

Undone



While they were reclining at the table eating, He said,
“Truly I tell you,
one of you will betray me — one who is eating with me.”
Mark 14:18

June Undone

When your life falls apart ...

Scripture-based exploration

Job (particularly Chapters 1 and 2, then 38-42)
Bible Boot Camp (See Suzanne's week)

Non-Scripture readings

Blue Book chapter "Undone"
Emotionally Healthy Spirituality - Scazzero
Wounded Healer - Henri Nouwen
Shattered Dreams - Larry Crabb

Artwork for the creatives

Convey "Destruction" or "Resurrection from the Rubble"
Draw/paint/create the miraculous process of transformation in the life of a butterfly

Movies

"Shadowlands" [C. S. Lewis (Anthony Hopkins), the renowned author of "The Chronicles of Narnia" series, is a bachelor and Oxford University professor who spends his free time debating with fellow academics at a pub. Although he seems entirely uninterested in love, Lewis agrees to marry Joy Gresham (Debra Winger), an American writer who is looking to secure British citizenship. Their arrangement soon becomes a romance, and, when Joy is diagnosed with terminal cancer, their bond grows even stronger.]

"Manchester by the Sea" [After the death of his older brother Joe, Lee Chandler (Casey Affleck) is shocked that Joe has made him sole guardian of his teenage nephew Patrick. Taking leave of his job as a janitor in Boston, Lee reluctantly returns to Manchester-by-the-Sea, the fishing village where his working-class family has lived for generations. There, he is forced to deal with a past that separated him from his wife, Randi (Michelle Williams), and the community where he was born and raised.] FYI - the language is really rough, so you may have to focus on the hearts of the people and what they are trying to express rather than the actual cuss words they speak.

Questions to ponder

It seems that God intentionally allows people of all situations to go through devastation. As a result, every person, at some time in their lives, becomes undone. Some people call this time "the dark night of the soul" or "the wall." Why does He allow this? What are His intentions toward us? (See Summers' week.)

As you read the account of **Job**, how do you respond toward God? Toward Satan? Toward Job? Toward his wife? Toward his friends?

Read through the 70 questions God asks Job toward the end of the book. Sit in them, ponder them, wonder through them. How do these questions somehow meet people when they are undone? What questions settled you when you were undone?

Consider a time in your life when you were undone: demolished ... devastated ... almost immobilized by life and/or death. How was God "with" you? When did He feel far away? When was He so present you could feel Him? What would He ask you to do differently in your next "undone" time?

How has God matured you when you were in pieces?

Brainstorm all of the beauty you found in being undone. What were the gifts God gave you through being undone? How has God re-created you?

Music and worship

What a Beautiful Name It Is
Great are You, Lord (All my Sons and Daughters)

Online resources

Ann VosKamp's blog!

Week One: The Big Gathering: Rebekah: Movies Scenes and Being Undone

Week Two: The Wall (Summers)

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. -- 2 Corinthians 12:9

"To be broken is not a choice; it is a gift." --*Leading With a Limp*, Dan Allender

Peter and Geri Scazzero, in their book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, talk about the reality of the Christian life that at one point or another, we all hit a Wall. This means that there is a season (or two or three) in our faith when we feel stuck.

Let's take a look at the life of Mother Teresa, a woman we know of deep faith and life of self-sacrifice. We can now read in the letters she wrote to her spiritual directors about the torments of her soul. These letters have stunned many of us, as it appears that Mother Teresa really struggled with her faith: "Where is my faith? Deep down there is nothing but emptiness and darkness... My God, how painful is this unknown pain... I have no faith." She struggled to pray, even while she continued fervently working and serving. Her letters reveal that she struggled with this inner darkness for nearly 50 years. Spiritually, she hit a Wall. But as we can see today, God was doing a mighty work in and through her.

The Wall is essential to us maturing in Christ and becoming the person God intends. Many times the Wall appears through a crisis that turns our world upside down: a divorce, job loss, death of a loved one, medical diagnosis, disillusioning church experience, a betrayal, a wayward child, infertility, a deep desire to marry that remains unfulfilled, a miscarriage, the loss of a friendship. We question God, we question ourselves, we question all that we once accepted. We discover that our faith doesn't seem to "work." We may have more questions than answers. We don't know where God is, we don't feel him near. We don't know what he is doing, where he is going, or if this will ever end.

