

Praise for *The Broken Way*

What you need to know about Ann Voskamp: after the stunning success of *One Thousand Gifts*, she has chosen to decline the mantle of spiritual guru and instead to become even more intimately vulnerable. In this book, she helps us slow down, stop time, and allow gritty faith to penetrate, expose, and bring the hint of healing to the mess of daily life. For all imperfect people—in other words, for all of us—she offers a compassionate and wise way forward to help navigate our broken world.

PHILIP YANCEY, editor-at-large, *Christianity Today*

In *The Broken Way*, a deeply personal revelation, Ann Voskamp leads us on a journey toward embracing and celebrating the brokenness in each of us. The passionate words that pour from her soul will make you weep and shout hallelujah at the same time.

KAY WARREN, Saddleback Church,
Lake Forest, California

There are only a handful of authors in the whole world who I try to find and read every last word they've ever written. Ann Voskamp is one of those. *The Broken Way* is no exception, as Ann does what she does best—articulating the incredible grace of Jesus in a profound way that makes all of us go YES! but had no words for before. This must-read book will give life to any weary soul.

JEFFERSON BETHKE, *New York Times* bestselling
author of *Jesus > Religion* and *It's Not What You Think*

Ann Voskamp is convincing that there is nothing broken that cannot be restored by making the living Christ present. She provides a stunningly fresh treatment of a subject so often littered with clichés. My favorite phrase is, “Fight back the dark with doxology . . . doxology can detox the day.”

EUGENE H. PETERSON, emeritus professor of
spiritual theology, Regent College, Vancouver, BC

I read *The Broken Way* with tears streaming down my face, my spirit crying out, “YES, YES, YES, YES!” Few authors have impacted my own life like Ann Voskamp. If we can live out the truth contained within *The Broken Way*, I believe we will reach and impact our generation like never before. So powerful. So prophetic. So profound. Please read this book.

CHRISTINE CAINE, founder of A21 and Propel Women

The Broken Way is the most honest and beautiful healing balm for an aching heart. The authenticity and grace from which Ann Voskamp writes are refreshing and life-giving. This book is a true gift from God!

LYSA TERKEURST, *New York Times* bestselling
author and president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

Ann Voskamp’s skill with words, her tenderness with hearts—it is incomparable. Life can leave us looking for an exit, a window. Ann has a hand on the curtain. She has a way of releasing light, just enough to chase shadows and give hope.

MAX LUCADO, pastor and bestselling author

Most of us want to run away from our brokenness. Ann Voskamp runs right into it, sharing the shattered pieces of her own life to help us acknowledge the shards we may be sifting through. Ann helps us see God's good purpose in all of it, and how He guides us, not around the pain, but through it. Beautifully written, *The Broken Way* offers a generous measure of hope, filled with Ann's tender honesty and God's powerful truth.

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS, bestselling author
of *Bad Girls of the Bible*

In the way only she can, Ann Voskamp invites us to discover that the whole life begins in our brokenness. Ann knows what it means to be broken. She knows what it means to have scars. This isn't her theory; it's her heartbeat. Lean in to this book, and listen for it.

LAUREN CHANDLER, singer/songwriter
and author of *Steadfast Love*

Ann Voskamp penetrates the soul with words that arrest us, convict us, and compel us to the arms of our Father. Ann Voskamps come along once in a generation. We best pay attention.

GABE LYONS, author of *Good Faith*

THE BROKEN WAY

A Daring Path into the Abundant Life

ANN VOSKAMP



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The Broken Way

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*To Mine . . . who never gave up on the broken—
and to every single one who carries
their own unspoken broken—
these pages had to be for you—
the tracing of scars.*

Contents

ONE

What to Do with Your One Broken Heart / 11

TWO

Re-Membering Your Broken Pieces / 27

THREE

When You Want to Exchange Your Brokenness / 39

FOUR

How to Break Time in Two / 53

FIVE

Becoming the Gift the World Needs—and You Need / 65

SIX

What's Even Better than a Bucket List / 81

SEVEN

Love Is a Roof for All Our Brokenness / 99

EIGHT

Why Love Is Worth Breaking Your Heart / 113

NINE

The Miracle in Your Pocket That Breaks Stress / 123

TEN

How to Passionately Love When Your Heart's Breaking / 131

ELEVEN

Breaking into Being Real / 141

TWELVE

Breaking Your Brokenness / 155

THIRTEEN

The Inconvenient Truth No One Tells You / 163

FOURTEEN

Breaking the Lies in Your Head / 179

FIFTEEN

How to be an Esther and Break a Thousand Gates / 195

SIXTEEN

When It Comes to Wooing God and Healing Wounds / 211

SEVENTEEN

How to Find the Heroes in a Suffering World / 223

EIGHTEEN

Why You Don't Have to Be Afraid to Be Broken / 243

Epilogue / 267

Acknowledgments / 273

Bible Translations Cited / 276

Notes / 277

One

What to Do with Your One Broken Heart



*The very thing we are afraid of, our brokenness,
is the door to our Father's heart.*

PAUL MILLER

The day I cut up the inner softness of my arm with a shard of glass, the whole thick weight of hell's pressing against my chest.

