

The Importance of Being Broken for Others

By F. Kefa Sempangi

Walking in the Light

Immediately after my conversion in 1961, I was introduced to the late Mondo, one of the founding fathers of the Revival Fellowship in Uganda. From time to time I would visit Mondo; I was profoundly attracted to his emphasis on walking in the light.

It was through Mondo's teaching that I came to learn about the East African revival. In the 1930s several Ugandans had discovered that, though they were busy having Bible studies, holding prayer meetings, and attending church services, the things they were doing were not the central message of Christ's teaching. They had to ask themselves: did Jesus die for their meetings? Or was it for something else?

They found that Christ gives the instruction: before you can enjoy your devotional life, make sure you are reconciled to your brother and sister whom you might have wronged during the day (Matthew 5:23). The command is to go quickly and make amends. Christ died not for our devotions; what Christ so dearly paid the price for is our relationship with God and with each other. When those relationships are violated, our devotions are an abomination to God.

A broken relationship is a poison. The Bible makes no exceptions: both the offended and the offender are equally guilty before God. You are to seek out those you think have something against you. If someone wrongs you, you have the obligation to rebuke him. If he repents, you have the obligation to forgive him.

The Revival Fellowship also found that we must confess our sins to one another. Confessing our sins is synonymous with walking in the light. Both James and John agree that when this occurs, there is a healing from the Lord (James 5:16, I John 1:7). When there is no walking in the light, however, our prayers and church services are used only as religious counterfeits.

Every time I met with Mondo I was greeted with a threefold challenge:

'Are you repenting?'

'Are you walking in the light?'

'Are you being broken?'

Mondo's questions were directed to the kind of fellowship I was having with the Christians with whom I was doing mission work. His suspicion that we were avoiding the real work of God in our lives was well-founded. Gradually, it became clear to me what Mondo was saying: Jesus did not die for working together but for fellowshiping together. He died for walking in the light, for confessing sins to one another.

I remember when I walked into my first Revival Fellowship meeting. It was a Friday afternoon. The hall was almost packed, and the people were singing and praising God. Most of the songs were about the blood of the Lamb that was slain. Different people stood up one after another confessing their sins. When a brother stood up and confessed openly his sin, I noticed that the rest of the people were not paying much attention to the sin confessed. Before a sister would finish her confession, they would burst out in songs of praise.

Even though I was a little shaky, I finally stood up too. I confessed about my past unfaithfulness to my creator and how that had damaged my life. Before I finished, people

started to sing praises for the blood of the Lamb. When I resumed my seat, one brother came and embraced me; I could feel the warmth in his hand as he said to me. 'This is victory, brother.'

'Is this the fellowship?' I asked myself. These brothers and sisters hardly majored on my sin. Mondo explained to me later. 'What we hear is not your sin, but God's work in your life. We hear you giving witness to God's power to break the chains of sin. We know that, left to ourselves, we can never go to a brother and confess to him, 'I have done foolishly, forgive me.' This can only occur when grace takes over and pushes our pride into a tight corner.'

One lady wrote me recently about a Revival Fellowship meeting which was meeting underground in Uganda. At one meeting many people began to be convicted of the sin of dishonesty in their lives. They confessed this sin to one another. One of Ami's spies was in the meeting and before he knew what was happening to him, he was on his knees confessing his deception. He was pretending to be a Christian, he said, when he was actually a spy. After this conviction of sin, he had the desire to know Christ.

Now I understand what Mondo meant. If I am having Bible study but disowning my brother, I am not walking in the light. If I am going to church but keeping my sister at a distance, I am not walking in the light. Without a willingness to live a transparent life before my brother and sister, our meetings are just another form of alienation. Where there is walking in the light, these things are the outflowing of a praising life.

In the mission command that I had heard as a young man, the emphasis had been on go, not love. It was the ministry, not the brethren, that was most important. As a result I came to love my sermons more than the people to whom I preached. In my zeal to carry out the commission I failed to see that the commandment came first. I was to love my brothers and sisters.

From Mondo I learned that walking in the light means a total sharing of my secrets with my sisters and brothers. Christ spoke to his disciples, 'I no longer call you servants; a servant knows not the secrets of his Lord, but I have shared with you the secrets of my father' (John 15:15). When we share our secrets, there is a total identification with one another. We have a reciprocal bond.

