

As I read through *Picking Up the Pieces*, I flashed back to the summer after my senior year in college when the girl I'd dated for three years wrote to tell me that our relationship was over—she'd met someone new whom she intended to marry. For weeks, I'd get sick to my stomach when I tried to eat. I did whatever I could to avoid being alone. I dreamed about happier times and awakened in the morning wishing I could go on dreaming. I wondered if I would ever love anyone again.

I wish I'd had Lou Priolo's book back then to help me get my focus back where it belonged—on God's Word and His perfect plan for my life. God used that breakup in my life to help me see that the woman I loved had replaced Him and had become an idol in my life. Ultimately, He used that trial as He does with all trials in our lives—to perfect us and make us more like Christ. That's what this book is all about. Whether you've experienced being abandoned by someone who once promised “till death do us part,” or you feel empty inside because someone you thought would always be there has left you, God is your strength! As you read through this book, you'll find the hope, the peace, and the joy that God has promised are the fruit of a growing relationship with Him.

—**Bob Lepine**, cohost, FamilyLife Today

Here you have a book about a problem that no one wants to acknowledge exists: the breakup of Christian relationships. With his typical straightforward, God-centered approach, Priolo has assembled 31 studies that will help you get to the heart of your sorrow. These thoroughly biblical, thoughtfully practical, Christ-honoring studies will help you regain your perspective and see your Savior: He's a Suffering Servant offering grace to His suffering children.

—**Elyse Fitzpatrick**, author, *Idols of the Heart, Overcoming Fear, Worry, and Anxiety*

Relationships bring us the greatest joy in life . . . and the greatest pain. Lou Priolo has done a masterful job of applying God's Word to the anger and agony that flow from broken relationships. He also shows us how to find healing and hope through Jesus Christ so that we can go on to love others more deeply and freely than we ever imagined.

—**Ken Sande**, president, Peacemaker Ministries

Do you know someone who has experienced the pain of a broken relationship? Is that person nursing loneliness and resentment instead of getting on with the rest of his or her life? Maybe that someone is you. If so, Lou Priolo's book is full of practical, solidly biblical advice that will help you move past the hurt to be the kind of person God wants you to be. *Picking Up the Pieces* addresses topics like fear, loneliness, forgiveness, and self-pity. The author writes in an engaging style that blends just the right amount of humor with the unapologetic proclamation of God's Word. I strongly recommend it.

—**James MacDonald**, senior pastor, Harvest Bible Chapel

Picking Up the Pieces addresses a real counseling issue (the breakup of romantic relationships) in a remarkable way. In 31 short chapters (each designed to be read on a different day of the month), Lou Priolo helps hurting people learn to apply the Bible to the specific issues common to such breakups. Practical, devotional, and most of all biblical, this book should be in every counselor's toolbox.

—**Jay E. Adams**, author, speaker, seminary professor

As the biblical counseling movement continues its rapid growth in size and maturity, it is encouraging to see a growing library of practical counseling aids such as this. Lou Priolo has once again tackled a specific issue with insight and depth that can shave weeks off the time required for counseling the heartbroken person.

If someone you love has abandoned you, you can find helpful biblical suggestions for dealing with the anger, hurt, bitterness, and sense of loss in the studies Lou has provided. I suggest reading and digesting a chapter a day for 31 straight days of intensive self-confrontation. Do the assignments; make the commitment of time and energy. At the end of that time, you may find that you are well on your way toward healing.

I suspect that many biblical counselors will be assigning this book in the years ahead.

—**Ed Bulkley**, president, International Association of Biblical Counselors

Picking Up the Pieces

Recovering from
Broken Relationships

Lou Priolo



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For clarity, some of the quotations from Puritan authors and from Charles Spurgeon contained in this volume have been slightly modified (rephrased into modern English). The pronouns “he” and “she” and “him” and “her” are used interchangeably.

