

The young man shrugged his backpack to a different resting place just above his kidneys. If he didn't shift the load's position every half hour, his day would end with a throbbing bruise where the pack rode his lower spine. The morning was red, an angry new-born thing, the sun bobbing low on a sea of curdled cloud. As he marched into the bloodstained sunrise that straddled the eastern hills, little snails of sweat crawled down his forehead, dripping their glistening trails of salt into his eyes. It was going to be a hot one.

Just as soon as it was light enough to squint around him, he'd hitched his bedroll to the backpack and aborted his resting place of last night, a shallow canyon partially sheltered by a railroad trestle. He smirked a little as he thought of that "resting place." He hadn't really gotten any rest at all.

A couple of tramps had climbed down into the canyon at dusk and unrolled their own bedrolls. After a few muttered words of wary greeting, no one had spoken for the rest of the night.

No one had slept either. Each occupant of the shallow gulch had been afraid of dozing off in the presence of a stranger. It wouldn't have been the first time a coroner had been called to bag and tag the remains of yet another homeless person butchered for a stained coat and a pair of worn shoes. So all three wanderers lying underneath the railroad tracks that night had gone without sleep.

Thoughts of rest and sleep brought the young man to cast his mind across the murky waters of the last few months, back to the home he had left. To a bedroom where he used to sleep deeply and well. To a house protected from the dangers of living rough on the open road. His baby sister would be on her way to school about now. Maybe she was waiting for the bus outside the rented apartment where what remained of the family lived.

He wondered if his baby sister ever thought about him anymore. If she did, what might those thoughts be? He remembered how her smile could light up the world, even on a dark day. And there had been plenty of those.

Of-course, most of those dark days had been his own making. Nobody had forced him to go down the twisted path he'd chosen. Nobody had made him start dealing drugs from the home where he'd lived with his family – to start selling black pills and white powder for the money he'd convinced himself he so desperately needed. That's what had really caused their lives to fly apart like so much dandelion fluff in a summer storm. Because the young man hadn't realized that the laws in their state mandated the immediate confiscation of a home where drugs were being dealt on any significant basis. And when the bust finally came, by the time the DEA agents came boiling through the shattered door of the little house, bristling black and yellow fire ants from a weird galaxy of giants, he was already moving tens-of-thousands-of-dollars of coke, and crack, and x in any given week.

So, after his arrest, the state had taken the house. His mom had moved what furniture she could manage to a small rented apartment in a part of town where people didn't go out alone at night. It was all she could afford. A tiny duplex with peeling paint in a part of the city where you got used to turning your TV up high, so as not to hear the angry voices of failed lives from next door and across the street.

But, there would be no quiet bedroom, no place of rest there for the young man. He was already 16, would turn 17 next month. And although, as a minor and a first-time offender

he had gotten off with probation, there would be no going home for him. In fact, his mother wouldn't even let him through the front door.

He didn't really blame her. He'd spindled and mutilated their lives quite enough. It was probably for the best that he put some space between himself and the family he had crippled.

So, he'd taken to the open road, with some idea of heading east. East to one of the bigger cities. East, to an unnamed place where he might find a construction job, or simply lose himself in the anonymity of a big-city population. He didn't really have a clear idea on what his plan was. Except to get away.

Traffic was now picking up a little along the road where the young man walked. Probably early-morning commuters, or parents taking their kids to school before rushing off to some desk in a nearby office. Thoughts of school led to thoughts of books. And thoughts of books caused the young man to stop for a moment, shrug off his pack, and stoop down on the grassy embankment beside the road.

He needed to make sure he still had it.

Reaching his hand into one of the side flaps of his backpack, he pulled out a tiny, black, well-worn book. It was, in fact, a pocket version of the Gideon Bible. For some reason, he felt greatly comforted that the book was still there where he had stowed it the night-before-last, the evening of that strange encounter.

That day, the road on which the boy traveled had skirted the edge of a state park. And as the twilight faded to a darker gloaming, he'd seen near the roadside what looked like a campfire. Curious, the boy turned off the road, and started walking toward the light. He passed between the massive trunks of old-growth hardwoods which creaked softly under the growing weight of the night. It was indeed a campfire. Its sparks rose and died in the dusk, dancing for a moment with the first stars, before flaring out to ash and drifting into nothingness. Someone had even pitched a small grey tent there by the roadside, at the edge of the park.

This was good! Campers, the young man knew, were recreational travelers. As such, they didn't normally represent a threat to wanderers like himself. In fact, a lone camper might very well be the one to be afraid of a stranger walking up to his fire at dusk. But the man he'd met that night had seemed to be somehow above fear.

As the boy neared his fire, the man rose from the folding chair where he'd been sitting within the halo of the firelight. He reached out his hand in smiling welcome, as though he'd actually been expecting his guest. And the man had shared his dinner that night, some trout he'd caught in the bright river which ran along the road. It was good trout too, tender, and fresh, and flavored with sprigs of rosemary and wild thyme. And as the warmth of the fire enfolded him, in that easy lethargy that sometimes comes after a good meal, the boy found himself emptying his heart to the strange bearded man with the warm brown eyes. The words geysered out of him, a frothing flood of sobbing pain for all the hurt he'd heaped on his family.

And then the man had said such a strange thing. "You know, you can't un-break broken eggs. But, if you're careful enough with them, guided by the right recipe you can make a pretty good omelet."