When a body of Christians begins to walk in the light together, there is no room left for gossip. Walking in the light puts gossip out of business. Nothing needs to be talked over in secret which is already in the light. Gossip is converted into efforts to seek solutions together. Instead of majoring on a brother's weakness, we can defend him where he is weakest and promote him where he is strong.

I knew that, if it was up to me, I could never walk in the light with my brother or sister. Gradually, I realized that walking in the light was not so much what I was able to do, but what Christ had made me to be-- a light, or better still, a lighted candle. I understood this best when I considered the African hurricane lamp: for its light to shine, the hurricane lamp requires a transparent glass, a trimmed wick, and unpolluted oil. If the glass is dirty, the light is faint. If the wick is untrimmed, the light flickers. And when the oil is contaminated, the light grows dim and eventually dies.

Many a Christian life would like to shine without being transparent and without being trimmed. And in Matthew 5 there is a whole list of things which contaminate the oil: sinful

anger, lust, contention, and evil hatred towards one's enemies. Without pure oil, we cannot be a light, and we cannot live transparent lives before our brothers.

When we cannot be a light, we cannot walk in the light. When we cannot walk in the light, we pile sin upon sin. There is anger and resentment instead of reconciliation. There is lust instead of love, contention instead of contentment, concealment where there should be confession, and bitterness where there should be forgiveness.

Every time I lose an argument with my wife, I feel I am ready for a divorce. But, beyond the argument, I can recognize that Christ, through his blood, has paid the price for my marriage. My identity has been paid for. It no longer depends upon winning or losing an argument. So every day when I am ready to swear and curse, I know Jesus paid for my peace. Instead of going to fight Judas, I go to wash his feet. I was saved by grace, and it is grace that will sustain me in all my relationships.

But we are mistaken if we believe-- as I think perhaps many in the Revival Fellowship did -- that confessing our sins to one another is the whole of walking in the light. To walk in the light is to renounce all the works of evil and to live the fruits of the spirit which are the work of grace in our lives.

It is a work of grace which fills my heart with humility and compels me to seek forgiveness from my brother. It is a work of grace which makes me restless until I can forgive him. But no matter how spiritual I feel confessing my sin to a brother in my devotional group, if I am not practicing the whole counsel of God, I am not living in the light. The God whom we serve, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has identified himself not only as the father of sinners, but as the father of orphans. He is the defender of widows, the liberator of prisoners, He gives good to the hungry and justice to those who are denied it (Psalms 68:5, 146:7). And he has commanded his church to do the same:

Let the weak and the orphans have justice, be fair to the wretched and destitute; rescue the weak and needy, save them from the clutches of the wicked. Psalm 82

One who suppresses God's truth for poor and oppressed is in as much spiritual darkness as the one who lives in a perpetual state of unconfessed sin. If it is a work of grace to humbly confess my sin, it is likewise a work of grace to walk among the broken down houses of my community and to be touched by the poverty of those who dwell there.

If it is a work of grace to feel remorse until I am reunited with a sister against whom I have sinned, it is likewise a work of grace to feel restless until justice is restored to my neighbors. It is a work of grace to become part of the healing ministry which brings God's truth to the poor and the oppressed.

But we must remember that, before we are a light to our neighbors and to the world, we are first a light to the home. Unless we are a light to one another -- to our families and to the body of believers to which we belong -- we will not shine at all. The light that is in us will turn to darkness. If we are to avoid the futility which comes when the blind lead the blind, if we are truly to walk in the light with one another, we must first be broken.

There is a popular expression among the fellowship that describes this disposition in the life of an individual. The Ugandan word is Okxmexyeka. There is no word just like it in English. It is a 'broken' individual. To be broken is to have no pride, for where there is pride, there is no

confession and no forgiveness. To heal a broken relationship, one must be broken; one must be willing to 'give in;' one must not find his or her identity in always being in the right.

When Jesus fed the five thousand, took the five loaves of bread, blessed them, broke them, and gave them to disciples to give away (Matthew 14:1). One brother of the Revival read this verse and then looked at me. 'Until God breaks your will, he will never use you,' he said. 'You will only remain a nice loaf of bread.' What Jesus did in feeding the multitude was very symbolic of what was going to happen to his body. To his own disciples he said, 'This is my body which is broken for you.'

Unless we are broken, we are of no use to God. And unless we are broken, we are of no use to the community of believers of which we are a part. Hardly any of us can go to his own Christian community and say, 'This is my body which is broken for you. I am laying all my professional skills, abilities, and economic resources at your disposal. Take them and use them as you see fit.' We cannot say this, because we are not broken. We are too proud to give our lives away to people who are not perfect. We don't want to lose ourselves for sinners. We want to find the perfect person and the perfect community, but we never find them.