St. John of the Cross wrote *Dark Night of the Soul* over 500 years ago, in it suggesting that we must all receive God's gift of the dark night, or the Wall, in order to move forward in spiritual maturity. This is the "ordinary way" we grow in Christ. This seems so paradoxical, doesn't it? The dark night as a gift? Struggle as a way to grow? But this actually happens all the time around us if we stop and look. A baby sea turtle must make the treacherous and physically demanding journey from its nest all the way down to the sea in order to build up the muscles to survive in the water. Any misguided "help" that someone may give this turtle as it struggles toward the ocean would in fact lead to irreparable harm.

Likewise, God uses the Wall in our lives to "rewire and purge our affections and passions" (St. John of the Cross). He does this so we might delight in his love and enter into a richer, fuller relationship with him. To enter into this, he knows that we must peel back the many ungodly layers of our heart and burn away our idols and unhealthy attachments. God so desperately wants us to taste and see that he alone is good that he gives us the "gift" of the Wall to get us there.

At the Wall, we learn that true faith is trusting God even when we don't feel him. Pete Scazzero says it well: "There are rich treasures at the Wall. Our image and understanding of God is dramatically transformed. We often have God in a small box. The Wall blows open that box and we begin to see God for the sovereign,

mighty, loving, good God that he is.” We all dream up our greatest dreams for how our life should look. God is gracious enough to sometimes break these dreams apart to give us what we really, really want (but oftentimes don’t know we want): an intimate relationship with him. Ultimately, more of him.

Henri Nouwen reminds us in *Life of the Beloved* that “the great spiritual call of the Beloved Children of God is to pull their brokenness away from the shadow of curse and put it under the light of the blessing.” Can we learn to surrender to God’s working in us at the Wall? Can we see our brokenness as places where God does his greatest work in us?

Week Three: Brokenness (Rebekah)

Brokenness ... just saying the word feels heavy. And it feels really heavy when you are in the midst of it. But with God, there is beauty; during and most especially afterward.

When I think of brokenness, I think of the times in my life when things have fallen apart. When dreams have died. When my sin has been brought front and center and the Lord says, “We need to work on this, now.” It is dark. It is lonely. It can cause us to want to hide and deny the cracks that are forming. We like to think that keeping the brokenness under wraps and putting forth the image that all is well, will bring about healing and health. But we are wrong. Even when buildings are under reconstruction, there are signs all over it. I think I (maybe all of us) should walk around wearing a shirt that says: “Under Construction”. Let’s shout the fact that we have not “arrived”. We are being transformed daily, hourly. Let us not hide this fact, but instead embrace it and the One who is doing the construction. Growth cannot happen without light, bring yourself into the light, with all your broken pieces and walk (1 John 1:7). Brokenness happens for our growth; that we may grow and become more like Christ.

In this world, broken things are despised and thrown out. Anything we no longer need, we throw away. Damaged goods are rejected, and that includes people. To us, broken things are despised as worthless, but God can take what has been broken and remake it into something better, something that He can use for His glory. There is a centuries-old Japanese art of mending broken pottery called *kintsugi*. Gold dust mixed with resin is used to reattach broken pieces or fill in cracks, resulting in a striking bond. Instead of trying to hide the repair, the art makes something beautiful out of brokenness. (Google *kintsugi* to see some beautiful images). We all look like this pottery. We have all been broken and put back together, not by gold dust and resin but by the blood of Jesus. On the night before He died, Jesus broke the bread and said, “This is my body, which is broken for you.” He went all the way to Calvary to die so that we can live. His death has made it possible for broken, sinful humanity to be reconciled to God and be healed. Without the broken body of Jesus, we could not be made whole.

