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Treasures of the Darkness

I am sure you have heard the story of Ivory soap, the “soap that floats”. However, it was not always that way. Years ago, this soap was just another brand among many until a factory foreman made a mistake. He left a fresh batch of soap in the cooking vat and went to lunch. When he was late getting back and the soap had overcooked, the foreman frantically examined the burned soap. It seemed to clean the same. The only difference he could see was in the weight. The burned soap was just lighter. He could either report the mistake and risk being fired, or he could make the best of it and ship the soap out as if nothing had happened. He shipped it out. The results surprised everyone. Instead of complaints, the company was deluged with orders for this new “floating soap” and the foreman was promoted.

God works the same way, taking our mistakes, our sins and bringing good out of them. Paul said it well in Romans 8:28, “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose.” (HCSB) If we let Him, God will use the pain of our sin and the results of our mistakes as the foundation upon which he can build a new life and a more effective ministry.

God works through our mistakes, knowing there is strength in pain that can be gained no other way. God does not eliminate mistakes but he does step into the midst of the mistakes we bring to him. At our invitation, God's very presence fills those mistakes with power and fresh hope, redeeming them for new truth and insight. God is not committed to our comfort, but he is committed to our character, to making us more like Jesus, and he will use every part of our life to make it happen. God does not waste a single experience and there are no “scraps” of life to be thrown away! He uses even our mistakes for our good.

1. God uses mistakes to direct us. Some of my biggest mistakes have yielded the most powerful lessons in my life, pointing me in a new direction or revealing an area that needs change. As the writer of Proverbs explains, “Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways.” Proverbs 20:30 (NLT)

2. God uses mistakes to inspect us. People are like tea bags. If you want to know what is really inside, just drop them into hot water! How we respond to mistakes, problems and sin tests the strength and reality of our faith. James writes, “Whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.” James 1:2-3 (NLT)

3. God uses mistakes to correct us. Some lessons simply cannot be learned in the light; they are wrapped in the darkness of pain and defeat. I can remember when our daughter, Danna, was a toddler with a fascination for electric outlets. I repeatedly pointed to each outlet in our home and firmly said, “No! No!” It was not until she stuck an object into one of those outlets, burning her little finger that she learned the lesson and changed her behavior. In fact, she hasn't repeated that mistake in twenty years! We would be wise to choose the attitude of the psalmist, “It was good that I had to suffer in order to learn your laws. The teachings [that come] from your mouth are worth more to me than thousands in gold or silver. Psalm 119:71-72 (GNT)

4. God uses mistakes to protect us. A problem can be a blessing in disguise if it prevents us from being harmed by something more serious. Several years ago, a family friend was fired for refusing to do something unethical that his boss had asked him to do. His unemployment was a problem and seemed like a huge mistake - but it saved him from being convicted and sent to prison a year later when his former management's illegal actions were eventually discovered. “You planned evil against me but God used those same plans for my good...” Genesis 50:20 (Message)

5. God uses mistakes to perfect us. When responded to correctly, mistakes and problems are character builders. Our relationship to God and our character are the only two things we are going to take with us into eternity. The apostle Paul warns, "There's more (trouble) to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we are hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next." Romans 5:3-4 (Message)

God is at work in us - even in our mistakes – even when we do not recognize Him or understand His process. Someone once said, "Success can be measured not only in achievements, but in lessons learned, lives touched and moments shared along the way."

While living in South Florida, I considered hurricanes to be mistakes of nature. However, I soon discovered that hurricanes are necessary to maintain a balance in the environment. We all know the devastation these monstrous storms can cause, yet scientists tell us that hurricanes are also tremendously valuable because they reduce a large percentage of the oppressive heat that builds up at the equator. In fact, hurricanes are indirectly responsible for much of the rainfall in North and South America. Meteorologists no longer use cloud-seeding techniques to prevent hurricanes from being formed because they are convinced that hurricanes actually do more good than harm.

Take a closer look at your mistakes. Have they become an albatross around your neck, constantly reminding you of your failure and inadequacy in ministry? Do past mistakes keep you from stepping out in faith today? It is time to strain each failure through a new God-given perspective for the valuable nuggets of truth and the treasures that the darkness holds.

Isaiah 45:3 I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

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