

“Broke” Hearts and Contrite Spirits

L. TODD BUDGE

Brothers and sisters, it is an honor to have this opportunity to speak to you today. I express my appreciation to President and Sister Worthen for their warm hospitality while we have been on campus. I am also pleased to be accompanied by my beautiful wife, Lori. BYU has a special place in our hearts. We met here our freshman year, forty-two years ago. When I returned from my mission, she was still at BYU and, to my surprise, still single. We married eight months later. Five of our six children have graduated from BYU. Our youngest son, Dan, and his wife, Tayla, who are giving the prayers today, are currently enrolled here.

I would like to begin by telling you a story that predates my arrival at BYU.

During my last two summers of high school, my parents sent me from my home in California to work for my uncle in Idaho. He operated Budge’s Golden Sunshine Honey—a family business started by my grandfather in 1924. My father grew up “working in the bees,” as they called it. He wanted me to learn how to work as he did. The job

was hard, and there were very few fringe benefits, but, on occasion, my uncle would let me take his 90cc Suzuki motorcycle for a ride.

One beautiful summer day I decided to go by myself on a ride up a canyon just south of the little farming community where I worked. The combination of the blue skies, the bright sun, and the wind in my face was exhilarating. It momentarily made all the hard work and long hours seem worth it. However, several miles up the canyon, the motorcycle suddenly sputtered to a stop. I had run out of gas in the middle of nowhere! This was before the invention of the cell phone, so I had no way to call for help.

I considered my options. Thinking that my uncle would be upset if I were to abandon the motorcycle, I decided to push the heavy bike back home. It was well after dark by the time I reached town. I was thirsty, hungry, and exhausted. As I passed Main Street, I saw my uncle’s truck parked at the movie theater. I went into the theater to tell him what had happened.

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I was surprised by his response when he said, “How could you possibly run out of gas?”

He came out to the street, sat on the bike, and flipped a switch. To my surprise, the motorcycle started.

In shock, I asked, “How did you do that?”

Shaking his head in dismay, he said, “Motorcycles have a reserve tank in case you run out of gas. All you have to do is flip the switch.”

Embarrassed and humiliated, I rode the motorcycle back home.

How many of us struggle through life carrying heavy burdens in the heat of the day, relying on our own strength? I testify that there is another source of power available to everyone—the infinite power made possible by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Now there are some, like I was with the reserve tank, who do not access this power because they are not aware of it. It is for this reason that Lehi declared, “How great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth.”¹ However, even among those who have been blessed to know of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, there are many who do not access its power because either they do not believe it will help them or they do not know how to access it. Today I would like to speak about how we can flip the switch, if you will, and allow His power to flow into our lives.

Ammon taught that Jesus Christ “is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will *repent and believe* on his name.”² The Savior declared to the Nephites “that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to *repent and believe* in me.”³

Thus these two fundamental principles, repenting and believing, are key to unlocking the power of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ in our lives. Therefore, let’s briefly consider these two principles, beginning with the principle of believing.

Believing

You may recall that when the children of Israel were bitten by fiery serpents in the wilderness, all they needed to do to be healed was to look at Moses’s brass serpent set upon a pole, but many did not. Alma explained that “the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that

it would heal them.”⁴ Do we believe that looking to Jesus will heal us?

Believing and questioning are not mutually exclusive. It is perfectly acceptable to have questions about our doctrine, Church history, Church policies, etc. However, the lens through which we see those questions is the determining factor of whether our faith is strengthened or weakened. Do we seek after truth with an easiness and willingness to believe, through the lens of faith, or with skepticism and doubt?

