


How to
Mend
a **Broken**
Heart



Nelson T. Dy



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Foreword

FROM PEOPLE LETTING YOU DOWN to letting yourself down, heartbreak is seemingly around every corner of our lives, waiting to jump out and rob us of our joy. And heartbreak doesn't just happen to the bad people of the world. Good people like you and me seem to experience heartbreak as much or more than those people who we think deserve to feel it.

As a pastor and marriage counselor for several decades, I've seen first-hand what heartbreak does to individual persons and families. I've seen it in people as heartbreak progresses from simple disappointment to seething anger and bitterness, eventually destroying both parties.

In all the years I've been listening and counseling people face to face and through the radio program "Heart Line," I've found that the journey to healing is more than a process of do's and don'ts. It's a unique experience one goes through that may take days, weeks or even years to mend.

So, how do we handle heartbreak? Where do we find help for it?

Counselors can help you get over it, but there is one thing we counselors cannot offer and that is the ability to comfort from within. Sure, we can offer you advice and comfort from the outside, but we cannot dive into the middle of your heart and give you peace that springs from right where you hurt.

And it is not just counselors—no human being is capable of helping you right where you hurt, because they cannot feel

exactly what you are feeling. People experience things in as many different ways as there are people, so only a higher source can know exactly how you hurt. 1 John 3:10 says “*But even if we don’t feel at ease, God is greater than our feelings, and He knows everything.*” (CEV)

Although this book does not teach you to avoid heartaches, it somehow helps you prepare for it. And hopefully, when heartache does come (and I’m sure it will, at some point in our lives), you will be able to cope and see yourself going through what the author essentially went through.

So, go ahead—be disappointed, be heartbroken, cry yourself a river if you want. But don’t let the pain remain. Read on and start mending your broken heart.

— Pastor Clem Guillermo
Managing Director
Back to the Bible, Philippines

Introduction

“HOW DO YOU MEND A BROKEN HEART?” the BeeGees once sang. The truth is, many people have been singing this song long before the BeeGees did; and many more will sing the same song for years to come. Many books talk about how to succeed in getting married. But what do you do when you are rejected, ignored, dumped or unloved?

I write this book as a man who was once head over heels in love, only to see the romance crash and burn before it even took off. From raw, painful experience, I want to give a man's perspective on how it is to be heartbroken and more importantly, how to recover. Perhaps you will identify with my story. Perhaps you'll say, “Yes, that has happened to me, too. Please tell me: What happened? How did you get over it?”

What does the healing process look like? The left-brain reader may be looking for a step-by-step formula. But I have found that emotional healing is more of a journey. There will be ups and downs, advances and setbacks. Mending a broken heart can be downright messy. Still, at the end of each chapter, I have put one-liners to serve as arrows that point in the right direction.

You may be browsing through this book for some answers to your heartache. There was a time when I was desperately clawing for answers, too. Since then, I have dug up many.

Let me now share them with you.

1

Journey into Heartbreak

Not only must one learn to do without someone he had come to feel he could not live without, but he must endure dagger-thrusts to the heart, such as: *You deserved to be rejected. You are not worthy to be loved. You will never be loved. Who would want you?*

Elisabeth Elliot¹

IT WAS LATE NIGHT. Rain was pouring down in buckets. I had no umbrella and was soaked to the bone. But I didn't care.

I was a massive welt of pain as I staggered back to the institute where I was studying to get my MBA. The romance was dead before it was even born. I felt so achingly hollow, as if someone had ripped my heart out of my chest. I couldn't think. I couldn't talk to people. I just wanted to walk and walk, even under the raging storm. *Perhaps I will die of pneumonia*, I thought, *but even that would be better than living.*

I was at the ripe age of 25. After graduating from college with an engineering degree, I worked in a factory for three years. However, I got bored with valves and pipes, so I decided to make a career shift to marketing. To pull this off, I decided to take a detour by getting an MBA. I applied for admission and a scholarship at a prestigious institute. That's when and where I met *her*.