Robert Benson in his book, *Living Prayer*, has taught me a great deal about brokenness. He brings us back to the Lord’s Supper (or the Eucharist). There are four parts to it: taken, blessed, broken, shared; and when we take part in the Lord’s Supper we are taking part in all four parts. “[I]f we are to be the Body of Christ, then we are to suffer the fate of Christ - we are to be broken that we might be shared” (p.40). I would prefer that the broken part was taken out of my assignment, please, Lord. I like that He takes me. I greatly enjoy that He blesses me. I even like that He uses my life to share His glory with the world. But the broken part ... I’ll pass. Thanks, but no thanks! And yet, Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12) to rejoice and be glad when suffering happens to you.

“Taken, blessed, broken, shared is the essential pattern of the prayer of the Eucharist, and the essential pattern for the life of the spirit. In all places, in all times, in all things, we are at some stage of that pattern. It is the pattern that makes us whole, makes us one with Christ, and each other, makes it possible for us to become a reasonable and lively sacrifice. It is the sustaining Dance of life itself.

It is a part of the Dance that we can choose to acknowledge or not. But whether or not we do so, it will overtake us in some moment and make itself known in our lives regardless of whether we ever can, or do, name it.

'Those who seek to avoid suffering,' wrote Merton, 'are the ones who end up suffering the most. They are troubled by every little thing as well, even as they move inexorably to the suffering that is to come.'

To be broken is to begin to pray the prayer of the Eucharist, 'not only with our lips but in our lives,' as the old prayer says. To be broken is to begin to live the reality of the Body and the Blood. To be broken is to begin to discover what they mean when they say to all the children who kneel at the table, 'This is a gift from Jesus. Take it and remember that He loves you'". (Robert Benson, *Living Prayer*, pp.48-49)

In the Psalms, David, after he had been confronted by Nathan about Bathsheba and Uriah, acknowledges his brokenness before the Lord (Psalm 51). He reminds us that the Lord wants us to present to Him our broken hearts. Hearts broken over our sinfulness are beautiful to God. When I first read the verse below, I needed more understanding of what was being said:

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

From the dictionary:

Brokenness: reduced to fragments; fragmented, ruptured; torn; fractured; not functioning properly; out of working order.

Broken: disrupted by change, subdued completely, reduced in rank

Contrite: feeling or showing sorrow and remorse for a sin or shortcoming.

Sacrifice: the act of giving up something that you want to keep especially in order to get or do something else or to help someone (synonyms: offering, contribution, donation).

From Biblehub.com:

Broken: shabar (shaw-bar') - to break down, break off, break in pieces, bring to the birth, crush, destroy, to burst.

Heart: leb (labe) - inner man, mind, will, heart

Spirit: ruach (roo'-akh) - breath, wind, spirit

Contrite: dakah (daw-kaw') - to crush, to collapse

Despise - bazah (baw-zaw') - despise, disdain, contemptible, think to scorn

After learning what the words mean, I am able to re-write the Psalm in words that I understand and have become very impactful to me. Here is my rendition:

My offerings to you, O God, are a completely subdued mind; a will that is reduced in rank (from thinking it sits on Your throne to sitting at Your feet), sorrowful and remorseful for my sins. This, O God, you do not scorn.

One of the most insightful things I learned pertained to the word broken. One of its meanings is "bring to the birth". When something (or someone) is broken, it is to bring to birth. This is beautiful! New life. Not a broken life, but new life! This is encouraging and in the midst of the darkness that often accompanies brokenness to begin to see the glimmer of His Holy Light. And to run toward His light.

How is God calling you to acknowledge your brokenness to Him?

What needs to be broken in order for new life to be birthed?

How would you re-write Psalm 51:17?

In what ways does your life show that you are taken, blessed, broken, shared?

Where are you in this rhythm right now?

Week Four: Bible Boot Camp (Suzanne)

The Bible doesn't skimp on the true stories of God-followers who became undone. Let's look at some examples below. Choose 3-4 and explore them more deeply with your group.