Conviction does not usually come from an either-or mindset, thinking that one has to know everything to believe anything. Nephi acknowledged that he did “not know the meaning of all things” but that he knew that God loves His children.⁵ Conviction comes from the witness of the Holy Ghost, “line upon line” and “precept upon precept.”⁶

Nephi is a great example of one who was willing to move forward in faith despite having an incomplete understanding of the meaning of all things. Seek for answers with a believing heart in the places of light in which the truth can be found and in qualifying to be taught by the Spirit. Like Nephi, I do not know the meaning of all things—far from it. However, my testimony is not simplistic or based on blind belief. My testimony is firmly rooted in the witnesses I have received from the Holy Ghost that God knows me and loves me, that Jesus is the Christ, that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, and that we are led today by prophets and apostles. These simple yet profound spiritual witnesses transcend the complexity of the arguments against the truth and have blessed my life with peace and joy in Christ. Believing in the power, goodness, and mercy of Jesus Christ is fundamental to developing “faith unto repentance.”⁷

Repenting

As you know, repentance is more than checking a list or going through the motions—it requires checking our hearts and going through the *e*-motions of turning our hearts to Christ.

President Nelson taught: “Repentance is not an event; it is a process. It is the key to happiness and peace of mind. When coupled with faith, repentance *opens our access to the power of the Atonement*

of Jesus Christ.”⁸ It is the equivalent of flipping the switch, if you will.

A Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit

Believing and repenting require that we turn to the Lord with broken hearts and contrite spirits. The prophet Lehi taught his son Jacob that “the Holy Messiah . . . offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.”⁹

What does it mean to have a broken heart and a contrite spirit?

The dictionary definition of a broken heart is “the intense emotional pain or suffering one feels after losing a loved one, whether through death, divorce, breakup, physical separation, betrayal, or romantic rejection.”¹⁰ I am sure that all of us at one time or another in our lives will experience this type of loss. Is that the sacrifice God wants from us—for us to suffer intense emotional pain? While it is true that repentance is not easy and involves godly sorrow, God “suffered the pain of all men”¹¹ that “they might *not* suffer”¹² if they repent and come unto Him. God’s desire for us is happiness and joy, not pain and misery.

The word for *heart* in Hebrew, *lev* or *levav*, means the “inner man” or “will.” It is similar in meaning to what King Benjamin described as the natural man, implying that it is the natural man, or man’s will, that must yield and break in submission to God. This is the sacrifice He requires.

To have a broken heart and a contrite spirit means that we are willing to put off the natural man and yield our will to God’s will, our will being swallowed up in His—or, as President Nelson described it, we are willing to “let God prevail”¹³ in our lives.

During scripture study one day while serving as a mission president, I was pondering about the relationship between putting off the natural man and having a broken heart. The words *natural man* and *broken heart* conjured up in my mind the image of a horse trainer “breaking” a wild or “natural” horse. I wondered if there might be something I could learn by comparing the process a horse trainer uses to tame a wild or natural horse and the process God uses to tame

the natural man in each of us—in other words, the process by which God grants unto us repentance.

So I did what any good researcher does these days: I googled it. And to my surprise, I found a book called *A Broke Heart* by a Christian horse trainer.¹⁴ As I read, I gained new insights and saw parallels between breaking a horse and how God was working with me, my missionaries, and many people in the scriptures. In fact, I have seen this pattern repeated over and over in the scriptures. Perhaps you will also recognize this pattern in your life and see how God is working with you to prepare your heart to repent and believe.

But before getting to the pattern, let me share one interesting insight. I was intrigued by the title of the book, *A Broke Heart*—not a broken heart but a “broke” heart. The author explained that a wild horse that has been tamed is not broken by the process but conversely discovers the joy and freedom of becoming one with its master—a state described as being broke, not broken. Likewise, God’s intent is not to *break* us but to redeem us. He does not want us to be *brokenhearted* but to have broke hearts and contrite spirits so that He can take the reins of our lives and guide us with His love to receive all of His promised blessings. The Lord said, “I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”¹⁵

Horse trainers seek to build a relationship with the horse based on trust and respect—to become one with and united with the horse. They describe the relationship-building process not as breaking the horse but as partnering with or starting the horse. Based on our understanding of gospel truths, perhaps the best way to describe our relationship with God would be to describe it not as a partnership but as a covenant relationship. God starts us down the covenant path with the first ordinance of baptism. Covenants are designed to unite man with God.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland described it this way:

Covenants always deal with the central issue between perfect, immortal God and imperfect, mortal man—why they are separated and how they can again unite. The Latin root for covenant is convenire, “to agree, unite, come together.” In short, all covenants

... since the beginning have essentially been about one thing—the atonement of Jesus Christ, the **at-one-ment** provided every man, woman, and child if they will but ... honor the terms of that coming together, that convenire, or covenant, whose central feature is always the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God himself.¹⁶

Whether it be the relationship between the horse trainer and the horse or the relationship between God and man, the objective is the same: to become united one with the other.

The Process

Now let's turn to the pattern described in the book *A Broke Heart* detailing the process of breaking a horse. The parallels to how God works with us will become readily apparent. The pattern has four objectives:

1. The first objective is to **establish direction**.¹⁷ The author explains that a horse will *yield* its will to its trainer when the pressure is applied by a confident and gentle leader it can trust and respect. The goal is for the horse to move its feet in the direction the trainer wants it to go. This is done by applying pressure: by pointing, clucking, or slapping the ground. The horse may just buck and run wild, try to jump out of the round pen, or not move at all—which is called being “stuck.” Have you ever felt stuck or wanted to run away when life has gotten difficult?

2. The second objective is for the horse to give the trainer “**two eyes**.”¹⁸ The trainer stands in the center of the pen and motions for the horse to come and give him or her two eyes. If it does, the trainer gives it a rest; otherwise, the trainer gets it to move again by pointing, clucking, or slapping the ground. Giving the trainer two eyes is a vulnerable position because the horse's hind legs are its most powerful weapons.

3. The third objective is to get the horse to “**change direction**.”¹⁹ After getting two eyes, the trainer steps back a couple of feet and points in the opposite direction. The object is to get the horse to change direction at the trainer's command.

4. The fourth objective is to **establish a place of rest**²⁰ in the center of the pen. The horse comes to know that the closer it is to the trainer, the more

rest and peace it will receive. The horse learns that when it yields to the pressure applied by the trainer, ultimately the trainer will grant a rest.

I found the parallels to be striking: The confident and gentle leader we can trust and respect is Jesus Christ. The round pen is mortality or whatever situation we find ourselves in that is causing us discomfort or stretching us physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually.

I have summarized each of the four objectives into one word. Each word rhymes to make it easy to remember and to note in my scriptures when I recognize the pattern unfolding. You might want to do the same.

1. The first objective, establish direction, I call **desire**. God stands in the center of our lives and does the equivalent of pointing, clucking, and slapping the ground to get our attention and to get our feet moving. He wants us to start moving—to trust Him. He wants us to begin the process of aligning our desires with His. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught:

Actually, everything depends—initially and finally—on our desires. These shape our thought patterns. Our desires thus precede our deeds and lie at the very cores of our souls, tilting us toward or away from God (see D&C 4:3). God can “educate our desires.” . . . Others seek to manipulate our desires. But it is we who form the desires, the “thoughts and intents of [our] heart[s]” (Mosiah 5:13).²¹

Mortality was designed to give us plenty of “round-pen” opportunities to learn and grow in order to reconcile the desires of our hearts to His.

2. The second objective, giving “two eyes,” I shortened to **inquire**. The Lord invites us to give Him two eyes, which is to seek His face and to pray with full purpose of heart and real intent to know His will in our lives. The Lord loves it when we inquire of Him. To Alma, He said, “And because thou hast inquired of me . . . , thou art blessed.”²²

President Nelson taught:

When you reach up for the Lord's power in your life with the same intensity that a drowning person has

when grasping and gasping for air, power from Jesus Christ will be yours. When the Savior knows you truly want to reach up to Him—when He can feel that the greatest desire of your heart is to draw His power into your life—you will be led by the Holy Ghost to know exactly what you should do.