She was working at one of the offices of that institute. I was instantly smitten by her flawless complexion, shoulder-length hair and slim figure. She mistook me for a Korean as I filed my

application papers. Chatting with her, I found her to be very respectable and intelligent. She chuckled as I vowed that I will not resign from my job until I was granted the scholarship that I was applying for. “*Sigurista ka talaga* (you only want sure bets),” she quipped.

My scholarship was indeed granted. I resigned from the factory and began the two-year full-time MBA course. During that time, I would “happen” to drop by her office every now and then, turning on whatever charm I had. I also learned that she would attend the Mass held in the campus chapel every Friday. “Wow,” I thought, “pretty and religious. I’ll never go wrong with this one.” Pretty soon, I was thinking of her more and more.

One morning I woke up and realized, *I’m in love with her!* The thought began to form in my mind: *Why not court her?* It would be great to graduate from the institute not only with a prized MBA degree, but also with a desirable wife. I certainly didn’t want to live the rest of my life alone. With that, I embarked on my first serious courtship.

I never had a girlfriend before. Being an only child, my childhood companions were mostly science books and comics. The fact that my teenage idol was Mr. Spock of “Star Trek” should be *prima facie* evidence that I was a nerd. In fact, during college I was more immersed in mathematical models than in female models, fashion or otherwise. I relished my forays into calculus, thermodynamics and physics—none of them, by the way, I used in the real world. Believing that having a good job depends on having good grades, I studied hard to collect those As.

You can imagine, therefore, how seriously underdeveloped my social skills were. In fact, I chose engineering because I wanted to deal with numbers rather than people. But it also left me socially awkward and unappealing as I was courting this girl. It was next to impossible for me to get in touch with my emotional side, let alone relate with her. Still, in a phase of romantic conceit, I had supreme confidence that she will be mine—all mine! So, I

dealt with the situation in the only way I knew how: I tried to analyze her and strategized what to do next.

In due time, I asked her out on a date. She smiled and chirped, “Next time.”

Two weeks later, I tried again. Again she said, “Next time.”

I should have seen it coming! The Love Train was speeding towards the ravine and I, the dull engineer, turned up the steam even more. I would visit her after office hours as she was waiting for her dad to take her home. I would share some of my experiences in the classroom. I projected the “Mr. Nice Guy” image as I greeted her boss on her birthday. Thinking I can lower her defenses with humor, I cracked jokes. I wince now at how corny I must have been in one instance: She once took a medical leave due to low iron content in her blood. When she returned, I gave her a hand-drawn welcome-back card, with the picture of what she needed: a steam iron. But whenever I would test the waters again and ask her out for a date, she would give one excuse after another. “Oh, it’s family day.” “Oh, I have work to do.” All the while she was still sweet and charming while turning me down.

Then the Hunk came along.

Losing Her to Somebody Else

It didn’t take the proverbial rocket scientist—or MBA student, for that matter—to figure out that a certain chemistry was developing between her and the Hunk. Boy, was he suave. I mean, he just glided into her office—and her heart—with ridiculous ease. And no wonder. With his rich brown skin, rascally smile, square chin, broad shoulders—not to mention a lucrative job in a multinational company—what girl wouldn’t fall for him?

I was seeing my courtship deteriorating right before my eyes. When I would drop by her office, the Hunk was there. Once,

when I visited her, she was splashing perfume on herself and the Hunk came minutes later. Mr. Wonderful asked her—right in front of me—where she would like to go. She sighed lovingly, “It’s up to you.” At which the Hunk laughed and stroked her chin. I left that scene not only in embarrassed retreat, but also with a sick feeling in my gut.

All this time, the girl never told me to stop courting her. Perhaps she didn’t want to hurt my feelings. Or perhaps she hoped that I would read the handwriting on the wall and just back out. Still, hope sprang eternal. I was thinking: *Don’t worry. They’ll break up. You’ll see.* I was expecting the girl to see something wrong with this guy, realize that I am the one for her, and rush into my arms. I was waiting for their Big Fight.

It never came. Instead, they grew closer and closer. One of my “spies” said that whenever she would say the Hunk’s name, there was a lilting quality in her voice. Their lunch dates became more frequent. Next thing I saw, they were holding hands. Later, he was the one taking her home, instead of her dad. At one point, I saw him chatting with her dad and sister at the lobby. I smelled “son-in-law” brewing.

