

THE WAY OF THE CROSS: MINISTRY TO THE BROKEN

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INTRODUCTION

Interview with C

We all have people like C in our lives. They are all around us in our churches, ministries, and neighborhoods. We'd like to begin by asking a simple question—"Why are you here at this conference?" For most of us, the answer is not complicated. No doubt many of us wanted a chance to get away, enjoy a lovely hotel, promote our ministry, or spend time with colleagues. But I'm confident that for the vast majority of us, the major reason we are here is that we want to be better equipped to serve Christ. We are concerned about the state of the family in America and we want to make a difference for the kingdom of God. That's why we are here. As I get perilously close to my 50th birthday (next summer) I feel more keenly than ever the passion to serve Christ faithfully and effectively. As I watch the changes in our culture—the weakening of the family, the impact of internet pornography, and growing secularization, the moral confusion of this younger generation, I am energized to do what I can to impact this generation for Christ. And no doubt you share that passion. That's why we are here.

Countless books have been written and seminars created on how to have a more fruitful ministry. We have no new model. We have no book to sell you on the best kept secret for building your church or your family ministry. We just want to focus your attention on how Jesus ministered and see what we can learn.

Read:

Matthew 9:9-13⁹ And as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he rose, and followed Him.¹⁰ And it happened that as He was reclining *at the table* in the house, behold many

tax-gatherers and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax-gatherers and sinners?" ¹² But when He heard this, He said, "*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ "But go and learn what *this* means, 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Do we realize how radical and scandalous Jesus actions are in this passage? Unless you know a little bit about first century culture, you will miss the shocking way Jesus treats Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector, a hated traitor against his own people. Tax collectors made their living by financially fleecing their own countrymen. They charged exorbitant taxes to everyone. If you couldn't pay, they would "loan" you the money, and then charge absurd interest rates. If you got too far behind on your loan, they would have you thrown in jail. There are also accounts during this period of tax collectors torturing and killing for the sake of locating tax fugitives. These were corrupt, traitorous, immoral people. Jesus understood this, and yet while Matthew was sitting at the very tax booth he used to cheat and pillage the poor, Jesus called him to follow. As if that wasn't enough, Matthew throws a party for his immoral friends and Jesus appears as the guest of honor (the Greek verb for "recline" indicates that this was a banquet and not just an ordinary meal). The text specifically tells us that other traitorous tax collectors and sinners were there. The Greek word for "sinners" often indicated those who were social outcasts due to their failure to conform to moral standards (*BDAG*).

In other words, Jesus is spending intimate time with the social outcasts, with the moral and social rejects. When the Pharisees jump on this, notice his response—I came for the sick; I didn't come for the righteous. And then to add insult to injury, Jesus uses one of the Pharisees own stock saying when they were teaching people the law (since they were considered the experts) "go and learn what this means." This would have been equivalent to Jesus telling these learned experts of the Old Testament that they should go review their kindergarten Sunday School lessons. What is the Bible lesson they had forgotten? It comes from Hosea 6:6 "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Do you remember the story of

Hosea? It is another beautiful but scandalous story of Hosea the prophet whose wife Gomer left him for other lovers and ended up being sold into slavery. She was stripped naked, utterly broken and in misery and shame. Hosea bought back his whore of a wife just as God in his love reaches out to sinners in their misery and brings them back to him.

What does this say to us?

GODLY MINISTRY IS ALWAYS TO THE BROKEN

Isn't it so hard to comprehend that our Savior, the Lord of Lords and Kings of Kings, the eternal God, the judge of the world would come and love and enjoy a banquet with the most sinful and broken around him. And this isn't the only time he does this. In fact he did this so often that later in Matthew he is called "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (11:19). Let me put it rather bluntly, when is the last time anyone accused us of being a friend of prostitutes, the homeless, or homosexuals? The Pharisees thought that if Jesus were truly a prophet of God, He would be the friend of the righteous but Jesus does the opposite. He came for the broken. He spent His time with the broken. He loved them, he befriended them, He died for them. He saw beauty in them.

Later in this same chapter we get a further insight into how Christ looked at people, and it tells us much about ministry to the broken. As the holy, righteous, pure Son of God we might expect Christ to see people and fixate on their sin. We certainly do that. But notice how he viewed the masses of humanity

Matthew 9:35-36 ³⁵ And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. ³⁶ And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.

"they were distressed"

The Greek word for "distressed" was used of being mangled or having skin torn, as sheep going among rocks and brambles. Sheep are defenseless and stupid, thus vulnerable to

wild animals and harsh elements. Jesus looked at the people around him, and saw them as bruised, vulnerable and hurting--in spite of their smiling or hardened exterior.

