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AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Best When Broken: Even the Young Grow Weary and Tired, and Young Men Stumble and Fall
Scott Coleman
WestBowPress
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Best When Broken is the autobiography of Scott Coleman, a Christian man who found the true meaning of an abundant, God-centered life when he became paralyzed from the neck down at the age of seventeen.

Coleman is a competent, but not especially gifted, writer who has managed nonetheless to compose a personal narrative that a broad spectrum of readers may find thoroughly engaging. The greatest weakness in his autobiography is that it fails to follow the arc of a well-crafted story, one that would provide his audience with the satisfaction of not only becoming acquainted with the author on a personal level but of reading a gripping tale at the same time. Coleman's story follows a loose chronological order, but it is primarily episodic, skipping from one event to another with only the slimmest narrative connection to hold the story together as a whole.

But whatever talent Coleman lacks in storytelling, he makes up for with a forthright and charming compositional style that appears to perfectly reflect his personality. Coleman is the rare author for whom an abundance of exclamation points and frequent interjections such as "Wow!" and "Amazing!" seem less like the benchmarks of an inexperienced writer than they do the sincere expressions of a man hoping to convey honest amazement with the goodness of his life.

Coleman is also unusual in that he is a Christian writer who can quote scripture without seeming to preach or wander off into theological mazes that seem to bear scant relationship to the real world that mortals inhabit. When Coleman turns to the Bible, it is not to analyze the finer points of religion but to find a practical guide to living a Christian life, such as when he draws on one of the lessons from the stories of King Jehoshaphat in "2 Kings." When the king and his army found they had run out of water, Coleman's interpretation of the Christian principle to be learned is simple and to the point: "quit whining and start digging trenches," and God will take care of the rest.

Readers will also find in Coleman an author who never glosses over the difficulty of putting the tenets of the Christian faith into actual practice. If Coleman is a man who has found a way to relish the simple joys of a life lived in communion with his creator, he is also a man who never loses touch with the baser instincts of his human nature. His is not the story of a reckless young man who suffered a traumatic accident and, in a moment, discovered once and for all that he was and always will be utterly dependent on the mercies of a loving God. Coleman's experiences are firmly grounded in the reality that even the best among us lose focus from one moment to the next. As Coleman puts it, we are endlessly "stinking it up" with self-centered thinking that leads us away from God and the eternal purpose of our lives.

Though *Best When Broken* is not a particularly great narrative, it remains a very good read for people interested in what it takes to stay true to their Christian beliefs regardless of the hardships that beset them.

Diane Taylor