

Praise for *The Broken Way*

What you need to know about Ann Voskamp: after the stunning success of *One Thousand Gifts*, she has chosen to decline the mantle of spiritual guru and instead to become even more intimately vulnerable. In this book, she helps us slow down, stop time, and allow gritty faith to penetrate, expose, and bring the hint of healing to the mess of daily life. For all imperfect people—in other words, for all of us—she offers a compassionate and wise way forward to help navigate our broken world.

PHILIP YANCEY, editor-at-large, *Christianity Today*

In *The Broken Way*, a deeply personal revelation, Ann Voskamp leads us on a journey toward embracing and celebrating the brokenness in each of us. The passionate words that pour from her soul will make you weep and shout hallelujah at the same time.

KAY WARREN, Saddleback Church,
Lake Forest, California

There are only a handful of authors in the whole world who I try to find and read every last word they've ever written. Ann Voskamp is one of those. *The Broken Way* is no exception, as Ann does what she does best—articulating the incredible grace of Jesus in a profound way that makes all of us go YES! but had no words for before. This must-read book will give life to any weary soul.

JEFFERSON BETHKE, *New York Times* bestselling
author of *Jesus > Religion* and *It's Not What You Think*

Ann Voskamp is convincing that there is nothing broken that cannot be restored by making the living Christ present. She provides a stunningly fresh treatment of a subject so often littered with clichés. My favorite phrase is, “Fight back the dark with doxology . . . doxology can detox the day.”

EUGENE H. PETERSON, emeritus professor of
spiritual theology, Regent College, Vancouver, BC

I read *The Broken Way* with tears streaming down my face, my spirit crying out, “YES, YES, YES, YES!” Few authors have impacted my own life like Ann Voskamp. If we can live out the truth contained within *The Broken Way*, I believe we will reach and impact our generation like never before. So powerful. So prophetic. So profound. Please read this book.

CHRISTINE CAINE, founder of A21 and Propel Women

The Broken Way is the most honest and beautiful healing balm for an aching heart. The authenticity and grace from which Ann Voskamp writes are refreshing and life-giving. This book is a true gift from God!

LYSA TERKEURST, *New York Times* bestselling
author and president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

Ann Voskamp’s skill with words, her tenderness with hearts—it is incomparable. Life can leave us looking for an exit, a window. Ann has a hand on the curtain. She has a way of releasing light, just enough to chase shadows and give hope.

MAX LUCADO, pastor and bestselling author

Most of us want to run away from our brokenness. Ann Voskamp runs right into it, sharing the shattered pieces of her own life to help us acknowledge the shards we may be sifting through. Ann helps us see God's good purpose in all of it, and how He guides us, not around the pain, but through it. Beautifully written, *The Broken Way* offers a generous measure of hope, filled with Ann's tender honesty and God's powerful truth.

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS, bestselling author
of *Bad Girls of the Bible*

In the way only she can, Ann Voskamp invites us to discover that the whole life begins in our brokenness. Ann knows what it means to be broken. She knows what it means to have scars. This isn't her theory; it's her heartbeat. Lean in to this book, and listen for it.

LAUREN CHANDLER, singer/songwriter
and author of *Steadfast Love*

Ann Voskamp penetrates the soul with words that arrest us, convict us, and compel us to the arms of our Father. Ann Voskamps come along once in a generation. We best pay attention.

GABE LYONS, author of *Good Faith*

ALSO BY ANN VOSKAMP

*One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live
Fully Right Where You Are*

One Thousand Gifts: A DVD Study: Five Sessions

*One Thousand Gifts Devotional: Reflections
on Finding Everyday Grace*

*Selections from One Thousand Gifts:
Finding Joy in What Really Matters*

*The Greatest Gift: Unwrapping the
Full Love Story of Christmas*

*Unwrapping the Greatest Gift: A Family
Celebration of Christmas*

THE BROKEN WAY

A Daring Path into the Abundant Life

ANN VOSKAMP

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Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

ISBN 978-0-310-31858-3 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-0-310-34927-3 (signature edition)

ISBN 978-0-310-34656-2 (international trade paper edition)

ISBN 978-0-310-31862-0 (audio)

ISBN 978-0-310-31859-0 (epub)

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Published in association with William K. Jensen Literary Agency, 119 Bampton Court, Eugene, Oregon 97404.

