

## CHAPTER 2. THE SHATTERING BEGINS

### *The Shock*

"I feel like we should not be together anymore," Barbara said. That was June 2001. Since she was in South Korea and I was in another Asian country, each of us serving mission terms, the break-up came by way of phone.

I had just seen her a month ago on vacation in China. We'd declared our love for each other, and we had talked about where we would live in the States once we were married.

What had happened? What had we done wrong that caused our relationship to crumble? Couldn't we work this out? I felt like I was losing all control, or maybe worse, realizing I'd never had control. Suddenly, the train of my life derailed. I wanted to throw up and then sleep for a week to forget about the break-up.

As soon as I hung up the phone, I broke into tears. Head in hands, a 30-year-old man weeping before the Lord, tears innumerable. I was glad for the tears, though. They expressed what words could not.

I was devastated. We'd known each other a whole year, and she was the first woman I had ever loved.

An avalanche of pain unleashed its fury on me that day, spilling down more than I could bear. Thousands of thoughts rushed through my mind. I felt a hopelessness move over me. All I could do was cry before God. I was sure that God had brought her into my life for marriage.

I watched my dreams slip away. Within my soul a storm started brewing that only Jesus himself could calm.

I opened up the Bible that night and began this break-up with God's wisdom. I read from the Psalms. Later, I thought of Job and how he'd suffered. I knew that my loss was small compared to Job's, but I felt he was a comrade in pain.

Whether Job ever had a break-up lies beyond my knowledge, but he certainly knew suffering. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21).

Job's words sparkle like stars when we consider that he had just been told his oxen, camels, sheep, servants, and grown children had been killed. Job must have been crushed under the weight of the news. His heart broke in one moment. How could such calamity fall on any one person?

Job's response was not to get drunk or swear. Instead, he tore his robe and shaved his head to express his grief. He fell to the ground and worshipped God. Job wasn't denying his loss. He was coming to terms with it in the presence of God. He turned to God and offered up his pain, the only way that pain can really be dealt with.

He went on to say, "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble" (Job 2:10)? The question spoke to my aching soul. If Job in his suffering could ask this, who was I to do differently? Job realized God was in control. "For he [God] wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal" (Job 5:18). We would do well to recall Job's words in our pain. God knows what he's doing and can be trusted. His trustworthiness may appear questionable when tragedy knocks, but he is reliable. If we fill our hearts

with God's word during our everyday routine, we may be better able to apply these passages when harm visits.

The night of our break-up, I read the little quote taped to my wall, which then seemed prophetic. When Jim Elliot wrote in 1952 in his journal, it was almost like he wrote the words for my situation in 2001: "To dream, and want and pray, almost savagely; then to commit and wait and see [God] quietly pile all dreams aside and replace them with what we could not dream, the *realized Will*" (*Shadow of the Almighty*, 191).

Then, I turned on a Christian song and sang while my tears flowed. I felt my loss, but I also felt God's strong hand helping me. He seemed especially real during that time.

Who is this great God who wounds and heals his children? "The . . . LORD binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted" (Isaiah 30:26). Who can fathom the ways of the Almighty?

Although waves of pain rushed over my soul, I felt God's hand caressing me. I then talked with my roommate, who mostly just listened.

Here's my first journal entry, the day after my break-up with Barbara:

June 5: I felt quite sad and unenergetic today, yet felt better than I would have guessed.

I think the hardest part is going through all these feelings, wanting to write my best friend and describe what's happened today, and knowing that I can't, because Barbara was my best friend. The very one that I shared my heart with is no longer available, and yet she's the person behind my heart's stirrings.

It's especially tough at night in my room, because I have to be quiet and alone, and because that's when I always wrote to her.

I feel this big loss in my life, this vacuum, this void, this gap. I want her to fill it, but I can't look to her anymore. I have to look to someone stronger, to the one I should have been looking to all along--God!

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### *The Quest for a Wife*

I started praying for a wife in 1989 as a young man. One year later, when I went to Bible college in Dallas, I knew God would soon bring me and my future wife together. Why wouldn't he? After all, I loved him and prayed daily for a godly wife.

The whole decade of the 90s turned out to be one romantic disappointment after another--a few dates and too many crushes. I'd always considered dating a serious thing, and I wasn't interested in dating around. I wanted to be married.

In 2000, still romantically unattached, I decided to do mission work for two years. Before going overseas, as mentioned already, I received five weeks of training. For the first time in my adult life, I was somewhat content at being single. I still wanted to get married, but at least momentarily I was OK not dating.

Shortly into my five weeks of training, with about fifty single adults, I became interested in Barbara. She stood tall, pretty, and kind-hearted, and she was serious about her Christian life. She'd also grown up overseas as a missionary kid. She was the perfect catch. Now, all I had to do was catch her.

Before long, she was equally interested in me. She let me pursue without playing hard-to-get. By the end of our five weeks of training, we'd grown fond of each other, although we'd not talked about our feelings. But there were complications. We were each heading to different countries for two years, so it couldn't be a typical dating situation, where each person would be living in the same town.

After she landed in South Korea and I arrived in my Asian country, I asked her to be my girlfriend. Within a ten-month period, we wrote each other daily through e-mail, talked on the phone every two weeks, and also met each other twice for vacation.

Our biggest disagreement was about gender roles in marriage. Because of my more traditional views of marriage, she wondered if she'd ever reach her full potential if we married. I did my best to assure her that life with me would be grand, but she feared that her life might never amount to anything more than changing diapers and making meals. I had no problem with her working outside the home, but I did want her at home for the first few years after we had children. And, she agreed that was best, too. This is why her break-up puzzled me. She desired to do the very things that frightened her about marriage. She wanted to stay home and take care of our future kids.

