, it’s all over... and our whole identity is shaken. When we live in the extreme of this kind of thinking, we never feel consistent in our perceptions of ourselves, because whether we are good or bad depends on our performance and temporal circumstances. This kind of thinking also causes us to never feel constant in our perception of others either, because whether they are good or bad depends on so many particulars. The root of “*black and white thinking*” is often perfectionism — “if you live up to my standards, then you are wonderful; but if you fail to meet those standards, then you are a disappointment.” When we let go of expecting perfection, we allow people to make mistakes and are more compassionate. Since it is a guarantee that people will make mistakes, we are more realistic when we expect and accept this truth. It should be noted, the same “*perfectionistic rules*” that we apply to others, we also apply to how we think about and judge ourselves. Therefore, we need to learn to view ourselves and others with more compassion, and accept the fact that though we make mistakes, we can

even learn and grow from those mistakes. None of us are “all bad” or “all good. As we replace the “*lies of extreme thinking*” with “*the truth of realistic thinking*,” we will be able to more accurately view ourselves and others with greater understanding and compassion, knowing that we are all people made in God’s image.

2. **Rules People Should Obey.** The issue here is living our lives according to a rigid set of rules that we believe people “*should obey*” at all times. These rules are not religious in orientation, but are simply inflexible personal convictions about what one should or should not do, say or feel in certain situations. When we live by the “*should principle*,” we tend to get frustrated, angry or hurt when people fail to live up to these obvious standards... and we feel guilty when we ourselves fall short. As **Bruce Narramore** says in his book “*No Condemnation: Rethinking Guilt Motivation in Counseling, Preaching & Parenting*” (Academic Books, 1984, p. 301): “People often live under unbearable guilt because of their inability to measure up to the standards of parents, society, or a Christian subculture.” For example, you may have been raised in a home where it is inexcusable to not be “responsible” and not be “on time” — however, other people have learned that people should be relaxed & easygoing, and that they should enjoy life and enjoy people, and that it is the journey rather than the destination that is most important. Can you see the conflict that occurs when these two positions collide? When our lists of should become rigid and inflexible, and when we fail to see the value in other people’s approaches to life, we fail to see and treat them as whole persons. When we fall into “should thinking,” our minds get clouded with guilty thoughts about how we *ought* to have a clean house all the time, or people *must* like us, or we *have* to be pleasant all the time. Take time to reflect upon your own list of “shoulds.” Are your expectations for yourself and others realistic?
3. **Jumping to Conclusion.** When we attempt to jump to conclusions about what other people are thinking and feeling, and why they are acting in particular ways... we often think the other person really feels what we think... when in truth, they may not be thinking that at all. So when we attempt to “*mind-read*,” we often become defensive and negative in our conversation, without any absolute knowledge. People who jump to conclusions often reconstruct the thoughts and feelings of others after a conversation or party, imagining what they thought about or about what you said. Though it is natural to wonder about what people think of us, sometimes we may come to conclusions about what others think without incontrovertible evidence. When we do this, we do not treat other people as whole persons; rather we treat them as we have imagined and created them to be in our minds, and we miss out on the reality of who they really are. Sometimes people may be thinking negatively of us, but sometimes they may not be. When we act as if we just *know*, we work against the development of authentic relationships.
4. **Worse-case Scenario Thinking.** Psychologists refer to this a “*catastrophic thinking*.” We see potential problems and begin reviewing the endless series of worst-case scenarios. *What if the storm gets worse? What if I never get married? What if I lose my job? What if my spouse leaves me? What if we can’t pay our bills? What if my children date the wrong people and end up in a bad situation?* The list of such kinds of questions is endless. Rather than dealing with the reality of a situation, we get lost in and distracted by our “*what if?*” thoughts. The truth is, “what if” thoughts keep us from living in the moment and working toward the solution of real problems... they simply make us feel more helpless and out of

control, emotionally depressed, and increase the amount of angst in our soul. Such anxiety is not rooted in reality, but in our own catastrophic fears about reality.

5. **Remembering Only the Negatives.** There are times when we disregard the positives and only dwell on the negatives. In the context of being a “teacher of the Word,” someone may make a negative comment about your speaking too fast... in spite of the fact that you may have shared some life-changing thoughts, and worked extremely hard in preparing for that class, the “negative comment” will more than likely dominate your thinking. “Negative remarks” are difficult for most of us to process, because they can not only be painful, they may cause us to be overly critical of ourselves. When ten people share positives with you, and only one shares a negative, it is the negative that seems to often carry the most weight. It is always important to weigh every opinion in a healthy way, and not simply value the negative. In order to grow toward wholeness in ourselves, we need to learn to interpret the world and people around us in a more holistic manner. When we simply focus on the negatives, we fail to take in the whole picture — consequently, we miss out on the best part. Let God take the positives and the negatives (discuss them with Him), and then ask Him to give you the grace to see things as He would have you to see them (cf. Rom 8:28).

