

~Other Speakers S-Z: K.P. Yohannan:

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18, NIV). It is very interesting to note how this verse says "the Lord is close." So what is the opposite? The Lord is far away. He is distant from someone who is not broken. The way to have God near to you is to be humble and broken. As long as we are stubborn and hard and unbending, He will be far from us.

But the kind of people God will never despise or walk away from are the individuals who live with a broken spirit and a contrite heart. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart" these, O God, You will not despise (Psalm 51:17).

Imagine someone dying of hunger. There is food placed before him, but no matter how hard he tries, he cannot eat. The problem is that his mouth is stitched closed and his hands are tied behind his back. Even if someone tried to feed him, he could not receive the food.

In our spiritual life, the same thing can happen. No matter how much God loves us, no matter what He wants to do for us or how earnestly He seeks to bless us, He cannot do anything with a person who closes his heart in pride, refusing to bend and break. And as long as this believer lives on earth, God's consistent work is going to be to bring him to the place of brokenness. God never gives up on us until we are broken. Consistently He works with us.

And He uses all kinds of methods. Either He will break our outward man gradually, like one steadily chips away at a large stone, or He will break us suddenly, through some major crisis. Sometimes there is a sudden breaking, followed by gradual. For others, the Lord arranges daily trials, difficulties, difficult people, hard circumstances, physical problems and all sorts of things "you can write your own list" to bring us to the place of brokenness.

God works with each one of us in His way. The way He breaks you may be different from the way He breaks me. And the timing of it all is in His hands. However, we can certainly prolong the process. In some lives, God can bring an individual to the place of brokenness in six months, one year or three years. For some it is a lifelong process "10, 20, 30 years. The saddest of all is wasting such incredible, precious years because of our resistance.

My Personal Experience

The first time I can distinctly remember the experience of being broken, I was about 18. At that time I didn't understand anything about what was happening, except that it was painful and it hurt.

From the age of 16, I had been involved with a youth evangelistic movement. The Lord had gifted me to teach, but at that time I didn't realize it was a gift He had given and not something I had of myself.

After a few years with the movement, I was known and recognized for my ability to communicate and teach effectively. I was in great demand by all the area coordinators. Everybody was asking for me to come to their area because they wanted someone to preach and teach like I was able to do. It's not that there were no other preachers. It was a young people's movement "there were only about 300-400 of us. There is a saying, "In a country where nobody has a nose, the one with half a nose is the king." I mean, in my little world out there, I was the one with half a nose. And I felt really good about my nose! I was in such demand, and I was flying high.

It was during our 30-day conference in Ajmer, Rajasthan, that I first began to experience what it means to be broken.

At the end of the conference, each area coordinator selected the people they wanted on their teams for the upcoming season of ministry. Throughout the conference, I was walking around like a peacock with his feathers displayed. I was thinking, "My goodness, what am I going to do when the conference is over? Everybody is going to want me. How am I going to say "no" to so many people? I am going to be in such demand. What am I going to do with myself?"

But when the conference came to an end, I had not been chosen to be on anyone's team. Nobody wanted me. The selections were made, and I just sat there all alone. One by one, I watched as the teams started to leave.

That evening, one of the senior leaders came to talk to me. He walked me out of the meeting place, through an old beat-up door with a half-broken light hanging down outside it. We walked out into the night and sat on a large stone outside the meeting place. He turned to me and said, "Brother K.P., all the teams are gone. Only five or six individuals are left. You are one of them. Nobody wants you."

I was totally shaken by that. I didn't have anything to say. He didn't tell me this in a nice, cozy living room with us sitting on comfortable chairs. There were no stars shining in the sky; it was a dark night. We just sat on a rock outside. He didn't put his arm around my shoulders to comfort me. He simply said, "Your pride, your arrogance is the reason." Then he got up and walked away.

I sat there for a long time. My whole world had collapsed.

The next few days I said to myself over and over again, "I will never preach again. I will never teach again. I don't ever want to do ministry again. Nobody wants me. They don't understand how much I have done

for them. They donâ€™t know how hard I have worked.â€• For days I was like this.