A mourning dove coos from the top of the lilac tree right outside the back door. West of the barn, my dad had yanked the steering wheel of that old International tractor, geared the engine down, and turned at the end of the field.

And I had stood, out on the back porch, all of sixteen, and let go of those glass jars. Dozens of them. I stood with broken glass shattered around my feet. No one could tell me how to get the dark, the fear, the ache, the hell out of me. No one could tell me how to find the place where you always felt safe and secure and held. Kneeling, I'd picked up one of the shards, dragged its sharp edge across my skin, relieved by the red line slowly seeping up, like you could drain yourself out of pain. I'd try to cut my way through the hurt down to the core of things. Who doesn't know what it's like to smile thinly and say you're fine when you're not, when you're almost faint with

The Broken Way

pain? There isn't one of us not bearing the wounds from our own bloody battles.

There isn't one of us who isn't cut right from the beginning.

All of us get pushed from safe wombs out into this holy mess. All of us need someone to catch us and hold us right from the beginning, and for one sacred moment, every single one of us is cupped. And then they cut that one thick umbilical cord. You can spend a lifetime feeling pushed out, cut off, abandoned—inexplicably alone.

What in God's holy name do you do when it feels like you're broken and cut up, and love has failed, and you've failed, and you feel like Somebody's love has failed you?

Dad had just kept breaking open the earth, just kept planting wheat seeds, thousands of them. They grew.

The wheat across the fields to the west waits in willing surrender.

Later, he'd cut down the harvest. I never once told him how I cut. Never once told him how, in that moment when the jars shatter, when the shimmer of glass slides through your skin, there's this exhaling moment when you feel the relief of not hiding anymore. Not acting, not for one more mocking minute that everything is just bloody fine.

I knelt down and held the shards in my hand and turned the edges over.

Not one thing in your life is more important than figuring out how to live in the face of unspoken pain.

It may have been more than two decades since my cutting throughout my teens, but standing there in the kitchen this older, more battle weary, more broken woman, looking out over wheat fields of our own, I'm overwhelmed by how my skin's starved again for the cutting, for the breaking edge of

What to Do with Your One Broken Heart

glass again. How my wrists want to feel that sharp, bleeding relief and hemorrhage out of all this pain.

And that's the razor edge of things right there: Our oldest daughter, she's just laid it all out in stark details, how intimately familiar she is with the very same struggle and strangle of silent anxiety and lies of unworthiness that I've spent my entire life wrestling. I feel a door opening on my very own private nightmare, and I'm kinda gaping just to breathe. *Keep holding on to the edge of the counter, keep trying to stand, keep trying to figure out how to hold on and let go.* Feeling the weight of your failure feels worse than taking a knife to your own pulpy heart. When you somehow pass your brokenness onto your own people, why does it hurt in a way physical pain never could? And for weeks, I've been falling hard in hidden ways, in ways I can't even find words to speak out loud, and seen the depth of my own brokenness in ways I would never have imagined. There's this ember that's burning up my throat. The wheat's bending into the wind, moving with the wind. *I don't know the way out of all this.*

I've changed. Life's changed and I've changed and five years ago I didn't know how to love or to feel love, had to count all the ways, a thousand ways, that God always loves me so I could even begin to learn how to let myself be loved—and somehow along the way, brushing up against hurting people and stories and places, I've changed into this woman who's embraced a love so large it's broken my heart in a thousand aching places. *Don't we all want to change? What do you do when it feels like everything's changed?* It's a strange thing to find out your heart can explode with love and suffering and find out they're kin in ways we don't care to admit. *I don't know the way to put all these broken pieces back into place. Maybe that's the point?*

NOT ONE THING
IN YOUR LIFE
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THAN FIGURING OUT
HOW TO LIVE
IN THE FACE OF
UNSPOKEN PAIN.



What to Do with Your One Broken Heart

Maybe this broken way is making something new. *He is making all things new.*

So how do you silence the demon-lies that won't stop crawling up the sides of your mind and really believe that? How do you bind up the slow bleeding of your one broken heart and still believe wounded warriors win, still believe that there is no remission of sins or the crossing of finish lines without things getting downright bloody, still believe that scars and wounds and broken places might become you and become who you are? And maybe this is how all the brokenhearted misfits finally fit. All I can feel is this unspoken brokenness splintering through me. What do you do if you're struggling to remember who you really are?

I'm not enough for any of this.

Not enough for anything I'm doing, for anything I am facing, for anyone I am facing. *Not enough for my life.*

Standing here in the kitchen, looking out at the wheat fields, I don't know there will be this funeral and coffin coming. That there will be this diagnosis coming that would stick its face in ours and we'd never get to turn away. That even more desperately broken parenting days were coming. But I know a mother's labor and delivery never ends, and you have to keep remembering to breathe.