I was right. The bombshell came: They were engaged to get married.

My hope was twisting into bitterness. I mutated from a prancing Romeo to a morose Mr. Hyde. Whenever we would meet at the corridor, I would give her the cold shoulder. I called her nasty names behind her back. When her birthday came, I gave her a key chain, engraved with her name. She stepped out of her office to thank me. But I responded with a growling “You’re welcome” and walked away. Come to think of it, I think I was fortunate the Hunk didn’t confront me and beat the sawdust out of me for the shabby way I treated her.

I was making life miserable for my dorm-mates, too. I was a smoldering volcano and, more than once, I erupted. One morning, while brushing my teeth, I banged the cup on the sink. In another fit, I slammed the door. What rubbed salt on my

wounds was that some of my classmates had girlfriends. I felt impaled whenever I overhear them talking about their sweethearts. Mercifully, one sensitive classmate, bless his soul, prevailed on the others not to talk about their love lives with me around.

I was beginning to be angry at God, too. I had been pleading that He would give her to me. But it wasn't happening. I demanded that God rebuke her, knock some sense into her, make her miserable with the Hunk. All that so she will come running "back" to me. But as the days went by, they were happier than ever. So I poured out my grief, accusing God of being unfair, uncaring, impotent or even dead.

In hindsight, I was angry at myself most of all. Why not me? Why was I not born rich or dashing, like that Hunk? Why was I a nerd, instead? I began to loathe myself, which only added to my misery. I was rejected, devastated, furious. I wanted to die. Hence, if I did catch pneumonia while walking zombie-like that stormy night, so much the better. What use is the MBA degree without her?

Indeed, what good is my future if she's not part of it?

Pain: Classified Top Secret

What you've just read is the most difficult piece of writing I have ever made. It took me three weeks before I finally tapped these words on the keyboard. It was torture, resurrecting those painful memories and emotions. It's like having a broken arm and the doctor begins to set the broken bones back into place. You flinch and jerk back your arm because of the pain. But knowing it is for your own good, you offer your arm back to the doctor and endure the pain while he continues to set your arm right. Similarly, as I re-expose my emotional scars, I re-live those painful days anew, making me want to abort this chapter. But I press on, if it means my writing will encourage you. If you are

groaning because of a broken romance, you are not alone; I have been there. I had trod barefoot on the thorny ground. I had tasted the ashes in my mouth. So have countless others. And we lived to talk about it, albeit not without pain.

So will you.

In the meantime, you have your own dark tunnel to walk through. You will wonder when the pain will ever go away. You will fret if you'll ever be happy. You will worry if there is someone for you. Other people may tell you, "there are other fishes in the ocean." But you want this particular girl.

Many times we hide our wounds. I know I did. While all this was going on, I didn't tell my mom. She didn't have an inkling of the emotional hell her son was going through during those two years. I reasoned that she wouldn't understand. In hindsight, perhaps I should have told her. I know my mother loved me and I love her dearly. She supported my decision to quit my job and get that MBA, even dipping into her savings to defray some of my expenses. How can I, then, presume that she will not care if I open myself up to her? I know she would have listened patiently. She is not much for words, although I think she would have said something about other fishes in the ocean. But I am sure she would groan with me and for me. At the time, we had an arm's-length relationship. This would have been a valuable opportunity to bond.

We tend to hide our pain from other Christians. I had supposed that as Christians we are to always put on a happy face. After all, didn't Jesus promise the "abundant life" and that Paul instructed us to "rejoice always"? Martin Lloyd-Jones once said that an unhappy Christian makes a poor recommendation for the Lord². Well, I certainly didn't want anyone to be turned off by Christianity because of me! But I was acutely tormented whenever I attended the Sunday worship. People around me were spouting happy songs while I just wanted to break down and weep. I craved for dirges and laments, not hand-clapping and

thanksgiving. The saying was true: “Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief” (Proverbs 14:13).