Cover design: Curt Diepenhorst

Cover photo: Mary Anne Morgan

Interior imagery: PhotoDisc / Siede Preis

Interior design: Kait Lamphere

First Printing August 2016 / Printed in the United States of America

*To Mine . . . who never gave up on the broken—
and to every single one who carries
their own unspoken broken—
these pages had to be for you—
the tracing of scars.*

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One

What to Do with Your One Broken Heart



*The very thing we are afraid of, our brokenness,
is the door to our Father's heart.*

PAUL MILLER

The day I cut up the inner softness of my arm with a shard of glass, the whole thick weight of hell's pressing against my chest.

A mourning dove coos from the top of the lilac tree right outside the back door. West of the barn, my dad had yanked the steering wheel of that old International tractor, geared the engine down, and turned at the end of the field.

And I had stood, out on the back porch, all of sixteen, and let go of those glass jars. Dozens of them. I stood with broken glass shattered around my feet. No one could tell me how to get the dark, the fear, the ache, the hell out of me. No one could tell me how to find the place where you always felt safe and secure and held. Kneeling, I'd picked up one of the shards, dragged its sharp edge across my skin, relieved by the red line slowly seeping up, like you could drain yourself out of pain. I'd try to cut my way through the hurt down to the core of things. Who doesn't know what it's like to smile thinly and say you're fine when you're not, when you're almost faint with

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pain? There isn't one of us not bearing the wounds from our own bloody battles.

There isn't one of us who isn't cut right from the beginning.

All of us get pushed from safe wombs out into this holy mess. All of us need someone to catch us and hold us right from the beginning, and for one sacred moment, every single one of us is cupped. And then they cut that one thick umbilical cord. You can spend a lifetime feeling pushed out, cut off, abandoned—inexplicably alone.

What in God's holy name do you do when it feels like you're broken and cut up, and love has failed, and you've failed, and you feel like Somebody's love has failed you?

Dad had just kept breaking open the earth, just kept planting wheat seeds, thousands of them. They grew.

The wheat across the fields to the west waits in willing surrender.

Later, he'd cut down the harvest. I never once told him how I cut. Never once told him how, in that moment when the jars shatter, when the shimmer of glass slides through your skin, there's this exhaling moment when you feel the relief of not hiding anymore. Not acting, not for one more mocking minute that everything is just bloody fine.

I knelt down and held the shards in my hand and turned the edges over.

Not one thing in your life is more important than figuring out how to live in the face of unspoken pain.

It may have been more than two decades since my cutting throughout my teens, but standing there in the kitchen this older, more battle weary, more broken woman, looking out over wheat fields of our own, I'm overwhelmed by how my skin's starved again for the cutting, for the breaking edge of

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glass again. How my wrists want to feel that sharp, bleeding relief and hemorrhage out of all this pain.

And that's the razor edge of things right there: Our oldest daughter, she's just laid it all out in stark details, how intimately familiar she is with the very same struggle and strangle of silent anxiety and lies of unworthiness that I've spent my entire life wrestling. I feel a door opening on my very own private nightmare, and I'm kinda gaping just to breathe. *Keep holding on to the edge of the counter, keep trying to stand, keep trying to figure out how to hold on and let go.* Feeling the weight of your failure feels worse than taking a knife to your own pulpy heart. When you somehow pass your brokenness onto your own people, why does it hurt in a way physical pain never could? And for weeks, I've been falling hard in hidden ways, in ways I can't even find words to speak out loud, and seen the depth of my own brokenness in ways I would never have imagined. There's this ember that's burning up my throat. The wheat's bending into the wind, moving with the wind. *I don't know the way out of all this.*

