**Sample Chapter**

**Flecks of Gold on a Path of Stone – Simple Truths for Profound Living**

**Chapter 6**

**The Untimely**

**When It All Happens When It Shouldn’t**

“‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD.”

Isaiah 55:8

“If you perceive that there are four possible ways in which a procedure can go wrong, and circumvent these, then a fifth way, unprepared for, will promptly develop.”

Unknown Author

Someone once uttered the timeless saying that “timing is everything.” There’s a calming feeling about things happening in a certain order in a certain time that makes it all fit in a certain way. We sense a natural and correct progression that, if followed, leads to success, happiness, fulfillment, or whatever it is that we’re chasing. The whole element of timing seems critical. The more important things are, the greater the issue of timing seems to be. Timing can be so critical that at times we set out to minutely orchestrate the tiniest pieces and parts of all the many things that we’re doing so that everything is perfectly cinched, tightly in synch, and precisely on time.

**Falling Apart Just to Fall Apart**

Yet, sometimes it all falls apart anyway. I mean it disintegrates—something like Murphy’s Law times three or four. Sometimes it’s not just a matter of a relationship or a career being a bit out of step or not lining up quite right. It’s not about tweaking a game plan that’s abruptly turned south or gently nudging it back into the place it was supposed to be before it was abruptly derailed. Sometimes the wheels fall off the thing, which then causes everything else to fall off as well. We end up with the classic train wreck where we met a downhill train on an uphill grade. More than that, however, there’s no rhyme or reason for the train wreck. It simply didn’t need to be, but it was. It was all way beyond any odds or all statistics. Whatever happened, it was a cruelly extenuated string of stupid, dumb luck.

Sometimes it all falls apart….all of it. We’re left standing dumbfounded, mired in the confusion of it all and running our minds down a thousand roads of the classic “what could have gone wrong?” question. Sure, we’ll likely find some things that weren’t well thought out or strategies that were a bit ill conceived. We might unearth some rationales that now, in hindsight, weren’t quite as rational or shrewd as we originally thought them to be. We might stumble over some misdirected motivations or less than ethical agendas that were part of the whole thing. The way we pasted it all together may have not been seamless, and the stuff that we pasted together in the first place might have been less of a fit than we had originally thought. We may have even chosen to force fit some stuff that in the end really didn’t mesh all too well. Yes, there are probably some quirks and a few flaws.

Yet, there are times when these quirks and flaws and other dynamics really represent only a small portion of the whole train wreck. We dig, scratch, and scrape only to uncover a sparse handful of these dynamics. There are times when the sum total of them is far too small and innocuous to explain why the wheels fell off and the whole thing fell apart. They don’t add up sufficiently to explain the mess that lays scattered, derelict, smoking, and broken at our feet.

**When Lack of Timing Makes Us Look Bad**

George McGovern once said, “You know, sometimes, when they say you're ahead of your time, it's just a polite way of saying you have a real bad sense of timing.” Sometimes, we just try to play it all off or make light of it in order to make it lighter. We missed a step somewhere, we lost our place in the script, or we missed our cue. Now what? We can make it all cute and cut up about it. We can poke fun at ourselves to lighten everything up a bit. We can make polite statements to take the edge off our stupidity. But when we lose our timing and things go horribly wrong, there may be nothing remotely right that can be said.

**No Answers**

In the end, we’re left with bushels of questions that rot for lack of answers. Things just didn’t line up. There’s no sustaining or compelling rationale other than it didn’t happen when and how we expected. If the timing had been good, it all would have all been good. But the timing was not, and now everything lays wrecked and ravaged.

Sometimes, the losses are marginal. At other times, they’re catastrophic. Sometimes, we can just pick up our toys, brush them off, head on home, and play another day. Sometimes, there’s nothing left to pick up other than the charred ash of incinerated dreams and the unidentifiable pieces of years’ worth of hope and sacrificial toil. Sometimes, it’s no big deal, and at other times, the whole thing is a deal-breaker. Sometimes, we can pick up and move on, and at other times, there’s nothing to pick up and no place to move on to.

**Better Questions to Ask**

Maybe we should expand our thinking a bit. Maybe we should ask the question “is loss sometimes the best thing that can happen?” That’s a bitter pill to swallow, on top of the fact that it’s completely unsavory to even entertain in the first place. It suggests, however, that things in life don’t line up because maybe they’re not supposed to. Maybe what we were doing was a whole lot more wrong than it was right. Maybe it would have been a whole lot more damaging than it would have been constructive. Maybe it would have been the thing that robbed us blind rather than enriching us beyond measure. Maybe it would have become the monster rather than the benefactor. Maybe the fact that wheels fell off and it derailed was one of the biggest blessings we’ve experienced in a very long time.

Is there room in our thinking to entertain the possibility that failure is sometimes preferred to success? Success does not always deliver a blessing; failure does not always deliver a curse. Life is far too vast to place success and failure into the neat and tidy categories that we aptly apply in every situation. Sometimes, the best thing for us is the very thing that we feel is the worst thing. Sometimes, in God’s grand scheme, pain and loss are the pavers to something grand and glorious. Sometimes, a misstep is a nothing more and nothing less than a change of cadence to right a path to God.

**The Taxing Nature of Our Preconceived Outcomes**

At the beginning, when we’ve started to head off into most of our endeavors, we don’t have the perspective of what this will look like on the other end. All we see is what we have in front of us, how it all goes together, and then—based on that—how we guess it will all come out in the wash. We can take a shot at speculating outcomes and be convinced that our conceptualization will indeed be what it will look like on the other side. We can do the math and project the numbers and point to what it should all add up to. We can play with our mental bell-curves and crunch the emotional numbers to calculate an outcome. But sometimes things don’t add up according to our calculations, despite how tedious they might be. Sometimes, our best projections become our most haunting nightmares.

We’re typically not open to this kind of thinking because we’re angry about the loss; we’re licking our wounds because we feel cheated. We didn’t land where we projected we would land, and we scour the minute fractions and infractions in order to get us to those ill-fated coordinates. We’re not in the mindset to think that maybe it blew up so that we wouldn’t. There’s no room in our heads to realize that we might have just been saved from ourselves. We’re too obstinate to realize that if we keep goading the situation in order to achieve our preconceived outcomes, there might come a point when we won’t be saved from ourselves anymore. All we tend to focus on is the feeling that we’ve been victimized, ripped off, audaciously cheated, short-changed, and short-sheeted. The reality is that sometimes we are. But quite often, this is life’s way of putting on the brakes.

**Is It Untimely?**

Are our circumstances untimely, or very timely? Do our situations appear untimely only because we’re seeing what didn’t happen? Do we refuse to see the things that are happening right in the middle of what didn’t happen? Are we so myopic that we can’t see beyond the train wreck to the fact that the wreck stopped the train and that this might have been the very thing that compassionately saved us or maybe graciously redirected us? To our chagrin, the exact time and place when we think something shouldn’t have happened may very well be the exact time and place when it absolutely should have happened.

Rose Kennedy said, “Life isn't a matter of milestones but of moments.” It’s not about what we achieve but what we learn on the way to the achievement. We glue our eyes to the goal and ignore the journey on the way there. And that journey will often involve our world’s falling apart despite heroic efforts to keep them together. Yet, our world’s falling apart have within those events great lessons that we would be well advised to embrace. Moments are not always nice, but they can be rich. So, when your world falls apart in the untimeliness of living, look at the wreckage. You just may have been saved and didn’t even know it. You just may have been mercifully redirected and missed it. Your world falling apart may in actuality be your world being put together.