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SOMETIMES YOU ARE *NOT* SUPPOSED TO PICK UP THE PIECES

La Toya Hampton

Sometimes when we go through disappointments, we feel as though we lose a piece of ourselves, as if we are being broken down. Instead, look at it as being built up.

When an artist creates his masterpiece, he carefully crafts and slowly makes changes to his work, at times so much so that to outsiders he seems to be overly cautious and dragging the sometimes painstaking process out unnecessarily too long. Observers and others in anticipation want to see the end product now.

Take a statue, for instance. It starts out as generic, unformed matter - smooth and untouched. As the artist starts out his work, the material may seem to the untrained or impatient eye chipped, damaged and ugly, having no likeness to anything of beauty. Maybe even in its early stages it appears that the artist has made quite a few mistakes, that he has ruined the material beyond help and now it is of no use or value. However, remember, that is the view of the person not included in on his master plan. He could take the easy route and quickly churn out something uncomplicated and ordinary, but in his heart and mind he knows exactly what he wants even if no one else understands. Instead of rushing through his work to see something beautiful and valuable to others, he moves one step at a time, stops and then examines his work from all angles and in different lights. He constantly reviews his plans, weighing the pros and cons of his next intended change he has accomplished so far, not caring what others see, always keeping in his mind the bigger picture. Carefully he places his chisel to well-calculated points and chips away at what he knows will be his greatest work-to-date. Every purposeful chip, dent and scrape is breaking down what some might have viewed as an already perfect form, to erect something he feels is not just good enough, but awesome. Once finished, it is precious to its creator and perhaps will be of great worth to others.

This process can be likened to God's plan for prepping and molding us for His will. Yes, at times we feel great pain and

loss. It may even feel like it will never end. Some of us let these experiences take from us, chipping away at our foundation, making us weak and susceptible to failing the next test. We feel sorry for ourselves and lose self-esteem and self-worth. We wonder when the hard times will end and when we will again be able to feel good about what we see when we catch our own reflection. Perhaps you did lose a piece of yourself, a part of you that you no longer require, that if you continued to carry it around with you, it would weigh you down and prevent you from going into the next phase of your life that God has planned for you. When those pieces start to fall, leave them where they lay. Maybe that piece was the way you *used to* think; that other piece the way you *used to* look and those others, the way you *used to* walk and talk. These are parts of you that no longer serve you well. You do not need them anymore. They do not fit you anymore; you are a new creature, a new and improved human being and child of God.

It may be hard to believe, but God did not bring hurt and strife to this world for the purpose of eternal punishment. He has a purpose for your life not just for your benefit, but also for the world. Those hard times are meant to be lessons for different reasons not to weaken you, but to build you up, to make you strong and wise, in turn making you beautiful, powerful and a testament to the existence of God. View each chip, disappointment or challenge in your life as the Creator carefully designing His masterpiece to be used as an awesome example for all to marvel. You are a wonderful display of careful and meticulous planning, hard work, perseverance, and achievement.

Stand tall and proud that God is using you.