

Broken Writer,

By Jennifer Slattery

It's often true—those used mightily by God have first been broken. For Athol Dickson, his pain-filled past made him the writer he is today.

Dickson has struggled with heartache, depression, and moments of faithlessness—these struggles helped him understand humanity at its core. He knows what it's like to run from God, to face betrayal, and to lose those he held dear. His pain contributes to the gripping realism of his books and allows him to penetrate to the very soul.

'I'm done with You'

A few years before his novel *River Rising* was published, Dickson's mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. The two were extremely close, enjoying vacations together, frequent phone chats, and daily visits. While she was sick, he was her primary caregiver. As a result, he saw firsthand how devastating cancer could be.

He saw firsthand how devastating cancer could be.

Then, a few months after his mother's diagnosis, when she was already bed-ridden, losing weight, and losing her battle, Dickson received more tragic news. His mother's sister and best friend of 70 years had died of cancer, and someone needed to tell his mother.

"I got so mad at God," Dickson says. "I was struck with an overwhelming sense of futility and loss and misery. I decided God and I were finished. I told Him, 'If this is how you treat the ones I love, I'm done with you.'"



At that point, Dickson deliberately stopped praying and tried to pretend God didn't exist.

'I came crawling back'

But his depression increased. Plunged into the depths of despair, living far from God, Dickson says he learned exactly what Solomon meant in Ecclesiastes when he talked about the futility of life. "When you turn away

Healed Readers

from God, having known Him as He truly is, what you're turning toward is nothing. Nothing at all. Everything becomes two dimensional, like cardboard cut-outs."

When you turn away from God ... what you're turning toward is nothing.

Dickson continued to spiral into a cycle of relentless negative thinking. Feelings of shame, inadequacy, and fear trapped him for no rational reason. He wanted out.

Before seeking professional help, he and his wife decided to get away. They embarked on a two-week road trip to the Rocky Mountains. While she drove, Dickson focused on the beauty all around. Before long, Christ broke through. By their return home, he had remembered who God was, how beautiful He is, and how much God loves him.

"So, of course, I came crawling back," Dickson says, "and like the father of the prodigal, God came running out to meet me." From where he is now, Dickson cherishes the experience. Not only did it teach him about the depths of God's love, it showed him there's nothing he could say or do that God will not forgive.

'He treats them no different'

Each painful experience, from the death of his mother to a personal struggle with drug addiction, has made Dickson the person and writer he is today. Having experienced the healing love of Christ, he now spends a great deal of his time demonstrat-

ing that grace to others. Once a week, he teaches a resume' writing class at a homeless shelter. Each month, he serves "the least of these" his famous ribs, looks them in the eye, and treats them with dignity and respect.

"Athol interacts with the homeless the same way he interacts with me if we are spending time together," says Eddie Orem, Dickson's close friend. "He treats them no different than if he was chatting with a businessman, a pastor, or a waitress at a restaurant."

Dickson spends a great deal of time demonstrating God's healing grace to others.

One week, an inebriated man walked into Dickson's weekly Bible study. The man sat down, quiet, and listened as Dickson expanded on some deeper truths of Scripture. Toward the end, the man broke down and started to cry. He asked for prayer, wanting release from his addiction. Dickson, having struggled with his own inner demons, was moved not just to compassion, but to action. He got up, walked over, and held the man while everyone prayed.

"Athol feels the hurt and pain others feel," Orem says. "I see a genuine sadness in Athol when he sees others that are suffering."

'A man of great inner strength'

Dickson's compassion comes from a heart set 100 percent on Christ, according to his brother, Garret Dickson. "He is a man of great inner strength, sensitive to a higher calling."

Athol Dickson's empathetic understanding and deep compassion bleed into his writing and impact his character development. "Compared to writers who haven't dealt with things

like addiction, depression, disease, and death, it's probably easier for me to imagine some of the dark places where my characters live and the difficult times that have shaped who they are," he says.

It's probably easier for me to imagine some of the dark places.

His latest novel, *The Opposite of Art*, is an example. One of his characters, raised around drug addiction and prostitution, is deeply scarred. "I lived some of that before I became a Christian," Dickson said. "And I've known many people in that kind of life, so I can write about it with some authority."

That authority and compassion in Dickson's novels is a result of what he's learned from his own trials. His books are driven by a passion rooted in deep affection for his Savior.

JENNIFER SLATTERY writes and edits for Christ to the World Ministries, and writes



for the *Christian Pulse*, *Internet Cafe Devotions*, and *Jewels of Encouragement*. Her work has appeared in numerous publications and

compilation works, including the *Bible Advocate*, the *Breakthrough Intercessor*, and CBN.com. She's also placed in various contests, including the Christian Writers Guild Operation First Novel Contest. Visit <http://jenniferslattery.com>.

Four classics re-released

Athol Dickson's novels transcend description with a literary style that blends magical realism, suspense, and a strong sense of spirituality.

He is releasing new versions of four early novels: *River Rising*, *The Cure*, *Winter Haven*, and *They Shall See God*. Each won a Christy Award or was a Christy finalist and each will have new introductions, written by Dickson.

Dickson loves reading and digging deep into the pages of Scripture. He draws inspiration from God's creation. Those who know him best describe him as *deep* and *compassionate*—someone who puts feet to his faith, on and off the page.

With the Internet booming and everything being done virtually, it would be nice to have someone to turn to when you don't know the next steps as an author.

WRITER'S RESOURCE

can help!

Services include:

- *Organizing documents
- *Fact checking
- *Manuscript editing
- *Manuscript printing
- *Marketing assistance
- *and more!

 Cheryl

Katie is a lifesaver! She goes above and beyond... so I can focus on writing.



618-889-4310

ktann2@hotmail.com

facebook.com/writersresource