But our greatest folly would be to hide our pain from God. Yes, we know that God loves us and has our best interests in mind for us. Yet I wrestled against the apparent inconsistency of “God is good” with “If God is good, why didn’t He give me this girl?” I plunged into deep depression as I was torn between Doctrine and Reality. There were times when prayer itself was painful, not only because I was reminding myself of my hurts, but also because God was silent. That infuriated me even more. So I gave Him the cold shoulder, too. Yet I couldn’t stand being away from God, either. I was even afraid this would be proof that I wasn’t a Christian in the first place.

A Psalm of Woe

The first step towards mending a broken heart is to be open about the pain. It is okay to grieve. Give yourself permission to weep over your loss, even if you are a man. David wailed upon the death of his son Absalom. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. Jesus wept near Lazarus’ tomb. Paul had fond memories of the tears shed by his protégé Timothy.

One of the key lessons I learned that kept me from going down the deep end is that God honors emotional honesty. That was a liberating truth that started me off towards healing. It makes no sense to put on a happy face in front of God when He sees the bleeding heart inside. So why hide your pain? You can even scream at God. Don’t worry, He can handle our crazy ranting.

I discovered this principle as I was desperately scouring the Psalms for comfort in my heartbroken days. The psalm that most ministered to me is not one that promised good times ahead, but one that conveyed no hope at all! Take a look at Psalm 88, written by a man named Heman. Many times we subscribe to

the popular notion that real men don't cry; rather, they tough it out. But when you read Heman's psalm, you can see that he was not only complaining, he was actually accusing God for his misery!

*You have put me in the lowest pit,
In the darkest depths.
You have taken from me my closest friends
And have made me repulsive to them.
I am confined and cannot escape;
My eyes are dim with grief.*
(vv 6, 8–9a, emphasis mine)

We don't know exactly what Heman's problems were, but they must have been severe ("my soul is full of trouble," v 3). He sought God only to be hurt even more due to the stony silence ("Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?" v 14). His trouble must have been around for a long time ("From my youth..." v 15a), delivering pain upon pain ("...I have been afflicted and close to death," v 15b).

Even towards the end, Heman points his finger at God as the source of his agony:

*I have suffered Your terrors and am in despair.
Your wrath had swept over me:
Your terrors have destroyed me.
You have taken my companions and loved ones from me;
the darkness is my closest friend.*
(vv 15c–16, 18, emphasis mine)

I doubt that you'll find Psalm 88 in your church songbook. While we sing soothing tunes like "It Is Well With My Soul," this one is a jarring, brutal shriek: "No! It is not well with my soul! I am in pain! I'm not even sure if God is real anymore!"

Have you noticed the line, "You have taken...loved ones from me"? Our complaints reverberate with his: "You have taken (or withheld) the girl from me!" But what is even more jarring is

that Heman ended with a depressing moan, “The darkness is my closest friend.” In the other psalms, the writer would lay out his sorrows, but remains confident of God’s help. But in this one, you’ll be hard pressed to find a single shred of optimism. Like me—and perhaps you—Heman found himself in the pits and blamed God for it.

The miracle is that God didn’t zap our friend Heman with lightning. Neither did He strike the psalm out of the biblical record. “Darkness is my closest friend.” Sounds like our days, doesn’t it? But there is value in this psalm. It shows that our prayers do not always have to be cheerful and upbeat. We can pour out torrents of woe before God. Have you noticed that while Job was undergoing an excruciating ordeal, God allowed him to rail on and on, then confronted him much later? I am amazed at God’s patience and grace to allow us first to vent our pain and give the object lesson later.

We do not have to be ashamed to bring our pain to God. After all, God puts our tears in a bottle (Psalm 56:8 NASB), although we feel that He would need huge vats to store our tears, not just a tiny vial. But God welcomes our tears nonetheless. One does not preserve what he does not cherish. He shows that He values our grief through His very presence. “The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18).

Isn’t it about time to get real with our pain?

Be honest about your pain.

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- ¹ Elisabeth Elliot, *Loneliness* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 24.
- ² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (Glasgow, U.K.: HarperCollins, 1965), foreword.