So, like Judas, we make only a partial commitment to the body of believers to which we belong, and we find our identity in our rebellion from them. Unlike Paul who clearly saw his identity -- 'an apostle of Jesus Christ'-- in terms of his function in the body, we see our identity in how we are different from the body and opposed to it.

If we are following Jesus, we cannot wait for the perfect community. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ allowed his body to be broken for us. Jesus lays the foundation for community life in the midst of betrayal: 'the Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread....' He gave thanks and broke it and gave it. Our commitment to one another in community can be no less than his: 'This is my body broken for you.'

Without the crucifixion of pride, we will always consider ourselves too inadequate to feed our brother and sisters in community. We will never want to run the risk of trying, because we have a secret anxiety that we will fail. Jesus said to his disciples, 'Give to the people to eat.' The disciples' reaction was that what they had was not sufficient. Still Jesus told them to 'go and see' (Mark 6:38). He knew that the Father was sufficient.

The problem is that we fail to realize that it is the small things -- a few loaves of bread or a widow's little oil-- that God wants us to place in his hands. God asked Moses. 'What is that in your hand?' Moses knew it was only a poor shepherd's stick. He knew he was only a poor shepherd. God wanted Moses in his service, but Moses could not believe that God would use the weak and base things of the world to declare his glory.

I know how my wife and I once tried to avoid God's call. We had only narrowly escaped death in Uganda and had come to seminary in the United States. Before long we started getting letters from our fellow refugees in Nairobi asking for help. At first we tried to ignore them. We hardly had enough for ourselves; how could we give to other refugee families?

Gradually the truth about Christ started to take hold of our lives. He would take the little we had and bless it. He was not asking us to set up a refugee fund for thousands of people; he was only asking that we be faithful with what we had. As we started to give, the miracle of the loaves took place. What we had thought was barely enough to feed ourselves became, through the Father's sufficiency, food and housing for many refugees.

We are broken for the community, and in community we are broken. In community we can no longer stand aloof and protect ourselves, we can no longer be 'spiritually incorruptible.' As we walk in the light with one another, as we repent and confess, our pride is no longer in control of our actions. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit, and together we are given to the world.

In that giving we are broken again. We are broken by a renewed sense of our own inadequacies, and we are broken by the very people we are trying to help. In 1971, with the help of Mrs. Hans Rookmaaker, I opened up an orphanage home in Uganda. It was always a discouraging and humiliating experience to go to a village and pick up an orphan. As I would drive away, ten other orphans would be chasing behind me until they gave up, exhausted.

It then began to hurt...'Lord, why am I taking one when there are ten others? Can't you give me a chance to save them all?' But then in the deep silence of my frustration, I would feel the conviction of the master saying, 'It is this one I wanted you to take.'

God wanted to teach me then of my own inadequacy and of his love for me. The need was clearly far greater than all my resources. My limitations, in light of the enormity of the evil I saw, began to haunt me. I felt useless in God's kingdom. I was humbled and broken by my own expendability. And it was then that I knew that God loved me, for it was not just my service he wanted; he wanted me.

When we are broken by grace to serve God's people, we find that our brokenness is only a beginning. Christ gave himself for us in humility and lowliness. The very people he came to save responded to his sacrificial giving by crucifying him. His best friends abandoned him when things stopped going well. But somehow we have been led to believe that our own lot should be different than our master's. We have forgotten that no servant is greater than his master and that our master died on the cross, despised and rejected by men.

So when we give ourselves to others, we are discouraged to the point of giving up when things go wrong. When we begin to be broken for our neighbors and find our efforts being hindered by the very people we are trying to help, we want to abandon them to Satan. We want to say, 'Lord, it wasn't these sinners I wanted to die for. Isn't there someone else, someone more grateful, more talented? Isn't there someone that will make me feel more successful in your kingdom?'

Our questions become the masks behind which we hide our disobedience, our unwillingness to follow the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for sinners.

But as we learn to abide in Christ, as we live in obedience to him and are broken for others, we find that God is not concerned to make us Christian success stories. It is not our reputation and successful service God wants. He wants us. He wants hearts that are humble. He wants a community of believers that is faithful. He wants a people who can say with their lives: this is my body which is broken for you.

It is then and only then that we can know the hope of glory, the crucified and resurrected Christ.