

Broken To His Likeness

From “A Small Book about God” by Roy Hicks Jr.

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In your moment of brokenness, Jesus asks “Do you love me?”

Every child of God lives in a state of tension, of waiting, and of longing. Something is happening inside you – something beyond your control. In your spirit, you sense that you’re in motion, you’re on your way somewhere – and even though you’re not quite there yet, you want it oh, so desperately.

The Apostle Paul describes this state of tension as an “inward groaning” – in fact; he said all creation groans with us, like a woman in the pangs of childbirth. What we are describing is a birthing process. You are in the process of being remade from the inside out.

Simply put, God is making each of us over, making us new so that we look like Someone else. We are being “conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he (Jesus) might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29, NIV). When the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit first said, “Let us make man in our image,” their intention was to create a human race that would share a beautiful and single family likeness. And God’s creative plan has never changed.

Right now, at this very moment, your process of *becoming* is in motion. God is always at work. Little, insignificant things, or large, all-consuming things – each one is being used by Him to make you more like Jesus. What you experience as a difficult situation or a challenging relationship, God wants to use to conform you into the image of His Son – so that Jesus Christ can be the firstborn among many.

God is up to something in your life: He wants to remake you in His likeness so that He can accomplish your true destiny by the power and authority that comes from His nature.

Imagine a man who has been so conformed to Jesus’ image that just by knowing him the people he comes in contact with every day – his wife, his children, men and women at work – discover God and their own individual potential.

Imagine a woman who, by her relationship with God through Jesus Christ, is released to become the person she was originally designed to be. She has no need to contend for her rights. She already has authority – she mirrors the Person of Christ. And every life she touches is changed for the better.

This man and woman demonstrate God’s plan as set from the beginning. His calling on our lives is to live out Jesus Christ’s likeness and power in our world. It is our destiny. It’s what all the waiting and groaning are about. It’s where we are headed – if we will let God’s remaking process go on completion in our lives.

The Process of Becoming

In this wonderful process of becoming like Jesus, God accomplishes His plans for each of us in three primary ways. I describe them as the *making*, the *shaping*, and the *breaking* of the man or woman of God.

The principal tool in the *making* is God's call or assignment for you – whatever task He has placed in your life. It is God's gift and purpose for you. Think of Joseph or David or of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Their unique lives grew out of their unique callings.

God always gives us something to do that we can't accomplish on our own. It's always just slightly beyond the reach of our human skills. Yet embracing this impossible destiny is the first step in becoming like Christ.

After you have accepted God's invitation, His *shaping* of you begins. The Word of God is the principal tool He uses to direct and define your life so that you are equipped for accomplishing the assignment God has given you. When I say the Word, I'm not only referring to the Bible, but also to God's daily voice in your life. This eternal and personal – and very dynamic – Word of God brings definition and motivation to your decisions.

Ask, "What has God been saying to me in the last two weeks?" You're His chosen child, and you've responded to His high mission for your life – why wouldn't He be in nearly constant conversation with you? If you can't identify a personal word that God has been using to penetrate your defenses; if you can't think of any affirming, confirming, or confronting work of God in your life, then you're not being shaped. Let me assure you that when God speaks to you, you will know it. And let me further assure you that the Lord is faithful to speak. When He speaks, our privilege is to respond to His shaping touch: He speaks, He prompts, He presses, and He pleads. We hear, we respond, we follow, we exclaim, "Yes, Lord!"

Through this tender yet powerful dynamic, our life takes on a different look. We become more like Christ. God is leading us to our destiny. He is at work transforming our very being.

The third way that God changes us is through *breaking*, a process that's often misunderstood. Of course, it sounds pretty negative: "I love you so much I'm going to break you!" Not exactly something you'd go looking for.

But God's way of breaking is different from the pain, destruction, or waste that first comes to mind when we think about breaking. What does it mean to be broken in God's economy? God's way of breaking corrects, adjusts, releases. It allows for new life to invade our routines – and for us to escape our hard-shelled, impoverished existence. God's way of breaking is not intended to hurt – although we will probably experience pain. God's intention through breaking is for healing, redeeming, freedom, and newness of life.

