

Broken Vessels: How God Uses Imperfect People



God continually chooses to work in and through His people.

Brokenness and pain.

Unfortunately, they are universal. It may have been from the pain of that young summer love that ended prematurely, the pain of abandonment and isolation, the pain of chronic illness or death, or the pain we bring on ourselves through our own sin and failure. We all know what pain feels like, and it feels like being broken.

Like clay jars, we are fragile. We can be easily broken—but we do not have to remain “broken vessels.” We are never beyond the healing and redeeming power of God. In the face of failure, God responds with restoration. In spite of our shortcomings, God will work in and through us. In the midst of our circumstances, God will help us endure.

But, God doesn’t stop there. He seeks to use us to speak into the lives of other “broken vessels.” He uses our experiences with His grace and power to comfort others. He desires to use us to help our neighbors and loved ones encounter the God who brings hope and restoration.

“Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). We are broken vessels, but this great treasure—the good news of Jesus Christ—shines through our brokenness.



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A Fresh Start



When have you really enjoyed making a mess?

QUESTION 1

#BSFLbroken

We fail; Jesus restores.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Making a mess in the kitchen is one thing; making a mess of life is quite another. I can clean the kitchen to the point you'd never know I was in there. But when I make a mess of my life, I can't just wipe away the evidence—or the consequences—with a good disinfectant.

Have you ever found yourself at rock bottom? It may have been because of an inappropriate relationship, a string of lies, or a temptation or habit that seemed to gradually take over everything in life. At that moment, you stand at a crossroad. Do you continue down the road you're on, repeating the same mistakes because the pain of changing seems greater than the pain of remaining the same? Or do you look to Jesus for a way out?

Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, knew what it meant to mess up. He failed in a big way. But Peter's story also offers us encouragement and points us to the way out—a fresh start in Jesus Christ.

WHAT DOES **THE BIBLE** SAY?

John 18:15-18,25-27 (CSB)

¹⁵ Simon Peter was following Jesus, as was another disciple. That disciple was an acquaintance of the high priest; so he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. ¹⁶ But Peter remained standing outside by the door. So the other disciple, the one known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the girl who was the doorkeeper and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ Then the servant girl who was the doorkeeper said to Peter, "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" "I am not," he said. ¹⁸ Now the servants and the officials had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold. They were standing there warming themselves, and Peter was standing with them, warming himself.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." ²⁶ One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" ²⁷ Peter denied it again. Immediately a rooster crowed.

Peter, also known as Simon Peter, was surely exhausted and confused. Earlier, Jesus had wanted him to pray, but instead he slept (Matthew 26:36-46). Awakened, he found himself surrounded by a group of soldiers, temple police from the chief priests, and Pharisees—all led by Judas Iscariot, a fellow disciple (John 18:3). In a tense moment, Peter pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Even more confusing was Jesus' response. With no hint of praise, He harshly reprimanded Peter telling him to put his sword away (vv. 10-11). What happened next was unthinkable: Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested, and He was taken away. Peter's whole world had just turned over.

What should his next steps have been? In an effort to get near enough to see and hear what was happening with Jesus without being detected, Peter and "the other disciple," (v. 15) who is generally acknowledged to be John, followed Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. John was an acquaintance of the high priest, so he was able to gain entry into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter stayed outside by the door.

What emotions would you have experienced in Peter's situation?

QUESTION 2

However, it wasn't long before people began to ask about his connection to Jesus—and the denials began.

- » The doorkeeper asked Peter, "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" Peter replied with an emphatic, "I am not" (v. 17).
- » Later, another onlooker asked Peter, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" (v. 25). Becoming defensive, Peter again denied any relation with Jesus.
- » Peter suddenly seemed to become the center of attention. One of the high priest's servants, who had been in the garden and likely saw Peter cut off the other servant's ear, asked, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" (v. 26). At this point, Peter denied it again, even though the accusation came from an eyewitness who saw what had just happened!

At that moment a rooster crowed. Luke's Gospel account of this event noted: "Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter. So Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62).

John 21:15-19 (CSB)

¹⁵ When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said to him, "you know that I love you." "Feed my lambs," he told him. ¹⁶ A second time he asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord," he said to him, "you know that I love you." "Shepherd my sheep," he told him. ¹⁷ He asked him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." "Feed my sheep," Jesus said. ¹⁸ "Truly I tell you, when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don't want to go." ¹⁹ He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, "Follow me."