Then, the man had revealed that he was actually a pastor in a small church about forty miles from that state park. And this pastor, this bearded preacher with the peaceful eyes told the boy about David, a man in the Bible who had done a horrible thing.

David was a mighty king. And he had arranged the murder of another man named Uriah, so that David could take Uriah's beautiful wife for his own. Now that was a terrible crime, and God made David pay for it. Because all crimes require payment in the end. But that didn't mean God stopped loving David. In fact, with God's help, David went on to do amazing things, incredible things for God.

And then the strange pastor with the warm brown eyes told the boy about Mary Magdalene. Some people called her Mary of Bethany. She was a woman who had lived a terrible, destructive life, abusing herself in the most shameful way. But this same woman was forgiven by Jesus. And the swelling depths of her gratitude were such that she came one night to Jesus and washed his feet with her tears. And she dried those beautiful feet with her hair.

Mary's story became an inspiration for thousands of years to multitudes of people. An example of how it's never too late. No one is ever too far gone to turn away from a life of chaos and destruction. Because it's never too late to give yourself completely to the mercy of God.

The boy had drifted into sleep that night, a peaceful, dreamless sleep such as he hadn't slept in many days. And when he woke up the next morning, he found that he was alone. The only thing to mark the presence of the strange man of God from the previous evening was a small Bible which lay beside the boy's backpack. And when the boy opened the Bible, he found that on the inside cover, the Pastor had written the day's date and this note. "I give this book to you. Study it carefully. It is full of wonderful recipes for what you can do with broken eggs."

Recipe for Broken Eggs (Reflections on Lk.7:36-50): It would be nice if Luke and John agreed about everything. But they don't. Luke would seem to have us believe that the woman of many tears in chapter 7 of his Gospel is Mary Magdalene. After all, immediately following this story, the account of Luke names Mary Magdalene specifically (see Lk.8:2). Scholars of the Bible will tell you that this type of juxtaposition is rarely incidental. So it is reasonable to conclude that the Mary Magdalene at the beginning of Luke 8 is the same woman we have just heard described in Simon the Pharisee's house at the end of the preceding chapter.

But other views persist. John's Gospel claims she was not Mary Magdalene at all. Instead, the Gospel of John identifies the woman of many tears as Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus (see Jn.11:1-2). So the debate goes on.

Other intrigues surround the true identity of this woman as well. One of the reasons Mary Magdalene's life before her redemption is linked with prostitution, is that the town of Magdala, from which she takes her name, has traditionally been associated with the oldest profession. However, this is a somewhat tenuous association. While there is at least one mention in Rabbinic writing of the town of Magdala being "destroyed because of prostitution,"¹ scholars have long noted that the name of the town "Magdala," comes from the Hebrew word for tower *migdol*. Unfortunately, this word has been used to identify multiple communities in the Ancient Near East. So there is no real way to reach a comfortable conclusion that Mary Magdalene actually came from the Magdala with the unfortunate reputation. She could have come from another Magdala all together!

Regardless of which Mary she is, and whether or not she was a prostitute, it seems clear from the many sins that were forgiven her that this woman of many tears must have been

¹Nosson Scherman, ed. *The Jerusalem Talmud* (Brooklyn, NY: Artscroll, 2006) y. Ta'anit 4.69c.

following a self-destructive lifestyle before she met Jesus. Profligate adultery would certainly fit the parameters of that kind of abasement. In this regard, my story's association between the woman forgiven much in Luke 7 and the crime of murder-by-proxy that David committed in order to legitimize his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba seems relevant (See 2 Samuel 11).

The point I have tried to make in *Recipes for broken eggs* is that God can turn our darkest sin into great victories in His redemptive plan. For quite a few years now, part of my ministry has been with the homeless and those struggling under the enslavement of drugs and alcohol. Countless people have passed through my office whose lives are in tatters. The truth is, while we should never go looking for sin, God can nonetheless use the wreckage of our lives as testimonies to His love. Once his beautiful plan has taken hold of us, the worst of sinners can become the greatest witness to His infinite mercy. In the parlance of the God business, these transformed people are often called "Grace Trophies." The term is an apt one.

A final point needs to be made. If you consider the account of the woman who was forgiven much in Luke 7, together with the woman caught in adultery in John 8, and the woman at the well with five husbands in John 4, you will quickly see that Jesus had a special, patient place in his heart for women who had succumbed to a life of sexual immorality. I have been wondering recently how much of an influence Jesus' earthly father, Joseph was in this respect.

Before God told Joseph that the child growing in Mary's womb was the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Joseph had determined to treat Mary with gentle kindness. We read that he had decided to dissolve the marriage privately so as "not to expose her to public disgrace" (See Mt.1:19). Until he was finally reassured by God of Mary's purity, Joseph must have hurt more than human words can express, because his much loved fiancé was pregnant with a child who was not his own. But Joseph did not strike out in anger at this young woman. Instead, he decided to treat her with a certain kind of charity, sparing her from public disgrace.

So, I am left to wonder how much the forgiving, merciful views of Jesus toward these wayward young women were due to the influences of his earthly father, this patient, gentle carpenter who strove to see the good in all around him. I have come to believe that we have not spilled near enough Christian ink writing about this wonderful, loving worker of wood.