

No Matter What We've Done, God Won't Cast Us Aside

There are moments in time that invade our everyday lives—circumstances in which the paths of strangers cross as part of a God-designed plan. The end result causes us to stand in awe knowing that He is and He delights even in the details of the lives of our lives.

My husband, Mark, and I had traveled many hours on I-10 across the Florida panhandle on our way to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. After a quick pit stop and fresh lipstick, my legs were ready to hit the trail around the rest area. Mark was still in the restroom with the keys to Bella (our Mini-Cooper), so I wedged my small black zippered makeup bag between the locked car's side mirror and window.

When we later re-entered the highway with increased speed, the little bag flew from its perch, and I knew right away I had forgotten to retrieve it. "It's OK, Mark." I quickly directed, "No need to go back. The bag is old and lipsticks are easy to replace. Let's not take the time."

How many times have we faced a horrifying moment when reality hits? So it was as we stopped for lunch and I reached into my purse for my wedding ring—the wedding ring I had slipped into the makeup bag the night before for safekeeping.

Oh, no! I couldn't believe this was really happening. But in the midst of regret and self-condemnation, the Lord brought comfort, strength and even—surprisingly—the words of a song that brought my focus back to Him. "Lord, You are more precious than silver. Lord, you are more costly than gold. Lord, You are more beautiful than diamonds. And nothing I desire compares with *You!*"

We had gone too far to go back. That is a message in its own!

Shockingly God called us to lay aside what had happened and continue our journey forward. Beyond our understanding, God's great grace enabled us to focus on and trust Him, allowing us to celebrate our son's graduation and encounter Him in the conference we attended.

The morning we departed from Baton Rouge was riddled with delays and uncertainty. Tropical storm Debby was stalled in the Gulf with a predicted path over our route home. I wondered if we could locate my ring in a torrential downpour. But God's timing is perfect down to the minute and what seemed to be annoying delays were actually His set-up for a rainless choice meeting with a man named Alton and his son Alton III.

Alton and his crew had been trimming and mowing the I-10 median. As my son Andrew and I searched the highway's edge we approached Alton, who was now strapping his weed-eater to his truck. I had jokingly commented to Andrew that he was possibly an angel sent by God to help us. Indeed he was God's chosen servant, a Christian man of integrity who assured me the ring would be returned should it be found. We joined hands to pray as his crew made its way toward us.

We were still at the rest area when Alton called to let me know a crew had picked up trash the day before and one of the men had a vague remembrance of a little black bag. The garbage bags had not yet been taken to the landfill and he assured me that he would look through each one until he found the ring.

Through impossible odds, God was at work in the midst of us through an extraordinary young man—a stranger, whose passionate, sacrificial goal was to seek and find that which was lost.

Minutes later the phone rang. I recognized the voice of young Alton. "I found your ring." As only God could orchestrate, Alton located the makeup bag in the very first garbage bag he opened. Inside, the three tubes of lipstick were a smashed

combination of color and sharp plastic shards. Feeling his way through the gooey mess Alton found the ring—covered in red.

While there was great rejoicing over the recovery of my wedding ring, a greater message left its deep imprint upon all of us. The man who picked up the bag on the highway's edge saw no apparent value. He knew nothing of its contents, for if he had, he would not have cast it aside as worthless trash.

Alton's heart, however, had been moved—because he knew of the beloved treasure within a seemingly insignificant makeup bag. To him, it spoke of unending, enduring covenant love, and the ring drenched in red reminded him of Christ's cleansing, redeeming blood.

I think of how much our Father loves each one lost by the wayside, even if they are viewed as having little value or purpose. Oh, my friends, inside is valued treasure—a treasure worth searching for. To God, it's a treasure worth dying for! "For God so loved the world that He gave up His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

In Jesus' parable, the master said, "Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:23).

Prayer Power for the Week of August 17, 2015

This week ask the Lord to direct you to those He values and are lost, overlooked or neglected. Take time to pray and seek ways in which you can share His love, compassion and hope. Remember Israel and continue to pray for it to fulfill God's plan and purpose for this season. Pray for those persecuted for His Name's sake, and ask the Lord to revive His church and

cause us to unite in prayer and purpose for the spread of the gospel and His kingdom. Continue to pray for all those in authority over us (John 3:16; 2 Chr. 7:14).