

# *What are the steps to* **Mending a broken heart**

By Dave Batty

The Bee Gees struck a responsive chord in the hearts of millions with their song, “How can you mend a broken heart?” The song raises several questions, and ends with a plea, “Please help me mend my broken heart and let me live again.” If you are wondering, “Who are the Bee Gees?” just ask someone with grey hair!

There’s no age limit to having a broken heart. A grandmother recently wrote me, “Please pray for my 14 year old granddaughter. She is very angry and rebellious because her mother’s boyfriend was sexually molesting her. When she brought it out, and charges were filed, her mother threw her out of the house. She is now with her father, whom she claims to hate because ‘he was never there for her.’ He has a very bad temper and abuses her physically. I want to care for her, but at the

present I am not able because I’m receiving chemo therapy treatments for cancer.”

It’s certainly not fair for any 14 year old to have to live with these kinds of problems. It’s no surprise that her broken heart has driven her to anger. And then the grandmother with her broken heart....

I received a note from another parent in anguish requesting prayer, “Our son is a school teacher and was recently arrested for inappropriate relations with one of his students. We are heartbroken.”

## **What can a broken heart do to you?**

A broken heart can bring so much pain. The pain can rob you of all joy and leave you in a place of despair. You can lose hope and give up on life.

A year after 9-11, a father was on TV tearfully talking about the loss of his daughter in that tragedy at the World Trade Center. His anguish was still overwhelming as he said, “My life is over. I have no reason to go on living.”

Many others have a broken heart—not because of what some stranger did to them—but because someone close to them betrayed them. Whether a family member or a close friend, the anguish is more toxic

as you reflect on the fact that this person should have been loving you, protecting you, and encouraging you. The sting of betrayal lingers on long after the action.

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*Many have a broken heart because of what family members and close friends have done.*

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One wife said, “I wish he would have physically beaten me. I could have handled that easier than the verbal and emotional abuse that just keeps hurting more every day.”

For some who have this pain, their response has been to harden their heart and say, “I’ll never let anyone get close to me again!” The walls go up, and people are held at arm’s length.

Juan came to Teen Challenge as a young father and husband. His wife had put a court order in place to keep him away. He had been physically abusing her. Juan had been in and out of jail, and also caught up in drug addiction. But these recent problems had their roots in his early childhood. He was brought into this world by a mother who did not want him. She gave him away when he was only about a year old. The uncle who ended up with Juan and his sister

- ❖ **What kind of damage can a broken heart do in your life?**
- ❖ **Where will you let your pain take you?**
- ❖ **How strong is the urge in your life to get revenge?**
- ❖ **What place does forgiveness have in mending a broken heart?**

didn't really want them either. The physical and emotional abuse got so bad that finally the Child Protective Services took him out of that home and placed him in a foster home.

But Juan's experiences in foster care were only more of the same and worse. He suffered even more abuse, including sexual abuse. His anger got him in more trouble, and soon detention centers were a way of life for him. Marriage and a child did not solve the broken heart he lived with—his brokenness caused him to repeat the tragic cycle of damage on his wife and son.

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*God is connected to us through pain. He understands betrayal.*

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When you look at all the hurt, damage, despair, and pain of broken hearts, the question still remains, "How do you mend a broken heart?"

For most who have a broken heart, there is no "magic wand" solution. It will be a process. How long? No simple answers—it may take days, or weeks, or longer. But it doesn't need to take a lifetime.

Here are three steps that can put you on the path to healing a broken heart. None of them are easy. There may be other steps required beyond these three. The closing line of the song by the Bee Gees offers a realistic insight into the process of healing: "Please help me mend my broken heart and let me live again."

To mend a broken heart may require the help of others outside yourself. An even bigger question is: "Do you want your broken heart to be

mended? Do you want to live again?"

## 1. Where will you let your pain take you?

The pain of a broken heart puts you at a point of decision. You can get stuck in your pain, and stay there forever. You can build up walls around yourself and refuse to let anyone in. Your anger can grow into bitterness, which can poison your heart and rob you of hope.

There's lots of choices for the one in pain—many of these choices can take you down paths that will only lead to more pain. Like Juan, your broken heart can set you up to break the hearts of others close to you.

So where are you going to let your pain take you?

You can choose to let your pain take you to Jesus who can heal your broken heart, and so much more. Psalm 147:3 offers the simple promise, "He [God] heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds." (NIV)

More than anyone else, God understands your broken heart. He's the one who made you, and He knows best how to find healing for your broken heart.

God is connected to us through pain—Jesus experienced the pain of betrayal by one of His disciples, and all the rest abandoned Him in His time of greatest need. He experienced the physical pain of the beating and the crown of thorns on His head, and hanging on a cross for hours before He died. He chose to allow His pain to take Him closer to God. He did it for you and for me. Why? So we could experience healing for our broken hearts.

Jesus offers a clear invitation to those in pain. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.<sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:28-29 NIV)

His offer includes a gentle touch as He brings His healing and rest. Think of how you want a doctor to handle you if you have a broken leg or arm—you want him to be gentle!

When Jesus talked to a woman at a well in Samaria, He treated her with gentleness and respect as He exposed her need for healing. At one point in the conversation He asked her to go call her husband and come back. "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are

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*God has put before us tools that we can use to bring healing to our broken heart.*

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right when you say you have no husband.<sup>18</sup> The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." (John 4:17-18 NIV)

Can you imagine the pain this lady was living with—5 failed marriages, and the man she was living with now didn't have the decency to marry her. Yet look at the gentleness Jesus uses in talking with her. He could have accused her of lying when she said she didn't have a husband. Instead, He reaches out with gentleness and kindness to move her to the place of healing.