"and downcast like sheep without a shepherd"

The Greek word used here for "downcast" means "thrown down, prone and exhausted"; it was used to describe a corpse lying on the ground. It indicates you are out of energy, your resources are exhausted, you are in a hopeless condition.

What is so hard is for us to look beneath the exterior and see the brokenness and hopelessness that lies beneath the surface. In the church we often work incredibly hard to look happy and whole. So no one sees our brokenness. So to those who look like they are whole and have no need, Jesus would have us see them as sick and in need of the great physician. On the other hand, sometimes all we can see in people is the hardness, and anger, and hatred of all we value. But no matter how militant, or immoral, or obnoxious, or mean, or covered with tattoos and body piercing, we are looking at a human being who beneath the surface is broken and bruised. Horrible tragedy takes place when we don't see what Jesus saw beneath the veneer. Hear this in the following poem written by a troubled teenager named Garrett. This was written to his father. It was his suicide note found with his body.

You don't understand why I need to hide

You don't understand my feelings bottled up inside

You don't understand my sorrow past and present

You don't understand where that good little boy went

You don't understand that he is no longer there

You don't understand, your love and affection I can no longer hear

You don't understand that my actions aren't all by choice

You don't understand, because you only listen to my voice

You don't understand, and truthfully I doubt you've tried

You don't understand or know the many times I have cried

You don't understand why I would ever take my life

You don't understand, Dad, but then neither do I.

The tragedy is that Garren's dad probably did love him, but if we don't open our eyes to the hopelessness around us, we will never offer the healing God wants us to offer. If we truly saw every human around us as spiritually destitute, hopeless without Christ, how would that change our priorities, our activities, our actions toward other human beings? What are some of the common forms of brokenness we need to start recognizing all around us? What do we often miss?

- Do you realize that in North America $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ of women will be physically assaulted by a husband or boyfriend?
- Do you realize that up to 30% of females around you will be sexually abused by age 21?
- Do you know that in the past twenty years AIDS has created approximately thirty million African orphans, and some estimate that by the end of the decade there could be one hundred million AIDS orphans in Africa?
- Are you aware of the fact that over 4 million people have died in the Congo in the past 10 years making it the most deadly conflict since WW2?
- Are you aware of the fact that right here in Phoenix AZ there is a major sex slave trade of adolescent girls?
- Did you realize that according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) nineteen million STD infections occur annually in the U.S., with almost half of these infections occurring among youth ages fifteen to twenty-four?

Furthermore, can we see beyond people's sin and see that they are a human being made in the image of God and broken by sin. The most grotesque person is still a human being; they aren't an animal.

- When you see a prostitute can you see a broken woman (or man) who has been trashed and is so desperate that they daily trade a piece of their soul for a few dollars?

- When you see a sex addict, can you see the hunger for love and the broken sexuality?
- When you see a rebellious, arrogant teenager who has just been arrested, can you see a scared young man desperate to prove his manhood and worth?
- When you see a drug addict, can you see a man or a woman with needs and longings just like yours who has been deceived by Satan into filling the hunger of their soul with poison?

Some of you will remember the movie Ironwood starring Jack Nickolson and Meryll Streep. These two main characters stumble across an old Eskimo woman lying in the snow apparently drunk. As they are rather inebriated themselves, they discuss what they should do about her.

“Is she a drunk or a bum?” asks Nickolson.

“Just a bum. Been one all her life.”

“And before that?”

“She was a whore in Alaska.”

“She’s hasn’t been a whore all her life. Before that?”

“I dunno. Just a little kid I guess.”

“Well, a little kid’s something. It’s not a bum and it’s not a whore. It’s a something. Let’s take her in.”

No one we meet is just a bum or just a whore or just a sexual addict. Everyone we will ever meet, no matter how unlovely is a human being, broken and hopeless and desperately in need of the Great Physician.

I love the quote Philip Yancey gives in his book *What’s So Amazing about Grace*. It is very relevant to the uniquely Christian ask of ministering to broken sinners. Yancey *notes* *“the world can do almost anything as well as or better than the church. You need not be a Christian to build houses, feed the hungry, or heal the sick. There is one thing the world cannot do however. It cannot offer grace.”* And following the example of Christ we look beyond the harsh veneer and see the broken human being in need of the grace of God.

