

# EVERYTHING GOT BROKEN

by Steve Zeisler

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The season of holiday get-togethers can be difficult for a number of reasons. Remember the old song,

*"Over the river and through the woods,*

*to Grandmother's house we go.*

*The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh..."*

Of course that has long since been rendered ridiculous--getting to Grandmother's house hundreds of miles away takes intricate planning. There's no parking at the airport, and since both parents and each of the children have full and separate schedules, maximum effort and sophisticated timing are required to even attempt the trip. "The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh" just isn't a useful description anymore.

Then once you get there, being together with the family may also be difficult. The people with whom you hope to have the greatest intimacy are sometimes the most frustrating of all. Too many family get-togethers are characterized by shallowness and discord and distance. And these hurts become more acute during the holiday season.

Or, conversely, perhaps the experience of family gathering is wonderful--times of warmth, congeniality, laughter, and good memories. But that can be difficult as well, because it throws into stark reality how unsatisfying the rest of life is. Lovely holiday get-togethers remind us that most of the time we don't experience joy and laughter and friendship and intimacy. Too much of our lives is spent on freeways commuting from home to work, and bills are piling up, and health concerns are difficult, and jobs are going nowhere. And all the difficult day-in-and-day-out struggle of life is made more plain by these too-brief moments of loving togetherness.

The holidays therefore can reinforce what the Bible teaches, that this world is not our home. As much as we love to go "home for the holidays," the fact is that, since we were banished from the Garden, human beings have not really had a home anywhere. The modern term that best fits the human condition is "alienation." We find ourselves at odds with the world we live in. We never quite seem to be able to make it work. We've had the door closed behind us to the place where we were first at home, the garden that God made for us.

We're studying the opening chapters of Genesis. Approaching the end of chapter 3, we're looking at the process by which this home that God made for us was lost, and at what is true of human beings in this world at this time. So far in chapter 3, there have been two main ideas, and we're going to look at a third in verses 16-19.

First, the opening verses of chapter 3 described the process of temptation, how the deceiver succeeds in making us follow sinful counsel rather than trust God. It's very useful to us to know what inclines us toward self-destruction.

Second, verses 7-15 talked about the corrosion of the heart that takes place inside an individual who has chosen to disobey the Heavenly Father, about three evidences of heart corrosion: (1) covering ourselves, (2) hiding from God, and (3) blaming someone else for our troubles.

Now we're going to consider social disintegration—not belonging where we live, knowing there's always an undercurrent of dysfunction and difficulty that we have to acknowledge. Verses 16-19:

**To the woman [God] said,**

**"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;**

**with pain you will give birth to children.**

**Your desire will be for your husband,**

**and he will rule over you."**

**To Adam [God] said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'**

**"Cursed is the ground because of you;**

**through painful toil you will eat of it**

**all the days of your life.**

**It will produce thorns and thistles for you,**

**and you will eat the plants of the field.**

**By the sweat of your brow**

**you will eat your food**

**until you return to the ground,**

**since from it you were taken;**

**for dust you are**

**and to dust you will return."**

There are two arenas of social disintegration before us: family life and the world of work.

Let me make a couple of literary observations before we look at God's words to the woman and to the man. First, the term "curse" is used in this section. In verse 17 God said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground because of you." Earlier in verse 14, the serpent was cursed by God, and snakes go on their belly as a reminder to us that the devil himself has received a curse from God. God didn't use the word "curse" when he spoke to the woman. That is because she was deceived in what she did. But neither the serpent nor the man were deceived. The serpent knew exactly what he was doing. His errand was destruction. God's indictment of the man makes clear that Adam also knew what he was doing ("...you ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'you must not eat of it..."). This prohibition was given before the creation of woman, and she presumably learned of it from the man. When she was asked, "Did God really say...?" she may have wondered if the transmission of information from God to Adam to her had been perfectly clear. But Adam learned directly from God and he had no excuse.

The word "curse" was properly applied in the case of those who knew that what they were doing was wrong and did it anyway. However, notice that Adam himself was not cursed. God loved the man too much to curse him as he did the serpent. But the creation ("cursed is the ground") for which Adam was responsible would suffer because of what he did.

