

Manteca Presbyterian Church

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Series: Unbroken

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“Brokenness”

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Acts 9:1-9; 19b-22

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

5 “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. 6 “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

Acts 9:19b-22

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” ²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

New International Bible

We’re continuing our series *Never Give Up, No Matter What* which is based on the best-selling book *Unbroken*. It’s the story of Louis Zamperini, World War II hero shot down over the Pacific where he spent 47 days on a small raft until picked up by the Japanese and beaten as a prisoner of war. The premise of the series is that the Bible teaches God has built into each of us a resiliency to withstand tremendous amounts of adversity that we sometimes have to go through in life. Until tested, most of us don’t even know we have such resiliency. Most of us think we’d break under the strain, but that’s not how God built us. Never give up, no matter what.

Today I wanted to tell you an unpublished story I heard about Louis Zamperini from John Ortberg, pastor of the Menlo Church where Louis spoke in 2012.

When Louis got back from World War II he was a national hero which got him a lot of nice invitations to exciting places. One of those places was a country club in L.A. where Hollywood stars often gathered. He was sitting at the bar with one of those stars when somebody came up to him and said the actor Oliver Hardy was in the locker room and wanted to meet him. You have to know that two of Louis' favorite movie stars, when he was young, were slapstick comedians Laurel and Hardy.

Louis went back to the locker room and there was his hero, Oliver Hardy, buck naked, soaking wet, standing in the shower. He sees Louis, jumps out of the shower, goes over and gives him a big hug, drenching Louis. He

stands back and says to him, "Louis, I prayed for you every day while you were missing in the war." Who would have guessed Oliver Hardy prayed every day for years for Louis Zamperini? Great story.

Unbroken

Many of you have read Laura Hildenbrand's book *Unbroken* which details Louis' life from juvenile delinquent, to Olympic track star to military hero. *Unbroken* is a good term to describe Louis Zamperini because nothing seemed to break him. A rough childhood couldn't. Double pneumonia couldn't. Getting in trouble with the cops couldn't. Olympic competition couldn't. Nazi soldiers at the Berlin Olympics, even after he stole their flag, couldn't. Even a World War couldn't. Getting shot down out of the sky in a plane crash in the Pacific Ocean, sharks, starvation, doldrums, and a typhoon couldn't. Being a POW in unbelievable degradation and humiliation and brutal conditions couldn't. Beatings, slave labor, torture, the sadism of the meanest guard in the Japanese army, the Bird, couldn't. Through all of these things he was unbroken. Then he got liberated and went home, unbroken, but not unscarred.

Broken

It wasn't until after Louis got home to California that he emotionally broke down. The book *Unbroken* doesn't cover as much about those broken years as it does his earlier years but fortunately Louis wrote his own account of what happened. While I believe it's true we're all born with an amazing amount of God given resiliency to withstand all sorts of trials and tribulations, those difficult times have a way of scaring us. Just as we can be completely healed physically from say a cut, we may still carry physical scars with it. Emotional scars can actually feel as if they're still open sores, even 70 years later.

Picture life for Louis when he returned home. I mean he was a celebrated war hero who actors and actresses wanted to meet. Universal Studios had even contracted Tony Curtis to play him in a movie about his

wartime experiences. Tony Curtis was the Brad Pitt or Tom Cruise of his era. He was invited to some of the most prestigious gatherings in the country and asked to give speeches to the elite. Little did anyone other than his wife and a few close friends know Louis was actually a very broken man.

As I said in my previous message, Louis found himself dreaming about strangling the horrifically brutal prison guard they called the Bird only to wake up with his hands around the neck of his pregnant wife. For help he turned to the drug we call alcohol to “fix” what we now know as post traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. A horrible choice for PTSD.

PTSD symptoms may result when a traumatic event causes an over-reactive adrenaline response, which creates deep neurological patterns in the brain. These patterns can persist long after the event that triggered the fear, making an individual overly responsive to future fearful situations. Fireworks at a 4th of July celebration can trigger for combat weary soldiers with PTSD, for example

Of course not all of us have PTSD. But on a lower level than PTSD, all of us are affected by traumatic experiences that have a way of helping us say or do things we know we shouldn't. For example, if you're someone who is constantly criticized you may become highly defensive even when you receive a compliment. Another example is if a person was beaten up as a child by a skateboarder, he may grow up to have an aversion to skateboarders and may even fantasize about harming them. Fortunately, most people who are emotionally healthy won't act on their fantasy even when those thoughts are brought back to the surface. But even in an emotionally healthy individual who has been harmed in the past, the memory will always be there. For Louis Zamperini it was still richly there, even 70 years later.

