



Glenn Brown

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441 ½ Lark Drive

Grand Junction, Colorado 81504

telephone 970-34-1377

LIVING IN BROKENNESS

(Quoted from John Wimber)

“I’m not all that Jesus wants me to be. I’m not all that he’s provided for me. I’m not walking in all that I know. I’m trying, but I’m not doing all that well some days. Are you? That leaves me in a broken state – an awareness of, ‘O God, O God, except for your mercy and except for your grace.’ I think it’s designed to be that way. I think we are supposed to live in the constant reality that we are not measuring up.

“Even in his righteousness, even under his mercy, even as a recipient of his grace, I can’t walk like Jesus does. I touch on it now and then. I visit it. That gives me hope and encouragement for more. But the reality is that we have to constantly live in brokenness. The way we do that is not by developing some sort of external religious thing that hides us and puts us in a denial process by which we pretend to be more than we are. Rather, we learn to live constantly with the awareness that we just don’t measure up.

“But that’s good news, folks. If you don’t measure up – if you *can’t* measure up – then you’re constantly asking for Jesus to make up the difference. That’s good news! It’s pretty hard to act overly religious when you know you don’t measure up, and that he’s paying the difference.

“I’m not sure that we ever get incredibly better or stronger or mightier, become these great men and women of God. I think we always live with the awareness that we are serving the great God of men and women. Jesus came down to earth, I didn’t go up to him. He came to the world. The world got saved by a merciful Savior. Didn’t you? And he’s still merciful toward me. Every day of my life I live in constant awareness of that.

I think God has designed the Bible to keep us humble and aware of our ongoing need to be “saved.” (Salvation in the New Testament is an ongoing experience, as demonstrated by Paul not only saying that *we have been saved*, but that we are *being saved*.) In Ephesians 2:8, a verse that most of us have memorized, Paul tells the gentiles in Ephesus that they were not saved by their “works” (obedience, holiness, love, service), but solely by the grace of God through their faith in Jesus. But in the next verse he adds: *God created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago*. In other words, we are not saved by our good works, but saved in order to do good works. The good works (obedience, holiness, love, service) demonstrate that we **have been saved**.

In chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians, Paul instructs them, and us, how to live worthily as followers of Jesus: In humility, gentleness, unity, love, kindness, and forgiveness. And he tells them what they must not do: fall into lust, immorality, anger, foul language, rage, harsh words, foolish talk, drunkenness, a lying. He says, *Don’t live like fools, but like those who are wise*. Note that the Christian life is a daily, moment by moment choice. We can still easily fall back to living like the devil.

I read the little book of Ephesians over and over because it helps me to stay focused on the simple directions of the Lord as I try to live like a Christian.

The Impossibly High Bar Set by Jesus

When you read through the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7), it can make you feel like throwing in the towel. God gave the Jews the 10 Commandments, and they were never able to live up to them. It was as if God set the bar at 10 feet and commanded everyone to jump over it. Then Jesus came along and raised the bar to 20 feet! He said, God commanded you not to murder, now I’m commanding you to not even get angry, or hate, or curse people, and in fact to love your

enemies. He said, God commanded you not to commit adultery, but I command you not to even look with lust. He said, You must be perfect as your Father in heaven in perfect! Thanks a lot, Jesus!

Why did he do that? I believe it was to show us that we need a Savior. We cannot consistently jump over that high bar that he set. He kept the commandments perfectly. He is the only one that could. Then, on the cross, he took our sins and our punishment and gave us his righteousness. Such a deal!

The interesting thing is to consider how Jesus related to people compared to his demanding teachings that seemed to leave no room for our failures: Children were drawn to him, common people were drawn to him, people referred to as “sinners” were drawn to him. Everybody was drawn to him except the arrogant religious folk, the Pharisees and Sadducees. He had an open countenance and an open heart. He really cared for the poor, the downtrodden, the people trapped in their sins and addictions. When he announced his purpose for coming to earth, he quoted Isaiah and said he came to heal those whose hearts were broken and to set the captives free. That’s you and me, brother and sister, so this is really good news.

