



Pause With Purpose

...to refresh

...to grow

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Muskrat Lessons

Musk rats are interesting creatures. While there is little about "musk" or "rat" that is particularly appealing, muskrats have found their way onto dinner plates, clothing, and even popular music charts (remember "Muskrat Love"). They also have found their way into the creek that runs alongside our home. This presents a problem, because muskrats burrow into creekbanks to dig out dens. Eventually, these dens collapse, compromising the integrity of the creekbank.

Several years ago, the muskrats were targeted for removal, and many now nourish the plants and bushes on our property. For the past two years, there have been no muskrat sightings. I considered the problem solved and the threat removed. However, while walking along the creek recently, I once again sank through the sod into a large, open cavity - another den!

It soon became apparent the what I had considered to be a victory was partial at best. I thought the problem had been solved because the usual symptoms (muskrats swimming in the creek) had disappeared. I relaxed, set the pellet rifle aside, and focused on other

projects. In the meantime, the muskrats remained active.

Looking *into* the creek now, I can see clear signs of muskrat activity - bright fresh sand extending out from submerged holes in the edge of the dark, silty creek bottom. Yes, the muskrats are back! More accurately, they never really left. They just learned to stay submerged.

How similar this is to our own journey of growth into maturity and health. Typically, when we identify a weakness in our character or behavior that produces undesirable results, we do what it takes to correct the problem. It might be a relationship weakness, a toxic attitude, an emotional challenge, or a moral impediment. Whatever the flaw, dedicated work helps to minimize its presence and impact. Growth occurs, and we celebrate a personal victory.

Far too often, though, we unexpectedly find ourselves deep in the hole of a problem that is strangely familiar. What happened? Was all our diligent effort just a sham? Let's consider three "muskrat insights" that might shed some light on this.

1. Once the obvious signs of a

problem disappear, we tend to assume that the problem is resolved. It may be ... or it may simply have gone "underground", only to surface later, possibly in altered forms. We relax our guard, and are surprised later when we suddenly "fall" into a mess created by the same weakness.

2. To effectively address personal weakness, we must do more than chase after and eliminate symptoms. Symptom removal may bring a sense of relief and accomplishment, but it can also distract us from dealing with the problem's power source. This power core resides in what we commonly call our "heart".

3. Willpower, punishment and rewards can alter behavior, but to overcome our weaknesses, we must expose the parts of our heart that may actually support them - beliefs, values, feelings, assumptions, needs, dreams, and identity. Once exposed, these parts require their own transformation. For the Christian, humbly embracing the power and work of God's Spirit is essential at this time.

While positive change can happen quickly with a single decision, overcoming long-term weaknesses requires time, focused energy, and courage. Let's provide all generously.



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CONTACT INFORMATION

Your thoughts and comments are warmly welcomed. I would also be happy to share with you more about life coaching and how it can assist you to be your best, personally and relationally, at home and at work.

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Spirituality and Muskrats

Muskrats are nature's way of teaching us that if we just assume that everything is okay, we set ourselves up for unpleasant surprises. While most of us have heard the saying "Don't go looking for problems", we also recognize that much of healthy living is built around responsible safety checks. This is the idea behind annual physicals, well-child exams, and furnace inspections.

And so it is with our spiritual life. Simply assuming that our spiritual life is healthy is a great way to be lulled into passive, and eventually hollow spirituality that looks good on the outside, but threatens to collapse when put under pressure.

Healthy spirituality requires effort and intention. It calls us to test and explore its realness, function, and strength. So, let's ask ourselves a few focused questions and grow.

1. How is the reality of my spirituality evident in my life from day to day? Can other people see it?
2. How has my understanding of my God grown over the past year?
3. What am I passionate about, and where does my relationship with my God stand in relation to that passion?

Spending time with such questions helps us maintain a healthy, truthful awareness of our spirituality, while encouraging us to strengthen our bond with the God at the center of it.



"Like ships, men
flounder time and time
again."
- Henry Miller

"You might have to fight
a battle more than once
to win it."
- Margaret Thatcher