Then God, in His mercy and grace, came through and told me, â€œWhat he said is true. It is your pride, your stiff neck and your unwillingness to bend.â€•

By His grace, I had the courage to look back over the past months and years on the teams I had been a part of and realize how impossible to live with I had becomeâ€” hard-hearted, argumentative and always thinking my way was best. No matter what the leaders suggested, I took a different approach. I had a different idea of how to do it. Regardless of what the argument was, I always sought to win. And most times, I got it my way.

That was the first time I can distinctly remember knowing the need to embrace the cross. I began to understand then that my worst enemy was my own stubborn, unbroken life.

Since then, many more times I have gone through similar experiences. That one time was not the end.

Wherever we are, wherever the Lord has placed us, we need to be sensitive to not resisting brokenness in our lives, ultimately delaying the good work He is trying to fulfill in us. The only person that can delay Godâ€™s promise in your life is youâ€”by resisting His breaking.

Jacobâ€™s life is a classic example of this resistance.

Donâ€™t Delay!

In Genesis 25:23, God gives the promise concerning Jacob and his older brother, Esau, before they were even born: â€œThe older shall serve the younger.â€• Godâ€™s promise was there from the beginning.

But despite that fact, Jacob lived his life trying to fulfill the promise through his own scheming and clever plans. What a man he was! He was bold enough and clever enough to steal his brotherâ€™s birthright and trick his father into blessing him instead of Esau.

Because of the tension now between him and his brother, Jacob fled to his uncle Labanâ€™s house for safety. While en route, he had a dream in which he saw the angels ascending and descending. God promised to make Jacobâ€™s descendants great and to bless him and bring him back to his homeland. But still, Jacob wanted to do things his own way. He bargained with God, saying, â€œIf youâ€™ll let me just continue in the way I am going and keep me safe and feed me, then when I come back I will build a temple for You. I will give tithesâ€” (paraphrase, see Genesis 28:20â€”22).

He still would not give up his own ways. He still would not break.

When he finally reached his uncle Labanâ€™s house, he soon discovered he was a man twice as conniving as himself. The medicine Jacob had dished out to his brother and his father was now returned to him a hundredfold. For 14 years he labored under his uncle, still scheming and planning to increase his wealth in his own way. God was trying to use Laban to break Jacob, but still he resisted.

Sick and tired of living with Laban, Jacob decided it was time to leave. So with all his livestock, his wife and children, he ran from his uncle, planning to return home.

While on his way, he heard that Esau was coming out to meet them. Afraid of what Esauâ€™s reaction might be, Jacob, still scheming and relying on his own ways, sent his servants, livestock, wives and children ahead of himself to meet Esau. He reasoned that if they got killed, at least he would still be safe. He was still looking after his own interests. He was still unwilling to give everything to God and let Him work it out. He still would not surrender.

Finally, after 20 years of running in his own strength, in his own cleverness, in his own scheming and planning and plotting, all by himself and out in the desert, he met God.

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacobâ€™s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, â€œLet Me go, for the day breaks.â€• But he said, â€œI will not let You go unless You bless me!â€• So He said to him, â€œWhat is your name?â€• He said, â€œJacob.â€• And He said, â€œYour name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailedâ€” (Genesis 32:24â€”28).

How can anyone wrestle with God and win? It reminds me of when my son, Daniel, was a little boy. I used to wrestle with him, and he would win every match.

This seems to be how God does it with us. He lets us win, but not the way we want to win. After wrestling with God, Jacob was not the same. He became a cripple; from then on he walked with a limp. But he won that night because he admitted who he wasâ€”Jacob, meaning schemer and deceiverâ€”and finally let God break him.

Once a friend of mine called from overseas, dealing with a situation in which he was trying to work things out with his own planning and scheming, not realizing God was trying to break him.

Troubled by a situation in which he was being taken advantage of, my friend, according to the law, could rightfully press charges and bring justice to his situation.