I couldn't know yet the way to the higher up and deeper in and that vulnerability would beg me to just break open and let trust in. *Let the abundance of God in.*

I just know that—old scars can break open like fresh wounds and your unspoken broken can start to rip you wide open and maybe the essence of all the questions is: how in the holy name of God do you live with your one broken heart?

Cutting the thin whites of my inner arms through my gangly teen years was this silent scream for bloody answers.

The Broken Way

Cora-Beth Martin, she'd cut her wrists on the sharp edge of the paper towel dispenser at the school, rubbing her wrists back and forth, wild for a way to get away from that old guy rubbing himself up against her in the locked dark every night.

Ema Winters, she'd stopped eating. Maybe if she didn't open her mouth, the pain wouldn't get in and the ache of everything would waste away off her bones.

I'd sat in some counselor's sticky office on a hot June afternoon, twisting this bent-up high school ring round and round my knuckle, watched her lean forward, her stringy brown hair falling like a veil, and heard her say point-blank that I showed all the symptoms of suffering enmeshment and emotional abuse, the words punching hard up into my diaphragm, and I can only shake my head. *No. No. No.* Every breath hurts along all the gravel roads home. If I don't inhale, that woman's words can't get to me. I park the pickup out by the barn and rummage through the garbage bin, desperate for a jar.

For the smooth skin of my inner arm.

Dad always said that the day my little sister was killed, the Terpstras had their John Deere tractor plowing the field right across from the house, breaking up the earth. Right across from where we'd watched that delivery truck knock her over like some flimsy pylon and crush her, us standing there like impotent shadows, watching her ebb away. Dad said they'd just kept breaking up the earth, when his world had stopped dead. He said he'd wanted to break their necks for not stopping and getting off that tractor, when he could do nothing to save the broken body of his little girl or find a way out of the brokenness cutting up this world. Sometimes you can feel the crush of it on your brittle rib cage. Great grief isn't made to fit inside your body. It's why your heart breaks. If you haven't felt this yet, it may be, God forbid, that someday you will.

What to Do with Your One Broken Heart

There's absolutely no tidy pattern as to who gets pain and who gets peace. How had I not seen that the brokenness of this world is so all-encompassing that it encompasses all of us?

The wheat stands behind the orchard, turning itself into pure gold.

This is the deal we all get: guaranteed suffering. We all get it. It is coming, unstoppable, like time.

There are graves coming, there is dark coming, there is heartbreak coming. We are not in control, and we never were. One moment you're picking up balls of crusty dirty socks strewn across the bedroom floor, and the next moment you're picking up the pieces of your one shattered life.

How do you live with your one broken heart?

All the wheat looks like an onyx sea. The trees at the edge of the field reach up like a lyric scratched across the sky. It's like that line of Hugo's from *Les Misérables*: "There is one spectacle grander than the sea, that is the sky; there is one spectacle grander than the sky, that is the interior of the soul."¹ *How does the interior of your soul live with broken things, through broken things?*

Jesus died crying.

Jesus died of a broken heart. Those words were still warm on His cracked lips: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"² The movement of a life of faith is always toward answering that singular question. Read the headlines. Read the obituaries. Read people's eyes. Isn't the essence of the Christian life to answer that one, nail-sharp question: *God, why in this busted-up world have You abandoned me?*

I can see that question hanging over our farm table, up in the gable, from that framed canvas of a thousand little broken squares of color. In the semiabstract painting, there's no tidy

The Broken Way

pattern, just light and dark bleeding into this subtle suggestion of Jesus hanging on the cross. He's hoarse with the begging, for Himself, for us: "God, why have You abandoned me?" And He surfaces in the patches of color, the broken brushstrokes, the silhouette of Him visible in the chaos—Christ entering all this chaos.

There is the truth: Blessed—lucky—are those who cry. Blessed are those who are sad, who mourn, who feel the loss of what they love—because they will be held by the One who loves them. There is a strange and aching happiness only the hurting know—for they shall be held.

And, by God, we're the hurting beggars begging: Be close to the brokenhearted. Save the crushed in spirit. Somehow make suffering turn this evil against itself, so that a greater life rises from the dark. *God, somehow.*

I was eighteen, with scars across my wrists, when I'd heard a pastor tell a whole congregation that he had once "lived next to a loony bin." I'd looked at the floor when everyone laughed. They didn't know how I had left my only mama behind the locked doors of psychiatric wards more than a few times. When they laughed, I felt the blood drain away from my face, and I'd wanted to stand up and howl, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."³

I'd wanted to stand up and beg: *When the church isn't for the suffering and broken, then the church isn't for Christ.* Because Jesus, with His pierced side, is always on the side of the broken. Jesus always moves into places moved with grief. Jesus always seeks out where the suffering is, and that's where Jesus stays. The wound in His side proves that Jesus is always on the side of the suffering, the wounded, the busted, the broken.

