

THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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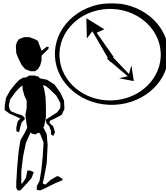
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Time of Assembly



Every other Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.

Worship 10:00 a.m.

OR

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.

Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

How I Met and Fell in Love With Marilyn

By David Truong

During the last few months of my brother's life, what I feared most was how much I would miss him for the rest of my life. So in the last few seconds of his life on earth, I knelt down next to his bed and whispered these final words -- "I promise to live my life in a way that will allow me to see you again." And with that promise, I took my first step toward meeting and falling in love with Marilyn.

The doctors diagnosed my brother Stephen with inoperable cancer and gave him six months to live. With that news, he left all in Louisiana, including the congregation he dearly loved and came home to Virginia to live out his life. The first thing he did when he arrived was look in the yellow pages for a church of Christ nearby. There was one in Annandale, Virginia, about ten minutes from where we grew up.

At first, Stephen would attend church at Annandale by himself. When his condition worsened, I would join him for Sunday services. Although I enjoyed being in church, I was really there for my brother. At night, we would discuss religion and read the Bible but I did it for Stephen more than anything else. Later, as the pain from cancer increased and each second became unbearable for him, Stephen would pray for strength to worship God and carry out His will. I on the other hand, prayed for my brother to get better. While Stephen prayed for salvation, I prayed for a better outcome.

Only three short months after he arrived home, Stephen peacefully left this world. The first Sunday after he died, I went to church by myself. A part of me was still going to church for Stephen because I knew his last wish was that I would be led to Christ. However, a part of me was also there because I wanted to listen to the words that gave my brother so much courage and life as his physical body withered away.

A year or so earlier, Marilyn arrived in Washington

D.C. and the Lord led her to worship at the Annandale church of Christ.

It was at the church building, before a Wednesday night Bible study class, that I saw Marilyn for the first time. I can still remember that moment very well because my heart skipped a beat. From that moment on, I found myself routinely sneaking secret glances at Marilyn from across the room and practicing hypothetical conversations in case we met. I felt guilty doing this at church so I made up a couple of ground rules. It was okay to look for Marilyn's car when I arrived in the church parking lot. It was also okay to look for her in the lobby, and if there was an empty space next to her and no other seats were available I would sit next to her and introduce myself.

On the other hand, it was not acceptable to think about her during services, and my attendance at church would not in any way be affected by hers. Needless to say, I found myself asking for forgiveness many times for failing to focus on God during services. But for the most part, I was able to follow my ground rules. As the Lord would have it, space never opened next to Marilyn and our opportunity to meet was yet to come.

I continued to attend church and studied with the local preacher. Along the way, a young Christian man from the same congregation also helped me with my studies. The three of us met on a Thursday for a Bible study. Before meeting up that night, my heart told me that I was ready to be baptized into Christ. It was almost a year since Stephen passed away, and without much ceremony, I became a Christian. The first thing I realized after my baptism was that I was cold. Once I dried off, I felt a great sense of joy -- that something wonderful was around the corner. My euphoria, however, was tempered by reality. I knew that becoming a Christian was one thing while living a proper life, faithful to God, was quite another. Sitting alone in the silence of the church building, I knew that I could not make it to heaven without help along the way. It was at this point that I thought about Marilyn. I closed my eyes and asked God to bring her into my life.

What most captivated me about Marilyn from the beginning was her love and obedience to God. Every time I went to church she was there. I also found her to be extremely attractive and quite unique because of her sincere devotion to God. Marilyn possessed all the qualities that I ever sought in a woman. The funny thing was, I knew all this from across the room without ever speaking a word to her.

A chance opportunity to meet Marilyn never presented itself so I felt it was time to take matters into my own hands. It happened one night after Bible class. As soon as we were dismissed from class, I rushed into the bathroom to pat down my hair. While there, I also practiced how I was going to introduce myself. Everything seemed fine except for the fact that I was so nervous. I saw Marilyn in the lobby talking to one of the elders in the church (whom I had become close with) and proceeded to join them. Before I could open my mouth, the elder introduced me to Marilyn. Apparently, he was almost as eager to introduce me to Marilyn as I was dying to meet her. Unfortunately,

he stole my opening line by telling her my name. I had it all planned that I was going to tell her my name and proceed with the rest of my script. Because I was so nervous, my ability to improvise completely abandoned me. I stood and stared at Marilyn for a few seconds before she was kind enough to ask me some questions. The more I tried to be cool and salvage my dignity the more embarrassing I became. My heart pounded and my knees buckled. After 15 minutes or so, I had to stop the pain and move on to another conversation with someone else.

Before leaving, Marilyn was nice enough to stop by and say goodbye. As I watched her exit the building, I thought to myself, "great, she's pretty and considerate as well. Too bad I just had the worst conversation in my life. What happened, I thought, to all that training talking to girls in high school, and women in college? Why was I so nervous that I reverted back to junior high school? I didn't have the answers. I just knew I felt sad when she left.

A month or so after our first meeting, the opportunity I had been waiting for finally arrived. Our preacher invited me to dinner after Sunday service and Marilyn was invited as well. Each night before I shut off the lights for bed, I turned to Marilyn's picture in our church directory and smiled knowing that Sunday was one day closer. The long-awaited day arrived and I picked out my whitest shirt and my best suit to wear. Before leaving my apartment, I thanked God for answering my prayers. I remember thinking, even if I tried, there was no way I could mess this up -- God wanted this meeting to happen.