When I heard him leaning toward this route, my response was one of shock. â€œI am surprised that you would even think those thoughts!â€• I said. â€œYour safety is not in any of these things. It is in the Lord. Why must you fight for your rights? The Bible says when the Levitesâ€™ rights were taken away, their properties were taken away, their houses were taken away, and their lands were taken away, they gave it up gladly and never went after it. That is the way you should be following.â€•

This is a modern-day example of how we can delay the Lordâ€™s work of brokenness in our lives by our own

planning and scheming. Thank God my friend saw this to be the correct response and used this situation as an opportunity to walk in humility and let the Lord be his defender.

In each of our lives, the Lord brings us Labans and difficult circumstancesâ€”either financial setbacks, failures, sickness, and so onâ€”to break us. Through these things, God is continually trying to break usâ€”not to destroy us, but to bless us. Only after the cross comes the resurrection. Only after the cross comes glory.

Other Hindrances

The work of brokenness is a beautiful thing. It causes our lives to become the sweet fragrance before God that it was intended to be. But we can also delay the work of brokenness by not realizing that God is the One working behind the difficult scenes of our lives.

When God brings pressure from circumstances, people or whatever else, many live in total darkness, not recognizing that God is at work. We blame our circumstances, people, our past and everything around us. We are blind to the fact that God is allowing these things.

This was the case with Jonah. He was a clever individual. He ran from God, refusing to preach to the people who were killing his countrymen. Yet when the storm came that tossed him into the belly of the fish, he began to realize Godâ€™s hand in his circumstances. Sitting in the belly of the fish, Jonah acknowledged that God was playing a major role in his situationâ€”â€œFor You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over meâ€” (Jonah 2:3, emphasis added).

What about you and the struggles and problems you face? I think it would be good to stop blaming circumstances and people and say, â€œLord, You are allowing this for a purpose.â€” All things work together for our good so we may become like Jesus (see Romans 8:28â€”29). When we truly believe this we can rest, knowing that God is the One orchestrating the events of our lives. It is His plan, and we learn to bend our neck and receive His yoke.

This causes us to become less frustrated with circumstances and people and everything else. When we look up and recognize that He is behind it all, His grace and peace enter our lives.

With all the decision making in my life, I often have to pause, look up and remember God is the One working behind the scenes. I say to myself, â€œHe is able to work all things out for good. I just need to submit to Him and His ways. I can rest.â€”

Another way we can delay the work of brokenness in our lives is by our self-love.

We may know that God is working in the difficult circumstances but still want our own way. Self-love always delays the process of brokenness.

There are many reasons why we may want our own way, even after recognizing what God may be trying to work into us. You may say, â€œI have been hurt before and I learned my lesson. I need to protect myself. Iâ€™m not going to open my heart to anyone.â€”

Maybe youâ€™re like Jonah, saying, â€œI am not going to preach to a Nineveh. I am not going to return to a place where they beat me up and profaned Your name.â€”

Or maybe you are more like the prodigal sonâ€™s brother, saying, â€œI am not going to accept my Fatherâ€™s love and forgiveness and celebrate with that prodigal brother who is undeserving. I am not going to keep loving and praying and hurting for my church when they donâ€™t appreciate me.â€”

You can say and do all these things. You can put yourself first and love and protect yourself. And you will remain intact and horribly unbroken.

C.S. Lewis said,

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casketâ€”safe, dark, motionless, airlessâ€”it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. . . . The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love . . . is Hell.¹

There are many other things that can also hinder usâ€”our own pride, self-sufficiency, lack of faith and fear. We can be so consumed with what others think of us when we do humble ourselves, that we forget the good fruit that comes from being broken, fruit that far outweighs all we could fear. We could be afraid to fully abandon ourselves to God, in the fear that He will not prove true and weâ€™ll be left out on our own. But we must believe in the goodness of the Lord. God is good. He is always faithful. His plans for us and the work He does in us are always for our benefit. He is the Good Shepherd and knows best. His heart toward us is always good. We can trust Him.

What situations in your life is God trying to use to help break you? Are you aware of the work He is doing within you and in your daily circumstances? Are you willing to let go and allow Him to have His perfect way in your life?

Notes:

1 C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Florida: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), p. 121.