



life is
Messy

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The human dilemma.

Life is messy.

This is the human dilemma. You're not doing it wrong.

Life isn't a color-within-the-lines exercise. It's a wild and outrageous invitation full of uncertain outcomes. Sometimes it is beautifully rational, at other times it lacks all logic. What appears to be a step back today, may turn out to be the first marvelous step forward ten years from now.

The mess of life is both inevitable and unexpected. It is filled with delightful mysteries and frustrating predicaments, indescribable joy and heart-wrenching suffering.

There is no plan you can devise that will solve the mess. There is nothing you can buy, learn, or accomplish that will eliminate the mess. Finding the love of your life and the perfect career won't either. There is nothing you can start doing or stop doing that will eradicate the mess. There's nothing you can tell yourself that will make the mess magically disappear, and you cannot think your way out of it. The mess is here to stay. It's unavoidable. It's just life.

It's what we do with the mess that determines everything. You can ignore it, avoid it, deny it, blame others, shame yourself, and exhaust yourself pretending your life isn't messy. But when you wake tomorrow morning, the mess will still be there. Or you can realize that the mess serves a powerful purpose.

To discover that powerful purpose, we first need to accept that the mess is not the problem. The problem is our erroneous belief that everything should be immaculate, orderly, neat, tidy, and in its place.

Everyone has their own mess to contend with. Our tendency is to think that we are the only ones with a mess, that our mess is messier, more embarrassing, more shameful than other people's mess. It isn't so.

You don't have to have it all together. Nobody has it all together.

Acceptance is the only way to make peace with the mess. This acceptance will lead you to a profound acceptance of life, others, and self. It isn't surrender or defeat. It isn't conceding that there is nothing we can do about the mess. It's just a penetrating awareness that the meaning of life isn't to solve the mess. That's not the goal.

This radical acceptance of self, others, and life may be

the beginning of wisdom. I'm not sure we can ever truly appreciate anyone or anything until we have made peace with the mess. Are you ready to make peace with the mess?

Life is messy, but we figure things out. We laugh, we cry, we grow, and we move on to new beginnings, second chances, and amazing possibilities.

A more beautiful question.

The gateway between confusion and clarity is marked with a quintessential truth: We are wounded and broken. Acceptance of this truth allows us to make peace with the mess.

I am wounded and broken. We all are. We are self-conscious about our brokenness. We are sensitive and insecure, even embarrassed, about our woundedness. But we needn't be. We are all wounded and broken.

Why are we so surprised when we discover that another person is broken? Perhaps because we are so intent on ignoring our own brokenness. Everyone is broken, everyone is wounded, to pretend otherwise is to open ourselves to vast and ongoing deception.

But it's okay that we are broken. It's only a problem if we subscribe to the false notion that we have to try to keep everyone and everything from being broken.

I am broken. Pretending otherwise is exhausting.

But let me share with you the real problem with our brokenness. In our wasteful, consumption-addicted society, we throw broken things away. So, we don't know what to do with our broken selves. What do we do with broken people, broken relationships, broken institutions, broken families, and of course, our very own broken selves?

This is an important question, but a more beautiful question holds the answer. It is one of the most beautiful questions I have ever stumbled upon: Can something that has been broken be put back together in a way that makes it more beautiful than ever before?

This is the question that all the words on these pages cling to.

It may seem like an impossible proposition to our straight-line, everything-in-its-place, secular minds. But I marvel at how God doesn't use straight lines or right-angles in nature. We invented right-angles and straight lines to prop up our insecure humanity.

The perfection of nature is marked by crooked lines, brokenness, imperfect colors, and things that seem out of place. The perfection of creation is achieved through its imperfection. And so it is with human beings. Your imperfections are part of what make you perfectly yourself.

If we put on the mind of God, we discover one of the most beautiful truths this life has to offer: Something that has been devastatingly broken can be put back together in a way that makes it more beautiful than ever before. It is true for things, but it is even more true for people, and it is true for you. This is the source and the summit of hope.

We believe that once something is broken it can never be as beautiful as it was before. But that's not true. It's true that it cannot be exactly the same as it was before, but that doesn't mean it cannot surpass its former self. You don't look at a wonderful tree that loses some leaves and limbs in a storm, and say, "It's ruined forever." But we say that about ourselves and others.

The Japanese have a beautiful artform called Kintsugi. It is a form of ceramics, and I have been meditating on it for the past several years. In our disposable culture, if we

break a vase or a bowl, we throw it away and buy a new one. This simple act allows us to maintain the illusion that life is not messy. It plays into our delusion of perfection. But life is messy, perfect is a myth, and the wisdom of the Japanese art of Kintsugi has much to teach us.

When a vase or bowl or cup is broken, artists gather up the broken pieces and glue them back together. Though it is how they put them back together that is steeped in wisdom and beauty. They mix gold dust with the glue. They don't try to hide the cracks. They own them, honor them, even accentuate them by making them golden. They celebrate the cracks as part of their story.

This is a beautiful lesson. They don't pretend the vase was never broken. They don't pretend that life is not messy. They don't pretend they are not broken. When we pretend to be someone other than who we are, our true self hides in fear and shame; the fear of being discovered and the shame of not being enough.

