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# The Starting Point



Sometimes the processes of our lives could be best represented by a circle. We start at a certain point, sure that we have all the answers, cocky, self-assured, ready to conquer the world and move aside all the poor fools who have so much less understanding than we do. However, life with its hard knocks and deep valleys, has a way of enlightening us and leveling the ground of our self-importance. We often find that we weren't quite as "right" as we first thought. We come full circle and learn to see the wisdom in some of the ones who have gone before us in this journey called life. We experience hurt and pain. We are wounded.

And a most peculiar thing happens for those who open their hearts to learn. We find that our wounds have the potential of becoming a source of healing for others.

I suppose that we have two basic choices when life wounds us – and it always does in one way or another. We can shake our fists at the pain, curse those who brought it, and become angry, resentful, and bitter, demanding payment from the world and life itself for surely we deserve retribution for the wrongs committed against us. Or we can allow God to bring beauty out of our woundedness.

If we are to truly make a difference in this life, it seems to me that the starting place for that is the place of our woundedness. Why would such a thing be true?

I can only speak from my own experience. My wounds give me understanding. They give me compassion. They are a source of humility. They make me approachable. They are a point of connection to hurting humanity.

Hebrews so beautifully paints this picture of Christ as One who can be "touched" by our weaknesses. Christ is approachable, touchable, accepting of our hearts while dealing with our sins.

Early in 2008, it appeared that my life had completely come unraveled. From all practical points of view, my entire life lay at my feet in a million broken pieces. Although I tried to frantically gather those pieces into my arms, it was as sand slipping through my hands. Despite all my best efforts, I lost. I could no more gather up the pieces than I could catch the wind. All I knew of the dreams I believed God had given me slipped away from me and I found myself in the deepest darkest desperation I'd ever known. The systems I'd built on failed. The structures failed. I saw no escape from the pain but perhaps death itself.

And although it didn't happen overnight, God began to heal my heart. God redeemed. He redeemed my life. He redeemed my dreams. He redeemed my ministry. He redeemed my marriage. And the redemption still continues. I've seen relationships redeemed. I experienced the comfort of God through His beautiful servants. I've tangibly experienced Isaiah 61: 3, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for my mourning, the garment of praise in exchange for my mourning.

Yesterday, I was checking out at a local business. The beautiful young woman who worked there looked at me and asked, "How are you?" And I knew from her eyes that it wasn't a rhetorical question. She knew my story. The question has been asked of me so many times in the last 2 ½ years. So many times I've wanted to run. I've felt shame. I've felt the pain all over again. But I have learned to accept the care and love so many have offered. For the most part, I've come to embrace the moment. So I said, "I am doing well." In a moment she pursued, her eyes full of love, "How are you doing?" "I'm really doing well", I replied and continued, "Do you know me?" And she shared how she knew me and my story. Once again, she asked me, "How are you?", her eyes full of pain.

I think I've learned something of what it means to be authentic. I offered, "It's really been hard. We've (my

husband and I) have done a lot of hard work. We've spent five weeks with a marriage counselor. We've grown so much. We're so much better than we've ever been. We've learned so much about communication.”

We talked for close to an hour. She was experiencing her own pain. I offered to her what I have found. God cares. He understands. I didn't offer her religious answers. I offered her healing from the place of my woundedness. I didn't feel that I needed to give her empty promises. I didn't offer her a quick fix. But I did offer her love and care. I offered to talk, to pray, to do anything I could.

And she shared a very personal story of how much my husband and I had blessed her more than once and tangibly helped her in years past. I left so blessed. How beautiful and mysterious are the ways of God! My willingness to step into the temporary pain of the moment had unlocked the door for an amazing God encounter.

Something we had “sown” in years past, I now “reaped” in the form of love and care and encouragement. And at the same time, I was able to sow back into her life in the present moment.

Allowing another to enter my life and come close to me had opened the door for my wounds to be a source of healing as I pointed to Christ who is our Healer. And I thought of how the Scripture says that by His stripes we are healed. He is our wounded Healer.

As we recognize our humanity and brokenness, this recognition has the potential to be the starting point of true ministry. As we become aware that we don't have to deny or escape our pain, we can humbly offer those very broken places as the bridge which leads others from despair to hope.

As I pondered these thoughts this morning, I have found myself in deeper wonder and amazement at God and His ways. My heart is led to acknowledge that there truly is none like my God who declares that we can rebuild the broken places and be a part of raising up a foundation for many generations. He satisfies my soul and strengthens me, making me like a watered garden and like a spring of water (Isaiah 58).

So it seems to me that the starting place of true ministry is often the healing we have found in our own lives. Dare we offer ourselves in the service of Christ to others?

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