Jesus purposely arranged a trip so that he would meet a certain woman at a well in Samaria – a race of people despised by the Jews. She had been married 5 times and was living with another guy. (6 is the number of man, and she was encountered by No. 7, the number of perfection.) Although he confronted the woman about her ungodly lifestyle, it was in such a gracious way that she was not offended. And he offered her living water that not only transformed her life but the life of her village. (John 4)

In John 8, Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees who, in order to trap him into denying the 7th Commandment, brought to him a woman taken in adultery. He turned the trap back onto the religious guys by saying, *He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone.* Then he graciously said to the woman, *Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.* I believe those words were not spoken in a harsh way, but that Jesus was gently telling her, “God the Father loves you, I love you, and I’m setting you free from the spirit of compulsiveness and thirst that has been controlling your life.”

And we can see the same Spirit at work when Jesus lovingly invites himself to the home of Zacchaeus, the hated tax collector; and when he healed the demonized man in the tombs; etc.

How does God deal with our failures after we become Christians?

All I have to do is look at the life I know better than anyone, mine, to figure that out.

After I was a pastor, I fell back into my destructive addictions. And it has been difficult for me to live in the way I know is right many times since then. God has been so patient and kind to me that I continue to be amazed. Because I am ancient but still teach a class and do some other things in church, there is a lady in the church who treats me as if I’m Father Teresa. I’m sorry to disillusion that nice lady, but Father Teresa, I ain’t. You may have fallen short from time to time yourself? As the old country preacher prayed one time, “Oh, Lord, forgive us for our falling shorts.” Indeed.

As John wrote to believers in 1 John 1:8-9 – *If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.*

Does God really expect us to live sinless, perfect lives?

You and I are not God, we are not Jesus, and we are not perfect. But God does expect us to live “blamelessly” before Him. The word, “blameless,” or “without blame,” or “without fault,” is used at least 12 times in the New Testament. Ex., Phil. 1:9-10 – *I pray that you will keep growing in love, knowledge and understanding, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return.* (An excellent Bible study would be to figure out what it means to live a blameless life before the Lord.)

I have been involved in ministry in local churches, in denominations, and on the mission field, for almost 60 years. I have met and worked with many gifted Christians who are living lives of love and sacrifice. A number of them I count as personal friends. But as I got to know them personally, I discovered that each of them is flawed. This should not disillusion us. The Bible is honest about the short-comings of every big name that we look up to.

Abraham, the father of the faith, lied about his wife to two different rulers and put her in jeopardy in order to protect himself. Moses was a murderer. Peter denied the Lord, and all the Apostles ran away in his time of need. Paul had such a problem with pride that God had to give him a thorn in the flesh.

John Calvin was a profound theologian, but he allowed his followers to torture and burn at the stake one of his opponents for denying the Trinity and opposing infant baptism. Martin Luther was the hero of Protestantism, but his anti-Semitic writings are embarrassing. (Hitler quoted Luther in some of his anti-Jewish rants.)

Consider men like John Wesley, A. W. Tozer, or Bob Pierce (the founder of World Vision). All of them had horrendous marriages because they sinfully neglected their families in the pursuit of ministry.

Samson never conquered his weakness in the area of sexual temptation. He is listed in Hebrews 11 as one of the heroes of the faith, but don't forget that he died blinded and chained to a grinding stone. King David also fell into lustful temptation, and although he was called a man after God's heart, the sword never departed from his home.

Charles Spurgeon and D. L. Moody were heroes of the faith, but they were both extremely obese and ate themselves into an early grave.

We should love, honor, and respect our leaders. But we should not put them on a pedestal. And we should not allow people to put us on a pedestal, if any misled soul is so inclined. There is an old saying, "Beware of letting people put you on a pedestal. You will make a great target." See Acts 14. When Paul and Barnabas healed a cripple, the crowd in Lystra tried to worship them. Later that week, the same crowd stoned Paul and left him for dead. The same thing happened to me one time. (Wait, that's not right. My memory gets mixed up at times. I just thought some people in my church were going to kill me.)

Then, is it okay to relax and not worry about sinning a bit?

Never, never, never! That is the slippery slope that God wants us to avoid at all costs.