I believed this then and believe it now and I'd say I know

What to Do with Your One Broken Heart

it to be true—but there is more than believing—there is living what you believe. *Do I really?*

What I wanted that Sunday when I was eighteen, sitting in a church of laughter mocking the hurting, was for all the broken to say it together, as one body, to say it for the hurting and broken and to say it to each other, because there is not even one of us who hasn't lost something, who doesn't fear something, who doesn't ache with some unspoken pain. I wanted us to say it to each other until it is the bond of a promise we cannot break:

The body of Christ doesn't offer you some clichés, but something to cling to—right here in our own scarred hands.

His body doesn't offer some platitudes, but some place for your pain—right here in our own offered time.

His body doesn't offer some excuses, but we'll be an example—right here in our bending down and washing your wounds.

And we are His and He is ours, so we are each other's, and we will never turn away.

But instead I'd heard preached what Jesus never had: some pseudo-good news that if you just pray well, sing well, worship well, live well, and give lots, well, you get to take home a mind and body that are well. *That's not how the complex beauty of life breaks open.*

The real Jesus turns to our questions of why—why this brokenness, why this darkness?—and says, “You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here.”⁴ “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.”⁵

There's brokenness that's not about blame. There's brokenness that makes a canvas for God's light. There's brokenness

The Broken Way

that makes windows straight into souls. Brokenness happens in a soul so the power of God can happen in a soul.

Isn't this what Mother Teresa laid out on the table: "There is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead . . . I do not know how deeper will this trial go—how much pain and suffering it will bring to me. This does not worry me anymore. I leave this to Him as I leave everything else . . . Let Him do with me whatever He wants as He wants for as long as He wants if my darkness is light to some soul."⁶

The sky is this fading grey across the fields, emptying across the rolling hills. But flames of light still catch in the far edge of the waving wheat, burning up the maples at the fringe of the woods.

The lit trees don't move in the wind, certain they are safe, that we are all safe.

I wash and dry the white porcelain pitcher at the sink. That moment, the edges of me, feel fragile. Not wanting one more thing to crack. Not wanting to crack one thing more.

Is there a grace that can bury the fear that your faith isn't big enough and your faults are too many? A grace that washes your dirty wounds and wounds the devil's lies? A grace that embraces you before you prove anything—and after you've done everything wrong? A grace that holds you when everything is breaking down and falling apart—and whispers that everything is somehow breaking free and falling together.

I had wanted someone to reach over to me at eighteen, sit in that church pew next to me, someone to touch my shoulder, to steady things and say: "Shame is a bully but grace is a shield. You are safe here."

What if the busted and broken hearts could *feel* there's a grace that holds us and calls us Beloved and says we belong

What to Do with Your One Broken Heart

and no brokenness ever has the power to break us away from being safe? What if we *experienced* the miracle of grace that can touch all our wounds?

I wanted to write it on walls and on the arms scarred with wounds, make it the refrain we sing in the face of the dark and broken places: No shame. No fear. No hiding. All's grace. It's always safe for the suffering here. You can struggle and you can wrestle and you can hurt and we will be here. Grace will meet you here; grace, perfect comfort, will always be served here.

How to remember there's a Doctor in the house who "binds up the brokenhearted,"⁷ a Wounded Healer who uses nails to buy freedom and crosses to resurrect hope and He never treats those who hurt on the inside as less than those who hurt on the outside. How do I remember that: "Hearts are broken in ten thousand ways, for this is a heart-breaking world; and Christ is good at healing all manner of heart-breaks."⁸ How do I stand a thousand nights out on the creaking porch, lean over the pine rail, and look up: The same hand that unwraps the firmaments of winging stars wraps liniments around the wounded heart; the One whose breath births galaxies into being births healing into the heart of the broken.

I put the porcelain pitcher on the barn board shelf by the farm table. All of us in a heart-breaking world, we are the fellowship of the broken like that painting over the table. Over all of us is the image of the wounded God, the God who breaks open and bleeds with us.

How do you live with your one broken heart? All I can think is—only the wounds of God can heal our wounds. This is the truth, and I feel the rising of it: suffering is healed by suffering, wounds are healed by wounds. It jars me, shatters

The Broken Way

my fears into the softness of Him: bad brokenness is healed by His good brokenness. *Bad brokenness is broken by good brokenness.*

What in the world does that even mean? And could I find out simply by daring to discover it—some new dare.

Like a brokenhearted way to . . . abundance?



Shalom had come to me sitting there at the sticky farm table, come with her heart cut out of white paper.

She brought the paper heart and this roll of tape to me and asks, “Will you do it, Mama? I can’t make it work.” And she holds out a roll of mangled clear tape.

I’m sitting there bent over her brother and his spelling words.

“What are you trying to do, sweet?” Tape it in half? Tape it to the wall?

“I just want the heart taped to me. Just right here.” Shalom staccatos her finger off her chest.

