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By Jim Mathis

REPAIRING, RESTORING, AND IMPROVING THE BROKEN

In my photo restoration business, I often see photographs that are stained, faded, or even torn into pieces. My job is to carefully put the pieces back together, remove stains and blemishes, and restore faded colors.

In the process I use a variety of tools. Sometimes the tools are obvious, such as soap and water and a cotton swab. Other times I use highly sophisticated computer graphics software, such as Adobe Photoshop, to fill in cracks or even replace pieces that are missing.

One of my great pleasures – professionally and personally – is being able to present to a customer a restored image that they believed was lost, beyond repair, whether of a loved one or a cherished memory.

There is a metaphor here for everyday life, because often it is not just photos that are damaged. People's lives are damaged as well, sometimes very badly. In one respect or another, this is true for all of us. Fortunately, we have a skilled craftsman named Jesus, who can examine the pieces of our lives, see what is damaged, discover what is faded or has been abused, and even find what is missing in our lives. Then, like a skilled photographic specialist, He can carefully go about putting things back as good as new.

Using specialized software, I can work to make just about any photograph even better than new, invariably better than the client expected. I work meticulously so that which was neglected, damaged, or torn can become superior to the original. I like to tell my clients that not only can I repair damaged photographs, but I also can improve them, even if they didn't know there was anything wrong.

In a far more profound, eternal way, every day God is doing the same type of work in our lives through His Son, Jesus Christ. He makes it His business to take lives that are damaged, broken, faded, or even have pieces missing, and put them back together, better than before.

God delights in this restoration and renewal process. He declares this in the Old Testament of the Bible. *"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?..."* (Isaiah 43:19). Then, as our relationship with Him grows, we are invited to experience a divine, everlasting transformation process: *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but*

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be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (Romans 12:2). As we focus on God and the Scriptures, we can become new people.

Instead of cotton swabs, airbrushes and computer software, God uses love, forgiveness and reconciliation as His tools for transformation.

Admittedly, I as a photo professional do not go around fixing every photo that I see. And God does not automatically repair broken lives. Each of my clients knows they have a problem photo, which is why they bring it to me to be improved. Once they have reached out to me, I do everything I can to solve their problem. In much the same way, God wants us to come to Him and admit that we are ready for the help that only He can give.

This is why Jesus said, *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened..."* (Luke 11:9). Just as my customers bring their needs to me, we must bring ourselves to God.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had or seen an old or damaged photo that an expert was able to restore to its original quality, or even better than the original? What was your reaction to that process?
2. Do you agree with the analogy between the process of restoring and improving old photos with the spiritual process of transforming lives that have been broken or damaged in various ways through their journey through life? Why or why not?

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3. Why do you think that not everyone going through difficulties or dealing with a troubled life turns to God for help?

4. Can you think of a time when God was doing something like that in your life? Perhaps He is making some much-needed repairs and changes in your life right now? If so, what is that process like in your personal experience?

NOTE: If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Romans 6:5-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 4:4-9; 1 Peter 1:3-4

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