*When you spiritually stretch beyond anything you have ever done before, then His power will flow into you.*²³

3. The third objective, “change direction,” I have shortened to **require**. The Lord invites us to change direction based on our understanding of His will. Repentance is about change. It is yielding our hearts to God with an easiness and willingness to move in the direction He requires.

4. And the last objective, establish a place of rest, I shortened to **retire**. The Lord extends to us His rest. As we turn to the Savior and draw closer to Him, He releases the pressure and gives us rest. The Savior taught:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*²⁴

So remember the pattern: **desire, inquire, require, and retire**.

Personal Example

God has given me many round-pen opportunities in my life, experiences that have blessed me by stretching me and causing me to rely more fully on Him: the round pen of my mission as a young missionary in Japan, the round pen of marriage, the round pen of fatherhood, the round pen of my career in Japan, the round pen of losing loved ones early due to tragic accidents and disease, and, most recently, the round pen of the Seventy and the Presiding Bishopric.

When I was called to be a Seventy, I was humbled and overwhelmed with feelings of inadequacy. I was invited to begin the journey of becoming a special witness of Jesus Christ in all the world. The natural man in me was

overwhelmed. I did not buck or try to jump the fence, but it was not long before I was on my knees, giving God two eyes with more intensity than at any other time in my life. I experienced for myself what President Nelson had taught: “When you spiritually stretch beyond anything you have ever done before, then His power will flow into you.”

I began to understand what the Lord required, the changes that I needed to make to be what He was calling me to be. Because of His grace I felt a release of pressure—a rest, if you will—and a peaceful reassurance of His love.

Examples from the Scriptures

Now let’s turn to the scriptures and see how this pattern played out in the lives of Enos and Alma the Younger.

Enos

As you may recall, Enos went into the forest to hunt beasts, and the Lord began to establish direction in his life by getting his attention. Enos recorded, “The words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart.”²⁵ Has the Spirit ever worked on you like that—something someone says or has said, for some unknown reason, sinks into your heart and shapes your desires? And then Enos described “the wrestle which [he] had before God.”²⁶ He may have been kicking and bucking a little. Enos then knelt before his Maker and gave him two eyes, perhaps for the first time in his life. He described it this way:

*And my soul hungered; . . . and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.*²⁷

Based on this sincere and fervent prayer, his life took a turn in direction. He turned more fully to God, devoted the rest of his life to preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, and “rejoiced in it above that of the world.”²⁸ Enos closed his record by describing the rest the Lord granted him. He declared, “And I soon go to the place of my rest,

which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest.”²⁹

Alma the Younger

Now let’s see how this pattern unfolded in the life of Alma the Younger. As you may recall, God went to some length to *educate his desires*. Alma recorded:

For I went about with the sons of Mosiah, seeking to destroy the church of God; but behold, God sent his holy angel to stop us by the way.

And behold, he spake unto us, as it were the voice of thunder, and the whole earth did tremble beneath our feet [talk about pointing, clucking, and slapping the ground]; and we all fell to the earth, for the fear of the Lord came upon us. . . .

*And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.*³⁰

That was quite a wake-up call. Perhaps we all need a heaven-sent wake-up call from time to time to get us moving in the right direction. Alma then described the moment he gave God two eyes. Perhaps, like Enos, it was for the first time. He recorded that he “was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul,” but he “did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy.”³¹ As a result, he made a 180-degree change in his life. He wrote, “From that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance.”³² I love how Alma described the rest he obtained when he turned his life to God: “And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!”³³

Applying the Principles

There are many other examples in the scriptures in which we see this pattern play out. As you study the Doctrine and Covenants this year, you may want to look for them. I have come across many already in my studies. Is this pattern sounding familiar to you? Have you seen this pattern play out in your own life? We all have round pens in our lives—situations that stretch us and cause us to grow—and situations that cause us to turn to God more fully in our lives. Sometimes it may

be the negative consequences of sin, but often it is the positive consequences of life’s challenges and opportunities. It may be the challenge of school, work, relationships, health, family, COVID-19, parenting, or a combination of these and other challenges. How is God getting your attention? Are you bucking and kicking and trying to jump the fence or perhaps even blaming God for your situation? If you do not turn away from God but turn to Him, your round-pen experiences will not break you but will redeem you.