I've changed. Life's changed and I've changed and five years ago I didn't know how to love or to feel love, had to count all the ways, a thousand ways, that God always loves me so I could even begin to learn how to let myself be loved—and somehow along the way, brushing up against hurting people and stories and places, I've changed into this woman who's embraced a love so large it's broken my heart in a thousand aching places. *Don't we all want to change? What do you do when it feels like everything's changed?* It's a strange thing to find out your heart can explode with love and suffering and find out they're kin in ways we don't care to admit. *I don't know the way to put all these broken pieces back into place. Maybe that's the point?*

NOT ONE THING
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Maybe this broken way is making something new. *He is making all things new.*

So how do you silence the demon-lies that won't stop crawling up the sides of your mind and really believe that? How do you bind up the slow bleeding of your one broken heart and still believe wounded warriors win, still believe that there is no remission of sins or the crossing of finish lines without things getting downright bloody, still believe that scars and wounds and broken places might become you and become who you are? And maybe this is how all the brokenhearted misfits finally fit. All I can feel is this unspoken brokenness splintering through me. What do you do if you're struggling to remember who you really are?

I'm not enough for any of this.

Not enough for anything I'm doing, for anything I am facing, for anyone I am facing. *Not enough for my life.*

Standing here in the kitchen, looking out at the wheat fields, I don't know there will be this funeral and coffin coming. That there will be this diagnosis coming that would stick its face in ours and we'd never get to turn away. That even more desperately broken parenting days were coming. But I know a mother's labor and delivery never ends, and you have to keep remembering to breathe.

I couldn't know yet the way to the higher up and deeper in and that vulnerability would beg me to just break open and let trust in. *Let the abundance of God in.*

I just know that—old scars can break open like fresh wounds and your unspoken broken can start to rip you wide open and maybe the essence of all the questions is: how in the holy name of God do you live with your one broken heart?

Cutting the thin whites of my inner arms through my gangly teen years was this silent scream for bloody answers.

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Cora-Beth Martin, she'd cut her wrists on the sharp edge of the paper towel dispenser at the school, rubbing her wrists back and forth, wild for a way to get away from that old guy rubbing himself up against her in the locked dark every night.

Ema Winters, she'd stopped eating. Maybe if she didn't open her mouth, the pain wouldn't get in and the ache of everything would waste away off her bones.

I'd sat in some counselor's sticky office on a hot June afternoon, twisting this bent-up high school ring round and round my knuckle, watched her lean forward, her stringy brown hair falling like a veil, and heard her say point-blank that I showed all the symptoms of suffering enmeshment and emotional abuse, the words punching hard up into my diaphragm, and I can only shake my head. *No. No. No.* Every breath hurts along all the gravel roads home. If I don't inhale, that woman's words can't get to me. I park the pickup out by the barn and rummage through the garbage bin, desperate for a jar.

For the smooth skin of my inner arm.

Dad always said that the day my little sister was killed, the Terpstras had their John Deere tractor plowing the field right across from the house, breaking up the earth. Right across from where we'd watched that delivery truck knock her over like some flimsy pylon and crush her, us standing there like impotent shadows, watching her ebb away. Dad said they'd just kept breaking up the earth, when his world had stopped dead. He said he'd wanted to break their necks for not stopping and getting off that tractor, when he could do nothing to save the broken body of his little girl or find a way out of the brokenness cutting up this world. Sometimes you can feel the crush of it on your brittle rib cage. Great grief isn't made to fit inside your body. It's why your heart breaks. If you haven't felt this yet, it may be, God forbid, that someday you will.

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There's absolutely no tidy pattern as to who gets pain and who gets peace. How had I not seen that the brokenness of this world is so all-encompassing that it encompasses all of us?

The wheat stands behind the orchard, turning itself into pure gold.

This is the deal we all get: guaranteed suffering. We all get it. It is coming, unstoppable, like time.

There are graves coming, there is dark coming, there is heartbreak coming. We are not in control, and we never were. One moment you're picking up balls of crusty dirty socks strewn across the bedroom floor, and the next moment you're picking up the pieces of your one shattered life.

How do you live with your one broken heart?

All the wheat looks like an onyx sea. The trees at the edge of the field reach up like a lyric scratched across the sky. It's like that line of Hugo's from *Les Misérables*: "There is one spectacle grander than the sea, that is the sky; there is one spectacle grander than the sky, that is the interior of the soul."¹ *How does the interior of your soul live with broken things, through broken things?*

Jesus died crying.