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Foreword

In this book, Lou Priolo addresses a very common human relationship problem: the problem of handling broken relationships, the problem of responding constructively to being rejected by someone for whom you have deep romantic feelings. I say this is a very common human relationship problem because of my own experience. As a young person, I personally experienced the pain of being rejected by someone for whom I had developed romantic feelings. And as a pastor, biblical counselor, and professor of biblical counseling at the Master's College, I have been called on to counsel numerous people at such a time in their lives. During the many years when I taught biblical counseling to graduate and undergraduate students, I was frequently involved in trying to help young people go through this valley time in their lives constructively. Again and again, I saw in living color the devastating effect that being rejected had on these students. As a pastor and marriage counselor for forty-five years, I have heard and seen the anguish of people when someone for whom they had deep feelings pushed them away and said, "I don't want to be with you anymore. I want out of this relationship. It's over. I want to move on."

When I am called on to counsel in such situations, in addition to the personal support I give these people in counseling sessions, I have wanted to have solid, biblically based, helpful material to put in their hands. Often, the homework I have given them has

FOREWORD

been of a rather generic sort that addresses the way a Christian can and should respond to difficult situations in his or her own life. After assigning this generic material, I have then in sessions made specific application to the particular issue the person is facing. This has often been very helpful, but I have wanted some material that was more directly and specifically related to the relationship breakup experience.

With the publication of Lou's book, all that has changed. Now, I have a great tool that is not a "one size fits all" approach to put into the hands of people. Now, I have a book that from beginning to end will provide the very kind of biblical, practical, specific help that people involved in the unwanted breakup of relationships need. Counselors who work with people who are going through this experience will find this book to be a valuable resource, as will the people who are actually experiencing the pain of broken relationships.

—Wayne Mack

Introduction

Your Achin', Breakin' Heart



“Will this ache in my heart ever go away?”

As a professional counselor, I've been asked that question a hundred times in dozens of ways. If you are reading this book, chances are that you (or someone you love) have been asking this question, too. When a romantic relationship ends, the confluence of potentially depressing emotions can wreak havoc in the lives of those involved. This is especially true for the person who didn't want the relationship to end. But for the Christian, there is a very good answer to this oft-asked question.

Yes! Your pain will go away *in time*.

For a Christian who knows and is willing to do what the Bible says, the heartache will be healed. And the more of God's Word a person implements, the sooner the anguish will stop. If you are the one who is hurting, there are specific things you can do to ease the pain and help yourself get back to the way you were before the breakup.

Perhaps the best place to begin this process is with prayer. You can pray that God will change your heart. Your prayer may include confession of any self-centeredness or failure to love God, thanksgiving to God for His attributes, and a request that He give you a greater desire to please Him than to get over your sorrow. You can continue to pray this way until you have the assurance that the Lord has answered your prayers. You will know He has done so when you find in your heart a willingness to endure this trial for as long as it takes to produce genuine godliness in your life.

You may have already noticed that this book contains thirty-one very short chapters. After reading it through in its entirety, you may use it as a devotional guide—reading one chapter a day for a month (perhaps the chapter that best relates to whatever issue you were struggling with the day before). Depending on your unique situation and your individual strengths and weaknesses, it may take several months before you can tell that the ache in your heart is starting to diminish. Reading through this book devotionally (every day) for at least two or three months will keep before you those things you can do (as well as those things you should not do) to help you lose those lamentable “lovin’ feelings” as quickly and righteously as possible.

“Righteously?”

That’s right! You could battle your sorrow in sinful ways (such as constantly reminding yourself what a “turkey” your former sweetheart is),¹ but you would only end up in more misery and displease God in the process. You see, sin, which is thinking or acting independently of God, results in both temporal and eternal *misery*. You may feel pretty miserable right now, but if you don’t respond biblically to the breakup, you will face another kind of misery later in life. If you do this God’s way, you won’t have to resort to methods that are displeasing to God. If you are a Christian, you can do it. The

Bible will show you how, the Holy Spirit will lead you, and this book will encourage you along the way.