Her brother’s erasing his paper too hard, wearing a hole right through. Trying to erase everything he’d got wrong.

“Just tape it right here.” Shalom points just above her own thrumming heart.

“And why are we doing this exactly?” I’m on my knees in front of her, half smiling, looking up into her face, my thumb smoothing the tape line of this exposed heart.

I asked the question, even though we’d just talked it over that morning at breakfast, about how we need to give love to others. So of course, she’s trying to put into practice her mother’s half-baked words and I’m going to have to tell her this

What to Do with Your One Broken Heart

is bold and brilliant, making herself into a walking sign of my little breakfast lecture.

Usually I'm the one cupping her face in my hands, but now she's got me here, kneeling in front of her, so she takes my face into her hands. And she bends so close I can feel her breath warm.

"We need to tape hearts right to us, Mama. So we always know." She strokes my cheek. "So we always know His love's around us everywhere."

His love's around us everywhere.

If only we could all wear a heart right across the center of us so there was always this knowing: God has not forgotten you. God has not abandoned you. God's love is around you everywhere. When you feel in your marrow how you're His Beloved, you do more than look for signs of His love in the world, more than have a sign of His love; you actually become a sign of His love.

Her palms warm on my cheeks, I feel it in one long moment—how we can be held again. I want her to never stop holding me. Maybe this is what real love feels like—a slight breaking of the heart, and a slight breathless surprise at finding yourself put back together into a kind of wholeness. *Shalom*.

Shalom looks down, smooths out her paper heart, white and larger than life (because isn't love always larger than life, and isn't that always the point?). And then the inevitable happens, what always happens: the heart breaks, rips right down the center, just where she tried to smooth everything out. I'd swallowed hard.

How in the world do you live with your one broken heart?

Shalom looks down at hers. I am waiting for her to brim and overrun.

The Broken Way

“It’s all okay.” She finds the right first words. She holds the torn bit of her paper heart out to me. “Maybe the love gets in easier right where the heart’s broke open?”

I blink at her, replaying the moment.

Maybe the love gets in easier right where the heart’s broke open.

I pull her in close, gently kiss her in the middle of her perfect little forehead—and off she goes with her one broken heart. And I’d sat there in the wake of her, waking: maybe you can live a full and beautiful life in spite of the great and terrible moments that will happen right inside of you. Actually—maybe you get to *become* more abundant *because* of those moments. Maybe—I don’t know how, but somehow?—maybe our hearts are made to be broken. Broken open. Broken free. Maybe the deepest wounds birth deepest wisdom.

We are made in the image of God. And wasn’t God’s heart made to be broken too? Wounds can be openings to the beauty in us. And our weaknesses can be a container for God’s glory.

Hannah tasted salty tears of infertility. Elijah howled for God to take his life. David asked his soul a thousand times why it was so downcast. God does great things through the greatly wounded. God sees the broken as the best and He sees the best in the broken and He calls the wounded to be the world changers.

Up in the gable hangs the painting of Jesus breaking over all our brokenness, Jesus bleeding here in our chaos: *our bad brokenness is made whole by His good brokenness.*

If I could figure that out—live that out—then could I know the grace that knows how to live fully, even though you’re brokenhearted?

The Farmer comes in from the barn, leaves a bucket from

What to Do with Your One Broken Heart

the henhouse at the back door with his boots. I can hear him washing up at the mudroom's porcelain sink. He steps into the kitchen. I look up from the dishes. He's seen it already. The man can read my eyes better than he reads the skies. Sometimes all our unspoken broken speaks louder than anything we could ever say. He reads my slow breaking over the kid's lightning-bolt news and all my not-enoughness that I can't even grope through the pain to find words for.

He pulls me into himself, enfolds me. And then, into the quiet, he says it so soft I almost miss it, what I have held on to more than a thousand times since.

"You know—everything all across this farm says the same thing, you know that, right?" He waits till I let him look me in the eye, let him look into me and all this fracturing. "The seed breaks to give us the wheat. The soil breaks to give us the crop, the sky breaks to give us the rain, the wheat breaks to give us the bread. And the bread breaks to give us the feast. There was once even an alabaster jar that broke to give Him all the glory."

He looks right through the cracks of me. He smells of the barn and the dirt and the sky, and he's carrying something of the maple trees at the edge of the woods—carrying old light. He says it slowly, like he means it: "Never be afraid of being a broken thing."

I don't—I don't even know what that means. I *am* afraid. And I think this journey, this way, will not spare any of us. But maybe—this is the way to freedom? I've got to remember to just keep breathing—keep believing.

In Christ—no matter the way, the storm, the story—we always know the outcome.

Our Savior—surrounds.

Our future—secure.

The Broken Way

Our joy—certain.

When we know Christ, we always know how things are going to go—always for our good and always for His glory.

Somehow Love can lodge light into wounds.

The warming spring sun falls behind him standing at the kitchen window. All across the field to the east, the wheat waves like a brazen promise.

