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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Waller, Ryan Casey, author.

Title: Broken / Ryan Casey Waller.

Description: 1 [edition]. | Cincinnati : Forward Movement, 2017. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2017022677 (print) | LCCN 2017024159 (ebook) | ISBN 9780880284417 () | ISBN

Subjects: LCSH: Christian life--Episcopal authors. | Consolation. | Suffering--Religious aspects--Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4509.5 (ebook) | LCC BV4509.5 .W347 2017 (print) | DDC 248.8/6--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017022677>

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ISBN: 9780880284417

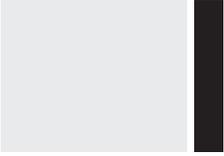
Printed in USA



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Ryan Casey Waller

Forward Movement
Cincinnati, Ohio



praise
for
broken

Whatever our brokenness may be, the God who has begun a good work in us will not abandon us. In these pages, with honesty, humor, and insight, Ryan Waller testifies faithfully to the movement of God in his life—and in all our lives, if we will only pay attention. *Broken* is a gift to a suffering world.

—Greg Garrett

Author of *Entertaining Judgment*
and *The Prodigal*

Ryan has given us a gift in the stories that fill these pages. Eloquent and accessible, honest and insightful, Ryan gives us permission to tell the truth about our doubts, fears, and struggles. His vulnerability reminds us that Christianity is for those of us who feel lost. And his sense of hope encourages us to acknowledge our brokenness, because there we find grace.

—Julie Rodgers

Popular blogger and speaker

I have never read a more clear, concise, riveting, hilarious, heart-breaking and life-changing book about a believer dealing with suffering. Ryan doesn't sugarcoat frustrations about God. Instead he opens our eyes to how our love, generosity, and kindness to other people opens our eyes to God's awesome love for us.

Harry H. Harrison Jr.

Best-selling author of *Fearless Parenting* and
Father to Son: Life Lessons on Raising a Boy

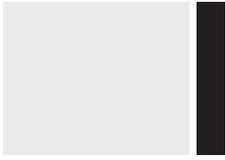
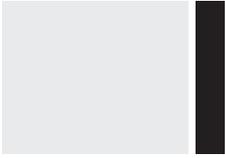


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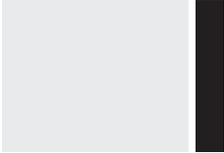
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for Caroline, the one I love





introduction

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it.

Mark 14:22-23

There is a crack in everything, that's how the lights get in.

Leonard Cohen

Are you ready for your blessing? Are you ready for your miracle?

Chance the Rapper

Dear God, I pray. I had no idea how much pain your children are feeling.

This is my singular thought as I sit reeling from my first few weeks in ministry. What have I done? I can't handle hearing about all this suffering, much less be expected to do something about it.

Deep breath.

I can always go back to being a lawyer.

Yes. I repeat these words to myself.

I can always go back to being a lawyer.

I say them again, and the thought begins to soothe the simmer in my brain. *Yes, I can run from God. God won't stop me. God won't even give chase. God doesn't do that sort of thing because God loves free will. Right?*

The image of Jonah trapped in the belly of a stinking fish comes to mind, but I push it away. *God knows I can't handle this line of work. God will understand there's been a terrible mistake. Besides, I'm not Jonah. No great prophet here. God knows exactly who and what I am.*

Broken.

Yes...I can always go back to being a lawyer.

I take another deep breath and read more prayer cards from parishioners in my church.

"My son is back in rehab with opioid addiction. This is the fourth time. He is 22."

"Last month I was diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer. This is exactly how my father died."

"I've been looking for a job for a full year now. No savings left. TERRIFIED."

"I cannot stop looking at pornography. It's making me hate myself. I can't stop."

"Want to be pregnant. Have wanted it for five years. Please pray"

"My child doesn't have a single friend at school. Please, God, send her a friend. Just one."

“Married nineteen years. Husband told me last week he doesn’t love me. Hasn’t loved me for a long, long time.”

I stop reading. I need another breath.

These prayers come from people in the pews of the church I serve. It happens every week. We stock the pews with the prayer cards and ask the congregation to write down anything they’d like for the clergy to pray for on their behalf. We collect the cards during the offering and pray for them on Tuesday mornings. In these first few weeks of my ministry, I learn something: Praying for each other isn’t always easy. Prayer is where people get real. We fake it with each another and pretend everything is *fine*, but we usually don’t do that with God. We tell God how it is. That’s good. Being honest with God is a sign we believe in the power of prayer. If we didn’t, we wouldn’t bother pouring our hearts out to God.

