

CHAPTER 6. THE FRETTING CEASES

I've experienced many ups-and-downs in my recovery, as my journal entries show. There have been a few times when I felt I was over Barbara, and then I'd have a set back, feeling overwhelming pain again.

It's now been several years since we broke up in 2001, and I haven't heard from her since 2002. But let me give an overview of the period following my break-up, because it could help others.

Not long after the break-up, I went through a two-month battle with insomnia. It might have been related to her. At the four-month point, I went to South Korea on vacation. Barbara was living there at the time, but I never made contact with her while I was there. I did, however, take some of our pictures and leave them at a place she thought was special. It was both painful and healing for me.

At another particular point, around six months after our break-up, I wept for her as though we'd just broken up the day before. But that wasn't a common experience for me. As I was honest with the Lord and my friends about my struggles, the shots of pain lessened in duration and depth.

I reached a milestone somewhere around the seven-month point. It was easier not to think about her. Until then, I was outwardly getting on with my daily life but morose inside. As the months went by, the pain lingered at various levels, but the depression lifted. I still had moments of gloom, but the depression was less frequent. I didn't forget about her entirely (which was never my goal anyhow), but I was finally able to let the pain, the nagging questions, and good memories sink into my past. It was a great place to finally reach, by God's grace of course.

I did write Barbara a few times to get more closure at the nine-month mark of our break-up. At first our correspondence was good. It was helping me process what had happened. It also gave me a chance to confront her with the hurtful way I felt she'd handled things. To keep me in check, I had a friend read over my e-mails before I sent them. Barbara wrote back and explained some things to me. But her explanations were never enough.

The one thing that I really wanted was for her to apologize for the way she'd hurt me, although I'm not sure I clearly articulated it at the time. So, I kept writing her, wanting more and more of an explanation. I should have limited myself to one e-mail, tactfully explaining my frustration and pain (or perhaps never sent one at all). Our continued correspondence put greater tension between us, hurting me (and possibly her) more. Unfortunately, I wrote again and told her what a terrible person she was. My e-mail spewed deadly venom. (Eventually, I apologized via e-mail for my vicious attack and that was another recovery time.)

At the eleven-month point, I went on the balcony of my house in Asia and burned all of the pictures, notes, and other reminders that I'd tucked away in a box the night we broke up. There were more than 100 pictures. Burning them was a freeing time, as I listened to Roxette sing "Must Have Been Love" and watched our memories further pollute the hazy air of my assigned country.

Nineteen or so months after our break-up, I ran into Barbara at a conference in the U.S. We both knew the other was going to be there, so that helped prepare us. But it still resurfaced some pain for me, as though we'd just broken up. Several weeks later, I wrote

to inquire if she was open to getting back together. The answer was, as you might have guessed, no. (I suppose I should have taken my own advice about making a clean break.)

Now, several years later, I can testify that the Lord has brought about much healing. I'm not predicting that everyone will move along at my pace. Maybe some will heal quicker, maybe others will take much longer. I'm simply testifying to God's goodness in healing me; I'm also acknowledging that it was a long road to walk.

As far as the pain I went through, I don't know that I want to talk in terms of silver linings around clouds, but I do possess joy again. Healing was hard to envision early after the break-up. But healing has come and I'm glad now that I didn't marry her. It appears that while I was trying to find God, he found me. Without his initial grace I never would have been groping around after him in the first place.

But what about my present situation? Have I found someone else, or do I remain single?

About a year and a half after breaking up with Barbara, I met a Christian lady named Denice through an Internet dating service. We dated for about ten months, and then married in 2003.

Denice is my love. *Beauty* is too weak a word to describe her. Her flowing hair highlights her femininity. Her smile brightens my weary soul when I drag in from a long day at work. Her diligence puts the Proverbs 31 lady to shame. Denice works as hard as anyone I've ever known, and she expends much of her energy serving others. She speaks gently, but always tells the truth. I love her devotion for the Lord Jesus Christ and her integrity.

She's not only smart, especially when it comes to trivia and major events in history, but she's wise. I may not always act like I care for her opinion or advice on a given matter, but I treasure it. She sees issues with more balance than I usually do.

Her heart beats passionately for missions, which attracts me like an ant to ice cream. Materialism hasn't been able to reach its claws around her throat. She's thrifty and enjoys giving generously to our church and to people in need.

Like a loyal wife, she appreciates me for who I am. She knows I have more rotten spots than a banana forgotten in the back of the refrigerator, but she loves me anyway. She says I'm her hero, that I help her deal with life's bruises. I draw strength from her and she draws strength from me. And I hope that makes God smile. We know he's behind our relationship and we try not to lose him in our schedules. But sometimes we do, yet he keeps on loving us. And that makes me smile.

I could never have imagined that just over two years after Barbara broke up with me, I'd be marrying someone who's a better fit. (By the way, *better fit* doesn't mean *perfect fit*. We also disagree sometimes, but we're committed to work through them).

Not every story in life has a happy ending, but mine certainly did. The fact that I'm married now doesn't eradicate the pain of the break-up I experienced with Barbara. Although the pain no longer surfaces when I think of our break-up, it was a long, painful trial. The Lord gave me a great wife, and I wouldn't trade her for anyone. God does work in odd ways, doesn't he?

If your pain has yet to subside, I encourage you to keep following Jesus. I know that's tough, but you'll never be sorry for obeying his Scripture. "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (Ps 42:5).

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