But chances are you already know that we are called to be gracious and merciful to those in need. If you read the ancient Jewish literature you will find that even the Pharisees agreed that we are to be compassionate. So why don't we really embrace ministry to the broken? As we reflect on our own lives, we can quickly identify several roadblocks to having a serious ministry to the broken. I'd like to briefly mention three common roadblocks.

Ministry to the broken is very painful

Notice 9: 36 which describes Jesus reaction to seeing the broken multitudes. "*He felt compassion for them.*" This is the strongest word in the Greek language for pity and in the gospels is used only of Christ. It literally means His bowels were churned. It describes the sick feeling you get in the pit of your stomach when you see something that hurts you, and causes you to ache over someone else's pain.

One of our favorite strategies to maintain our personal peace is to pretend others aren't hurting. We emotionally brace ourselves so we don't feel the pain. Can we allow ourselves to believe a Sudanese woman grieves for her lost child just as we would? Can we grieve with her? Can we allow ourselves to believe the homeless in Phoenix get cold at night just as we would? Can we allow ourselves to feel the weight of their suffering?

As a young youth pastor I would often take our teens to Mexico. As we prepared for our first summer trip to Mexico one of the parents of 2 of the teens in our group declared to me that her kids wouldn't be going on this trip because "our family doesn't go to Mexico. It is just too depressing." But of course not looking at the faces of hungry children doesn't make their hunger go away. Not looking at refugees living in squalor doesn't give them a warm clean floor to sleep on. It hurts to think about the fact that millions of children will go to bed tonight hungry. I lose sleep thinking about the children in my community and around the world who are being abused. But that pain must not stop me from ministry to the broken, it must energize us.

Ministry to the broken is incredibly painful, wrenchingly painful. But it isn't enough to just say those words. We would like for you to hear it and feel it. The following recording

is from a counseling session a Christian psychologist had with a client. We use it with the client's permission. The man you will here is a horribly broken sinner.

Ministry to the broken is controversial

We read in Matt 9 that Jesus was severely criticized for enjoying a banquet with tax collectors and sinners. He was their friend. No doubt we will be criticized just as surely and just as fiercely if we really start ministering to outcasts, to broken sinners. It will raise questions. Some will say you are compromising your convictions and going soft on sin. Some will say it is a waste of time. Others will indict you with Bible verses to show how unbiblical your ministry is. But we are called to follow the example of Christ, not to dodge criticism. **In 13 of the 28 chapters of Matthew, we read of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders** (5-7; 9; 12; 15; 16; 19; 21; 22; 23; 26; 27;). He never let their gossip and accusations keep him from outrageously loving broken sinners. On several occasions he healed people knowing that they were watching, ready to pounce on him for violating their understanding of the Sabbath law. He taught the multitudes knowing that the Pharisees would be listening to criticize the teaching. He let an immoral woman touch him and wash his feet with her tears (Luke 7:37-39), knowing the gossipy tongues would wag and the Pharisee host would condemn him for allowing this.

Illustration--Pastor's comments when he saw D. come into church with her hair dyed pink "what kind of young people are you bringing into this church? This is just going to create problems. This pastor was unaware of the fact that this girl's father was a raging alcoholic and she often had to flee her home in the middle of the night when he was in a drunken rage.

Ministry to the broken is humbling—it forces us to see our own sin

Read again with me Jesus words in Matt 9:12 “it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick...I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

I suppose if we only had this one paragraph we might draw the conclusion that not everyone needs Jesus because some people are whole, healthy, and righteous. But of

course that goes against literally hundreds of passages of Scripture. Jesus wasn't saying that only some are broken and need his healing touch. He was speaking to the self-righteous Pharisees who mocked his love for sinners. In this context he in essence is saying that everyone is broken and in need of his touch, but only some (esp. the outcasts) could recognize their need. In fact later in Matthew he makes this crystal clear when he states he blasts the religious leaders by saying "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you" (21:31).

So how does ministry to the broken humble us? In others' sins and the brokenness that leads to sin and results from sin, we see our own sin and brokenness. As we minister to the broken, esp. those broken by abuse I often feel as if I am entering holy ground. I am immensely humbled at the courage abuse victims have to face their pain and take it to Christ. I am humbled at their love for Christ that comes from their sense of deep need for Christ. And this is exactly what Jesus told us would happen. Remember the account in Luke 7:36-50 when Jesus is invited to dinner at the house of a Pharisee named Simon? In the middle of the dinner a "sinful woman"—most likely a prostitute comes in uninvited she is weeping so profusely she gets his feet wet with her tears. She then dries his feet with her hair and then anoints his feet with costly perfume. Simon is very critical of this in his heart and Jesus reminds him that he didn't weep over Jesus or kiss him or anoint his feet with perfume. And the punch line is "Her many sins have been forgiven—for she has loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." The broken help me see my own sin and challenge me to embrace my savior with greater love and passion.