I made sure she knew I was more than willing to help out with these things. Yet she feared that I would dominate her, and her concern confused me. We'd known about our disagreements from day one of our relationship, and she'd never accused me of being domineering.

Although this conflict loomed over all of our other disagreements, we seemed to be working through it. Yet she was growing increasingly troubled about our relationship--more troubled than I knew.

That's when she called on June 4, 2001, to say she felt like we were on different paths. According to her, God's plans for her future were different than his plans for mine.

June 6: Things are still fresh and tender. I hurt mostly at night and in the morning. It's tough now because I find myself searching for a reason for the break-up. What went wrong? How can I prevent it next time? Would this have happened if I'd done things differently? Was it my fault?

I felt pain throughout the day. I put away a few more things--pictures, notes--that reminded me of Barbara.

It was really hard today to consider that she won't be a part of my life anymore.

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### *Making a Clean Break*

But what was I to do? The relationship was over. What next?

I started taking down my pictures of her and all the other things around the room that reminded me of her. It wasn't my goal to wipe her from my memory, for after all, I had some great memories. And that's what made it so painful. But I was nonetheless trying to settle in my heart that this relationship was over. I realized boundaries could be important when it comes to getting closure. We shouldn't try to erase people from our memories, but we do have to set some boundaries so we're not holding out false hope for the relationship to begin again.

Let me say right away that I'm terrible at setting boundaries. But after many times of pursuing girls after they'd said no, and after I'd held out hope, hoped against

hope, only to have my heart broken worse later on, I've come to believe there is a time to give up and make a clean break. I needed to move on.

Barbara and I had ended on friendly terms. And she invited me to stay in touch if I wanted to. But I knew that if I did that, I'd always be hoping for another chance. It had to be a total cut-off.

Staying in touch seems like a Christian thing to do. Yet for me, staying in touch would likely have been a recipe for disaster. Two people can go their own ways without doing it in hatred. And that can be more important than staying in touch. Maybe some people can actually stay in touch and be OK, but I couldn't in this situation.

It might be best, in many cases, if we cease praying for our former boyfriend or girlfriend. I'm sure that sounds unspiritual. I wanted to keep praying for Barbara, but continuing wasn't healthy. In my case, real faith was to trust that God would raise up people to pray for her. I didn't need to concern myself with her future; it was no longer my business. She'd given me my walking papers, so that's what I was to do--walk on.

Praying for her would have only encouraged me to keep hanging on. And I needed to let go, at every level, especially at the spiritual level.

June 7: Today it seemed like God helped me turn a corner. I woke with less pain about her. I was happy and light-hearted.

[Several hours later] I've felt restless tonight. I'm really missing her now, and my heart wants to believe there's still a chance for reconciliation.

This thing is heavy. I feel so weighted down and burdened. One year ago today, I landed at the place where I met her. Knowing this stirs pains and insecurities. I'm fearful of my future without her.

I feel rather void and empty. I was doing so well earlier, but now I feel so needy.

I hate checking my e-mail because I know she's not going to write. I'm disappointed every time I check it.

In these days of hurt and pain, there is something that strikes me. My heart longs to have her in my life. But I realize that what I'm longing for, even in the embrace and hope of a life with her, is something that neither she, nor any woman, could ever give. The hole that's in my heart--and the fears and insecurities mounted there--can only be filled by God himself.

This isn't to say that I don't miss her, nor to deny that there is some gap that she could fill, but I realize that not even she could really meet my ultimate need. Only God can do this!

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### *Keeping Dignity*

Part of my reasoning behind making a complete break was for the purpose of keeping dignity. It's true that pride can easily be confused with dignity. Not staying in touch was my attempt at respecting her decision as well as respecting myself. After all, could I not trust God with my situation?

Because of the break-up, trust had been lost and just inviting her back would not have solved the problems that led to the break-up. Nor would it have resolved the problems caused by the break-up. In order to restore our relationship, we both would have had to think and pray seriously about the details of what would have to happen in each of our lives to restore trust. I chose not to pursue.

At first, I thought I would do what love was supposed to do--*pursue her at all costs*. I thought by asking her back I'd be swallowing my pride and taking another chance. But the truth was, I was in pain and wanted relief.

However, this wasn't a broken marriage. She was only a girlfriend. That hurts to say because I loved her, but she was only a girlfriend. It wasn't like I was giving up on a marriage.

And to bring things into focus more clearly, she had broken up with me, not the other way around. I'd never been given a vote about breaking up, so what made me think that I could persuade her to come back to me? Of course, this is not to say that it's always wrong for a person to pursue the one who left, but there is good reason for caution.

If the couple has been having sex, the rejected one may find it especially hard to move on. God created sex for marriage, and it's a powerfully binding aspect of intimacy. That's one of the reasons he created it for marriage. By the grace of Christ, Barbara and I remained sexually pure in our relationship, so fortunately I didn't have that to deal with. But if we had, the break-up would have been harder to bear.

Unfortunately, today so many singles, who profess to be followers of Christ, engage in sexual activity. H. Norman Wright, a Christian counselor, says that about half of the couples he works with in premarital counseling admit to having sex of some kind with their partners (*Let's Just be Friends*, 161). The sexual aspect will make the break-up or recovery harder. If you've been involved inappropriately with your partner, you not only need to confess this sin to God, but you most likely will need to get with a pastor or another mature believer to work through the repentance part of your sin and the special grieving process you'll be going through.

I want to caution anyone who claims to be a Christian and yet who lives in open rebellion against God, like involved in premarital sex, looking at pornography, etc. This sort of lifestyle very well could show that someone hasn't yet trusted Christ. The Bible encourages us to examine ourselves to make sure we're in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). Does your life bear fruit that you hate sin and love Christ? Are you obeying his word? Please take time to examine your faith now.

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