Jesus died of a broken heart. Those words were still warm on His cracked lips: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"² The movement of a life of faith is always toward answering that singular question. Read the headlines. Read the obituaries. Read people's eyes. Isn't the essence of the Christian life to answer that one, nail-sharp question: *God, why in this busted-up world have You abandoned me?*

I can see that question hanging over our farm table, up in the gable, from that framed canvas of a thousand little broken squares of color. In the semiabstract painting, there's no tidy

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pattern, just light and dark bleeding into this subtle suggestion of Jesus hanging on the cross. He's hoarse with the begging, for Himself, for us: "God, why have You abandoned me?" And He surfaces in the patches of color, the broken brushstrokes, the silhouette of Him visible in the chaos—Christ entering all this chaos.

There is the truth: Blessed—lucky—are those who cry. Blessed are those who are sad, who mourn, who feel the loss of what they love—because they will be held by the One who loves them. There is a strange and aching happiness only the hurting know—for they shall be held.

And, by God, we're the hurting beggars begging: Be close to the brokenhearted. Save the crushed in spirit. Somehow make suffering turn this evil against itself, so that a greater life rises from the dark. *God, somehow.*

I was eighteen, with scars across my wrists, when I'd heard a pastor tell a whole congregation that he had once "lived next to a loony bin." I'd looked at the floor when everyone laughed. They didn't know how I had left my only mama behind the locked doors of psychiatric wards more than a few times. When they laughed, I felt the blood drain away from my face, and I'd wanted to stand up and howl, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."³

I'd wanted to stand up and beg: *When the church isn't for the suffering and broken, then the church isn't for Christ.* Because Jesus, with His pierced side, is always on the side of the broken. Jesus always moves into places moved with grief. Jesus always seeks out where the suffering is, and that's where Jesus stays. The wound in His side proves that Jesus is always on the side of the suffering, the wounded, the busted, the broken.

I believed this then and believe it now and I'd say I know

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it to be true—but there is more than believing—there is living what you believe. *Do I really?*

What I wanted that Sunday when I was eighteen, sitting in a church of laughter mocking the hurting, was for all the broken to say it together, as one body, to say it for the hurting and broken and to say it to each other, because there is not even one of us who hasn't lost something, who doesn't fear something, who doesn't ache with some unspoken pain. I wanted us to say it to each other until it is the bond of a promise we cannot break:

The body of Christ doesn't offer you some clichés, but something to cling to—right here in our own scarred hands.

His body doesn't offer some platitudes, but some place for your pain—right here in our own offered time.

His body doesn't offer some excuses, but we'll be an example—right here in our bending down and washing your wounds.

And we are His and He is ours, so we are each other's, and we will never turn away.

But instead I'd heard preached what Jesus never had: some pseudo-good news that if you just pray well, sing well, worship well, live well, and give lots, well, you get to take home a mind and body that are well. *That's not how the complex beauty of life breaks open.*

The real Jesus turns to our questions of why—why this brokenness, why this darkness?—and says, “You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here.”⁴ “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.”⁵

There's brokenness that's not about blame. There's brokenness that makes a canvas for God's light. There's brokenness

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that makes windows straight into souls. Brokenness happens in a soul so the power of God can happen in a soul.

Isn't this what Mother Teresa laid out on the table: "There is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead . . . I do not know how deeper will this trial go—how much pain and suffering it will bring to me. This does not worry me anymore. I leave this to Him as I leave everything else . . . Let Him do with me whatever He wants as He wants for as long as He wants if my darkness is light to some soul."⁶

The sky is this fading grey across the fields, emptying across the rolling hills. But flames of light still catch in the far edge of the waving wheat, burning up the maples at the fringe of the woods.

The lit trees don't move in the wind, certain they are safe, that we are all safe.

I wash and dry the white porcelain pitcher at the sink. That moment, the edges of me, feel fragile. Not wanting one more thing to crack. Not wanting to crack one thing more.