When we think in fragmented ways, we keep ourselves from seeing ourselves and others as whole persons... therefore we need to begin identifying and restructuring those destructive thought patterns. Through our union with Christ we are to “renew our minds” (cf. Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23). Like all change, this is easier said than done, yet we must learn to let go of our distorted thinking patterns. The truth is, we don’t have to listen to our negative self-talk. Practically speaking, every time we become aware of a destructive thought, we need to tell ourselves to “stop!” and engage our mind in a constructive thought (cf. Phil 4:6-9). The key to stopping destructive thought patterns is to focus on stopping them the moment they are recognized as such. Obviously, our critical self-talk will not magically disappear simply by saying “stop!” We will become more aware of our critical voice, and such noticing will lead to increasingly positive changes in our ability to reflect God in our inner voice more and more. Conscious identification of negative thoughts is a huge step in eventually reframing them. Challenge all irrational negative thoughts and evaluate the accuracy of them. Remember, as believers we are to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (cf. 2 Cor 10:5) — so we are to replace negative, inaccurate thoughts with the truth of God.

The most important truth that believers must affirm over and over again every day is the wonderful truth that “God loves us with an everlasting love.” This is the truth that Satan will do everything he can to cause us to question it! Reflect upon all the truths in Scripture and the reality of God’s love for you. Just because you may feel a certain way does not mean that is the reality; emotional reasoning frequently is based on unreality. For example, if you are overwhelmed by the sin in your life and feel like you must be beyond Christ’s reach, remember that Jesus “gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness” (cf. Titus 2:14; Is 1:18). Jesus didn’t just die for some of our sins. There is nothing you can do that is outside of God’s reach. Remember, when doubts and despair fill your mind, Satan is busy at work trying to destroy your faith; he has access to your mind, and often injects a toxic thought into your mind when you are at your lowest — the issue at this point is one of “spiritual warfare.” As the apostle Paul said, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and powers and world forces of this darkness, and the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places; so take up the full armor of God

that you might stand... praying with all prayer and petition at all times in the Spirit” (cf. Eph 6:11-18). It is only when you replace your negative and inaccurate thoughts with the truth of God’s Word that you are more able to participate in and experience the wholeness Christ offers. It was the psalmist David who said, “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer” (cf. Ps 19:14). If Christ is not the Rock upon which you are standing, you will fall. By using your mind the way God intends for it to be used, you will grow in your ability to more reflect God in the world.

Growing Through Difficulty & Depression (Eckert, pages 79-95)

When you become overwhelmed by *feelings* of sadness, worry or anger... it is common to get lost in your emotions, and wonder how you will ever get out of them. The question is how will you find hope and growth in the midst of pain, frustration and despair. The underlying message we often hear as believers is this: if we are good Christians who pray and seek God, then we should not feel angry, depressed or anxious — the truth is, such thinking only exacerbates the problem. We do have victory in Christ over all things... at the same time, our world is a broken place filled with sin and pain, and it is in this broken world that we live. When Jesus found men using the temple courts as a marketplace, it made Him angry... but He did not become enraged or act out of control... neither did He pretend to be happy about what He found in the temple. Furthermore, He did not avoid conflict or pretend that it was okay... He did not even diplomatically ask the sellers to stop what they were doing... rather, He expressed His feelings directly to the men in the temple courts... He was perfectly genuine and authentic in His emotions. Conversely, we live in a fallen world and worship a loving Father who looks at our pain with compassion: “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you” (cf. 1 Pet 5:7). You’ll note this passage *assumes* that we will experience anxiety, and God gently invites us to lay our painful emotions at His feet.

When we walk through life with “*false proclamations of constant joy*,” we become less than real. Notice again the words of Peter: “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been *distressed* by various trials, that the proof of your faith... even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (cf. 1 Pet 1:6-7). The reality is *painful trials are distressing*. We honor God when we stop pretending and begin living authentically — God wants our whole self, not ingenuine happy faces. The truth is, sometimes as believers we feel pressure to get to the trust without ever feeling the despair. Contrary to what some believe, it is generally in the despair (the dark night of the soul) that our trust becomes real and deep and honest (cf. Ps 77:1-2). In order to have an authentic relationship with God, characterized by genuine trust, we have to be honest with ourselves and with God. We cannot hide our anger and anxious feelings from Him... instead we need to trust that God views us with infinite compassion and loves us as we are — contrary feelings and all. So deal with your painful feelings as the psalmist did (cf. Ps 4:4). Scripture is filled with examples of how God teaches them through their pain, regardless of why they suffer. Painful feelings and circumstances change and shape us because we know that “*suffering produces perseverance... character... and hope*” (cf. Rom 5:3-4). Growth through refining fire is central to the Christian faith (cf. 1 Pet 1:6-7). In order to grow up in Christ, we must embrace seasons of pain (Jn 16:33) as part of our journey, and a way in which “*we share in Christ’s sufferings*” (cf. 1 Pet 4:1, 13, 18; 5:10; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24).