The most beautiful and surprising lesson the Kintsugi artform teaches us is this: We are each other's wounded healers. *We each possess the gold dust needed to glue other people back together, making them more beautiful and loveable than ever.* Our love, connection, acceptance, generosity,

community, and kindness are that gold dust. This is astoundingly profound.

There is a vital truth here. Kintsugi ceramics are staggeringly beautiful. There is an honesty to their beauty that is missing in the artificial perfection of mass-produced items. Once repaired in this ancient method, Kintsugi pieces are more beautiful, and more loved than before they were broken.

This idea creates vast confusion and cognitive resistance for us. We don't believe that something that has been broken and repaired can be more beautiful, and more loved, than ever before. But hope depends on overcoming this false belief. Moving on from this false assumption is essential to making peace with our own brokenness and a vital ingredient in all healthy relationships.

Someone who has been broken and healed can be more beautiful, and more loved, than ever before. Embracing this truth is liberating. But it is easier to do once we realize it's okay to be broken. It's normal, in fact—part of the human condition. Once we embrace this truth, we are on the path of hope. When we reject it, we are on the road to despair.

Can someone who has been broken be healed and become more beautiful and more lovable than ever before?

This is the central question in our journey together. I am convinced the answer to the question is yes. But as you will soon discover, arriving at this conviction was no easy feat. This book is my own messy and imperfect grappling with this question. If at any point in this book you find yourself lost, confused, or disoriented, return to this question. It is the North Star we are exploring. Whatever topic we are discussing in the pages ahead, though they are vast and varied, we will never be far from this question.

Someone who has been broken and healed *can* become more beautiful and more lovable than ever before. That someone is you. My singular hope as you make your way through these pages is that you discover this to be true.

The mountaintop.

Every life has highs and lows. I've had more than my fair share of mountaintop experiences, but like everyone else, I live in the valleys and on the plains.

The thing that surprises me in this moment is the stillness in my soul. Writing this book has been a tumultuous experience. I have experienced the effortless grace of inspiration over the years as a writer, but this book wasn't like that. These words didn't come from a mountaintop experience. A high price had to be paid for them. They were hard-fought for in the lowlands and the wastelands.

I know there will be more storms, and I know I am better prepared than ever before. But right now, in this place, at this time, I cherish this profound calmness. It is a gift.

There is so much more I would like to share with you. I sit here, paging through my journals, and on each page, I find some insight that begs not to be left out. Here are some that I cannot pass over.

1. You cannot live a meaningful life by filling your life with meaningless things and activities.

2. Everyone is going to hurt you. Find the ones that are worth the suffering and heartache, don't let anyone harden your heart, and remember, that even with your best efforts to avoid it, you are going to hurt people too.
3. Don't complain. It's not attractive or productive.
4. Give people the benefit of the doubt. Life is difficult and messy, and everyone is carrying a heavy burden.
5. Death comes to us all. When death approaches, the person you have become meets the person you could have been. This is a humbling encounter. Don't wait for it. Meet with the person you are capable of becoming for a few minutes each day. The more time you spend in these meetings the less you will fear death. Use your thoughts, words, choices, and actions, to close the gap between who you are today and who you are capable of being. This is the path that leads to a deeply fulfilling life.
6. Ignore your critics. Everyone has them. They will tear down in an hour what they couldn't build in a lifetime. But life eventually puts all critics in their place. With time they become remote and unimportant. The people who love you don't care about what your

critics care about; they care about you as a human being. Your critics don't see you as a human being. They have dehumanized you. They see something in you that unsettles something in them. So, they have to decide: attack you or investigate their own dark mystery. Most people don't know you well enough to compliment you or criticize you, and it is the unseen moments of our lives that define us.

The good life.

Since Aristotle first spoke of "the good life" almost 2,500 years ago, it seems everyone has been on a quest to experience it. I have heard many people speak about it and I have read many books on the subject. Some people think it's about success and accomplishment. Others think it's about money and things. Some think it's about love and family. Others think it's about food, wine, travel, adventure, education, meaningful work, independence, friendship, and pleasure.

There's nothing wrong with these things, unless these things are all you've got. Because even all of these things together will not deliver the good life.

There is only one ingredient essential to the good life. So essential that without it, the good life is impossible. You would think that such an ingredient would be widely sought after. It isn't. You might think that such an ingredient is scarce. It isn't. You may think this ingredient is expensive. It isn't. You may think people would be clamoring to get their hands on it. They aren't.

When people talk about the good life, you get the impression that it is mysterious and only available to a select few people. This isn't true.

There is no secret to the good life. It isn't a mystery. No exceptional talent is required. It isn't only for the rich and famous. It is available to everyone, everywhere, at all times.

What is the essential ingredient of the good life? Goodness itself. The secret to the so-called good life has always been right before our very eyes. If you wish to live the good life, fill your life with goodness. Fill your life with love, kindness, gratitude, compassion, and generosity.

Take risks with your goodness. Test the limits of your goodness. Don't just love, astonish people with your love. Don't just dabble in generosity, live a life of staggering generosity.

How would your life change if your only goal was to do as much good as possible? Let's find out. Don't let this question remain unanswered. Celebrate goodness every chance you get.

Don't waste your gold dust.