So where are you going to let your pain take you?

## 2. Give up the right to revenge

Many movies produced by Hollywood today have a common theme. The main character is often the victim of some injustice. The whole plot of the movie centers around the hero getting revenge for the wrong done against him or her. And we cheer the hero on—all right! Stick it to him (or her)! It's payback time!

You may find it easy to relate to the injustice others have experienced. The desire for revenge is common. But God has very specific instructions for us: "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." (Romans 12:19 NIV)

Paul shows how this can be applied in real life. Alexander had done a great deal of harm in Paul's life. His response to Timothy was, "The Lord will repay him for what he has done." (2 Timothy 4:14 NIV) Paul wasn't going to meddle in God's affairs.

When you have been deeply hurt by someone, you can easily fill your mind with plans for revenge:

- rehearsing how to get even
- keeping a list of all the things this person has done wrong against you
- rejoicing when judgment comes on this person.

But God makes it clear—if you want to experience healing for your broken heart, give up the right to revenge. What God calls us to do is not easy. "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to

those who hate you, <sup>28</sup>bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." (Luke 6:27-28 NIV)

You say, "It's not right! They should have to pay for their sins against me!" But God is clear—let Him take care of revenge. You need to get busy doing what God wants—loving your enemies, doing good to those who hate you, and blessing those who curse you.

Giving up the right to revenge frees you to move ahead on the path to healing. Holding on to revenge prevents you from experiencing God's healing for your broken heart.

## 3. Discover the power of forgiveness

"I can't let go of my anger," stated one young man who had been deeply betrayed. Often those who have been damaged by others feel that unforgiveness is a way to punish the offender. But unforgiveness does much more damage in your life, and often has little impact on the offender.

Sallie Culbreth, founder of *Committed to Freedom*, a ministry to survivors of sexual abuse, offers a picture of unforgiveness. "It's like buying rat poison, eating it yourself, and then waiting for the rat to die."

God restores broken hearts through the power of forgiveness. Joseph in the Old Testament discovered this power in his relationship with his evil brothers. They hated him so much they planned to kill him. The only thing that stopped them was realizing they could make money by selling him as a slave. Joseph ended up in Egypt because of their betrayal. Later he was betrayed by Potiphar's wife and ended up in prison. But through it all,

Joseph allowed his pain to take him closer to God.

Some time later he was used by God to save the nation of Egypt and his own family. Years later, his brothers still feared he might take revenge on them. Joseph's response showed he had discovered the power of forgiveness. " 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup>You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. <sup>21</sup>So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them." (Genesis 50:19-21 NIV)

Joseph spoke the truth when he said, to his brothers, "You intended to harm me." But Joseph had moved beyond the pain of their betrayal because he had discovered a greater truth, "God intended it for good." He

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was able to move ahead with his life and accomplish meaningful things because he did not allow revenge and unforgiveness to enslave him.

We need to be careful that we do not offer cheap forgiveness to those who have been deeply damaged. A teenage girl had finally seen her father arrested for sexually abusing her. But her mother and friends were telling her to forgive her abuser. Later that day, she said to a friend, "I am so angry at my mom and her friends. All they tell me is to forgive him. And I know if I do that, he can come home and keep

Forgiveness is not the magic wand to healing a broken heart. But even when you do forgive the offender, it does not mean the relationship should be restored. All forgiveness means is that you give God the responsibility to deal with that person for what they did to you. You release them to God. And you put yourself under God's care.

This young teen needs to hear that forgiveness does not give her offender permission to come back home and continue to abuse her. Restoring a relationship is a completely different step from forgiveness. Some people are not safe, and you need to learn how to stay away from unsafe people. Just because someone says, "You can trust me," does not mean you should believe them.

True forgiveness frees you to move on with God. Don't stay stuck in your damage and brokenness. If you forgive others, God will do the same to you and enable you to move ahead with him.

The damage of your broken heart may put you in a place where it is very hard for you to trust others. The steps to discovering and building healthy relationships with others may be hard and very unsettling. But it's worth the risk. Healing is better than brokenness.

So where will you let your pain take you?

Let your pain take you closer to Jesus. Cry out to God for His help. When you cry out to Him, your tears release an irresistible power—the power of a loving heavenly Father. Just as loving parents respond to the cries of their child, in an even greater way, God is touched by our tears. When you reach out to Him, you release His power to bring healing into your heart. And with obedience to His direction, you can move safely ahead on the path to healing for your broken heart.

## What are the steps to Mending a broken heart? Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Read Isaiah 61:1-3. This is a prophecy talking about the future ministry of Jesus. What does verse 1 say about His ministry to the broken hearted? How important must this be for Jesus for this issue to be singled out in a prophecy? What can you receive from this prophecy?
2. Read Romans 12:19. How hard is it for you to release revenge to God? How big an issue are thoughts in your head about revenge against the one who offended you?
3. Some have a broken heart because someone betrayed them. Others have a broken heart caused by disappointments, for example, someone breaking off a relationship. If you feel it's appropriate, share with your group the kinds of issues that broke your heart. Have you recovered from that hurt yet?
4. Read Luke 6:27-28. How can you relate these instructions from God to those who have offended you?
5. How big an issue is "unforgiveness" in your life? Read Genesis 50:19-21. Have you been able to see God using for good what your offender meant for evil against you?
6. What are the questions that still remain regarding how to deal with your broken heart? Or with the person(s) who hurt you?
7. What additional steps do you need to take to experience healing of your broken heart?



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