All of us as believers are wounded and scarred... the challenge of painful seasons is to find hope in the midst of despair. One of the essential ways we learn to overcome depression and anxiety is to learn to live in the present moment... and not try to escape it through alcohol, drugs, sex, food, etc. Ask yourself, "What am I feeling? Seeing? Hearing?" Look for God in the present moment and invite Him to speak to you in the here and now. When you find yourself getting worked up in your thinking... silently tell yourself to slow down... take several deep breaths... and then name those thinking errors for what they are, and challenge your thinking — challenge your thoughts and replace them with the truth of God's Word. A passage that is a great help to many is Lamentations 3:19-24, 31-32 — here's an interpretive rendering: "God of heaven, remember my affliction and my wandering... surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind... Thy lovingkindnesses indeed never cease... Thy compassions never fail... They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness. Thou art my portion, Lord, therefore I will hope in You.... Thou will not reject forever... even if You cause grief, then You will exercise compassion according to Your abundant lovingkindness." That is a powerful passage. Search God's Word and find other passages that speak to you and your situation and feelings — write them down and prayerfully meditate upon them — without reflecting and meditating upon the truths of Scripture, they will not become dear to your soul. For those of you who like to sing songs and hymns that speak to your soul, this a powerful way of prayerfully affirming biblical truth as well — carefully reflect upon the words as you sing them to yourself. The renowned psychiatrist **Dr. Ralph Menninger** encouraged depressed people to "get their eyes off of themselves by helping someone else who is in need" — nothing helps us get outside our own circumstances and feelings better than getting into someone else's pain. Do something for someone else. Anger, depression and anxiety are painful... it is tempting to try and suppress or ignore these emotions. We cannot become whole persons by growing through those emotions unless we acknowledge their presence, examine their message, and learn from them.

Growing Through Difficulty & Depression (Eckert, pages 96-116)

God created us in His own image... as such, "we are fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps 139:14). Perhaps the most incredible thing in all creation is the fact that God created us with the freedom to have fellowship with Him or even reject Him, and in spite of the fact that we chose to reject Him, He loved us so much that He went to the cross and died for us. It is impossible to understand how the Creator could possibly love the rebellious creature so much that He would die for him. Oh, the depth of His love and unfathomable His ways. **Charles Wesley's** hymn expresses this amazement — "Amazing Love! How Can It Be That Thou My God Shouldst Die for Me?" There is no greater profound truth in all the universe than that. How can it be? Looking inward to rediscover and accept the unique person God created us to be (as incredible as that is) is not prideful or a matter of being self-consumed. Jesus told us to "love our neighbor as ourselves" (Mt 22:39). Self-esteem is not a bad word, nor is it equivalent to selfishness. Self-esteem simply refers to how we see, think, and feel about who we really are. Some people have inflated self-esteem, in which they see themselves in an unrealistically positive light; conversely, others have such a low self-esteem, they see themselves in an unrealistically negative light. God did not create us to be harsh, mean and critical to other people or to ourselves. It is "this deepest self," this miracle of creation and grace, that we must learn to properly esteem... in spite of the fact that we inhabit sinful flesh (cf. Rom 7:18). Part of growing in wholeness is learning to accept the "you" God made. A healthy level of self-esteem is neither unreasonably high nor low.

How do we arrive at the place where we respect and care for ourselves? As children grow up they develop beliefs and expectations about the security and reliability of their caregivers based on repeated experiences. Psychologists refer this set of beliefs and expectations as a child's "internal working model" — it contains a model of both self and others. This internal working model becomes the earliest blueprint of self-esteem because it embodies our feelings and thoughts about ourselves and our ability to get our needs met in relationships. The internal working model is "rooted in early experiences," but is maintained or modified over time. Our parents, siblings, peers, teachers and friends greatly influence the way we see, think, and feel about ourselves. The wounds that are rooted in childhood are often maintained in our adult relationships. If we see ourselves as "unworthy of love" and unable to get our needs met, that will influence our behavior and expectations of those around us. Obviously, we all long for love and acceptance... but should we not get it as youngsters, it will affect the way we see, feel, and think about ourselves when we grow older. The beliefs we develop about ourselves lay the foundation for our self-esteem... and those beliefs are maintained or strengthened over time with other relationships.

Our "true mirror" is found only in God. Only God can love us perfectly, and only by letting go of the expectation for others to fill that role can we rest in our true identity. When we love God and receive His love with no strings attached, then we can love others in return. Although "our relationships" play a strong role in the development of self-esteem as we're growing up, "our culture" also provides important lessons about how we should think or feel about ourselves. Another cultural setting that teaches us these lessons is "the church" — Jesus intended the church to be a sanctuary of hope, love, and acceptance to broken, fallen, sinful people. We need to learn to see ourselves as Jesus sees us — individuals worthy of respect and love. For those of us who struggle with a lifetime of low self-esteem, the journey toward self-acceptance may not seem possible at this point. We have spent years learning to see, think, and feel about ourselves the way we do now. Learning to be more gracious in our self-treatment will not happen overnight. The following suggestions are a good starting point:

1. Improve your Self-knowledge. Get to know yourself. Reflect on who you are and what you like doing, and what you are good at... look for opportunities to live as the person God has made you. If you like bike riding, hiking, playing the piano, playing sports, writing, teachings, working with your hands — make these things a priority in your life... set goals and celebrate your successes when you accomplish them. If you like working with children or young people, use that desire and gift to build relationships by becoming a youth leader, being a "Big brother" or "Big sister" to someone. When we understand the unique gifts and skills God created us with, we are better able to enjoy those gifts by serving God and others.