You will learn in the pages ahead how to deal with the residual romantic feelings you may be carrying as a result of the breakup as well as other painful emotions that may be preventing you from getting on with your life. May God bless you as you respond to your trial by depending on His Spirit and His Word.

Special Instructions

If you are reading this book to help overcome romantic feelings for someone to whom you were married, or from whom you are presently separated, please turn immediately to Appendix A to receive some special instructions and guidelines for using this book.

If you are reading this book because you are attempting to overcome romantic feelings for someone with whom you've had an adulterous affair, please turn to Appendix B to receive special instructions and guidelines for using this book.

1

How Can I Mend My Broken Heart?

The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways.

—Proverbs 14:14



Charlie's radio alarm clock went off at 6:00 A.M. The easy-listening station began playing a series of love songs. As was his habit, Charlie stayed in bed for 30 minutes or so, allowing the elevator music to slowly awaken him. But today something was different. For one thing, he couldn't help but notice how so many of the songs were about the breakup of relationships. He also noticed how many of his favorite songs had lyrics promoting selfish, feeling-oriented, idolatrous views of love.¹ The longer he lay in bed, the more depressed he became. You see, Brenda, the girl Charlie deeply loved, had dumped him the night before. She gave no reason for the breakup other than telling him that her feelings had been slowly diminishing over the past several weeks.

Charlie was devastated. "But I love her," he reminded himself as the music played. "I was going to ask her to marry me. How

could she do this to me? How will I ever get along without her? How will I ever get over her?”

These mornings of misery continued for days. Sometimes Charlie stayed in bed for over an hour, tormenting himself with songs that reminded him of Brenda. Finally, he realized that the sooner he got out of bed and began putting his mind on other things, the faster his daybreak depression would subside. Small as it seemed, this was the first big step in Charlie’s walk from sorrow to freedom.

We live in a world that glorifies romance more than it glorifies the God who created man and woman with the capacity to enjoy romantic relationships. This worshiping the creature rather than the Creator produces misery. Of course, not all sorrow is the result of our sin. Grief and other emotions commonly associated with a breakup, however, can become overly intense if we do not worship God as the Bible says we should.

Scripture has much to say about emotions such as grief, loneliness, rejection, anger, bitterness, guilt, and jealousy. It reveals what it takes to change these feelings, what you can do to keep them from paralyzing you, and how you can turn them around in the days ahead. The most direct way to do this is to learn how to control your thoughts and behavior.

Proverbs 14:14 warns us of the danger associated with allowing our hearts to draw back from God’s resources. “The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways.” If you allow yourself to be consoled with unbiblical thoughts, you will be filled with your own ways—that is, your misery will increase. You must depend on God’s solutions (and resources) to get you through this trial. Look at the counsel given in Isaiah 55:6–9.

Seek the LORD while He may be found,
 Call upon Him while He is near.
 Let the wicked forsake his way,
 And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
 Let him return to the LORD,

HOW CAN I MEND MY BROKEN HEART?

And He will have mercy on him;
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.”

Your ways and your *thoughts* must become God’s ways and God’s thoughts. In order to respond to this situation in godly ways, you need to examine your thoughts and motives so that you can be “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).

The problem with most of us is that we listen to ourselves rather than talk to ourselves. When we go through trials, it is easier to just put our minds in neutral and listen passively to our hearts. How about you? Are you a listener or a talker? Here is a little test you can take to help answer that question.

Listed below are twenty statements representing thought patterns that are bound to produce misery in the life of someone who is experiencing the hurts of a broken relationship. After each sentence, write the number that best corresponds to how frequently the statement is true of you.

ROMANTIC THOUGHT PATTERN INVENTORY

RATING SCALE	POINTS
Never (or Hardly Ever)	5
Seldom	4
Sometimes	3
Frequently	2
Always (or Almost Always)	1

HOW CAN I MEND MY BROKEN HEART?