Just because we humbly recognize that we fall short does not give us license to practice sins. This is the very reason that today's church is no different from the world in any measurable way: divorce, pornography, sexual sins, dishonesty, materialism, abuse in the home, etc. Read any book in the New Testament and see what God says about it.

We are to live holy lives, separated unto God. Blameless lives.

The Bible says this literally hundreds of times. The angel said to Joseph, engaged to Mary: *She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.* (Matt. 1:21) "From their sins," not in their sins.

Paul said that we are in a race and are to press on toward the goal. He also says to the believers in Rome in Chapter 2: "*Do you think that if you continue to practice (the sins listed at the end of Chapter 1: sexual immorality, covetousness, envy, murder, violence, being unloving, unforgiving, etc.) that you will escape the judgment of God? The goodness of God leads you to repentance. God will render to each one according to his deeds/actions in this life: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish...*"

Jesus said, *Those who practice sin become slaves of sin.* We know all too well the way addictions enslave and destroy people. How many people have you known, perhaps even in your family, who have destroyed their lives with alcohol, cocaine, meth, pornography, gambling, fornication, homosexuality, love of money? Jesus is warning us about these things because he loves us. He can and will enable us to escape if we will call on him.

So, on the one hand, we acknowledge our brokenness and inability to live up to the measure of Christ. But, on the other hand, we lean on his grace and strength to enable us to do what we can never do without Him. Someone called Him, "The upward receding Christ." He is always calling to us, as he did to John on the Isle of Patmos, "Come up higher."

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INSIGHTS ABOUT ADDICTION

(From George Hunter's book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*)

“William White's *Pathways from the Culture of Addiction to the Culture of Recovery* has demonstrated the astonishing complexity of addiction by showing that the addictive personality is sucked into a “tribe” or a “social world” that reinforces and celebrates drug abuse and even shapes people over time into a different identity. For instance, the addiction tribe's new members acquire a new language while losing the capacity to talk about their feelings. They enter a new world of symbols – logos, specific clothing or jewelry and other articles. Addicts become involved with institutions, places associated with abuse (like the saloons in towns of the old West), and with daily rituals that trigger abuse – such as using drugs after meals or between activities, or like a needle-sharing ritual. Their culture of addiction uses music, like the rap music that legitimizes rage and glorifies cocaine use, that reaches repetitively into the addict's right brain to confirm the culture's beliefs and values, to make the drug lifestyle seem normal, and to trigger craving.

The new recruit is gradually introduced to a local tribal history, which is passed on through stories and folktales. These stories revolve around tribal events and personalities. These tales are used to teach newcomers the skills and dangers involved in procuring drugs. Folk medicine tales teach them how to use and reduce risks associated with use. “Enemy tales” reinforce cultural paranoia and teach them how to cope with cultural enemies, such as undercover agents, snitches, nonsmokers, supervisors, dealers who peddle “garbage,” “shrinks,” and “crazies.”

(Think about how this describes the culture of gangs, and of religious cults. You can see it most clearly in the homosexual community, which is organized around a fabric of deception and lies, such as:

1. Homosexuality is heroic, something to be celebrated. Hollywood has bought into this totally.
2. It is approved by God. He created you this way and you cannot change.
3. Everyone must not only be tolerant of this lifestyle, but must agree that it is normal, healthy, and wonderful.
4. Anyone who does not wholeheartedly concur is branded an enemy and accused of being motivated by hate, by “homophobia,” and must be punished by law, public shaming, etc. It is inconceivable to the homosexual culture that anyone opposing their way of life can be motivated by love and by the desire to rescue them from deep deception and coming judgment.)

White reports that, in time, involvement with the drug and the drug culture changes a person's identity and religious orientation. Whereas before drug use some persons were religious, some ignored religion, and some were rejecting their religious roots, such differences disappear as addiction takes over. Addiction does not make atheists or agnostics:

Addiction, until the latest stages, renders questions of God and religion insignificant.

Addiction is so consuming there simply is no energy available to raise religious questions, let alone ponder answers.

Addiction becomes one's religion, drugs become one's God, and rituals of use become rites of worship.