2. Reject the Perfect Person Idea. We all have an ideal in our minds of "The Perfect Man" or "The Perfect Woman" — they are often a combination of the traits we saw affirmed in our families, our culture, and our churches. How do you see "The Perfect Person"? Big, handsome and strong? Beautiful, attractive and shapely? Hospitable, kind and attentive? Pleasant, well-behaved, and much admired? Smart, well established in a career and hard-working? Confident, friendly, and never irritable? Spiritual, well-read, and a servant at church? etc., etc., etc. The truth is no one is like this! We are all human. We all have weaknesses, inconsistencies and faults, and it is through those weaknesses and faults that Christ's power is made perfect (cf. 2 Cor 12:9-10), because in the midst of our own struggles, we learn and grow. Christ is able to redeem

our mistakes and sins (contrary to what some believers think), as well as the sins that have been done to us, to make something good; as only God can (cf. Gen 50:20). When you begin chastising yourself for not measuring up to that unrealistic ideal... extend grace to yourself. God calls us to sit at His feet and learn from Him. Remind yourself of this when the self-doubts come, and lay the idol of "The Perfect Person" at His feet. That is the essence of true humility (cf. Jam 4:6).

3. Embrace God's Assessment of Who You Are. When we hold on to wounds inflicted by others and allow those people's distorted views of us to dominate our self-esteem, we do not allow God's truth of who we are to transform the way we think and feel about ourselves. In order to develop healthier self-esteem, you have to change the way you think about yourself. You can know if you have internalized negative messages — whether they came from your parents, sibling, your peers, your friends, your church or your culture — when you have begun believing and acting as if those negative messages are true. Remember, we repeat those messages to ourselves as "negative self-talk." Try a little tenderness in your self-talk; gently remind yourself to stop focusing on the hurtful messages from the past. Spend time simply meditating on the fact of God's amazing love for you... invite Him to fill you with His love and presence... spend time meditating on these powerful words — "you are beloved by God." If you don't "affirm this truth" over and over again, you will never experience the reality of it in your own heart and soul. Remember, if you have lived life being convinced of "your unloveliness," you have cemented that negative distortion into your mind, and it is not something that will fly away without ever bothering (attacking) you again. After meditating on God's unfailing love, imagine what God would say to you (read Eph 3:14-21).

Growing Through Intimate Relationships (Eckert, pages 160-180)

People care about relationships, and rightly so. We are created in the image of God... as such, we are relational beings. We all long for healthy, whole relationships, and not just with spouses; we want to feel connected to our family and friends and co-workers. It is precisely in these intimate relationships that we image God best... yet we often feel like this kind of intimacy is missing in our relationships... for some reason they feel more like acquaintances than intimate friends. Some of us are so intent on finding intimacy that we will pretty much do anything to maintain relationships, even if we lose our very selves in the process. Others of us value relationships so much that we want them to be perfect. In order to grow healthy and intimate relationships, we must interact as whole people, and whole relationships require that we learn to be authentic in relationships, and that we also allow and invite others to be real and genuine. Obviously, if you can't be yourself in a relationship, you can't have a true intimate friendship with that person. Healthy, intimate relationships require not only that we know who we are, but that we share who we are with others. So intimacy begins with us, and we can only control who we are in a relationship... if the other person doesn't find that acceptable, then you can't have a genuine, caring relationship with them. If you want to experience greater intimacy in a relationship, you have to offer more of yourself. Psychologist **David Schnarch** suggests in his book "Passionate Marriage" (Owl Books, 1997, p. 107) that intimacy involves taking an honest look at ourselves and sharing that self with our partners. If we only rely on ourselves for our sense of security and comfort, we are destined to feel inadequate because we all mess up and fall down over and over again. It would be natural then to look at our spouses or friends to make us feel better about ourselves. We are all imperfect, fallen people... but because we are complete in

Christ, we are free to see others for who they really are, instead of who we wish or need them to be for us. Christ came to restore us in every way — including our ability to form authentic relationships with others. Our fear of rejection can be disabling, but by holding onto the work Christ has already done to redeem us from our sin and imperfection, we can find courage to let go of our own masks and get real with people.