The problem is nobody else hears our prayers. And in the age of social media, where our lives are curated to show only our best and most beautiful selves, it is easy to believe we are the only ones who are broken.

But we’re not. We are all broken and in need of God’s blessing. No one has it all together; no person is perfect. Behind our smiles and affirmations that everything is *fine* are gaping wounds of the soul that desperately need the care of a divine physician.

I am learning that we need to pour out our brokenness, not just to God but to each other, so we can know that we are not alone. Something sacred happens when we make ourselves vulnerable to one another—we connect. And in connection, we find healing and life.

John’s Gospel offers a provocative moment when Jesus tells his followers they must eat his flesh and drink his blood if they want

to have eternal life. John tells us that many people viewed this as a hard teaching and because of it, abandoned Jesus.

Jesus turns to Peter and says, “*Will you leave, too?*”

Peter answers, “*Where would I go? You have the words of life.*”

Peter has connected with Jesus and understands that the life he found in Jesus couldn't be found anywhere else. Peter is broken, just like us, but in Jesus he knows he can become something else: blessed.

It has taken me a while to learn this truth: Jesus is the physician my soul needs. So much of religion makes it sound like we need to fix our brokenness before we come to Jesus. But Jesus says just the opposite.

Do you remember what happened on the night Jesus was betrayed?

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it.

Mark 14:22-23

Did you notice what Jesus did *before* he broke the bread?

He blessed it.

We are all broken in some real way. No person has arrived. No person is whole. We long to be whole, but we are broken, wounded, hurting people. But here is the amazing news of Jesus Christ: he blessed the bread before he broke it. And through Jesus, our brokenness is also blessed, our wounds healed, our hearts made whole.

We may be broken but a current of blessedness runs in the river of our spirit, deeper than our brokenness.

May the words humbly offered in this book give you permission to share your brokenness with others so that you may know you are not alone. May you also remember that you are much more than the sum of your broken parts.

You are something else completely.

A child of God.

And we all know what God does with his children.

God blesses them.

Ryan Casey Waller
Dallas, Texas





help

Be pleased, O God, to deliver me;
O LORD, make haste to help me.

Psalm 70:1

The only thing my mother ever wanted was a family of her own. Her biological father was an alcoholic, and her mother wasn't quite up for the task of raising her as a single mom. So for the first twelve years of her life, my mother was passed between relatives. When her aunt Rachel finally adopted her, Mom said it was the first time in her life she really believed someone loved her.

She married my father shortly before her twentieth birthday with clearly defined goals in mind: to create the family she never had and to shower them with love. And that's exactly what she did. Today, my parents have been married forty-four years. They have four children of their own and ten grandchildren with one more on the way. And while my mother is honest enough to admit there were days she would have happily signed divorce papers, she never did. She stuck it out. She worked it out. She loved and she loved and she loved. My parents both say they are more in love with each other today than they were as teenagers.

Their story, however, is not without its shadows. All families have secrets. Ours is no exception. The trouble is that our secrets tore our family apart.

I know a lot of people who grew up in harsh environments. Like my mother, they were affected by alcoholism or abuse or neglect. If by some chance they were spared these serious maladies, they still experienced all sorts of situations they would rather forget.

I am not one of those people. My childhood was nothing short of idyllic. If you asked me about the worst thing that happened during my childhood, I would have no answer for you. I was spared from suffering. I was surrounded by love. The members of my family were my favorite people on earth. I always had lots of friends, but my best friends were my family. We were as tight and happy a unit as there ever was.

That same family hasn't been under the same roof in years. Not at Thanksgiving. Not at a birthday. Not even for Christmas. The family that my mother dedicated her life to creating and nurturing is utterly broken.

For the sake of those involved, people I dearly love, I will spare you the exact details of the secrets that caused this destruction. For our purposes, it's enough to know the secrets involved money and betrayal. Ultimately, the details of what happened don't really matter. What's done is done. The past cannot be changed. What matters is that some people who once loved each other now hate each other. And that matters a lot, because, unlike the past, this can be changed. Just not by the person we might think.

