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By Ken Korkow

PAINFUL, YET REDEMPTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

A couple weeks back I did something most people would consider unusual. I went to the Goodwill thrift store in our community and bought a small suitcase. After I took it home, then came the unusual part – I cut the handle off and threw the suitcase away. The handle I put into my pants pocket.

You might wonder, who would do this? That is understandable. But for me it was important – a reminder that when I leave this earth, I am taking NOTHING with me. Everything tangible will remain behind. However, all the things I have had of eternal value will have been sent ahead: My prayers and intercession for others; my tears for their salvation (eternal destiny) and spiritual growth; and any spiritual influence I have had the privilege of having in the lives of others.

Jesus spoke of this when He said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, whether moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mathew 6:19-21).

As you can see from what I listed above – praying for others, concern for their spiritual well-being, and desire to have an eternal difference in their lives – my focus these days is simple: Relationships. Sadly, the vast majority of relationships most of us have are superficial. There is little if any personal investment. We take from them what we need and then move on. You know what? This makes our spiritual enemy smile. He loves relationships, as long as they are

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superficial and meaningless. Because his strategy is simple: deceive, divide, and destroy.

I regret how I operated in the past as a businessman. I used relationships to get business. I would pretend to be nice – and pretend to care – to get what I wanted. I used people to get things I loved. Thankfully, several decades ago God touched my life and taught me that instead, I should be using things to love people.

This is why my years of experience working on our family's cattle ranch has been so valuable. As you work with livestock you discover two truths: Fast is slow. Slow is fast. The same can be said about relationships. They take time and cannot be rushed.

Recently I was on a several phone calls: one to buy a truckload of insulation for a building at the ranch; another to buy a 50-foot diameter pen for working with horses, and another to buy a couple horse shelters. In each instance, while talking about my intended purchase, I could hear "something" in the other person's voice: Pain. Or tiredness. So, I "went there" and asked each person what was going on in their life.

As I did so, the Lord opened doors. Each time, as the person shared their story, they also shared tears. This gave me the opportunity to share the truth and hope of Jesus Christ. In all three instances I prayed with them, then mailed them some discipleship material. Later I followed up on each with another phone call.

In the past, I would not have taken the time, would not have noticed – or would not have cared. But God has taught me another important principle: Pain shared is pain divided. Joy shared is joy multiplied. Now at the start of each day I pray, "Lord, please give me divine appointments – and keep the time-wasters away." Realizing the Lord provides for my personal and business needs, this frees me up to develop redemptive relationships. What a privilege it is to share in the pain of others, along with their joys.

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. What do you think of the story about buying a suitcase and discarding it, retaining only its handle? Do you appreciate the symbolism?
2. Have you been making it a practice to store up treasures in heaven – or are you still busy trying to accumulate treasures on earth? Explain what this means for you.
3. How would you describe most of your relationships? How many deep, meaningful relationships do you have, compared to superficial ones without much value?
4. Do you see the value of striving to establish and maintain redemptive relationships? How do you think the principle, "Pain shared is pain divided. Joy shared is joy multiplied," relates to this?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 12:25, 14:13, 15:13,30, 17:17, 18:24, 27:9,17; Matthew 6:33-34

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