Not only do we need to treat ourselves as whole people in order to cultivate healthy and whole relationships, but we must also allow and invite others to be whole people. We allow others to be who they really are when we respect them as separate from us. Real relationships involve two distinct persons who have made a choice to come together. A genuine, intimate relationship celebrates and protects the differences and the boundaries between persons. So whole relationships are reciprocal relationships in which we allow others to be themselves. When we stop insisting that other people meet our needs, then we can cease our subtle efforts to change or fix the other person... in the process, we discover a wonderful gift — the gift of the other person's true self. We have then been set free to experience and learn from other people's unique gifts. When we see others as separate people and allow them to be who they are, we can then appreciate their unique gifts and personalities, rather than view those differences as threats. So we foster whole relationships by allowing others to be real with us, respecting boundaries and differences. We cultivate whole relationships when we choose to be vulnerable and use our voice to speak the truth in love. Yet we must also understand that people can be *difficult* because they are *different* from us — no two of us are alike. As **Megan Hutchinson**, the Adult Ministries Pastor at *St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach* recently said to her congregants, "*Being as we are all fallen creatures we are all a piece of sandpaper;*" that is, we are all abrasive at times. Solomon put it this way, "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (cf. Prv 27:17); that is simply the reality of what it means to be human.

Relationships are not just a byproduct of the human journey; rather, relationships are the point of the spiritual journey. Christ came to earth to form relationships with human people... the Christian life beckons us to engage in a relationship with our Creator, and intimacy with God prepares us for intimacy with other people. We can cultivate intimate relationships by getting to know ourselves and sharing that self in relationships, and we can also grow in intimacy by inviting others to be genuine and authentic with us. Although pursuing whole and healthy intimate relationships is hard work and requires us to take risks and be vulnerable, it is worth it. Additionally, by caring for ourselves, we care for others because we free them from having to meet our needs. **Parker Palmer** writes in his book *"Let Your Life Speak"* (Jossey-Bass, 2000, p.30), "*Self-care is... good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer to others.*" Self-care includes taking care of basic needs, like getting adequate sleep, eating a balanced diet, exercising, and getting some good alone time in the Word. When we don't take care of these needs, we have less energy, less vitality, and less life. Self-care also includes addressing our deeper needs, which are different for everyone. Self-awareness is important because it will help us understand and identify our unique needs... it knows when it needs a few minutes of silence, and when it needs a break, etc. Self-care knows what we enjoy doing (gardening, running, studying, playing an instrument, and other activities) and we find time for it.

One of the ways we grow toward relational wholeness is by valuing all relationships. Since we image God best in the context of relationships, then we need to take seriously the importance of every relationship as an opportunity to reflect God's love and grace. So we need to learn to

choose to act as a whole person, being genuine, honest and authentic with each person we meet. Choose to be an encourager with every person you meet, be it at work, at church, the bank, or the marketplace — offer them grace and respect. Every individual you interact with is an amazing creature made in God's image. You grow in wholeness when you treat every relationship with respect and care. By asking meaningful questions of people we care about, we show people that we are interested in their story for them alone; we communicate that we care about the hurts they have encountered (not that we are trying to change or fix them by offering pat answers). It is also important to affirm other people for being honest and open and authentic with you.

Healing from a Broken Heart (Eckert, pages 181-201)

Although we were created for relationships, one result of the Fall is that we function in broken ways in relationships — principally because our focus is on ourselves and our needs, rather than on others and their needs (cf. Phil 2:3-4). When we are wounded in relationships, through abandonment or death or divorce or betrayal or abuse, the wounds run deep. **Philip Yancey** in his book *"Where Is God When It Hurts?"* (Zondervan, 1990, p. 22) describes pain as "an unusual gift... because pain demands the attention that is crucial to my recovery." Like physical pain, emotional pain awakens our senses. When we ignore the pain or seek relief through alcohol, food, work, new relationships, etc., we are only helped for a time. In order to experience genuine healing we must face our pain directly — in so doing, we are taking an active step in beginning the healing process. We begin the process by examining those wounds — instead of pretending that some things don't really hurt, we need to look directly at the pain and admit how much it does hurt... because whether we acknowledge our pain or not, old wounds have a way of resurfacing in our lives.

Although facing our wounds is essential, we do not need to do it alone. By acknowledging our pain to others and allowing them to walk alongside us, we allow God to use our friend's to speak comfort and strength to our fears and sadness. When we admit our need and ask God for help we allow Him to minister to us in powerful ways. Some of us may fear allowing others to be a part of our healing journey. A trusted friend or counselor can help us reframe the telling in ways that are not just cathartic, but allow us to move toward healing and growth. Remember, one of the primary ministries of the Holy Spirit is the interactive dialogue and fellowship that takes place between believers — the Holy Spirit dwells in each one of us for the common good, so let Him minister in and through your life through other brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not to be "lone ranger" Christians — reflect upon some of the following thirty-seven "one another" passages in the New Testament — Jn 13:34; 15:17; Rom 12:10; 13:8; 14:19; 15:7; 1 Cor 12:25; Gal 5:13; Eph 4:32; 5:19; Phil 2:3; Col 3:16; 1 Th 3:12; 4:9; 5:11; 2 Th 1:3; Heb 3:13; 10:24; Jam 5:16; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:10; 1 Jn 4:7). The Holy Spirit is referred to in Scripture as the "paraclete" — "one called alongside" to comfort and instruct and encourage (cf. Jn 14:16-18; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7); when we allow our brothers and sisters in Christ to "come alongside us," the Holy Spirit does a powerful work through them. Remember, the Holy Spirit dwells in each one of us as believers to minister in and through each one of us — that's one of the incredible functions of the body of Christ; it is the presence of the Holy Spirit ministering in and through our lives collectively. Don't limit the work of the Holy Spirit in your life by trying to navigate the spiritual life alone (i.e., outside the body of Christ). When we have been wounded in relationships, through loss or rejection or abuse, the first step toward healing is acknowledging the wound. Although it can be frightening and painful, true healing requires that we examine the wound — we need to fully understand why we hurt. Rather than ignoring or suppressing the pain,