A second observation comes from the phrase, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree..." Is

this suggesting that listening to one's wife is a bad thing? Absolutely not. The emphasis in this clause is on the verb, not the object. God was not saying, "You listened to your *wife* ."The problem was, "You *listened* to your wife." Adam had already listened to God. God had been very clear: "Don't eat from the tree in the middle of the garden."There were no nuances that required interpretation. He should have been *speaking* to his wife--acting, protecting, stepping in, dealing with the serpent himself. He should have been active instead of passive.

## **PAIN IN CHILD-REARING**

Now let's look at the word of God to the woman and to the man, the consequences to family and to work. The first consequence, spoken to the woman, is that pregnancy and childbearing will be difficult:

**"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;**

**with pain you will give birth to children."**

I'm convinced that "childbearing" has to do with the entire lifetime of a child. It's referring to the whole range of experiences parents go through: not being able to fix the world their children live in, not being able to protect them from all harm, not being able to keep them from making the same mistakes that we made. Anyone who is a parent of a teenager knows what it's like for hours to stretch out into the night when your child hasn't come home at the time they were supposed to, and you anxiously wonder what's happened to them. The older children grow, the more serious their problems are, and we as parents suffer pain, as our parents did with us.

Labor pains are an early indicator of all the difficulties that come with having children, a way that God says, "These children are going to be a source of struggle for you all your life."And so the period of pregnancy grows increasingly uncomfortable, and then the birth of the child has physical pain associated with it.

## **UNMET EXPECTATIONS OF A HUSBAND**

The second statement of consequence regarding family that God spoke to the woman has to do with the husband-wife relationship:

**"Your desire will be for your husband,**

**and he will rule over you."**

Now, there are feminist thinkers who object to this language, saying first of all, "Why do all the consequences in family life get addressed to the women? Aren't men responsible for their families, too?"And secondly, "Since the Hebrew Scriptures are foundational to our culture, isn't the reason for tension in family life that women were put in difficult circumstances by these very words?"This point of view suggests that if we were raised with a different religion, our familiar struggles with gender wouldn't exist.

But that can't possibly be true. The tension between husbands and wives is the same all over the world, and has been all throughout history. In cultures that have no influence of the Bible in them, the same tensions exist between husbands and wives. And in whatever language you find marriages described, you will see husbands and wives struggling with each other over the same things. At whatever time in history, in urban societies and agrarian societies, among educated people and uneducated people, the tensions of marriage have the same shape. This text didn't create the problem. It is describing the beginning of gender-based misunderstanding and it's predictable outcome.

"Your desire will be for your husband..."This phrase declares that wives want more from their husbands than they get--more willingness to listen; more emotional connection; more romantic attentiveness; more sharing of thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams; more time together; more discussion of plans; more openness to influence. In depth of connection, in noticing, appreciating, knowing, and understanding, husbands in every culture and in every time have disappointed their wives.

"...and he will rule over you."The rule of husbands can be despotic, cruel, violent. There is no defense for marital cruelty, and the worst of such husbands need to be locked up. But even the best husbands will often be perceived as ruling rather than loving their wives.

The dysfunction here is in the heart. Genesis 3:16 declares to the woman, "One of the consequences of being alienated from God is that you will be alienated from your husband."It is easy to imagine that the grass is greener somewhere else. A wife who grows tired of her husband's relational failures may look on at another marriage and imagine how happy she would be if she were married to that husband. But his wife knows too well that he is no ideal partner, either. The problem is in the heart. Our alienation from God means that no marriage partner will be without disappointment.

A husband's "rule over you,"despotic or benevolent, describes a masculine tendency to respond externally. The best husband, wanting to do the best he can, will render decisions, take action, fix structures, and invent strategies. Most passive husbands have withdrawn because they are at a loss for "something to do."And yet very often a wife is longing for depth of understanding, rather than a "rule over you"strategy for action, no matter how well-intentioned.

There's a television show called *Men Behaving Badly* . I haven't seen the show, but that phrase stuck in my mind. If you were to go back to any time in history or go anywhere in the world, and call for humor that pokes fun at men, the jokes would all be the same. It wouldn't matter whether they spoke English, Swahili, or Urdu, men would be behaving badly in the same way. They are emotionally distant. Their sexual desire is without nuance or sensitivity. They are coarse, blustery, physically aggressive, self-indulgent, and out of touch.

Do you remember the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, and the questioning of Anita Hill? The enduring phrase from that was the insistence of women legislators that the men on the panel "just don't get it."The word "it"meant something to almost all of the women and nothing to almost all of the men. The shortcomings of men are in a predictable pattern.