Because “the total drug experience” is so social, consuming, and transformative, it is often more difficult to liberate a person from the addictive culture than from the drug. Indeed, membership and involvement in an alternative “culture of recovery” are usually necessary for a person's freedom from the twin powers of the drug and the drug culture.”

Wow! This spells out so many things that all of us have either experienced or observed about the sociology of addiction. These are truths the Bible spelled out over 2,000 years ago:

- Jesus said that a person who sins becomes a slave of sin. (Addiction is just a sin magnified.)
- Scripture warns again and again that we must be careful about our friends. (If an addict is not willing to cut all ties with his old friends, they will drag him back to destruction.)
- Addiction becomes a person's idol, religion, and God.
- Again and again, the Bible exalts “Truth,” and Jesus even declares that He is the Truth. (The addictive culture is saturated with deception and lies.)
- The recovering addict needs Christ, but he also needs the rescuing culture of a church community, Celebrate Recovery, A.A., G.A., etc.

If there is no God, and if the God revealed in the Bible is not the true and living God, the Creator and Redeemer, then I certainly agree that all values are relative. But if the Bible is true, and if Jesus Christ was God in flesh who came to die on a cross and save us from our sins and from hell, then we must fall before Him, worship, love, and serve Him, and we must listen to and obey His teachings above everything else in our lives.

THE CULTURE OF COMPASSION

(from *Charisma*)

Mark Buntain, an Assemblies of God missionary, founded a great work in Calcutta. He knew that people's physical needs must be tended to as well as their spiritual needs, so he began a clinic. There, children were successfully operated on to restore their ability to walk. But Mark wanted to build a hospital to care for more children. Land was scarce in that densely packed city. There was a plot of land on Burial Ground Road, the site of a deserted English cemetery. He dealt with two years of red tape but could not get permission.

While driving in his car during a rainstorm he saw a well-dressed man trying to hail a taxi. Mark pulled over and picked him up. A few minutes later, Mark saw a little boy crawling like an insect along a muddy path. Mark stopped the car, got out, picked up the boy, disappeared into the slum and returned with the muddy boy, placing him in the back seat. He explained to the man that he had a clinic and this boy could be made to walk. He apologized for disappearing for a few minutes but had needed to find the boy's mother to get permission to take him. Mark told the man his hopes about the plot of land that he wanted for a children's hospital.

Two weeks later, Mark unexpectedly received word that he had been granted a 99-year lease on the land he sought. The man he picked up was the one official who could cut through all the red tape. One act of compassion opened the door for thousands to be ministered to. It's the same in your life or mine. What door will open because you have heart?

OBSERVATIONS AND QUOTES

- Remember that the Greek word for witchcraft is *pharmakia*, which is the root of our word pharmacy. Sorcery, a part of witchcraft, is defined: "The use of spirits or drugs to access supernatural power." Drugs are a door to the demonic.
- Proverbs says "the fear of the Lord" means, "to hate evil."
- A "fool," in Proverbs is not someone who is ignorant but is a rebel against God.
- I just read an article that said that our national debt is growing by \$2.37 billion each day! Our government is living in massive denial. Anyone who doesn't realize that our whole economy is going to crash is living in illusion.
- A quote: "Are Yoga positions a way of doing homage to Hindu gods? Not exactly. In advanced Yoga they can be. For most people Yoga is an innocent way of stretching and relaxing. For some, Yoga can also be a way of centering and connecting with the God within: 'Namaste, I bow to you. I salute the light of God, the divine, within myself. The entire universe resides within me.' Note: The Yoga community has remained silent about the many physical injuries it has caused, the people who have wrecked their backs, necks, hips, and knees. These casualties of Yoga have for decades been published by the American & British Medical Ass'ns." I realize that a lot of injuries are also caused by bicycles, but I thought I would quote this article to stir things up.
- An "oxymoron" is a phrase that combines two things that are contradictory, like "congressional restraint," or a "selfish Christian."
- Remember: *He who loves another has fulfilled the law.* (Ro. 13:8)
- The Atheist's Prayer: "Oh, God, if there is a God, please save my soul, if I have a soul."

God Bless

Glenn

e-mail address casabrn441@gmail.com

WEBSITE: www.glennbrownministries.com

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