we must allow ourselves to feel those painful emotions. Finally, true healing requires that we allow others to share our pain and walk us through it... it is here where we can begin to clean out the wound. None of us as believers are so independently sufficient in and of ourselves spiritually that we are beyond the need of others in our lives; that's just the way God designed us (dependent creatures) — to maintain otherwise is to stubbornly walk through life alone.

We all engage in relationship patterns based on our internal working models of who we are, and who we expect others to be in relationships. When relationship patterns are overly rigid and become wounding to us or to others, identifying them and letting them go can aid us in the healing process. Perhaps your childhood home was filled with conflict or was highly critical or was abusive and unloving... then growing up you learned to respond in ways that protected you from the pain... as such your relationships with others were probably more superficial... where you never felt comfortable with letting people know the real you. In order to heal from the relational wounds of the past, we need to identify and let go of the relational patterns we fall into that re-open old wounds in current relationships — a safe and trusting relationship is the best place to explore those maladaptive relational patterns; be it a counselor or a trusted friend, you need someone who will be honest with you, and can help you get outside yourself to examine objectively the harmful patterns that are replaying themselves in your life. Having a supportive and trusted person in your corner to talk and pray with is essential.

In order to experience genuine healing and freedom from our painful past, we have to find a way to let go of those insidious emotions... depending upon the severity of the situation, the idea of "***forgiveness***" may seem unacceptable; yet the reality is that the choice not to forgive usually is even more damaging. Choosing to forgive does not mean that we forget what happened to us, or that we excuse the person(s) who hurt us, or that we pretend that the hurt never happened, or that we ignore the wound. Forgiveness is God's way of dealing with sinful behavior — be it our sin or someone else's sin. When we forgive, we hand ourselves over to God, trusting that God alone can restore and heal us fully and completely. Ultimately, the sins committed against us are powerless to prevent us from having lives that fully glorify God. When we forgive, we are also trusting that God is totally opposed to evil and sees it whenever and wherever it occurs. So we agree with God that what happened to us ought not to have happened. Therefore when we forgive we also hand the offending person over to God.

Forgiveness allows us to look at ourselves honestly, as broken children of God who are first and foremost "forever forgiven creatures." Empowered by Christ's work and His love for us, forgiveness allows us to replace our negative responses with more positive ones. As believers we are surprisingly empowered to be "forgiving creatures." As the Lord's Prayer says, "Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors" (cf. Mt 6:12). We are forgiven people, and when we forgive others, we reflect God's grace and mercy to the world around us. By choosing to forgive, we give God our hurts and allow Him to walk with us. Forgiveness allows us to let go of the burdens of bitterness and resentment and lay them at the feet of Jesus, who understands and even bears our suffering and pain. Forgiveness is essential to the healing process. As **Everett Worthington** writes in his book "*Forgiving and Reconciling*" (InterVarsity Press, 2003, p. 73), that forgiveness requires us to "admit that a wrong was done to us." By constantly blaming ourselves for wounds that were inflicted by others, we keep ourselves from finding real freedom. Sometimes in the process of trying to manage our own pain, we end up wounding others. We need to repent and seek their forgiveness. Not only do we blame ourselves for old wounds and hurts,

but many of us also feel resentful and angry toward God. When we feel hopeless and lost in pain, we can harbor bitter feelings toward God (which is common among hurting believers), but that only intensifies our sense of distance between us and God. Healing from our wounds, therefore, requires that we also honestly face our feelings toward God — let Him know exactly what you're feeling, and the difficulty you're having in working through it. The reality is this: God loves you perfectly and He is absolutely sovereign (cf. Joseph, Gen 50:20) — obviously, it is difficult to reconcile those two things sometimes. It is also important to remember that God is big enough to handle our questions and doubts and fears and anger. Thus true healing requires that we not only let go of all the bad stuff from our hurtful relationships, but that we hold on to all the good stuff... and that we choose to love again. When we love, we are vulnerable... others may hurt us or betray us or leave us or die, and our hearts may be broken... love can disappoint us... yet the truth is, we are made for relationships and life is not worth living without them. We were not meant to live in isolation and be hermits. The key to genuine healing from past relational wounds is to find the courage to really love again. Take risks, make mistakes, and be vulnerable — with other people, with yourself, and with God.

