

## ***BROKEN HEARTS***

Joe Slater

*“So rend your hearts, and not your garments”* (Joel 2:13a).

I’m not accustomed to ripping my clothes as a sign of distress. But such was common in ancient times and is still practiced by some Jews mourning their dead.

In the first instance recorded in Scripture, Reuben tore his clothes, being horrified at what his brothers had done with Joseph (Genesis 37:29). A few verses later, a grief-stricken Jacob tore his clothes, mistakenly believing that Joseph was dead (37:34).

Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes in anguish and grief upon hearing their fellow-spies’ pessimistic report. Many years later, Joshua once again tore his clothes as he mourned Israel’s defeat at the first battle of Ai (Joshua 7:6).

Young King Josiah tore his clothes after hearing the words of the Book of the Law (2 Chronicles 34:19). His people’s appalling disobedience to God’s law would result in horrifying punishment. Josiah himself, however, would be spared from seeing it *“because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me”* (v. 27).

Joel’s people knew the custom of tearing clothes to signify repentance, but for them it was empty ritual. God wanted broken hearts and changed behavior, not just ripped clothes.

What does God want from you and me? He is still *“gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness”* (Joel 2:13). But repentance must be from a broken heart, not merely a ritualistic show. As David wrote in Psalm 51:17, *“A broken spirit . . . and a contrite heart, these, O God, You will not despise.”*

## ***How Are You Doing?***

How are you doing? This seems to be the most asked question when we come together. Often someone asks the question, and while he is asking, he moves on to the next person. Then the first person answers, "I'm okay," but the asker is gone.

I am not saying that the person asking, "How are you doing?" is a hypocrite. We can be most sincere in asking that, but we are so used to the "Okay" response we expect it.

Our problem is conditioning. We have been conditioned from the beginning in our culture not to admit problems. Acknowledging that we are struggling is admitting that we cannot handle what is going on in our lives. That hinders us from getting help in solving our issues or at least knowing that there are sincere loving brethren praying for us. Or we can ask, "How are you?" and give the impression that we are just being polite, especially when we haven't stayed to hear the answer.

There is room for improvement on both sides. We need to be willing to open up. We need to be willing to listen and help. We need to trust and we need to be trustworthy. We must be non-judgmental, and we must not betray confidences.

The ties with our Christian family should be greater than the bond with our physical family. Remember that Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Is your love for your brethren apparent to outsiders?

--Ed Wittlif (Denver, CO)

## ***One Step At A Time***

Have you ever heard someone say, "I can't chew gum and walk"? What that means is, "I'm not very good at multitasking." I feel that way at times, especially when I have a lot "on my plate." I want to get it all done at once but that usually results in poor quality all-around. I feel like the little child trying to put square pegs in round holes!

The solution to such chaos is simple: "Take one thing at a time." It's logical; you can't spin a half dozen plates, or juggle six balls unless you are one unique human being. Most of us can't juggle two balls!

So how do these thoughts help me spiritually today? First, letting distractions steal precious time from our time with the Lord is detrimental for our spiritual health. How often do our cell phones dictate our life? Some can't even make it through an hour of worship without checking their phones for text messages. Consider the many senseless deaths on the highways that are caused by people texting or talking on their phones. We can let distractions kill the quality of our time with the Lord, too.

Next, we are not always at our best in choosing to handle the priorities first. We tend to do the things we like rather than doing the most important. Think of those who are "OCD" about physical fitness and diet. There isn't anything wrong with being concerned about fitness and eating healthy. If, however, this is more important to us than our spiritual health, we are living in Alice's Wonderland where up is down and down is up. Jesus commanded us to "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33a).

Have you allowed your pressing obligations, and duties crowd out your duties to God? Have you missed worship, and Bible classes more than you have in the past? Have you stopped praying, and omit Bible reading, and personal devotionals?

Let's stop letting "the tail wag the dog" and ask God's help to spend more time with Him and His people.

--Rob Redden (Arroyo Grande, CA)