

Update 15, written August 10, 2012

Failure is often God's own tool for carving some of the finest outlines in the character of His children.

T. Hodgkin

If June - with its relaxed schedule, play days and personal retreat - was a "mountain top high" month then July was the "valley below". A bunch of tough stuff happened at once. . . and well. . . my response to it all didn't make my Coach proud.

How I did it or what I did, I'm not really sure. All I know is that I did a number on my right shoulder and injured a muscle that attaches to my shoulder blade. The stabbing pain wrapped around half my body and took my breath away. The blessing was that it only hurt with specific movements. The bad part was that I'd forget about it and went on to re-injure it 3 more times.

Then my internet went out. I'd been having problems for several months but after 6 days of no internet and no help from the provider, I lost my patience. A complicated, frustrating 3 week story made short, I went on to change providers, get a Trojan virus, have the computer crash, get resurrected and then die altogether. Because so much of it lays beyond my understanding, relatively minor computer problems stress me out. This whole saga sent me over the top.

God bless Sergi and Vitalik; the guys who walked through this all with me. Despite their own extremely busy schedules, they went above and beyond to help me. I now have a new internet provider, new laptop and I'm pleased with both. However even with all of this I wasn't exactly up and running again. I had lost things, had to reenter much information, many of the programs are brand new to me and half the commands are in Russian. It has been a slow walk up this steep learning curve and one reason why I haven't sent out an update for 6 weeks.

\*side note: I've had to reenter all my update addresses and with there being more than 300 of them I could have made a mistake. Therefore, if you are receiving this twice please tell me. If you are getting the updates but don't want them, please let me know. Sorry about that.

Depression happens. It is anger turned inward and it doesn't please God. It is sin because it is disagreeing with God. And, that is where I was. "Why me?! How come?! It's their fault! I don't like this and I'm mad!" I so easily fumble the ball when life hands me a tough situation and the other team takes it and scores. Frustration comes my way and I foul out because I've slugged the problem in anger. I'm found offside because I've run ahead, trying to fix the problem on my own. And then I listen to the jeers of the other side, "Look at all these fumbles, fouls and technical errors! And, you call yourself a Christian? The team would be better off without you. ÷"

Discouragement comes but oh that I would use paper plates rather than fine china for my pity parties. Then two Sunday's ago, my Coach reached out His hand through a song at church. In

voice full of grace & mercy and a touch of sternness He said, "Get up. I agreed with God about all my mistakes, took His hand and stood up again.

To those of you who pray for me, I want to say thank you. Just because I have "missionary" attached to my name doesn't mean I'm some spiritual giant. Hurt and hard times knock me down. But, whether you know what is going on with me or not, in your prayers you step forward for me when I can't for myself. In heaven you will fully understand the critical role you played in my life but at least for now allow me to say thank you.

What do you have that you did not receive?

And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you did not?

-I Corinthians 4:7

"I watched Corrie ten Boom receive people's heartfelt thanks for her ministry. "How do you stay humble, Corrie?" I asked her. "It must be hard not to get big-headed when everyone keeps saying 'thank you' all the time." Corrie smiled and replied, "I used to struggle with it, but not anymore. All through the day I collect people's appreciation as if I'm collecting a beautiful bunch of flowers. Then at the end of the day I kneel by my bedside and offer my bouquet to Jesus. "Here You are, Lord," I say. "They are all Yours, for what have I that I did not receive?"

"Do you struggle with pride?" by Jill Briscoe ó Just Between Us Devotional

I can totally relate. It gets heady being appreciated so much. Over the summer I had the chance to visit 7 Vacation Bible Schools (VBS's or camp as we call them here) and at each village I was treated as an honored guest by grateful pastors, church planters, Sunday School teachers and Vacation Bible School leaders. God, through His people, had provided the funds to purchase the craft & sports stuff or simply gave the materials themselves; the funds to ship it and the funds for the VBS's. I didn't supply anything but rather, like the postman, I simply had the honor of delivering God's gifts. May I be like Corrie and "Collect the flowers and make sure they are offered to Him at the end of the day."

Thank you for your prayers for the health & safety for all those involved in summer outreaches; wisdom for the leadership; open hearts for the children/teens and their parents. Today was the last day of the last of the 27 VBS's my ministry was financially involved in. I will share the stats a little later once the reports come in but there are lots of stories that won't show up in the stats like

· "My daughter is changed! She gets herself up & dressed in the morning because she doesn't want to miss her ride to camp."

· "My little son woke me up at 6 am every morning this week with "Mama is it time to go to camp?"

·       ōThe kids cried on Friday confused as to -Why does camp have to end?ø We are pretty sure they don't get the food and attention at home like they did this week.ö

·       ōParents who don't come to church approached us during the week offering us money and saying, öPlease continue camp because our children love it.ö

At Cozy Village I chatted with several girls who looked like they were about 12 years old and asked, öWhy did you come to camp this week?ö They smiled and said, öIt's interesting, fun and we learn about Jesus.ö

Leaders for VBS were hard to find this year and that meant several worked at 2 to 5 camps this summer. I was wiped out after working at the Batalnia VBS. I simply can't imagine doing 5! So when I saw Lelia (a sweet heart of a gal who is about 16) already the 3rd time I asked, öHow can you do it?ö She ducked her head shyly and said, öI like it and it is a privilege to serve God in this way.ö

At New Cover Village I spoke with a different Lelia (age 18) who I had seen before working as a leader and asked her, öHow did you get started in camp?ö She said, öI first came to camp when I was 14 because someone invited me. I repented (accepted Christ) that week. Then I wanted to tell others. I wanted to give others what I now had. I thank God that I am able to serve - it is a great joy!ö

Any (age 15) is a pastor's daughter so she has been going to church from the start. Her quiet comment was, öI love being a part of the church and involved as a helper with Child Evangelism Fellowship. School is amoral and these help me hold on.ö

Tamara is a pastor's wife and although she could find work and the family could use the money she said, öWe choose to trust God. I don't even look for work because it would get in the way of camp. Summer camp is the more important.ö

Pastor Victor (Tamara's husband) said, öGod told us to GO! And, don't hinder the kids.ö

One pastor said about camp, öEven a fisherman will tell his close buddies where the fish are biting. How much more should we, God's kids, tell others about God?!ö

Pastor Igor and his wife Luda pointed to the charred grass in the distance and said, öA few days before camp was to start a large field fire started and was quickly headed our way. We prayed, clouds gathered and the wind turned. Our camp area was saved. The night before camp a huge thunder and lightning storm happened. We received a couple calls from the helpers saying, -Should we delay camp?ø We told them, -Do what you want but we are starting camp tomorrow as planned.ø The next morning the weather was wonderful. ö

On the way home from one visit, a mother and her 4 children who had been at VBS that day sat in front of me on the bus and the impact of the decision she had made slammed home. She had chosen to lay out the cash and spend the travel time for them to go to the neighboring village each day for 5 days so her kids could attend VBS. By the way they were dressed I knew money was scarce. This effort doesn't even speak to the late nights I knew she must pull to cover all the regular chores at home. I was humbled at the cost she had been willing to pay. I touched her shoulder and made a comment as such and she said, "My husband died when he was 29 because of poor decisions. My oldest boy (then 12) died when he disobeyed me and went swimming in the canal. How can I lose this opportunity to give my remaining 4 the chance to learn to make good choices?"

In closing I'd like to pass on a heartfelt thank you we (you & I) received this summer!

"You laid out a piece of your life (your time, your effort, your funds) for these kids.

Thank you.

With you we give a piece of our life and together we give back to God."

June