One practical way to bring those wounds into the light, is to relive our story by writing an autobiography. Start at the beginning and write everything you remember about your childhood. If it seems important, write it down. Don't judge yourself or your memories, and don't edit or proofread your story — just write it. Let the memories and the feelings come. While writing it you will re-experience the painful wounds of your own story, it will also help remind you where you have come from and how you have grown through it. Then share your story with someone else — this is a great way to allow another person to walk with you in your pain. It can also help to hear someone else's perspective. Ask yourself what you can learn from your story, and where God is in your story? Allow God to quietly move you. As you review your story, one particular issue you might want to attend to is any bitterness or resentment you are struggling with. As much as we mess up and need to be forgiven by God and others, we also need to forgive others we have wronged. It is also important to try and understand the humanness of the other person who may have caused you pain (we all have foibles). Forgiveness can be a hard slow process... it hardly ever happens all at once. Ultimately, when we forgive we let go of our longing for vengeance — hope is the essence of Christianity. One of the worst things about pain and hurt is that it leaves us hopeless. Christ is our hope (cf. Col 1:27). Look for the kind of hope Job spoke of after facing innumerable sufferings and calling out to God in the midst of them — "Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him" (Job 13:15). Hope that things can get better... hope that we will be loved... hope that we will be able to love again... hope that we can be happy... hope that we can trust others and not be punished for doing so. Hope in your desire for health and wholeness, because God has planted that longing for wholeness in you. Hope in the promises of God — "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (cf. Jer 29:11). Pray that God will fill you with hope, even when you feel most hopeless, and then look for Him to act in your world.

Journey Toward Wholeness (Eckert, pages 202-224)

Renowned psychologist, **Lewis Smedes**, in his book *"The Art of Forgiving"* (Ballantine Books, 1996) says that he believes the only workable response to unfair pain is "hope" — hope for the time when pointless and unfair suffering no longer happens. In the crunch, he says, when we see

no substantive evidence that this is where God is leading us, hope becomes a kind of courage — courage to trust Him and our hopes. The brokenness that comes when people's lives are ravaged by pain is a topic that is seldom dealt with in the pulpits of our churches, in spite of the fact that it is one that is extremely relevant. We are fallen people who live in a fallen world... as a result, things are not the way they are supposed to be and we face pain of all kinds. Many believers harbor the secret and futile hope that the path toward wholeness bypasses pain... that somehow as believers we can avoid pain. The journey toward wholeness, however, is not a pain-free one. Christ's life was characterized by suffering and pain, and as believers we join with Christ by sharing in His sufferings (cf. Rom 8:17-18; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24; 1 Pet 2:21; 4:1). Brokenness, therefore, is not something we can escape or avoid... rather, it is an essential part of the Christian journey. The psalmist David said, his sacrifice was a broken spirit — a broken and contrite heart (cf. Ps 51:17).

Philip Yancey says in his book "Where Is God When It Hurts?" (Zondervan, 1990, p. 11) that pain is "the gift nobody wants," and one of the gifts of pain is that it makes us honest about our need. When we are broken, we are desperate. Feeling lost and without hope, we open ourselves up to God in a more radical way than when things are going well in our lives. Brokenness reminds us that we cannot make it on our own. As believers, we wish that we walked through each day with a constant awareness of our utter dependency on God for every breath — but that is not the case. Too often it is only in the face of failure or loss that we are reminded of our complete and utter need for God. Brokenness forces us to give up the fantasy that we are in control, and it make us acknowledge the truth of God's sovereignty and place our faith in His goodness — even when our life seems like it is falling apart. Overwhelming pain makes us desperately aware of our need for help. In his famous work on suffering, **C. S. Lewis** suggests in his book "The Problem of Pain" (Macmillan, 1962, p. 93), that God uses pain to get our attention: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain." When we find ourselves in the midst of debilitating pain, be it through the loss of a loved one or some other significant loss, the last thing we need to hear from others is the frustrating platitude that "God works in mysterious ways, and that His ways are higher than our ways" (cf. Is 55:8-9). The truth is, these kinds of trite responses from others is that they are really not helpful... and can actually make us angry.

We often feel like children in the dark, and want to find our way into the light... but we don't know the way. When pain and suffering overwhelm us, we can cling to the One who stands in our place. It is not only by grace that we have been saved, it is by grace that we grow and heal and learn of God. And when we doubt, it is by grace that we find faith to make it through. As the theologian **T. F. Torrance** writes in his book, "The Meditations of Christ" (Eerdmans, 1983, p. 108), "Jesus Christ in me believes in my place and at the same time takes up my poor faltering and stumbling faith in Himself — 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief' — embracing, upholding and undergirding it through His invariant faithfulness. That is the kind of faith that will never fail." When we are faithless, Jesus remains faithful, even though we are completely unworthy (cf. 2 Tim 2:13). The wonderful truth is, we can trust Him with our own unbelief and doubts and fears and questions. **Renee Altson** in his book "Stumbling Toward Faith" (Zondervan, 2009, p. 98), describes a God who seeks us and loves us as we really are. This God does not ask us to put on a happy face when our hearts are broken. Rather, He meets us in our whys and fears, and in our questions and doubts. We have a God who truly sympathizes with our weaknesses (cf. Heb 4:15). By God's grace we discover our own "shallow, shabby faith" through darkness, pain and suffering. As **Brennan Manning** writes in his book "Ruthless Trust: The Ragamuffin's Path to God" (HarperCollins, 2000, p. 117), "Often trust begins on the far side of despair. When all human resources are exhausted...

when we forego control... [when we are] at our wits ends... trust happens within us." Ultimately, on the far side of despair, trust emerges within us. Through brokenness we experience and discover a trust and a belief in God that is more radical and honest than we had known previously.

