



Brokenness and Renewal

January

The December spiritual discipline focused on practicing gratitude and celebration – appropriate for that season personally and theologically. But a Christian vision of the world recognizes that we cannot look at everything and call it good on this side of sin’s corruption of all things through the Fall.

This month, people practice their annual version of “spiritual” formation with New Year’s resolutions. Research shows they rarely lead to sustained change, but at a minimum, these resolutions are evidence that people are looking at themselves and their world and seeing brokenness. They are identifying personal habits and lifestyle issues they’d want to see changed.

God is always about this kind of renewal, and he commissions his followers to join him. In Christ, God continues “to reconcile to himself all things” (Col. 1:20). In the vision of eternity, he says, “I am making everything new!” (Rev. 21:5). Since we have been entrusted with “the ministry of reconciliation” with and for Christ (2 Cor. 5:18), then we join this renewing task in all the places that we work and serve.

But that co-mission presumes that we are aware of the brokenness in our world. This month, we’ll practice awareness of the brokenness around us – particularly at work – and respond to it faithfully. Dr. Steven Garber often asks the question, “Can you fully know the world, and yet, fully love it?” He suggests this is the universal Christian vocation we join God in.

Reflective Awareness

Over the course of this month, keep a running reflection on aspects of brokenness within your work. If we believe that God wants the renewal “all things,” then we can slowly begin to see more places where our work isn’t as he would want it to be: questionable business practices, assumptions about money, interpersonal dynamics, lack of clarity and organization, and systems that unfairly benefit some and oppress others, just to name a few.



Keep a running list or journal on these places where God may want to see redemption:

- What is broken and in need of renewal about my job? (expectations, motivations, tasks, frustrations, etc.)
- What is broken and in need of renewal about my office or company?
- What is broken and in need of renewal about our industry?
- Where do you see brokenness within peers or workplace interpersonal dynamics?

Responses of Renewal

Only God can renew all things, and in his sovereignty and mysterious timing, he often does bring redemption to brokenness in this life. But we are not God, and in our co-mission of reconciliation, we have limits. While seeing the brokenness around us, we need faithful responses to sustain our life with God and for the world. Practice the following this month.

Lamenting

Complaining, cynicism, anger, defensiveness, disengagement. These are common reactions to brokenness in workplace settings. But for thousands of years, the people of God have practiced a sacred alternative to these responses: *lament*.

Lament is a response of prayer that joins God in sorrow, grief, and regret about a situation. It recognizes truthfully what is broken and falls short of how God would want the world to be. Lament may be a less familiar personal or corporate worship practice for Christians in the West, particularly in more affluent or cerebral churches. But lament has been a rich spiritual practice in the persecuted church worldwide, the American black church, and the Hebrew people in the Old Testament.

Roughly 40 percent of the Psalms are laments, and we have a book called Lamentations. A common biblical pattern to lament includes three responses:

- *Crying out to God* – full honesty and full expression
- *Asking for God's help* – beg for God's renewal and intervention
- *Responding with trust and praise* – committing to faithfulness within brokenness

As you name the brokenness you see in your work, consider these responses of lament:

- Pray about a situation using the pattern of biblical lament above.
- Journal about how you *feel* in response, not what you *think*.



- How might God describe his feelings in response? Try imaginatively journaling words he might say.
- Pray responsively with one of the psalms of lament: 12, 13, 22, 44, 54, or 86.

Hoping

Hope is a practice of “active passivity.” Hope does not assume that we can actively control or fix brokenness, but it does allow us to actively submit to the ongoing, slow work of God. Prayerful hope is a posture of rebellion against the status quo, holding ourselves and situations before the possibility of God’s healing. It becomes an antidote to cynicism, jadedness, despondency, and other forms of withdrawal from our work.

As you name aspects of brokenness in your work this month, prayerfully hope for God’s work in them. Consider a simple breath prayer of hope, such as: “Christ, you died to make _____ new.”

Prayerfully reflect on these passages in response to the brokenness you name:

- “For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” (Romans 8:24-25)
- “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:3-5)
- “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Colossians 1:17-20)

Welcoming



Father Thomas Keating developed a prayer to help people faithfully respond to God in the face of frustrations within the day. The Welcoming Prayer gives us a way to respond to brokenness by surrendering to God's presence, our limitations, and some of the perceived needs we bring to a situation.

Contemplative Outreach is an organization that resources people with prayer practices for daily experiences. They describe the Welcoming Prayer as:

A method of consenting to God's presence and action in our physical and emotional reactions to events and situations in daily life. The purpose of the Welcoming Prayer is to deepen our relationship with God through consenting in the ordinary activities of our day – "consent-on-the-go."

Read and reflect on the Welcoming Prayer below. What are your responses? What feelings or attitudes does it bring up within you? Over time, could this type of consent-on-the-go help your responses to the stresses, frustrations, and setbacks of the day?

Pray the Welcoming Prayer in response to moments of brokenness you encounter at work.

*Welcome, welcome, welcome.
I welcome everything that comes to me today
because I know it's for my healing.
I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons,
situations, and conditions.
I let go of my desire for power and control.
I let go of my desire for affection, esteem,
approval, and pleasure.
I let go of my desire for survival and security.
I let go of my desire to change any situation,
condition, person, or myself.
I open to the love and presence of God and
God's action within. Amen.*



Acting

It has wisely been said, “You can’t do everything. You can’t do nothing. What is one thing you can do?” As you encounter aspects in your work that aren’t as God would have them, consider small, faithful ways you can bring actions of reconciliation to those places.

- In the 5280 Fellowship, we talk a lot about personal stewardship. Consider your skills, experiences, organizational power, and relationships. Is there a way God might want you to respond to what you see?
- Are there people you can begin talking with – constructively and redemptively – about what could be in response to what is?
- Do the mandates of your job or job description allow you or your team to address any of the issues you see?
- Are there opportunities to connect with others in your job or industry at other companies who might help you think through faithful responses?
- Prayerfully hold this situation before God and commit to acting in response to his leading. Take a posture of listening for God about this situation over time.