

Our Personal Testimony of Love, Courtship and Marriage

For the past three weeks I have been dealing with marriage. We have talked about making marriage work in spite of the storm, the characteristics of a great marriage and marriages that last. This week I want to share a bit of our personal testimony. I hope you benefit from it as much as I have been refreshed by re-living this time in our lives.

In September of 1972, I met a young lady by the name of Barbara Wright who was attending the college to which I had just transferred. I had friends who believed we should meet; she had friends (among who was Cindy Briner) who also believed we should meet. I was going to the post office to check my mail; she was walking down the same hallway and I introduced myself. I asked her for a date to a rescue mission in downtown Chicago. She played piano as I led the singing. I humorously say on our first date we began to make beautiful music together. From the very start I liked everything about her. We continued to see one another and it did not take long for us to become serious. During the Christmas holiday, I received the blessings from my parents to proceed to proposal of marriage. I returned to the north, which was not so cold to me now, at least emotionally, because up there in that winter wonderland was the girl of my dreams. I preached a revival in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and upon arrival back to Indiana to begin classes, Barbara, wondering if things were going too fast, decided to follow the advice of her pastor and break up with me. I was devastated! All along, however, I maintained peace that God's will was being performed.

Whenever I had dated girls before, I could always see just over the shoulder to the next girl if the present courtship did not work out. After I had met and fallen in love with Barbara, there was no one beyond her. For the first time in my life I entertained the idea of remaining celibate for my life. I was considering this because I believed, and still do, in one great love of a lifetime. And she was the one and only. The thought of marrying only for companionship seemed ludicrous to me. I was now open to God sending me to a remote mission field that would not have been conducive to married life, perhaps a mission field in the jungle or the bush would be the place God would send me. Three months transpired and my friends finally set me up (against my will) with another girl to date. The only thing that date did was convince me that Barbara was the one and anybody else would just not be right. I was contemplating the life of remaining unmarried, that is, until Providence took over.

Dr. Max Helton, the Dean of Students, had taken sick. He was supposed to be preaching at Grace Baptist Church of Plymouth, Indiana. Under normal conditions, another staff member would take his place, not a student. Yet against the norms and standard practice, he asked me to go in his place. The Hylander Trio was the assigned singing group to go with Dr. Helton. Can you guess who the pianist was? It was Barbara! I was driving and she sat in perfect alignment with my rear view mirror. On the way to Plymouth my eyes locked with hers occasionally and she re-captured my heart. I began to talk to God silently, "Lord, what is this all about? I thought I was getting over this and going on." I preached that night with great liberty after the trio sang and Barbara played. God had my full attention. In a few hours I began a week of fasting and prayer about the will of God in marriage. God warned me that just as surely as He had the right one for me, the Devil had one too and I was praying, "Lead me not into temptation." So the prayer was "Lord, give me Barbara or peace to go on without her until Your will becomes clear."

A precious event took place. Without communication with her, Barbara began fasting and praying about the same thing in that very week. By the end of the week, we were not only back together, but we were engaged to be married. All doubts settled. That visit to Grace Baptist Church of Plymouth, Indiana was most providential. This spring it will be 37 years since that glorious "rendezvous with destiny" took place. I had not been back there since, until last night. I stood in the same pulpit, looked over to the same place where the piano still is and saw the same pew, three down,

just to my right where the girl of my dreams sat. I reminisced with the pastor and congregation about how special this place was to me and we were blessed all over again. After all these years, the story is more precious to me now than ever. I met and married the right one. Let me close off this article with what was right in our courtship and ultimate marriage.

1. We obtained the blessings from our parents.

“Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee...” (Deuteronomy 5:16). *“The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it”* (Proverbs 10:22).

2. We sought counsel from spiritual leadership.

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise” (Proverbs 12:15). *“Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end”* (Proverbs 19:20). *“He that walketh with wise men shall be wise...”* (Proverbs 13:20).

3. When in doubt, we ceased to see one another.

“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (I Corinthians 14:33). Even in the case where only one is doubting, that is still a sign that both should back off and pray about it. It is a life-long decision, therefore all doubts should be settled before the union, not after.

4. We both spent much time in prayer over our relationship.

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6).

5. We did not become physically involved.

Becoming involved in this way only confuses the issue. The Bible says, *“...O thou whom my soul loveth...”* (Song of Solomon 1:7). No less than five times in the Song of Solomon this phrase is used. True love starts in the soul, not the body. You fall in love with who someone is. People are people from the inside out, not from the outside in. To approach the outside first is not only temptation for advancing possible sinning, but it is getting the cart before the horse.

6. We live a shared life.

To this day, we talk freely about everything. I do not live a private world away from my wife. *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh”* (Genesis 2:24). *“Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”* (Matthew 19:6).

7. We put God first.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). In truth, only God can keep a marriage together. To God’s glory, our marriage is not one we endure; it is one we enjoy, now more than ever. And for this, we give the credit to the One who brought us together.

- Pastor Pope -

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