But even when the broken are not turning to Christ they can humble us because **if we see them as broken human beings made in God's image just like us, we will inevitably see ourselves in them. It is so easy for us to distance ourselves from sinners, to label them so that we stand above them. But as we minister to the broken we begin to see that we are really no better, no less righteous.**

Over the years God has given me the privilege of working with many male sex addicts, including some who had committed sex crimes. When I first started doing this work I was

forced into it as a pastor who had men coming to me for help. Early on I primarily saw their sin and its ugliness. I couldn't imagine how they could do what they did. There was a ugly stench of self righteousness in my heart. But before long I began to realize that they were men just like me. I often wondered after a group session when I heard of men who grew up with absent fathers and in many cases were sexually abused and ended up engaging in sexually compulsive behaviors if I wouldn't have ended up the same way if I had the same background. And I also began to contemplate that even though I had never had an affair, gone to a prostitute or looked at online porn, that I had sexual sins of my own. Their sin and brokenness began to convict me of my own sin and brokenness.

TS So where does this leave us? God calls us to minister to the broken and yet doing so is painful, can lead to much opposition, and shows us how broken we really are. In fact, the more we minister to the broken the more we will feel the destruction of sin in the entire universe. Where can we go from here? There is a final lesson that ministry to the broken teaches us.

III. THE CROSS IS OUR ONLY HOPE

We would like to close by reading the Apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians. This is the great missionary whose entire life was devoted to bringing the love of God to every broken sinner he came across—Jew, Gentile, slave, rich, poor, men and women. This is the same man who was so keenly aware of his own sin and brokenness that he declared "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst" (1 Tim 1:15). What was Paul's basis for hope in the midst of brokenness? It is starkly singular—the cross of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:18-29 ¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. But God

chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

Paul understood the incredible irony and offense of the cross. The tragic irony is that the great physician had to become fatally ill to heal the sick. But it is more than that. The message of the cross is so outrageous that it is either the most insane nonsense every uttered by a mad man (the Greek perspective) or it is vile blasphemy that should be stomped out (the Jewish perspective) or it is the only hope for the broken (the gospel).

Think with me about what the gospel says to the broken—the holy divine savior who dwells in unimaginable glory left the eternal joys of heaven to take on a frail human body for the sole purpose of dying a criminal's death on a cross. We don't always think of the fact that Christ experienced fatal physical abuse, verbal abuse, spiritual abuse, and in a sense sexual abuse (he was publicly crucified naked) to give life to the broken. He was crushed for the broken. He suffered indescribable shame for our shame. Crucifixion was an obscene topic in the ancient world. It was reserved for traitor and slaves. So the idea that God would become a man to be crucified was absolutely absurd in the Roman world.

Let me show you a replica of the oldest surviving picture of crucifixion. It comes from the 2nd century. It was found on the wall of a school for imperial pages in Rome. The picture is of a rough cross, on which is a man with the head of a donkey. To the left of the cross stands a man with one arm raised in worship. Underneath are the words "Alexandros worships his God." This is a mockery of Christ and the doctrine of the crucifixion. To the Romans a religion that taught that God was crucified for sinners might as well worship a jackass.

Truly, to those who are perishing the cross is insane, it is foolishness, but to we broken sinners who are being saved it is the power of God.

Perhaps no writer better portrayed both the depth of human sin and suffering and the grace of God than the great Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In his classic novel

Crime and Punishment he reminds us of the incredibly radical, shocking nature of the gospel—that God loves, calls, and redeems broken unworthy sinners. This is the message of the cross and the heart of Christian ministry. He states:

At the last judgment Christ will say to us, ‘Come you also! Come drunkards! Come, weaklings! Come, children of shame! And he will say to us: ‘Vile beings, you who are in the image of the beast and bear his mark, but come all the same, you as well.’ And the wise and prudent will say, ‘Lord, why do you welcome them?’ And he will say: ‘if I welcome them, you prudent men, it is because not one of them has ever been judged worthy.’ And he will stretch out his arms, and we will fall at his feet, and we will cry out sobbing, and then we will understand all, we will understand the Gospel of grace! Lord, your Kingdom come!

Oh may we devote ourselves more wholeheartedly to lead broken men and women to the foot of the cross.

C’s testimony.