I'll take it. I'll take his words like a daring covenant, not knowing yet what's to come: there is no growth without change, no change without surrender, no surrender without wound—no abundance without breaking. Wounds are what break open the soul to plant the seeds of a deeper growth.

My dad had told me this once. For a seed to come fully into its own, it must become wholly undone. The shell must break open, its insides must come out, and everything must change. If you didn't understand what life looks like, you might mistake it for complete destruction.

I whisper it to the Farmer, one line that unfolds like willing, cupped hands: "Brokenness can make abundance."

And the weight of hell shifts almost imperceptibly to feel more like the weight of glory, even if I'm not quite sure yet if that greater grace will come.

Two

Re-Membering Your Broken Pieces



But, first, remember, remember, remember . . .

C. S. LEWIS

The day after we'd held on to each other in the kitchen, this package came in the mail with three words—"Open Me Carefully"—as if it could be a soul.

I have no idea how this happens. How in the thick of ache you can be this solid dam—yet you catch bits of a song on a radio somewhere or the light falls a certain way across the floor or you lean the mailbox forward and a package slips right there into your hand—and in a moment, the loss of it all breaks you wide open.

Maybe it's because we never stop hoping for the best, waiting for the best like it got lost in the mail—and then one day there it is, unexpected and with our name right there on it.

I trace the ink across the top of the package—I don't recognize the handwriting.

The package is largish—and way too small for the shoulder-crushing load of questions about what the bloody point of all this is. I keep forgetting, me with the chronic soul amnesia.

A mourning dove coos out in the maple to the west of the kitchen. It calls out bravely, unafraid in its lament.

The Broken Way

Hurt is a contagion. When one person hurts in a family, everyone aches. And this is always the choice: pain demands to be felt—or it will demand you feel nothing at all.

I slice the box open. Whatever it is, it's wrapped in tissue paper, a thin swaddling. I lift it from the box and this note falls to the table. It's from Peru, found in a shop that a friend was wandering through. She writes it across the embossed note-card: "Saw it and thought of you." The tissue paper feels like mummified dressings wrapped around something old enough to have the greatest story to tell. What do they say—that the great stories are the ones you need to hear again, the ones that call you back to find the wholeness of yourself again?

I unwrap slowly, hoping. There it is—something clay. Red clay. A base about eight inches long. Painted along its edge to look like thin bricks. Like a foundation, like the foundation for a story that might rejoin broken pieces. Unwrap it slowly, carefully—full of care for what might be. Thirteen small figures, earthen and primitive, kneel around the perimeter of the base, and it takes me a moment.

The Last Supper. The Great Story. A bent Jesus kneeling with His disciples, each of them kneeling before their own small cup and darkened loaf of bread.

This is the wholeness, right here in my hands, like my beginning and middle and end; this is the great story that defeats lostness and loneliness, that grows your heart larger. Maybe even large enough to break wide open.

There's something left in the box? Pieces roll around. And then I see the hand.

The hands of the Jesus are snapped right off. The Jesus has no hands.

I sit down. Jesus' hands lie there in front of Him, in front of

Re-Membering Your Broken Pieces

all the disciples, two hands broken off, lying there palms open like an invitation.

The jug in front of Him is knocked over. Poured out.

How many times in your life do you get the Last Supper delivered to your very doorstep? Hadn't this been the story I'd been unpacking for the last five years? Hadn't I just been searching for an answer to the question of how to live with your one broken heart? Where is the abundant life? And how in the world to find it?

"And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them . . ." ¹

I had first read it slowly, years ago—how in the original language "gave thanks" reads *eucharisteo*. The root word of *eucharisteo* is *charis*, meaning "grace." Jesus took the bread and saw it as grace and gave thanks.

There was more. *Eucharisteo*, thanksgiving, also holds the Greek word *chara*, meaning "joy." Joy. And that was what the quest for more has always been about—that which Augustine claimed, "Without exception . . . all try their hardest to reach the same goal, that is, joy." ²

Deep *chara* is found only at the table of the *euCHARisteo*—the table of thanksgiving.

I had sat there long . . . wondering . . . is it that simple? *Is the height of my chara joy dependent on the depths of my eucharisteo thanks?*

So then as long as thanks was possible, then joy was always possible. The holy grail of joy was not in some exotic location or some emotional mountain peak experience. The joy wonder could be here, in the messy, piercing ache of now. The only place we need see before we die is this place of seeing God, *here and now*.

The Broken Way

I'd whispered it out loud, let the tongue feel these sounds, the ear hear their truth.

*Charis. Grace. Eucharisteo. Thanksgiving. Chara. Joy.*³

A triplet of stars to reveal the outline of the fullest life, thanksgiving, joy. Five years of living thanks, of counting and giving thanks for one thousand everyday gifts, of struggling, miserably failing, and then purposing again to take everything as grace, gift—*charis*—give Him thanks for it—*eucharisteo*—and therein find joy in Him—*chara*.