What factors may cause us to shrink back from identifying as Christ-followers?

QUESTION 3

When have you seen God bring restoration to a seemingly hopeless situation?

QUESTION 4

After Judas betrayed Jesus, he was so remorseful he committed suicide (Matthew 27:3-5). Peter's grief, however, led him in a different direction: he went fishing (John 21:3). Peter understandably might have thought his friendship and usefulness to Jesus was over. Maybe he just wanted a distraction from his failure—to return to the one thing he could do well. But Jesus had a different plan.

In John 21, we see God's pattern of restoration. Peter and the disciples were out fishing on the Sea of Tiberias. After an entire night of not catching anything, Jesus called out to them from the shore and told them to "Cast the net on the right side of the boat . . . and you'll find some" (v. 6). They obeyed and were rewarded with such a large catch of fish they couldn't haul the net in. John, correctly identifying who Jesus was, said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" (v. 7).

As impulsive as always, Peter jumped into the water and swam to the shore to be with Jesus even though the boat was only 100 yards away. It's here that we see a personal interaction between Jesus and Peter. Jesus asked Peter three times about his love for Him. Three times—the same number of times Peter had betrayed Jesus.

A key word in verses 15-19 is "love." In English, the deeper impact of this passage is lost to us because the English language has only one word for love—so it seems like Jesus was asking Peter the same question three times. However, if we look at the original Greek, which has multiple words for love, we unearth a deeper interaction.





What do these verses teach us about our relationship with Christ?

QUESTION 5

In the first two interactions, when Jesus asked Peter if he loves Him, Jesus used *agapao*, the deep, affectionate, and cherishing type of love that God has for Jesus and that Jesus has for us. Interestingly, Peter didn't respond with that same word for love; instead, he used *phileo*, which refers to more of a brotherly, personal love. In the second interaction, Jesus again used the *agapao* term for love, and Peter again used *phileo* in his response.

In the third interaction, however, Jesus switched to *phileo*, the same version of love Peter had been using. Peter responded in kind, with the same *phileo* version of love.

Why didn't Peter respond with the same *agapao* version of love Jesus used? Perhaps he was feeling too guilty from his betrayal and felt unworthy to use the higher form of love since he had not displayed it on the night of his denials. Or perhaps Peter intentionally used the more personable version of love, *phileo*, because he wanted to show Jesus how deeply repentant he was.

In either case, what matters most is that, each time Jesus asked the question, He followed up with a commission. Jesus not only forgave Peter for his three denials, but He restored and commissioned him to service. "Feed my lambs" (v. 15). "Shepherd my sheep" (v. 16). "Feed my sheep" (v. 17). Peter was a broken vessel, but the past was forgiven, and Jesus desired for Peter to move forward in ministry.

The beautiful thing about God is He does not simply offer forgiveness; He wants to restore, redeem, and renew our past, our hurts, and our failures. He takes the broken parts of our lives and makes us whole again. Relationships that seem beyond the point of repair can be renewed. Hearts broken through divorce can experience a restoration through God's grace and faithfulness. Lives ruined through addiction can be repaired and move forward to live productive, Christ-honoring lives.

As Christ forgives and restores, He also commissions us and calls us to serve Him and His kingdom. Whatever our past sin and failure—however we might have denied Christ—He forgives. He restores. And, He chooses to work through us for His glory.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!"

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

MADE NEW



In which of the following areas do you need to experience God's restoration? Check all that apply.

- A fractured friendship
- Your relationship with God
- Family conflict or past wounds
- Contention at church or with other Christ-followers
- Other: _____

In the space below, write out a brief prayer to God about this need.

LIVE IT OUT

God's grace is beyond measure and He has plans to use us when we turn to Him.

- » **Ask for forgiveness.** Have you allowed God's forgiveness to guide you through past mistakes? The same grace Jesus offered to Peter is available to you. Get alone with God and ask for forgiveness. He will restore you!
- » **Memorize 2 Corinthians 5:17.** Get this truth in your heart so that you'll be reminded of God's desire to restore His people and commission them to serve Him.
- » **Extend grace to someone in your own life.** As Christ-followers, we're to love others the same way He loves us. Choose to give grace this week to someone who has messed up. If this doesn't come as easily as you'd like, ask God to work in and through you as you encounter this person.

We've each messed up, but God's grace is so deep and His love is so wide that He will always restore us when we come to Him in repentance. **Our sin is not the end of the road. Christ offers a fresh start.**



My thoughts