

Caring for One Another

Shaped & Reshaped: Vessels of God's Love



Opening Questions *(select 1 or 2 questions)*

- Talk about something that's not perfect, but beautiful in its own way (for example: a child's artwork, a faded photograph, a chipped plate, etc.)
- When or where do you feel closest to God?
- Share a book, movie, story, or something else that has given you inspiration or encouragement.

What Does the Bible Say?

Psalm 31: 10, 14-16, 24

For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.

But I trust in you, O LORD;
I say, "You are my God."
My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.

Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD.

Think About... *(optional, depending on time)*

- What words or phrases speak to you today?
- What is comforting to you in this Psalm? What do you find challenging?

What Do Others Say?

Reflection written by Luther Dale in 2010. Re-released as part of the Caring for One Another series.

I never cease to be amazed at the insights in the daily devotional readings from *The Upper Room Disciplines*. They can speak to the heart, a true word from God that is needed for just that day. It happened again several weeks ago, during my recovery from my heart attack. I was feeling a bit low, wondering why this had happened and anxious about the future---how I would feel, what limits to activity might be imposed. The day's Bible reading was from Psalm 31 and included

these words from David: "For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away."

Now I didn't feel as badly as David did, but his words resonated with me. The meditation that accompanied these verses really spoke to me. It talked about a person who had had an accident that left her unable to resume her career. She lamented her loss. A friend dropped a lump of clay into her hands and in working it she found comfort in forming the clay into pottery vessels. She developed a wonderful new skill as she took comfort in her new creations. "As she moved from brokenness to wholeness, she found inspiration in a traditional practice of Eastern potters who, after perfecting a pot into an item of great value, carefully break it and lovingly seam the pieces with gold, rendering the pot priceless. 'How often', says the potter, 'we whine as we're broken, reshaped, or fired in life's kiln, forgetting that all the while we're in God's hands'... formed into vessels that carry Christ to others." (from Carol Padgett in *The Upper Room Disciplines: A Book of Daily Devotions 2008*, p. 85. See www.upperroom.org)

It was a reminder to me that to be human is to experience brokenness and imperfection, illness and lament. It is to live in trust and hope that God works to reshape us, in ways that we become Christ to others. We change and in the midst of that, God works healing in us. God seams the pieces of our lives together and makes us whole in new ways. All of us are human and in some way broken, and yet are made whole and useful vessels to carry Christ's love to others. I needed to be reminded of this work of God as I recovered and reflected on what needs to be different and new in my life.

I have experienced others as vessels of Christ's love to me in kind words and in prayers, that others prayed on my behalf. They lifted me up. I realized how important simple acts of kindness are to people who experience illness. I was reminded firsthand how important communities of faith are in the healing process as people express Christ's love to others.

Our lives are not in our control. We are human. We break. We need healing. We need each other as vessels of Christ's love to give care and to remind each other what David expressed in Psalm 31: "You are my God. My times are in your hand."

—Reflection written by Luther Dale in 2010

Think About... (select one or more questions)

- What are some of the many life experiences where we feel "brokenness"? When have you seen or experienced this feeling?
- Tell about a time when you felt that someone was a vessel of Christ's love for you. What did they do or say?
- When have you been a vessel of Christ's love for someone else?
- What makes it difficult to step into the role of sharing Christ's love with someone else?

- When have you seen or experienced brokenness leading to strength?
- Do you have any regular faith practices that you do daily or weekly? Have you experienced a time when you read or experienced something, in a surprising way, at just the right time?
- When you've been in a difficult time, where have you found hope or encouragement?
- We don't have to be ill to be healed. What are some ways that you have experienced healing, either in yourself or in a loved one?
- How would you define the word, "transformation"? How do you know when "transformation" has taken place?

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for holding us in your hands. We thank you for providing communities of faith that nurture and uphold us through encouragement and prayer. When we are ill or when we feel that our lives are not in control, remind us that you have sent others to be vessels of your love. Help us to be sensitive to those around us so that we may carry your love to others at the time when they need it the most. Day by day, form us more and more into vessels that carry your love to others. Amen.

Connecting Faith with Daily Life...

(for individual reflection & action)

- Be a vessel of Christ's love for someone who may not be expecting it or may not even recognize it this week.
- Reflect on something around you that is imperfect. What beauty does it hold?
- Memorize this portion of Psalm 31. Use it as a prayer throughout your day. "Let your face shine upon your servant; Save me in your steadfast love."

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