But now, what of brokenness? And what did it mean that “bad brokenness is broken by good brokenness”? Had I only been scratching the surface? What if there was more to full abundance? And isn't the answer right here in my hands?

I hold the broken Last Supper in front of me, a Jesus with broken hands. What did Jesus do after He gave thanks?

“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them.”⁴

He took it and gave thanks. Eucharisteo.

Then He broke it and gave.

How many times had I said it: “*Eucharisteo* precedes the miracle”? Thanksgiving precedes the miracle—the miracle of knowing all is enough. And how many times had I read it—how Jesus “took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people”?⁵

Eucharisteo—Jesus embracing and giving thanks for His not-enough—that preceded the miracle. But why hadn't I been awakened at the detonation of the revelation before? What was the actual miracle?

The miracle happens *in the breaking*.

Not enough was given thanks for, and then the miracle

Re-Membering Your Broken Pieces

happened: There was a breaking and a giving—into a kind of communion—into abundant filling within community. *The miracle happens in the breaking.*

I wonder if . . . if this is the truth that might make sense of so many questions—of all the pain? Not that I have any groping idea yet what that means—or what it will take to find out. But something about this unexpected moment, this gift, makes me want to try?

If *eucharist* had been the first dare, the first journey of discovery into a life of letting God love me and counting all those ways, could this be a dare for the next leg of the journey, the way leading higher up and deeper in, daring me to let all the not-enough there in my open hands—let it be broken into more than enough? A dare to let all my brokenness—be made into abundance. *Break and give away. The broken way.*

What if this were the safest embrace—the way of being wanted and held and found in the midst of falling apart? What did Jesus do? In His last hours, in His abandonment, Jesus doesn't look for comfort or try to shield Himself against the rejection; He breaks the temptation to self-protect—and gives the vulnerability of Himself. In the sharp edge of grief, Jesus doesn't look for something to fill the broken and alone places; He takes and gives thanks—and then does the most countercultural thing: He doesn't keep or hoard or hold on—but breaks and gives away. In the midst of intimate betrayal, He doesn't defend or drown Himself in addicting distractions; He breaks and is given—He gives His life. Because what else is life-giving?

Out of the fullness of the grace that He has received, He thanks, and breaks, and gives away—and He makes a way for life-giving communion. A broken way.

How does this make any rational sense? It doesn't. But

The Broken Way

maybe that's the only way you ever know the greatest truths: The greatest truths always are the greatest paradox. And what could be a greater paradox than this? Out of feeling lavishly loved by God, one can break and give away that lavish love—and know the complete fullness of love.

The miracle happens in the breaking.

Somehow . . . the miracle of communion, oneness, wholeness, abundance, it happens in the exact opposite—in breaking and giving.

Somehow . . . the miracle, the intimacy, of communion comes through brokenness.

I run my fingers along the three cracks across the base of the sculpture.

What if a kind of communion is found in a trinity of brokenness—through broken places and broken people and being broken and given.

The hard clay feels like it's shaping something here in my hands. Like Someone is touching the rawness of the stinging wound.

When our own brokenness meets the brokenness of the world, don't we enter into and taste the brokenness and givenness of Christ?

And isn't this is the actual abundant wholeness of communion?

Somehow I wonder if it's in shattered places, with broken people, we are most near the broken heart of Christ. What if we only find our whole selves through this mystery—the mystery of death and resurrection, of brokenness and abundance? Could this be what it means to live in the encircling embrace of communion: brokenness giving way to abundance—and then abundance, which is then broken and given . . . gives way

“WHAT MATTERS IN LIFE
IS NOT WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU
BUT WHAT YOU REMEMBER
AND HOW YOU REMEMBER IT.”



The Broken Way

to an ever greater abundance? I think this—is the ring of the fellowship of communion. I move the broken pieces of the Last Supper closer together.

Why are we afraid of broken things? I can think of a thousand raw reasons. But touch the broken and the hungry and the hurting and the thirsty and the busted, and you touch a bit of Christ. *Why are we afraid of suffering?* What if the abundance of communion is only found there in the brokenness of suffering—because suffering is where God lives? Suffering is where God gives the most healing intimacy.

What if . . . what if I made a habit of every day pressing my wounds into the wounds of Christ—could my brokenness be made into a healing abundance for the brokenness of the world? A kind of communion? Could all brokenness meet in the mystery of Christ's brokenness and givenness and become the miracle of abundance? Wouldn't that be good brokenness breaking bad brokenness?

The strength of the reality weakens the knees here a bit. A paradigm shift—more like an earthquake, like a foundation is breaking. Breaking open.

Is this way realest life—or is life really this way? Am I saving myself . . . or dying—or both? Oh, God.

Picking up the broken hands of Jesus rolling about the cracked Last Supper, those two clay hands suddenly look like the offering of a gift, like an opening in the palm of my hand.

