

## Broken To Pieces

On Sunday we talked about how to respond to the impermanence and imperfection that pervades life here on planet earth.

1. Warm-up Question: Jeff told how much he loves sameness and permanence in his life – same hair style, same exercise routine, same food, for years on end. Some of us are like that; others of us are full of spontaneity. Give a simple example from your life that illustrates either your love for spontaneity or your love for permanence.
2. Pastor Lanecia Rouse faced a deep crisis when her daughter was still born. The grief was overwhelming and simple “spiritual platitudes” only deepened her despair. When we lose someone or something we dearly love, we come face to face with the impermanence and imperfection of life.
  - a. When in your life have you lost something that you hoped would last for a lifetime?
  - b. What’s something in your life right now that you hope will last for a lifetime?
3. The Bible tells us that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8.) Since God is eternal, we just tend to naturally assume that things that last are valuable and things that don’t aren’t. The most famous Bible passage on this subject is found in Ecclesiastes 1:2:

*“Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. . . . A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun goes down. . . . The people of long ago are not remembered, nor will there be any remembrance of people yet to come by those who come after them.”*

  - a. At first glance, when the translators’ use of the word “vanity,” what point does this passage seem to make?
  - b. The Hebrew word “hebel” does sometimes mean “vanity.” But its core root meaning is simply “breath.” Read back through the foregoing passage, substituting the word “breath” for “vanity.” How does that change the meaning?
  - c. Each breath we take is fleeting, but that doesn’t mean each breath is “vain.” Far from it. The next breath you take is absolutely essential to your wellbeing and, together with all your other fleeting breaths, sustains your life. That’s why near the end of his book, the Teacher in Ecclesiastes concludes that we should treasure all the simple experiences of each day that come and go. Think back through your day. What’s something simple you experienced that you should celebrate?
4. In Matthew 12:36, Jesus says, “I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter, for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.” That verse is usually used to

warn us to be careful with our words. But there's an even deeper meaning in what Jesus says. Words are just a breath. We breath in, force the air through our vocal cords, and the resulting vibrations form words that are here then gone. Yet Jesus says every fleeting word will live into eternity. Apparently, in a timeless realm, past, present, and future collapse into an infinite present where everything that ever was in your life is infinitely present in the moment.

- a. How do you feel about that idea?
  - b. Jeff told about his beautiful experience climbing Sheep's Rock. What's a beautiful moment from your past that you will relish carrying with you forever?
  - c. Read the well-known poem printed on page 3. What thoughts or feelings does this poem evoke within you?
5. So far we've talked about how even the briefest experience in life has eternal value. Still, though, when we lose something we dearly loved, it brings great grief, as when Lanecia lost her child. For Lanecia, the Japanese artistic concept of Wabi-sabi proved extremely helpful. Wabi-sabi teaches us to see the "flawed beauty" inherent in all life's imperfections. The classic example is the Japanese process of Golden Repair, where a beautiful bowl is deliberately broken, so it can be put back together with dramatic golden fault lines that add character and strength to the bowl.
- a. In her theology retreats, Lanecia has students paint their bowls to reflect life the way they wish it was. How would you paint your bowl? Describe how you wish your life was?
  - b. After students painstakingly paint their beautiful bowls, Lanecia asks them to lift their bowl over their head and smash it on the ground. Would you do it? How do you think that would feel?
  - c. Only after the students gather up the broken pieces does Lanecia teach them the concept of Golden Repair. Once each student has repaired his/her bowl, they sit in a circle and talk about what they learned from the exercise. What are the lessons?
6. Read Exodus 2:1-15. Moses' life is a dramatic illustration of Wabi-sabi in action. He was raised a Prince of Egypt, but then committed murder in a fit of rage and had to flee to the wilderness. He lost everything. But there, in communion with God, he put the broken pieces back together, met God in the burning bush, and found his extraordinary life calling. Moses' life was far more beautiful after it had shattered.
- a. A wise person once said, "If we don't transform our pain, we are sure to transmit our pain." What does that mean?
  - b. Tell us about an experience that shattered you. With regard to that experience, where are you in the process of Golden Repair? In what ways are you stronger and more beautiful now in the aftermath of that experience?

## **A Reason, A Season, or A Lifetime?**

People always come into your life for a reason, a season and a lifetime.

When you figure out which it is, you know exactly what to do.

When someone is in your life for a REASON, it is usually to meet a need you have expressed outwardly or inwardly. They have come to assist you through a difficulty, or to provide you with guidance and support, to aid you physically, emotionally, or even spiritually. They may seem like a godsend to you, and they are. They are there for a reason, you need them to be. Then, without any wrong doing on your part or at an inconvenient time, this person will say or do something to bring the relationship to an end. Sometimes they die, Sometimes they just walk away. Sometimes they act up or out and force you to take a stand. What we must realize is that our need has been met, our desire fulfilled; their work is done. The prayer you sent up has been answered and it is now time to move on.

When people come into your life for a SEASON, it is because your turn has come to share, grow, or learn. They may bring you an experience of peace or make you laugh. They may teach you something you have never done. They usually give you an unbelievable amount of joy. Believe it! It is real! But, only for a season. And like Spring turns to Summer and Summer to Fall, the season eventually ends.

LIFETIME, relationships teach you a lifetime of lessons; those things you must build upon in order to have a solid emotional foundation. Your job is to accept the lesson, love the person/people (anyway), and put what you have learned to use in all other relationships and areas in your life.

Author Unknown