In all my years of ministry, I've never met a man or a woman who is becoming like Jesus Christ who has not been, or is not being, broken.

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Consider the big picture: You understand the call God has placed on your life. You begin to move toward your destiny. As you do, God begins shaping you as you listen for and heed His voice. But now

that you have committed yourself to God's agenda, you are also vulnerable to it. Remember that His whole purpose is to conform you to the image of His Son. But I must tell you that once you sign on to God's purpose, you will be broken.

Why? Every single one of us has something in us that cannot be healed. It has to be broken. Whatever this "something" in you is, you can't be delivered from it, healed of it, or empowered to resist it. This something in us is what philosophers call the sin of hubris. Greeks understood hubris to be ambitious pride in one's own goodness that scorns any higher divine moral order. You see, a man's hubris isn't an ambition for evil but for good. Hubris is unfailingly sincere and well intentioned. Hubris has all the outward marks of righteousness and goodness – and a heart of utter arrogance.

And that's the terrible thing. Hubris is the deadliest kind of pride because it first appears to be goodness. In the act of trying so diligently to be and do good – to say, "I'm going to be like Jesus" – hubris becomes the ultimate lie.

It takes the *life of Jesus* to live the life of Jesus. We lie to ourselves and others when we strive for righteousness in our own strength when we are merely human. No matter how hard we try, or how much goodness or energy or skill we bring to the effort, we'll never pull it off. But, oh, how we like to try.

Caught in Love

The man in the Scriptures who best illustrates the sin of hubris is Simon Peter. He is like us, making all the commitments and confessions that make us proud to be members of the human race. Peter is absolutely sincere, completely genuine, without guile. His motives are pure. His insights are stunning. When he declares, "Lord, You're the only one who has the words of life," we know he's seen the light while the rest of the disciples are still in the dark. Alone, he knows that Jesus is the Son of the Living God. Later when he says, "They may do that, but I never will!" we believe him completely.

And why shouldn't we?" Peter is as good as it gets. That's why we're just as stunned as Peter when Jesus says to this prince of a man, "You're going to betray me three times." Jesus goes on to say, "Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31-32). Clearly, Jesus knows a breaking will come for Peter – and He allows it.

How easy it is to trust God to a point – then balk when we realize He may allow Satan to test us. But Jesus Christ, who is no respecter of persons, will let every one of His loved ones go through seasons of testing. The same dazzling and terrible disease of hubris that affected Peter – "I can pull it off – the rest of them can't, but watch me!" – infects us too.

A number of years ago, startling revelations of sexual immorality and financial scandals came out in the newspapers about several of our better-known media evangelists. Many of us said, "I've made my mistakes, but I would *never* do that!" But the proper response when we're confronted with one who has failed Jesus Christ utterly is to admit, "I could do that too."

Live with the discomfort of those words. Struggle with the simple ugliness of them. Because what was in Peter is in you. You cannot be like Jesus Christ without the life of Jesus Christ. Better to come to the place where you confess, "I don't want to fail like that, Lord. But if I don't have You, I will fail."

The deep transformation into God's likeness doesn't begin and end here. God will let Satan have access to your life – so that you can discover it is impossible to carry out your promises without His

power. Yet the principal tool in the breaking of a man or woman of God is not his or her failure or sin, or even any terrible circumstance that might befall. For a clue to what I mean, let's look closely at the conversation Peter had with the Lord after he denied ever knowing Jesus.

After His death and resurrection, Jesus began making appearances throughout Jerusalem and the Galilee region. In fact, He was with Peter twice without bringing up that dark, dark night when Peter horribly failed the Lord. This silence on the part of Jesus led Peter deeper into his own discouragement and sense of failure.

Peter finally concluded that he would never be able to follow Jesus and decided to return to what he knew best – fishing. Peter persuaded a few of his buddies to go along and set off for the Sea of Galilee. Of course, we discover in John 21 that the very thing he felt confident enough to do, he couldn't do either. All night long Peter fished – and came up with nothing.