When my family first broke apart, I was consumed by the desire to fix it. I thought about it constantly, prayed relentlessly, and did everything in my power to "make it all better." I made phone calls, sent texts, begged for us to come together and talk it through. I

asked my priest for advice; I asked my therapist for advice; I asked any friend who would listen to tell me what to do. Somebody had to have the answer. It was out there, and I was going to find it.

I carried on like this until one night I woke up with shakes that wouldn't stop. I had become so obsessed with trying to fix my family that I had neglected my own mental, emotional, and spiritual health. It was the first time in my life that I had encountered a problem I couldn't solve. My family was broken, and apparently I was too.

This led me to a dramatic truth about my own faith in God. Up until that point in my life, I had publicly professed God as my Great Helper, all the while quietly believing I could help myself. I proclaimed publicly that I was a helpless sinner who needed the grace of the Lord for salvation. But what I really believed, deep down, was that I could save myself.

Recently I had the opportunity to talk with some people about the pain of addiction. One was a mother who used to pick up her children from school while black-out drunk. Another was a successful businessman who drank in absolute secret. Nobody cared so long as he was winning in the markets. The other was a rich kid who had been given every opportunity in the world only to find himself consumed with hunting down his next pill. They were a diverse group, but they all had one thing in common. They understood the power of asking for help. In the depths of their despair, they asked for help. And, they said, this decision saved them.

What I learned that day is that when a person hits rock bottom, there are only two choices: Stay there. Or get up.

What recovering addicts understand (and what I didn't) is that nobody gets up on her own. Nobody is restored on his own. Nobody is saved on her own.

We all need help.

Whoever wrote Psalm 70 understood this too. *O LORD, make haste to help me.*

I've heard people say that the most authentic prayer is the one that asks for help. So I ask you: When was the last time you asked for help? When was the last time you admitted you couldn't do it alone? When was the last time you fell to your knees and begged God to make haste to help *you*?

I know this is not easy. It's frightening to admit we can't fix it on our own. It feels better to try and believe we have the power to "make it better" because that means all we have to do is work harder and it will happen.

But the truth is that elbow grease and hard work can't always fix a problem. I can't fix my family. Trust me, I tried. It didn't work. *I cannot fix my family.* I have to tell myself this at least once a day. Otherwise, I forget, and I jump right back into the broken cycle of trying.

The good news is that I can ask for help from the One who can fix my family. And even though God has yet to do it—my family is still broken—the simple act of asking has brought me a significant amount of peace. When I declare I can't do it on my own, this acknowledgment allows me to truly trust in the God who can—not just with my lips but with my soul, with every fiber of my being.

A few years ago I delivered a sermon in our church where I told the congregation about a spiritual discipline I learned from author Anne Lamott. She calls the practice "the God Box." Here's how it works. You take out a sheet of paper and you write down a prayer. You ask God for something you really need. Then you put the paper in the box, close the lid, and leave it alone. Once the prayer is inside the box, you are not allowed to touch the box again. The idea is that by physically seeing your hand write down the need, burying it in a

box, and letting it go, you will better understand that prayer is about truly giving our concerns to God—and trusting that God will do something about them. God doesn't forget.

I followed Lamott's advice and before I preached the sermon, I put my prayer in a God Box. Then I told the congregation about the experience. What I didn't tell them is what the prayer said. But I'll tell you. This is what I wrote: *God, please heal my broken family of origin.*

A few months after I delivered the sermon, I was moving my God Box from my office to another room when I accidentally dropped it. The lid popped off, and the paper came floating out like a feather, drifting gently to the floor. I picked it up and stared at my messy handwriting for a minute or two.

And then I cried—but not because God has yet to answer the prayer—but because I felt a peace about the situation that I couldn't explain. There I was, reading a prayer that hasn't been answered but feeling completely different about it. We were still broken, but I was a little less broken about it.

I want more than almost anything in the world to see healing within the family my mother and father worked so hard to make. But this may never happen. I cannot control that outcome. It is not for me to control. What I can control—what I'm supposed to control—is who I believe can help solve the problem, who can make whole the broken. Is it me? Or is it God?

My family may never be healed. But my prayer has been heard.

And so I trust, as the psalmist did, that God will not forget to do what God knows I cannot do for myself.

Help.