Scripture	Person	Situation	Resolution
1 Samuel 1	Hannah	Infertility	Prayer, God's intervention, then baby Samuel
Isaiah 6	Isaiah	his unholiness in the presence of holiness	A burning coal to purify, then a volunteer assignment
2 Corinthians 6:3-10, 12:6-10	Paul	Incredible hardships	God's peace and strength amidst weakness while doing Kingdom work
Luke 22:39-44 with Philippians 2:5-11	Jesus	Pleading prayer about the impending cross	"Your will, not My will, be done." Surrender and obedience.
Psalms 84:5-7	Believers	Valley of Baca (Baca means weeping)	Worship in Jerusalem
Mark 20:1-18	Mary Magdalene	In pieces because of Jesus' death and disappearance	He appears, sends her on an important errand as the first missionary
2 Samuel 11 and 12; then Psalm 51	Sinners! David caught with pregnant Bathsheba	Confessing sin after being caught	A repentant heart and costly consequences
Genesis 37, 41, 50	Joseph	Brothers hatefully throw him down into a well then sell him; he is forgotten	Over a decade later and jail time for an unjust accusation, Joseph rules Egypt and forgives those who harmed him
(Your ideas)			
(Your ideas)			

Reflecting on the table above, what have been your situations and resolutions? Are you in a situation right now, still waiting on a resolution?

Sometimes we choose to be undone for the Kingdom. We choose loss for a different kind of gain. Take, for example, when Peter speaks to Jesus about how their hands, once full of family, fishing, and their own choices, are now empty. Why? They've given up everything in order to follow Him. They let go of all the good gifts God had given them to pursue the greater Gift, Jesus.

Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!"

"Truly I tell you," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life" (Luke 18:28-30).

What do you think about this? Would you agree with me that some of God's favorite people (if I can even talk that way!!!) are most assuredly undone at some point in their lives?

Jesus was undone for us at the cross. Choose one or two gospel accounts and read through the trials, denials, crucifixion, burial, and ascension of Jesus. Take to heart that He did this with a pure heart, sinlessly, with a right

mind toward His persecutors and toward us, His future people. ***It was all love. Jesus chose to be undone for our sake, that we might be whole and holy, reconciled with God and living for Him.***

Personal Lessons

Here are a few lessons from my time at the Wall (an ancient way of saying I'm undone; see Summers' week for an excellent description). Make sure to add yours to this list:

- ❖ People serve us best during this time as comforters and listeners, quietly "being with" us, and as faithful pray-ers. We learn this from Job's friends: the first seven days they were with Job, they simply sat in silence with him, grieving, receiving the pain. They were stunned by his suffering and sadness into silence. This is the powerful "Be With" principle.
- ❖ Most people will not understand what we're feeling and experiencing unless they have been through a Wall too. Don't hold it against them; be there for them when they go through their own Wall.
- ❖ We lean on those who are wise in the ways of the Wall and pray for them to come to us, to mentor us through it as much as God allows. Be open to others who can wisely help.
- ❖ There are depths to God we can only plumb through suffering. He wants to take us there. His intentions toward us are good; that is a Scriptural promise and faith-fact. So in spite of the pain we feel, like a surgeon's knife or a farmer's plow, what is happening will end in health, wholeness, and a good crop of belief, rest, and peace if we journey through the Wall. Press on.
- ❖ In God's loving and wise hands, suffering is a tool. It is like a fire that burns off the dross (the impurities) in our lives. We've all got it: rubbish, selfishness, sinful junk. This is the Pruning Principle: God prunes fruitful trees to make them even more productive for His Kingdom and His glory. This is painful but ends well.
- ❖ Suffering illuminates that famous "log in our own eye" so that we see ourselves and others more clearly, more lovingly. Don't be afraid; the ensuing humility is so beautiful. It's so pleasant to be around a humble person, and God is making us more humble as we see our own faults. He acquaints us with our need of Him, and we learn to eagerly welcome Him in, no matter what the cost or what darkness suffering reveals. We trust Him to take out the log and give us a more gentle spirit.
- ❖ We rest and yield to God. Rest in His care, for He is still watching over us. His eyes never leave you; His love is so near. We also yield to Him. Listen: what is He saying? We grab hold of Him and do not let go until He blesses us. (See the life of Jacob in Genesis 32, and a few more lessons below.)
- ❖ After we push through the Wall, we would never dream of being who we used to be. We like our new self more. It would be like a butterfly comparing itself to a caterpillar: the butterfly is infinitely more beautiful, more free, more light, more versatile than the caterpillar, although there is nothing wrong with the caterpillar. But a butterfly does not want to return to its previous state; it wants to fly!
- ❖ We will see so much more God in ourselves as He re-makes us. Do not be afraid! He is the Potter, we are the clay. He is the Gardener, we are the branches. He is the Good Shepherd, we are the sheep. He is the refining fire, we are the silver. Trust in Him as He reshapes you into who He wants you to be.
- ❖ During our time at the Wall, if we have a tendency to withdraw or isolate, this can bring us harm; if we have a tendency to over-expose ourselves to others, this can also bring us harm. Part of the Wall is giving us wisdom to navigate toward Center, toward Christ. The extremes are not fruitful places. Learn to level off toward Center.