Is there a grace that can bury the fear that your faith isn't big enough and your faults are too many? A grace that washes your dirty wounds and wounds the devil's lies? A grace that embraces you before you prove anything—and after you've done everything wrong? A grace that holds you when everything is breaking down and falling apart—and whispers that everything is somehow breaking free and falling together.

I had wanted someone to reach over to me at eighteen, sit in that church pew next to me, someone to touch my shoulder, to steady things and say: "Shame is a bully but grace is a shield. You are safe here."

What if the busted and broken hearts could *feel* there's a grace that holds us and calls us Beloved and says we belong

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and no brokenness ever has the power to break us away from being safe? What if we *experienced* the miracle of grace that can touch all our wounds?

I wanted to write it on walls and on the arms scarred with wounds, make it the refrain we sing in the face of the dark and broken places: No shame. No fear. No hiding. All's grace. It's always safe for the suffering here. You can struggle and you can wrestle and you can hurt and we will be here. Grace will meet you here; grace, perfect comfort, will always be served here.

How to remember there's a Doctor in the house who "binds up the brokenhearted,"⁷ a Wounded Healer who uses nails to buy freedom and crosses to resurrect hope and He never treats those who hurt on the inside as less than those who hurt on the outside. How do I remember that: "Hearts are broken in ten thousand ways, for this is a heart-breaking world; and Christ is good at healing all manner of heart-breaks."⁸ How do I stand a thousand nights out on the creaking porch, lean over the pine rail, and look up: The same hand that unwraps the firmaments of winging stars wraps liniments around the wounded heart; the One whose breath births galaxies into being births healing into the heart of the broken.

I put the porcelain pitcher on the barn board shelf by the farm table. All of us in a heart-breaking world, we are the fellowship of the broken like that painting over the table. Over all of us is the image of the wounded God, the God who breaks open and bleeds with us.

How do you live with your one broken heart? All I can think is—only the wounds of God can heal our wounds. This is the truth, and I feel the rising of it: suffering is healed by suffering, wounds are healed by wounds. It jars me, shatters

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my fears into the softness of Him: bad brokenness is healed by His good brokenness. *Bad brokenness is broken by good brokenness.*

What in the world does that even mean? And could I find out simply by daring to discover it—some new dare.

Like a brokenhearted way to . . . abundance?



Shalom had come to me sitting there at the sticky farm table, come with her heart cut out of white paper.

She brought the paper heart and this roll of tape to me and asks, “Will you do it, Mama? I can’t make it work.” And she holds out a roll of mangled clear tape.

I’m sitting there bent over her brother and his spelling words.

“What are you trying to do, sweet?” Tape it in half? Tape it to the wall?

“I just want the heart taped to me. Just right here.” Shalom staccatos her finger off her chest.

Her brother’s erasing his paper too hard, wearing a hole right through. Trying to erase everything he’d got wrong.

“Just tape it right here.” Shalom points just above her own thrumming heart.

“And why are we doing this exactly?” I’m on my knees in front of her, half smiling, looking up into her face, my thumb smoothing the tape line of this exposed heart.

I asked the question, even though we’d just talked it over that morning at breakfast, about how we need to give love to others. So of course, she’s trying to put into practice her mother’s half-baked words and I’m going to have to tell her this

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is bold and brilliant, making herself into a walking sign of my little breakfast lecture.

Usually I'm the one cupping her face in my hands, but now she's got me here, kneeling in front of her, so she takes my face into her hands. And she bends so close I can feel her breath warm.

"We need to tape hearts right to us, Mama. So we always know." She strokes my cheek. "So we always know His love's around us everywhere."

His love's around us everywhere.

If only we could all wear a heart right across the center of us so there was always this knowing: God has not forgotten you. God has not abandoned you. God's love is around you everywhere. When you feel in your marrow how you're His Beloved, you do more than look for signs of His love in the world, more than have a sign of His love; you actually become a sign of His love.

Her palms warm on my cheeks, I feel it in one long moment—how we can be held again. I want her to never stop holding me. Maybe this is what real love feels like—a slight breaking of the heart, and a slight breathless surprise at finding yourself put back together into a kind of wholeness. *Shalom*.