1. When thinking about the future, I imagine how miserable I will be without the companionship of my ex² rather than imagining how God is going to cause all things to work together for my good. _____
2. I allow myself to fantasize about things I know will probably never materialize. _____
3. I spend more time thinking about my ex than about God, His Word, or delights of eternal significance. _____
4. I dwell on or exaggerate the shortcomings of my ex to remind myself of how glad I should be that I am rid of him. _____
5. I give in to depression rather than trying to fight it. _____
6. I put the worst possible interpretation on the actions of my ex. _____
7. I struggle with vain regrets (looking at the past in such a way that it keeps me from living biblically, responsively, and productively in the present). _____
8. I wish I were someone else or someplace else. _____
9. I feel guilty because I know I've not acknowledged or sought forgiveness for my own sins that contributed to the breakdown of the relationship. _____

I have thought or said the following:

10. "It will be a long time before I can forgive my ex." _____
11. "I hope someday somebody does to her what she did to me." _____
12. "I can't adjust to being single again." _____

13. "I'm a total failure." _____
14. "The loneliness is more than I can stand." _____
15. "The embarrassment is more than I can stand." _____
16. "The rejection is more than I can stand." _____
17. "All men (women) are alike." _____
18. "I can't believe God is doing this to me again!" _____
19. "Life isn't worth living anymore." _____
20. "I'll never be able to face my family and
friends again." _____

Total Points _____

How did you do? The closer your score is to 100, the more you are thinking biblically about the breakup of your relationship. Let me suggest that you take this test every thirty days over the next few months to monitor your progress. If you scored lower than 75, you may want to read one chapter of this book daily for several months until you can raise your score to at least that level.

So what are you doing with your thought life these days? Are you spending too much time allowing your mind to dwell on the past or worrying about the future rather than focusing your thoughts on what God has given you to do today? Are you listening to the lies that your flesh tempts you to believe, or do you speak the truth in your heart, knowing that God has given you all the resources necessary to "fall out of love" biblically? If you do the former, you are in for extended periods of unnecessary heartache. If you do the latter, you can be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

You will find in the pages ahead practical biblical insight that will not only help you improve your test score but, more importantly, draw you closer to God as you deal with the hurt of your broken relationship.

2

Have You Tossed Those Lovin' Feelings?

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

—Galatians 5:22–23



Before we proceed any further, it might be helpful if we take a crash course in the theology of emotions in order to help you better understand what part feelings play in life and to what extent we should trust and follow them.

Have you ever wondered why you can't just turn off your feelings the way you turn off the kitchen light? Wouldn't it be nice if, after you got tired of a particular feeling (such as anxiety, loneliness, depression, grief, or guilt), you could simply hit some kind of button and turn it off? Actually, it wouldn't be such a good thing if you could turn off your feelings at will. As we will see, emotions (even painful ones) play an important part in our lives. Thankfully, God didn't make our emotions so that they

could be easily controlled. You can't get at them or control them directly. You can access them only indirectly—through your thoughts and actions.

"I'm not sure I agree with you. I'm not really comfortable with the thought that they're as indirectly accessible for modification as you seem to believe."

I understand your apprehension with this suggestion. But please allow me to persuade you by giving you a chance to directly alter your feelings right now. I'd like you to try to emote and then stop emoting on command. Let's see how long it takes you to turn your feelings on and off. Are you ready? Good. Sit up straight in your chair, take a couple of deep breaths, and we'll begin the experiment.

On the count of three, I want you to become frightened. One, two, three: *Be afraid*. That's right—try to work up a colossal measure of stark, abject fear. Come on, you can do it! Concentrate! Reach down into the depths of your being and grunt it out.

It didn't work, did it?

"No, I guess it didn't."

Most people can't work up a good fright without spending a considerable amount of time *thinking* about the danger of a potentially hazardous circumstance. If you're not currently facing such a hazard, you would have to imagine one to become frightened. Of course, if you could immediately place yourself in real danger by some *action*, you might then more easily become frightened. You see, your emotions are directly connected to your thoughts and actions. To change your feelings, you usually have to change your thoughts and your ways.