Jesus had said to do this in remembrance of Me—"to do," the Greek word *poieo*, a present imperative. The present tense indicates continuing action and can be translated "continue to do this." Continue to do this literally, with bread and wine—and continuously do this with your life, with the bread of your moments, the wine of your days.

Re-Membering Your Broken Pieces

A preacher's words had grabbed me by the lazy jugular: *This is the one and only command Christ gave to do continually over and over again.* This is the practice He gave for us to practice our faith, to practice again and again. *In remembrance of Him.* Continuously do this at the sink, at the stove, at the street corner, at the setting of the sun and at its rising again, and *never stop* continuously doing this.

Did I know anything about this? How was I doing the one command Christ asked to do continuously?

And continuously do what? Remember Me. We, the people with chronic soul amnesia, are called to be *the re-membering people*. The people who remember—and have their brokenness re-membered.

The shaft of light falling across the floor, falling across my feet—it's fractured by shadows from beyond the window.

Remembrance—it comes from the Greek word *anamnesis*.

The only four times this word *anamnesis* is used in Scripture, it is in reference to the sacrifice that Christ made and is “remembered” in the Last Supper (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24, 25; Hebrews 10:3).

The little clay-sculpted loaves in my hands feel like a memory I'm starved for. Like a memory become real between fingers.

I had read it once that *anamnesis* was a term used to express an intangible idea moving into this material, tangible world. The philosopher Plato had used the word *anamnesis* to express a remembering that allowed the world of ideas to impact the world of our everyday, allowing something in another world to take form in this physical one.

That was the point: remembrance, *anamnesis*, does not simply mean memory by mental recall, the way you remember your own address—but it means to experience a past event

The Broken Way

again through the physical, to make it take form through re-enactment. Like the way you remember your own grandma Ruth by how your great-aunt Lois laughs, how she makes butterscotch squares for Sunday afternoons too, how she walks in her Birkenstocks with that same soft heel as Grandma did, her knees cracking up the stairs the same way too. The way your great-aunt Lois acts makes you remember in ways that make your grandma Ruth real and physically present again now.

There's a cupping grace to it—how remembering becomes a healing. We welcome remembering, we hold remembering, we let remembering wrap around us and carry us like a dance that need not end.

We are never abandoned when we hold on to remembrance.

Gabriel García Márquez had scratched it down once, like words sealed in a bottle and sent back to the world: “What matters in life is not what happens to you but what you remember and how you remember it.”⁶

That's it. What matters in your life is not so much what happens to you but what you happen to remember—and how that will influence how your life happens. What and how you remember will determine if your broken, dis-membered places will re-member you in your broken places.

So how to continuously re-member? Re-member your broken and busted heart, remember Him crucified and who you are and your real name: the Beloved.

“Continuously do *this* in remembrance of Me.”

The truth of *anamnesis* is “to make Me [Christ] present.” That's the truth of what He was saying: “Continuously make Me present.” How in the world do you make Christ, who is always present, to be visibly present through this shattered chaos?

Re-Membering Your Broken Pieces

I turn the broken hands of Jesus over in mine. *Be broken and given in a thousand common and uncommon ways. Live given a thousand times a day. Die a thousand little deaths.* This feels like a dare that is choosing me. I don't know if I know how to do this. I don't know if I *want* to do this.

The sun pools. It's like the clay Jesus with no hands ignites mine with light.

The floor lights, everything lights: there is no physical body of Christ here on earth but ours. We are now Christ's only earthly body—and if we aren't the ones broken and given, we are the ones who dis-member Christ's body. Unless we are the ones broken and given, we incapacitate Christ's body on earth.

Maybe—there is no breaking of bad brokenness unless His people become good brokenness.

Something burns like a funeral pyre up my throat. What do I know about the Via Dolorosa? What do I know of this suffering and sacrifice of the broken way?

It's as though His broken hands beg me with a new begging dare.

Notes

CHAPTER 1: WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR ONE BROKEN HEART

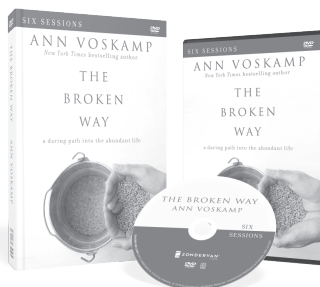
1. Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (New York: Carleton, 1863), 127.
2. Matthew 27:46.
3. Matthew 9:12.
4. John 9:3 MSG.
5. John 9:3 NLT.
6. Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*, ed. Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 149, 185, 212.
7. Isaiah 61:1.
8. Charles H. Spurgeon, “Christ’s Hospital: A Sermon on Psalm 147:3,” *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2260.php (accessed June 3, 2016).

CHAPTER 2: RE-MEMBERING YOUR BROKEN PIECES

1. Luke 22:19.
2. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), 228 (X, 21).
3. This paragraph and the preceding six paragraphs are based on a section in my *One Thousand Gifts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 31–33.
4. Luke 22:19.

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