Shalom looks down, smooths out her paper heart, white and larger than life (because isn't love always larger than life, and isn't that always the point?). And then the inevitable happens, what always happens: the heart breaks, rips right down the center, just where she tried to smooth everything out. I'd swallowed hard.

How in the world do you live with your one broken heart?

Shalom looks down at hers. I am waiting for her to brim and overrun.

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“It’s all okay.” She finds the right first words. She holds the torn bit of her paper heart out to me. “Maybe the love gets in easier right where the heart’s broke open?”

I blink at her, replaying the moment.

Maybe the love gets in easier right where the heart’s broke open.

I pull her in close, gently kiss her in the middle of her perfect little forehead—and off she goes with her one broken heart. And I’d sat there in the wake of her, waking: maybe you can live a full and beautiful life in spite of the great and terrible moments that will happen right inside of you. Actually—maybe you get to *become* more abundant *because* of those moments. Maybe—I don’t know how, but somehow?—maybe our hearts are made to be broken. Broken open. Broken free. Maybe the deepest wounds birth deepest wisdom.

We are made in the image of God. And wasn’t God’s heart made to be broken too? Wounds can be openings to the beauty in us. And our weaknesses can be a container for God’s glory.

Hannah tasted salty tears of infertility. Elijah howled for God to take his life. David asked his soul a thousand times why it was so downcast. God does great things through the greatly wounded. God sees the broken as the best and He sees the best in the broken and He calls the wounded to be the world changers.

Up in the gable hangs the painting of Jesus breaking over all our brokenness, Jesus bleeding here in our chaos: *our bad brokenness is made whole by His good brokenness.*

If I could figure that out—live that out—then could I know the grace that knows how to live fully, even though you’re brokenhearted?

The Farmer comes in from the barn, leaves a bucket from

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the henhouse at the back door with his boots. I can hear him washing up at the mudroom's porcelain sink. He steps into the kitchen. I look up from the dishes. He's seen it already. The man can read my eyes better than he reads the skies. Sometimes all our unspoken broken speaks louder than anything we could ever say. He reads my slow breaking over the kid's lightning-bolt news and all my not-enoughness that I can't even grope through the pain to find words for.

He pulls me into himself, enfolds me. And then, into the quiet, he says it so soft I almost miss it, what I have held on to more than a thousand times since.

"You know—everything all across this farm says the same thing, you know that, right?" He waits till I let him look me in the eye, let him look into me and all this fracturing. "The seed breaks to give us the wheat. The soil breaks to give us the crop, the sky breaks to give us the rain, the wheat breaks to give us the bread. And the bread breaks to give us the feast. There was once even an alabaster jar that broke to give Him all the glory."

He looks right through the cracks of me. He smells of the barn and the dirt and the sky, and he's carrying something of the maple trees at the edge of the woods—carrying old light. He says it slowly, like he means it: "Never be afraid of being a broken thing."

I don't—I don't even know what that means. I *am* afraid. And I think this journey, this way, will not spare any of us. But maybe—this is the way to freedom? I've got to remember to just keep breathing—keep believing.

In Christ—no matter the way, the storm, the story—we always know the outcome.

Our Savior—surrounds.

Our future—secure.

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Our joy—certain.

When we know Christ, we always know how things are going to go—always for our good and always for His glory.

Somehow Love can lodge light into wounds.

The warming spring sun falls behind him standing at the kitchen window. All across the field to the east, the wheat waves like a brazen promise.

I'll take it. I'll take his words like a daring covenant, not knowing yet what's to come: there is no growth without change, no change without surrender, no surrender without wound—no abundance without breaking. Wounds are what break open the soul to plant the seeds of a deeper growth.

My dad had told me this once. For a seed to come fully into its own, it must become wholly undone. The shell must break open, its insides must come out, and everything must change. If you didn't understand what life looks like, you might mistake it for complete destruction.

I whisper it to the Farmer, one line that unfolds like willing, cupped hands: "Brokenness can make abundance."

And the weight of hell shifts almost imperceptibly to feel more like the weight of glory, even if I'm not quite sure yet if that greater grace will come.