

## Picking Up the Pieces

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When I was growing up, my mom had a big Christmas cookie platter. It was in the shape of the face of Santa Claus. A few years ago, mom came over for dinner one night and said, “Well, I broke the Santa Claus platter.” Immediately, I asked, “What did you do with it?” She said, “Oh, I threw it away.” I was crushed. That platter was iconic to my childhood. Surprised at my reaction, mom said the pieces were in the trashcan, but she could retrieve them. I was relieved. Once she saved the broken pieces, I glued them back together. That Christmas, she gave me the platter.

There are some things in life that we cannot just throw away. An item may be broken, but because of our affection, we will do our best to put the pieces back together. Of course, sometimes we break more than just a cookie platter. There are times when our lives shatter to pieces.

There are events we experienced that can alter our world in ways previously unimaginable. An injury or diagnosis. The death of a loved one. A rebellious adolescent. Marital infidelity. Unemployment. Betrayal. As long as sin is in the world, we will be subjected to tragedy and disappointment. Sometimes we will be the cause of our brokenness. Sometimes we will be the casualty of another’s recklessness. In the wake of destruction, we will have to pick up the pieces of our lives and forge ahead. But how?

Picking up the pieces of our lives is easier said than done. We can readily recognize the need to do so when we are whole. When we are broken, picking up the pieces seems impossible. Some become angry and bitter. Others attempt to escape their misery through drugs and alcohol. Even more tragic, some may choose to end their lives. Nevertheless, we cannot give up on life. Notice three Biblical principles to help us pick up the pieces.

**1. Picking up the pieces of a broken life takes faith in God.** God has proven His ability to put a broken world back together. Despite all the failings of the human family, God was able to keep His promise of salvation. He did this through His Son, Jesus. Jesus promised to heal the brokenhearted. Yet, receiving wholeness requires the faith of the shattered.

When Moses first explained God’s plan to liberate Israel from slavery, the people did not believe him. Their spirit had been broken by the Egyptians: “...they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery (Exod. 6:9). Eventually, God proved His power to save Israel by sending plagues on the Egyptians. Israel responded to God’s power by faith and Moses led them from Egypt.

Likewise, the harshness of the world may break our spirit. However, God has proven His power to make us whole. He has raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection gives us hope of renewal. While our future may seem bleak, God gives life to the dead and calls into existence

things that do not exist (Rom. 4:17). Therefore, by our faith, God can put us back together and make a new life for us.

**2. Only love.** God can put our lives back together; however, we must work with God to do it. Much of the brokenness we experience in life is relational. Marriages break down; friendships strain; brotherly love grows cold. Most significantly, sin breaks our relationship with God. Only self-giving love can bond broken relationships back together. The self-giving love of the cross draws us back to God: “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore... those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Also, the love of Jesus will empower us to put the broken pieces of our relationships back together. The cross of Jesus gives us greater perspective to be willing to share in the work of reconciliation. To this end, Paul wrote, “Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:12-14).

These are the faithful actions of love. They require the greatest possible effort from us. Bitterness, anger, and hatred will never heal. They will only widen the chasm and deepen the hole. Only love can lift us up and bring us together.

**3. Accept the scars.** With faith and love, God can put our broken lives back together. Yet, scars will remain. We cannot undo the past or erase the memories. Pain and loss shape us, but do not have to define us. God's grace will help smooth the scars. We can use tragedy for good.

For example, Paul cryptically references a most painful time in his life (2 Cor. 1). His situation was so bad that he did not want to live. Yet, God delivered him. Then, Paul used this experience to bring hope to the suffering. Remembering those terrible events at Ephesus was not easy; yet, they strengthened Paul's hope in the God that raises the dead. Those who have been healed from their sorrow can help the hurting.

Also, brokenness makes clear our dependence on God in ways nothing else can. The scars of the past remind us of our need for God. The scars can point us forward. After recounting his past sin, Paul told the Philippians of his resolve to reach forward toward the prize of God's calling (Phil. 3:13-14).

## Conclusion

This December I'll display my mom's Santa Claus cookie platter. It has some visible cracks from where it broke, but that's ok. A repaired platter on my shelf is better than a broken one in a trashcan. Much more than a sentimental cookie platter, a broken life put back together by faith and love is much preferred to a ruined life. If your life has been broken, please know that things can get better. With our trust in God, day by day His love can make us whole.