

Scars

By [James A. Harnish](#)

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A sentence [written](#) by Ernest Hemingway hooked my soul years ago and has never let go. “The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places.”

I thought, “That’s so true it should be in the Bible.” Then I realized that it is. Hemingway’s words have served as a hermeneutical key to open a number of biblical stories, particularly this week’s Gospel passage. I’ve experienced its truth in my own life and the lives of people in the churches I have served, resulting in my book [Strength for the Broken Places](#).

The broken places sometimes leave scars. Another writer, in reviewing Harry Crew’s novel [Scar Lover](#), described scars as signs of healing. Scars are always ugly, but they continue to remind us of all that we have been through.

Once I began thinking about scars and healing, I started discovering confirmation of the idea in many places. Here’s a quotation [from Eugene Peterson](#), to which I refer in my lectionary column in the [Century](#):

This wound of the self that calls for help, this self that is closed in upon itself and now is open just a little bit, is an opening through which we can listen to and answer God. For the wound is more than a wound. It is access to the outside, to God, to others....The wound must not be bandaged over as fast as possible; it is there to be a listening post, a chance to exit the small confines of the self-defined world and enter the spaciousness of a God-defined world.

In [Bread for the Journey](#), Henri Nouwen writes that

Jesus invites us to embrace our brokenness as he embraced the cross and live it as part of our mission. He asks us not to reject our brokenness as a curse from God that reminds of our sinfulness but to accept it and put it under God's blessing for our purification and sanctification. Thus, our brokenness can become a gateway to new life.

I think people responded positively to [The Shack](#) because it speaks a word of love and grace to the wounded places in our lives. It's hard to beat the moment when Papa allows Mac to touch the scars on her wrists and says, "I never left him, and I have never left you." That's good news for all of us who carry around the scars of our own experience.

Additional lectionary columns by Harnish appear in the April 6 issue of the Century—click [here](#) to subscribe.