At dawn, a voice came over the water, "Throw the net on the other side!" You can almost hear Peter grumbling, "Somebody's *always* telling me what to do!" Reluctantly, he hauled in the net and threw it over the other side. John records that the net filled with 153 big fish. Not sardines – big fish! Maybe that's when John started studying the shoreline to find out the identity of the mystery fishing guide. Soon he jabbed Peter in the ribs. "It's the Lord!" he blurted out.

Peter looked at the figure walking on the beach, then jumped into the water and started swimming to shore. When the boat pulled in, he singlehandedly dragged the bulging net ashore. I imagine that under the surface of all Peter's hyperactivity was guilt, terrible frustration, and an enormous desire to restore himself in the eyes of Jesus. Yet when he finally hauled in the catch and stood on the beach dripping wet and exhausted, Peter discovered that the Lord *already had* fish – and was preparing him breakfast.

There in the presence of Jesus, the remarkable conversation began. "Peter, do you love Me?" I sense Peter thinking, *Good, an easy one!* "Yes," he said to Jesus. A dramatic pause. Then Jesus asked again, simply and gently, "Peter, do you love me?" I imagine Peter thinking, *Did I miss something?* Possible a quiet rage began to build. *Okay, I blew it*, he thought, trying to swallow his punishment. *I deserve this. Here it comes. Let's just get it over with.* And Jesus asked the third time, "Peter, do you truly love me?" Then it all came apart in Peter. "Lord, you know everything! You know where 153 big fish are! You know I love you! You know I've failed." Only then could Jesus give back to Peter His purpose in life, "Peter, follow me. Love my lambs. Feed my sheep."

Can you see it? Word by word, glance by glance, Jesus is making, shaping, and breaking Peter. Right before our eyes, we see our loving Lord at work. Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, lovingly took a proud, foolish, sincere Peter (so much like us, don't you think?) and brought him a huge step closer to Jesus' own beautiful likeness.

The Savior who Intervenes

Think with me now about the tool God used in the breaking of Peter – and uses as well in us. It's not His love for us that breaks our heart, though that is a compelling part of our relationship with the Lord. What breaks your heart and mine is being forced to recognize that even though we have failed Him miserably, we genuinely do love Him. *We love Him desperately, and we can't pull it off without Him.*

Colliding with this truth is what breaks the sin of hubris. We have failed Him – only to discover that He doesn't want to talk about our failures. He wants to talk about our love.

We're taught that if we really love, we won't do certain things. Or if we do certain things, then we don't really love. "You told me you loved me," a forlorn daughter wails to her father, "but that must not be true because you left!" "You made a commitment to me," a man tells his estranged wife, "but that love and that affection can't be genuine because if it were genuine, you wouldn't have done that."

That's how we think. When loyalty is breached, when failure occurs, we automatically take away all of the value that might be there. We say that the two can't possibly coexist – failure and love together.

But they can. It's possible to terribly deny the Lord and still deeply love the Savior. That's what makes men and women weep bitter tears. In our brush with sin and death, we have discovered our mortality. We finally have accepted the truth that no matter how honest and good our commitments are, we don't have the strength to pull them off alone.

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In your moment of brokenness, Jesus sets the stage to intervene in your life, to give you the chance in the face of your failure to say, "I do love You, Lord." Only Jesus can do this, just as He did with Peter. Only He can put you back on the road of living the life God intended. He comes to you in these moments of failure as you confess your love, and says to you, as He did to Peter, "All right, then. I want you to do something important. Even though you failed me, you say you love Me. I believe you. So here's an assignment."

Wherever you are in the making, the shaping, or the breaking process, you are headed toward His likeness. He desires that you not only arrive at your full potential but are in a position to release others around you to reach their potential as well. Of course, there are no shortcuts in this remaking journey. And birthing always involves pain.

But there needn't be any uncertainty either. Until the day when you see Jesus face to face, your faithful God will be conforming you – calling you to His very likeness.