Now let's try something else. Let's see if you can *stop* emoting on command. Please sit up straight in your chair again, take another deep breath, and on the count of three we'll begin. One, two, three: *fall out of love!* Try to stop loving that person you've been in love with for so long. Come on, focus really hard. Reach

down into the depths of your heart and turn off the flow of those sentimental emotions that have been causing you so much pain of late. You do want them to go away, don't you? Well, then, "just say no" to those hurtful feelings. Stop tormenting yourself with those warm, fuzzy memories from the past. Stop yearning for his/her companionship. Stop feeling so hurt and rejected. Turn off those passion switches.

Well, how did you do? That didn't work either, did it?

"You knew it wouldn't!"

You might succeed in temporarily getting your ex out of your mind by thinking about something or someone else. But even that would have proved my point: you have to change your thinking to change your feelings. I trust that you're now convinced (or at least a little more open to the likelihood) that people can't change their affections directly. We can't instantly and permanently turn our feelings on and off at will, but we can gradually turn them around.

"All right, I guess you made your point, but what do you mean about turning feelings around? And how can I do that?"

With the Holy Spirit's enabling power, you can develop self-control—a magnificent piece of the Spirit's fruit described by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:23. By learning how to control those things that control your emotions, you can turn them around. In other words, by learning how to exercise self-control over your thoughts and actions, you can ultimately train your emotions to go in a new direction—a direction that works with you to accomplish your goals rather than against you.

Self-control is the ability to consistently make wise decisions and fulfill responsibilities on the basis of God's Word rather than on the basis of one's feelings. Self-control has to do with *not* giving in to your feelings. The greatest hindrance to developing self-discipline is your feelings. The greatest enemy of self-control is your feelings. People who are self-disciplined do (and think

about) what the Bible says whether or not they feel like it. People without self-control do what they feel like doing, regardless of what the Bible says.

Self-control is largely a matter of learning how to go against your feelings. It's about becoming less of a feeling-oriented person and more of an obedience-oriented person.

In the process of getting over a broken relationship, self-control involves doing and thinking what the Bible says you should even though you feel otherwise. It involves thinking about your ex in God-honoring ways though you may *feel* like thinking the opposite.

That may sound like hypocrisy, but it is not hypocritical to feel one thing and do something else any more than it's hypocritical to do something loving for someone even when you don't feel like doing it. (John 3:16 doesn't say, "For God so loved the world that He felt warm and fuzzy inside.") It would be hypocrisy for you to *profess* one thing and do another. If you said, "I'm really glad this relationship is over" when you weren't, or "Changing the way I think about my ex was easy" when it wasn't, that would be hypocrisy. But to struggle against your flesh (Matt. 26:41; Rom. 8:5, 13; Gal. 5:17) in obedience to God's Word so that your thoughts and ways may glorify Him is not hypocrisy.

Another definition of this important character quality¹ has to do with managing one's emotions. Self-control is the ability to rule one's own spirit through the power of the Holy Spirit. "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Prov. 16:32). Solomon says that if you can control your emotions, you are, in God's eyes, greater than a famous military leader such as General Patton or General Schwarzkopf.

Solomon also warned us of the dangers associated with not being self-disciplined. "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls" (Prov. 25:28). A city

without walls is vulnerable to all kinds of peril. If you allow the unpleasant feelings generated by your broken relationship to get the better of you, they will make you vulnerable to such dangers as neglect of family, friends, church, school, and work activities, the development of unhealthy future relationships, self-pity, guilt, and even difficulty trusting God in the future. So to be hooked on a feeling can be as dangerous as being hooked on drugs.

To change your feelings *in the long run*, you must learn to develop self-control. But *in the short run*, you must not let your feelings hinder the Spirit as He helps you develop self-control. By God's grace, you can say no to your feelings when your feelings are tempting you to disobey God.