One of the gifts of brokenness, therefore, is that it can make us honest about our need, and can lead us to a radical openness and trust in God. Another gift of brokenness is that God can redeem and use it — and He does — God uses our pain to grow and mature us in Him. In the story of Jesus and the hemorrhaging woman (cf. Lk 8:43-48), God used her brokenness to display His healing power. It does not get any more redemptive than that. The hemorrhaging woman teaches us that brokenness can make us honest about our need and that God can and does use our brokenness. Years after *C. S. Lewis* had written his famous theological exploration on the problem of pain, his own wife died... he then published another book under a pseudonym titled, "A Grief Observed," but this one focused on the personal rather than the philosophical. In it he writes, "Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are... so happy that you have no sense of needing Him... if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be (or so it feels) welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside... After that, silence [many theologians refer to this as "the dark night of the soul"]... you may as well turn away. [Furthermore,] the longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become." Those are extremely poignant words — they are the words of a man who is unmistakably lost in pain. In his book, Lewis reminds us that when our own lives are struck with tragedy, our perspective changes. So the greatest thing we can do when a friend of ours suffers a significant loss, is to simply sit with them in their pain, and not try and rush them through it — "grieve with those who grieve" (Rom 12:15); don't try to be a fix-it man, because you can't fix it. There is compassion in not giving advice... there is compassion in not trying to fix them. We can truly be the hands and feet of Christ by simply mourning with them, and caringly sitting silently with them in their pain. Don't even tell them, "This too shall pass." There are no easy answers — simply do the hard thing and follow Christ's example and enter into their pain.

We are all broken people... regardless of our longing for purity and integrity, the reality of our fallen world and our messy lives is that we are broken people. We have hurt others, and others have hurt us. Sometimes the pain we have faced is so unfair and intense that it paralyzes us. One of the paradoxes of brokenness, however, is the truth that God can lead us along the journey toward wholeness through that pain... and through the hard work of growing through pain, we find that "God can turn our ashes into beauty" (cf. Is 61:3). It is in the acceptance of our lack of faith (or little faith) that God gives us greater faith. Instead of running from your pains, allow them to teach you — ask God to reveal to you how He has used your wounds to make you more like Him. Remember, when you turn to God in your moment of angst, you are already exhibiting a modicum of faith — you are not turning to an astrologer or some air-headed palm reader... you are turning to GOD! Though you may be full of angst and completely in the dark (nearly), you are trying to reach out to GOD! and that, beloved, is faith... even though it be a small faith. Never forget, as Christians, none of us are spiritual giants with a gargantuan faith; we have faith in an incredibly great GOD! Don't make your faith the object of your thinking... simply make CHRIST the object of your thinking... "and even though you may be faithless at times, GOD is always faithful to you!" (cf. 2 Tim 2:13) — that never changes! — and His faithfulness overrides your

unfaithfulness. God fully empathizes with you and your weaknesses (cf. Heb 4:15), and is mindful that you are but dust (cf. Ps 103:14)... simply admit your condition and fall into His arms (1 Pet 5:7).

So instead of running from or trying to avoid pain and suffering, the journey toward wholeness embraces and asks how we can learn from and grow through broken experiences. Remember, the apostle Paul was a deeply wounded person, and he describes the mystery of God working in brokenness this way: "The Lord said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness' (God's power is manifested in our weaknesses — when we admit that we are truly weak, we are forced to depend completely on Christ, because we recognize our own inadequacy. Therefore, says Paul, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me [that He might do great and wonderful things through me (cf. Jn 15:5)]... therefore I will delight in my weaknesses and hardships and sufferings (they keep me humble and mindful of my inadequacy), for when I acknowledge how truly weak I am, then I am strong [Christ is my strength]" (cf. 2 Cor 12:9-10; Eph 6:10; 2 Tim 2:1). Beloved, be amazed at the mystery of God — that in your brokenness you are being made whole in a mysterious way by the Holy Spirit. Who you are is no longer who you were as an unregenerate person... who you are is who you are becoming in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Phil 2:13). Remember, Christ holds your future in His hands... and your future is "certain!" (cf. Phil 1:6; Jn 6:39; Rom 8:28-32; 1 Pet 5:10).

In conclusion, it is important to remember, as image-bearers of God we have been created for relationship and community. We are not meant to enjoy victories and struggle with difficulties and challenges in isolation. We bear the imprint of God — hence, a longing and capacity for intimate connections. Therefore, let me strongly discourage you from trying to make this journey alone. Genuine community is found among people who can be real with each other and with God — real about the good stuff and real about the bad stuff. When we are most hurting is when we are most in need of community, so allow this journey toward wholeness to also be a journey toward community.