Before arriving at the preacher's house, I stopped by to get a present. I knew the occasion was not appropriate for me to bring Marilyn a gift so I brought the preacher's dog some doggie treats and a stuffed animal. Unfortunately, the dog gave me much more attention than Marilyn did. Marilyn sat as far away from me as possible at the dinner table. We barely talked. In fact, she wouldn't even direct her attention toward me.

Marilyn's interest was with someone else at the time so she did not want to encourage my attention. In a world where I've seen married women flirt or covet the attention of other men while in the company of their husbands, Marilyn chose to act with class. Although she was there alone and could have gotten away with "innocent" flirtation, she chose to act in a manner that was pleasing to our Lord. Not a word was spoken about this but I understood her decency.

I tried my best to hide the pain that afternoon, but inside, my heart was ripped to shreds. I was not upset with Marilyn. Instead, I appreciated her honor. I was just feeling the hurt of being the one on the other side of her heart. To be the one close to her heart I thought ... but I stopped thinking about it. Despite all my prayers, God refused to make this happen. For this, I was angry at God.

I had watched my brother, a healthy and decent man, die without questioning God. A few months later, I received the news that my father was ill without ever ques-

tioning God. In fact, all my life I prayed for the well-being of others and tried to live a good life. I never prayed for anything bad, only good. I prayed to have Marilyn in my life for all the right reasons. I wanted her to be in my life so I could be a better Christian. I understood my weaknesses and needed her help to overcome the temptations of this world. For that, this is what I get in return? To be hurt when I needed help the most. Just when I thought I had learned enough, I was more confused than ever.

After that Sunday, I continued to attend church but my faith suffered. I started to focus on tangible, nonspiritual things in life in order to find happiness. I wanted to live my life the way I did before my brother came home.

I started to slip back into my old lifestyle. One day, as I was walking home from work in the midst of feeling horrible, it occurred to me that I had received everything I had ever asked for. I had terrific health, great parents and siblings, wonderful friendships all my life, a terrific job, and currently living in the city of my favor. But why wasn't I happy? It was at this moment that an amazing thing happened. I realized that all my life God had indeed answered all my prayers. The problem was, I had never truly sought the one thing that would bring me lasting happiness: to have God in my life. It became clear to me that being separated from God was the true source of my emptiness -- not unanswered prayers. I finally reached the point where I prayed with all my heart never to be separated from God again.

The following day at church, I was sitting in one of the front pews when I saw Marilyn out of the corner of my eyes. I wasn't sure if she was there to talk to me so I gave her a nervous smile and a quiet "hi." She didn't say "hello" back but to my surprise asked for my business card and promptly left. Shortly thereafter we went on our first date. Three months later I asked Marilyn to be my wife. Four months after that, we became one, in front of our closest family and friends, as husband and wife.

Looking back, it appeared that God wanted me to learn one last important lesson before I could be with Marilyn. Before that point, my faith was still based on whether I received something I desired -- even if it was for good. Only after I truly desired to follow Christ, did He bring Marilyn into my life. Now with her, I leave behind a life pursuing empty dreams and unfulfilling accomplishments. Every day, Marilyn helps me live a life that is pleasing to God.

I am reminded of His love and His gift every morning that I wake up next to Marilyn. I no longer look for her blue car because I now drive her to church. I no longer look for her at church because she is right next to me. I do not get nervous around her because I know she will always love me. But I still thank God every day for Marilyn because I will always love her.

We are just now beginning our lives together, but God joined us together in His plan years ago. When people ask me how did you and Marilyn meet, I simply tell them "God set us up." Together, we will live a wonderful life on earth and help each other get to heaven ... where I will see my brother once again.

Good Credit

By Zeke Flores

When I was a much younger man, I wrecked my credit. I made foolish decisions, borrowed more than I should have, and made late payments. Soon, the only ones who would lend me money were the high-rate lenders and even they were wary. It took years to restore my financial good name and I'm glad to say that today I have a very good credit rating.

The word "credit" is from a Latin one meaning something like "belief in, faith in, a thing entrusted to another." Since it involves trust, we say that one who is trustworthy has "credibility." It's a positive thing and when someone exhibits high integrity in a thing we say they're a credit to what they represent.

I think Christians ought to have good credit, financially and otherwise. While I realize that sometimes money troubles are unavoidable, they shouldn't wreck our character along with our credit rating. We ought to be people of high integrity even when, **especially** when, life around us crumbles. When people see my trust in God when circumstances are tough, I hope they'll see the genuineness of my faith and maybe even cultivate one of their own as a result.

See, I want to be a credit to Christ. I represent His cause and people ought to know they can trust my testimony and my character. This is because everything I do and say is an extension of my

trust, or lack of trust, in Him. And because I trust Him, He's extended to me a trust, a stewardship, that I must maintain with absolute integrity. I'm a custodian of my relationship with Him so my moral soundness must be pure and that means I won't make promises I can't keep, financially or otherwise. Then, maybe people will say, "He's a credit to his Lord."

"Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy" (I Corinthians 4:1-2).

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(See Luke 10:30-36)

09-10-1998

DON'T GET TOO EXCITED FELLA, I'M THE
MEDIocre SAMARITAN ... I ONLY GIVE YOU A
BANDAID AND THEN I'M OFF