Now, is this a consequence only for women? What if a man loves his wife, as Adam clearly did? What if she is the most important person in all the world to him--someone with whom he has become "one flesh,"and to whom he has given his heart? Isn't it terrible to rule when you want to love somebody, to not be able to draw near when you want to know and be known? Isn't it as much a sadness for husbands as for wives if they forever seem to not quite connect or understand; if they receive feedback, subtle or otherwise, that their best efforts fall sadly short of the mark?

Most men who love their wives and see them going through a difficult childbirth would do anything to alleviate the suffering. Men suffer in the raising of children and greatly so when a beloved wife suffers anguish as a mother. Simply stated, the consequences that have descended on women have tremendous impact on the husbands who love them.

## **PAINFUL TOIL, THORNS AND THISTLES, MEANINGLESSNESS**

What about the second statement of consequence, made to the man, concerning the world of work? There are three things we can distill from the word to Adam. First of all, the work fallen creatures engage in will always be much harder than it would have been otherwise. Long hours, monotonous duties, sore muscles, stress, sleep deprivation, a deteriorating body that comes from work--everything from carpal tunnel syndrome to black lung disease--all happen because work was rendered so difficult.

Not only does it cost a lot of effort to get any return, but very often the return is the wrong thing. The earth was cursed because of the choice the man made. And that curse comes back in thorns and thistles and weeds. Not only are crops difficult to grow, what we grow instead is nettles and poison oak. The earth thumbs its nose at the one who caused its cursing. We experience choking aggravations in our work--bugs in computer programs, financial reversals, hard-disk crashes, crucial phone messages being erased, side effects to medicines, missing connections at airports at the worst possible time. Co-workers become competitors, children fall sick at the least convenient moment, and on and on. The effort to make a living is beset with thorns, thistles, weeds, and contrariness of every kind.

Lastly, there is a cycle of meaninglessness. Adam came from dust and would return to dust, and he would spend his lifetime scratching in the dust to grow things to eat. The dust becomes a source of food, the food is consumed, and eventually the body dies and is buried, and it becomes dust and fertilizer for the next generation. What significance does anybody have, working as hard as they do but accomplishing only the end of their life?

Finally, do these consequences apply only to men? Don't women work at difficult jobs and feel the same frustration? And don't the women who love their husbands sorrow over the struggles their husbands have in providing for a family in hard work environments?

## **OUR TRUE HOME**

This alienation has occurred because we lost the first and best home that we had. All the wishing for family life and for accomplishment, all the desire to be someplace that fits us, are reminders that this world is not our home. And whatever home you go to for the holidays will have some level of disappointment in it.

But there is a home waiting for us. For those of us who know Christ, there is a destination that we haven't arrived at yet. We can recognize what God has done for us in Christ. We can see what is yet future, and we can embrace it and delight in it now.

Do you want to know how to enjoy the holidays? Here's my best tip: Don't expect too much. Don't expect the experience of being with your family to make you happy. Decide to let God make you happy before you arrive. Let him fulfill you and meet the needs of your heart. Then go and be a blessing to everybody else without needing their response for validation. Decide beforehand that you have everything you need, that you know where your real home is.

There's an old story that I remember Ray Stedman telling. An elderly missionary couple spent decades of hard service on the mission field. All the people they had known well at home were gone, and the churches that had supported them had changed.

When they were returning home, they landed at the same time the Beatles did on their first visit to America. There was a crowd of well-wishers and photographers snapping pictures. There were interviews, hoopla, and enthusiasm for the Beatles. Nobody came to meet the returning missionaries. Nobody remembered, and it seemed as if nobody cared. The contrast was devastating.

Time went by and the husband grew more and more frustrated and bitter over the experience. He complained repeatedly at their lot in life: "All this time on the mission field, and no cares about us at home." His wife finally offered a simple word of perspective that made all the difference: "We're not home yet."

Hebrews 11:13-16 speaks of many of the great heroes of the faith and what they believed about their lives. Eugene Peterson paraphrases it this way in *The Message* :

*"Each one of these people of faith died not yet having in hand what was promised, but believing. How did they do it? They saw it way off in the distance. They waved their greeting and accepted the fact that they were transients in this world. People who live this way make it plain that they are looking for their true home. If they were homesick for the old country, they could have gone back any time they wanted, but they were after a far better country than that: heaven country. You can see why God is so proud of them and has a city waiting for them. "*

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That city is our home, too.

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