The Turnaround

It's not until we realize that all of us are broken in some way and need help can we truly give our lives over to Christ. And the way we know we've given our lives to Christ is that we're led to do something that we're not

comfortable with but we consequently go ahead and do it. For Louis, it was to break the grip of alcoholism by going home and pouring out the booze from his cabinets. Later it was to return to Japan and share the good news of forgiveness in Jesus Christ to the people who tortured him. Many years later it was to actually forgive the Bird, the horrible guard who had beat him even when the Bird refused to receive his forgiveness.

An interesting thing about humans is if we still think there is a tiny chance we can pull ourselves out of this brokenness we'll rely on that chance. That determination comes out of the same resiliency God built within us for survival. But at that point the resiliency works against us. If we can realize we're in a hole and we're not going to get out on our own, that's when Jesus will become very real to us. That's the uniqueness of the Christian faith from all the other religions of the world. But some folks unfortunately never get to that understanding, always thinking they're supposed to pull themselves up on their own first before they get to God.

The Brokenness of Paul

Take the Apostle Paul, one of the most terrifying and powerful Jewish leaders of his time before he came to Christ. Here he was on the road to Damascus where he was going to oversee the persecution and execution of Christians. Sudden he got blinded by the light of God's Spirit. For three days he was blind and at the mercy of some Christians. Prior to this he was one of the most educated and brilliant men in all Israel. He was a man who demanded and received respect. When he ordered Christians imprisoned for following Jesus, they were imprisoned. If he said they needed a beating, they received a beating. He was a powerful man and one rising in influence.

Not only was he blinded but he heard the voice of God calling him to stop what he was doing. Saul, as he was called then, thought by killing Christians he was doing God's will. But he heard otherwise on that road to Damascus. His eyesight was now broken and for three days was completely blind and at the mercy of others. More than that and maybe more important to his sense of purpose in life, his confidence that he was a man of God obeying

the commands of God was broken. He had learned that he was actually disobeying God. This is a good description of brokenness. Physically and emotionally Saul was broken. While that probably seemed like the worst thing that could happen to him, but that's not necessarily a bad thing because when we're broken that's when positive and permanent growth can often happen.

What being broken does is break down our self reliance. Way out in the Pacific Ocean, over 40 days without a glimmer of hope, burned, dehydrated and sick, Louis had nowhere else to turn but to God. There was nothing else and no one else to rely on. The same for the future Apostle Paul, there was nothing else and no one else to rely on.

We're Broken

But we don't always turn to God first when we're broken. Often we start looking around for the cause. For a broken church it must be the pastor or the elders or the choice of worship music or for a while in the Presbyterian church the approval of new ordination standards were seen as reasons for our being broken.

Louis Zamperini knew he was broken the night he stood in Billy Graham's preaching tent in downtown Los Angeles. But he didn't make excuses about how he got there. He didn't make suggestions for what he could do to fix his condition. Louis Zamperini did the only thing that makes sense when we finally realize that we're broken and stuck in a hole. Repent and turn to Jesus.

Conclusion

What we have to know and realize is that even when we turn to Jesus as a broken person, that broken area still may remain a vulnerable place for us. It's like when we glue a vase back together. It's together, but its structure is weakened. Since all of us are broken in some area, there's some part of our structure that's weakened and we're vulnerable to falling apart.

There's never a time when we can say, I'm not a broken person. There's no church in existence that can say it's not a broken church, because churches are made up of broken people. Sometimes the glue holding a person together gives out and causes all kinds of trouble in the church and the Master has to put us back together. But that's who we are. That's why Jesus came to die for us. Except for the grace of God, we are what we are. So remember to be patient with one another and that includes our politicians because everyone and every church is working through something. May we work through our brokenness with Christ. Amen.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO GET STARTED IN FAITH

1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's ideal

Romans 3:23

2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death

Romans 6:23

3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us

Romans 8:5

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow
Him to become the master of our life**

Romans 10:13

Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below...

"Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me."