- ❖ God wants something to die on the Wall. Perhaps He has given us insight into what that is: self-sufficiency? Pride? Self? Image? Perfection? Secrecy? Only He can show us, and He will. Our job is to let it die or boldly crucify it.
- ❖ God is a God of life, YES. But He especially loves the **resurrection** kind of life! When He determines that something in us or about us must die, He has a flip side to His decision: **resurrection life**. When we are in the throes of dying, whatever **it** is, let it go. Let it die.
- ❖ When God kills something, He fills something. If He kills our pride, He will fill us with humility. If He kills our selfishness, He will fill us with other-centeredness. If He kills our perfectionism, He fills us with grace. If He kills our pride, He fills us with kind tenderness and grace-based understanding. And on it goes.
- ❖ Just because God is silent doesn't mean He isn't speaking. We must learn a new level of listening. Ask for eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to obey. Then wait.
- ❖ Waiting is so hard! Waiting, well done spiritually, is never passive. Listen; attend; invite; examine; put away fear; silence distractions; kill sin.
- ❖ We are not in control. Control is an illusion. Our attempts to control the Wall are futile; just stop. Our self-based longing to control and fix and manipulate must be vanquished completely. Acknowledge this; literally, ceremonially, we must give over the control of our well-being to God, and then rest.
- ❖ Rest: ah, what a lovely word. Yet how do we rest when we are writhing? We must allow God to teach us this, just as He taught Paul, Abraham, Job, and His precious Son Jesus. This is a lesson of Intimacy, which is the name of the path on the other side of the Wall.
- ❖ When our doubts rise, when fear comes in like a flood, it is best if we acknowledge that this is part of the Wall. **Fear** is the other side of the coin of **love**; both fear and love can bring us closer to God. **Doubt** is the other side of the coin of **faith**; both doubt and faith can bring us closer to God. When we place fear, love, doubt, and faith into God's hands, He will use them to bring us into new maturity and intimacy with Him.

No!

If we choose not to journey through the Wall, not to enter into the pain of it, not to submit to God in it, we will find our paths leading into places of poison:

- ❖ Bitterness, with a metallic coldness of heart that weighs you down like an anchor
- ❖ Criticalness, with a sharp tongue to finish off a comment
- ❖ Cynicism, with a doubting of goodness that rises from our damaged trust and resulting pessimism
- ❖ Unforgiveness, with self-protection that prevents us from ever loving or giving ourselves fully to another
- ❖ Hard-heartedness, a lack of sympathy and kindness that infiltrates our words and attitudes, making us difficult to be around
- ❖ Legalism and perfectionism
- ❖ Rigidity, inflexibility

Do you know some people like that? In what way am **I** like that, are **we** like that?

While the Wall is devastating, **not** going through the Wall is also devastating. The cost on both sides is high, true; but the cost for **not** going through the Wall is far-reaching and destructive.

What do we do?

We pray.

We cry.

We wrestle and flail and try to sleep and stare into space and wonder and get sad and stay sad.

We crack into pieces and feel it so deeply that we struggle to breathe.