Instead of resisting, humble yourself before God and let Him educate your desires. Give Him two eyes. Yes, you might feel a bit vulnerable, but remember that He loves you—you can trust Him! Pour out your whole soul to Him, and I promise that He will answer your prayers and His power will flow into you. “Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”³⁴ I promise that if you “ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ,”³⁵ He “will show unto you all things what ye should do”³⁶ by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Once you know what He requires, commit to do it. Through the enabling power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, you can make the changes in your life that He requires. One of my wife’s favorite scriptures is “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”³⁷ “All things” includes the sometimes difficult but necessary changes He requires. I promise that when you do, you can retire your fears and you will find peace and rest to your soul. In summary, *desire* the things of God, *inquire* of Him, and do what He *requires*, and you will find rest to your soul—you can *retire* to the safety of His arms. This pattern is not a checklist. I have found it to be a recurring pattern in my life. It does not happen on our timetable but on His. The process of reconciling our will to His is the work of a lifetime. It takes patience, faith, trust, and resilience.

I witness that Jesus Christ is the gentle and loving God who stands at the center of our lives. He invites each of us to repent and to believe with broke hearts and contrite spirits so that the power of His atoning sacrifice may flow into our lives. Unlike the motorcycle reserve tank, which has a finite capacity, the blessings of His Atonement are

“infinite and eternal”³⁸—like “a well of [living] water springing up into everlasting life.”³⁹

I testify that Jesus is the Christ. As we enter into a covenant relationship with Him, we will experience the joy and exhilaration of becoming one with Him. When we give Him the reins, He will make of our lives more than we could ever dream, more than we could ever do running wild through life on our own. His promises are sure, and His grace is sufficient to get us home if we will believe and repent with broke hearts and contrite spirits.⁴⁰

May God bless us as we strive so to do. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 2 Nephi 2:8.
2. Alma 26:35; emphasis added.
3. 3 Nephi 11:32; emphasis added.
4. Alma 33:20.
5. 1 Nephi 11:17.
6. 2 Nephi 28:30; Isaiah 28:10.
7. Alma 34:17; see also verse 18.
8. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” *Ensign*, May 2019; emphasis added.
9. 2 Nephi 2:6–7; emphasis added.
10. Definitions.net, s.v. “broken heart,” definitions.net/definition/broken+heart.
11. D&C 18:11.
12. D&C 19:16; emphasis added.
13. Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign*, November 2020; quoting Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Israel.”
14. See Whitney Cartrite-Huckaby, *A Broke Heart: Revelation Through the Eyes of a Horse into the Heart of God* (Bloomington, Indiana: WestBow Press, 2013). I am indebted to the author for helping me understand the process of taming a horse and how it applies to our spiritual journeys.
15. Jeremiah 17:10.
16. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 8; emphasis both added and in original.
17. See Cartrite-Huckaby, *Broke Heart*, 20.
18. Cartrite-Huckaby, *Broke Heart*, 20.
19. Cartrite-Huckaby, *Broke Heart*, 25.
20. See Cartrite-Huckaby, *Broke Heart*, 20.
21. Neal A. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” *Ensign*, November 1995; paraphrasing Joseph F. Smith, *GD*, 297.
22. Mosiah 26:19.
23. Russell M. Nelson, “Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2017.
24. Matthew 11:28–30.
25. Enos 1:3.
26. Enos 1:2.
27. Enos 1:4.
28. Enos 1:26.
29. Enos 1:27; emphasis added.
30. Alma 36:6–7, 16.
31. Alma 38:8.
32. Alma 36:24.
33. See Alma 36:20; see also verse 21.
34. Luke 11:9.
35. Moroni 10:4.
36. 2 Nephi 32:5.
37. Philippians 4:13.
38. Alma 34:14.
39. John 4:14; see also verse 13.
40. See Moroni 10:32.