

If It's Broken, It Must Be Mine

by Andrew Stenhouse

We were driving home from the Grand Canyon, trying to determine which soda belonged to whom, when my youngest daughter claimed hers by identifying the straw. She explained how she would bend and break the tips of all her straws in order to mark her drinks. *If it's broken, it must be mine.*

I could relate. I felt as if everything I touched had broken. If something was broken most likely I had been there to break it. There was a trail of broken things behind me—opportunities, dreams, aspirations and people. As the girls slept in total silence, I drove on through the Arizona desert and reflected on my daughter's mark of ownership: brokenness.

My dreams were broken. I was broken. And all my friends knew it. I shared King David's lament from Psalm 31:11-12. "I am a dread to my friends—those who see me on the streets flee from me. I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery." That was exactly how I felt, like broken pottery.

Here I was on another vacation with my daughters, watching other families in their cars occupying the seats the way they do in the TV commercials; Dad, Mom, the kids in the back. It seemed that mine was the only car on the road with no one sitting in the front passenger's seat. I felt

alone. I felt sad. A dad, two daughters and a dog; something was missing. Something was broken. I slowly nodded my head and admitted, *If it's broken, it must be mine.*

Were my dreams really broken though, or was I simply disappointed because things had not turned out as I had hoped they would? Perhaps my dreams were really just altered. Since that trip I have often pondered these two questions: Is it really broken? Or is it really altered?

Is it really broken?

It can be many things; a career, a relationship, a family, a dream. *It*, like most things, can usually break. But is it really broken? Sometimes it is. Sometimes it is utterly destroyed and irreparable, and we must admit the loss, hurt a while, grieve and heal. Other times, it's not really broken.

Occasionally when I think something is broken I later discover that I just didn't understand it. One time I bought a treadmill and couldn't wait to use it, so I immediately plugged it in and turned it on. Nothing. I called the store and told them they had just delivered a broken treadmill and they needed to send someone out immediately to replace it. They encouraged me to read the instructions and call them back if it was still broken. (I got the feeling I wasn't the first person who had placed such a call.) Of course I

found out that it did in fact work. I had simply failed to insert the safety key. It wasn't broken after all. I had just failed to fully understand it.

We are often overwhelmed by the moment and fail to understand the much larger picture. We then conclude that our dreams are completely destroyed. When talking to a friend of mine about the broken life that I had ended up with rather than the life I had dreamed of, I told him that I was a family man without a family.

He tired of my self-pity and told me so. "First of all, your life isn't over yet, so stop talking about how it has ended up. Secondly, you have a beautiful family. You have two wonderful daughters. What you don't have is a wife, but you do have a family. Don't get the two confused!"

He was right. While my marriage was broken, my family was only altered.

Is it really altered?

While the death of a loved one or a marriage is always tragic, I do believe that God can provide peace after the storm, and good things can emerge from tragedies. Having experienced the tragic death of a sister and a divorce within months of each other, I grew weary of the perky-chirpy advice I received from many about turning lemons into lemonade. I did, however, deeply appreciate the wise few who had experienced similar pain

and patiently encouraged me to allow time to heal. One wise friend said to me, “God will make this up to you. I promise.” He was right. God has.

Occasionally when something appears to break, it isn't totally destroyed but only altered and can actually become more useful than before. In the movie *Cast Away*, Tom Hank's character, Chuck Noland, is trying to break open a coconut with a rock. The rock shatters. Moviegoers can easily see the despair on his face until he realizes he is now holding a sharp-edged blade rather than a bulky blunt rock. His broken rock had become a much more functional tool. It wasn't broken at all but was instead altered and more useful. Sometimes *it* breaks enough to be more useful. And sometimes we are *it*. We become wiser, more sensitive, more understanding, more pliable and more willing to rely completely on God.

I have been surprised to learn how many people have experienced the same brokenness I had. I have been comforted by others before me and have been a comfort to those after me. We all share a common journey and eventually better understand the bends and turns of the paths we have been on. We know that things do break, and we must let healing happen. We learn that God will make it up to us. We read the Psalms now and better understand King David when he wrote “Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again” (Psalm 71:20).

As I drove, I remembered the countless sermons about God reshaping and remolding broken vessels that He would ultimately use for His glory. I remembered all the books I had read about the importance of total submission to God, being broken and humble before Him. I remembered the verses I had memorized since childhood reminding me that Christ came to provide hope and to heal the broken.

I remembered many things during that long quiet drive as my daughters slept in the car. I particularly remember a paraphrase of Matthew 9: 12. It is not the whole who need the healer, but the broken.

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