And time passes, and God picks up those pieces and makes something beautiful shine out of our jars of clay.

There is no shortcut. The Wall is the Wall, and God will do His work through it.

So what do we do? We take a lesson from Jacob's dark night of the soul (Genesis 32:22-33), when he wrestled with theophany-Jesus.

- ❖ We learn that wrestling with God is allowed, and sometimes, just plain necessary.
- ❖ We learn that there are some times in life during which we know God has called us to a holy confrontation with Him. You may be restless, unable to find His shalom until this holy confrontation.
- ❖ We learn that long-term wrestling with God is difficult, painful, and ordained. He does not spare us from difficulty and pain. The prosperity gospel is not truth.
- ❖ We learn not to let go of God until He blesses us. And ah!, the beauty: He does bless us, but during the Wall, the blessing is delayed.
- ❖ We learn that along with the wound God inflicts (Jacob's limp), He also gives us a new name; in other words, God gives us a new identity through the Wall.
- ❖ We learn that our new wound goes hand-in-hand with a new name (*Israel*, "he wrestles/struggles with God"), and a new era of our life begins.
- ❖ We learn that life does not stop at the Wall; it continues to move, to go forward, even though we travel forward with our wound. When we re-join the world after this dark night, we will be different. Speak of your experience as God prompts! Others will need encouragement ... life is difficult.
- ❖ We learn that our new name is precious in God's eyes, as we are, and that He has plans for a new level of intimacy with us.
- ❖ The Wall prepares us for something. I don't know what; God knows. As we rest and wait on Him, He will guide us into the path we are to take.
- ❖ Trials, wrestlings, and Walls are holy ground. Never minimize this sacred space.

Dear reader, lean into God when you're undone, not away from Him. He is your greatest hope, your surest love, even if you don't feel Him. Considering all of these Biblical accounts in the table and the lessons above, what are you learning about being undone?

Short Form: If my group can't do all this stuff

Week One

Discuss a time in your life when you have been undone or at a wall (see Summers' descriptions of what that means). Listen well to each other, and take your time. This is holy ground. Pass the tissues. Read Psalm 51 together and pray for each other.

Week Two

Jesus was undone for us at the cross. Choose one or two gospel accounts and read through the trials, denials, crucifixion, burial, and ascension of Jesus. Take to heart that He did this with a pure heart, sinlessly, with a right mind toward His persecutors and toward us, His future people. ***It was all love. Jesus chose to be undone for our sake, that we might be whole and holy, reconciled with God and living for Him.***

Week Three

Gather together for one of the movies. Watch it through the lens of being undone. Discuss how people were undone, what happened, how that relates to you, and how you feel about the process of being undone and re-made.

Week Four

Have Communion together after discussing Rebekah's quotes below.

Robert Benson in his book, *Living Prayer*, has taught me a great deal about brokenness. He brings us back to the Lord's Supper (or the Eucharist). There are four parts to it: taken, blessed, broken, shared; and when we take part in the Lord's Supper we are taking part in all four parts. "[I]f we are to be the Body of Christ, then we are to suffer the fate of Christ - we are to be broken that we might be shared" (p.40). I would prefer that the broken part was taken out of my assignment, please, Lord. I like that He takes me. I greatly enjoy that He blesses me. I even like that He uses my life to share His glory with the world. But the broken part ... I'll pass. Thanks, but no thanks! And yet, Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12) to rejoice and be glad when suffering happens to you.

"Taken, blessed, broken, shared is the essential pattern of the prayer of the Eucharist, and the essential pattern for the life of the spirit. In all places, in all times, in all things, we are at some stage of that pattern. It is the pattern that makes us whole, makes us one with Christ, and each other, makes it possible for us to become a reasonable and lively sacrifice. To be broken is to begin to pray the prayer of the Eucharist, 'not only with our lips but in our lives,' as the old prayer says. To be broken is to begin to live the reality of the Body and the Blood. To be broken is to begin to discover what they mean when they say to all the children who kneel at the table, 'This is a gift from Jesus. Take it and remember that He loves you'". (Robert Benson, *Living Prayer*, pp. 48-49)