

When Valentines' Day Went All Wrong *And God Made It All Right*

by Gordon Dalbey
at www.abbafather.com

I admit it.

When it comes to “special times” like anniversaries, birthdays, and such, I panic. “Occasion Challenged” would be my official diagnosis.

On one particular Valentine’s Day, however, I was determined to get it right. Aiming for a new start, I bought roses (red, two dozen), chocolate (no Halloween Hershey’s, but dark, 100% real cocoa), two tickets to a live musical comedy downtown (“Sure to lift your heart!”), some excellent sleepwear (gift-wrapped in an earring box), and last (but certainly not least) a baby sitter who for a few bonus bucks promised to make sure our son was asleep when we got home.

This time, I had it together.

SATISFIED SIGH

That evening, when I had handed the play tickets to the usher and walked Mary to our seats, I settled in with a satisfied sigh. Taking her hand, I smiled at her, and as the orchestra broke out in a spirited welcome, she squeezed my hand and smiled back.

The first half of the show’s music and comedy was entertaining, and when the lights went up for intermission, we stood happily and stretched. “How about a chocolate cookie?” I suggested.

Moments later, amid the animated buzz of our fellow playgoers, we stood chatting with cookies in hand. As Mary was commenting on the play, suddenly a loud “WHOP!” sounded just above the din from off to one side.

FROM GLANCE TO LOOK

I glanced, and there a young lady had dropped her purse. As she bent down to pick it up, a seemingly waist-high slit in her skirt drew my eye, and my glance became a look.

Catching myself, I drew up, turned back very casually to our conversation and took a quick bite of my cookie. Soon thereafter, the lobby lights began to flicker, and we followed the crowd back into the auditorium.

The second half was even more entertaining than the first, and we left the theater amid loud applause and excited chatter among the crowd. When we had returned to our car, I began talking about how much fun the play was. With a vision of our little son sleeping peacefully, I hit the freeway in great spirits.

Valentine’s Day, after all, was not over yet.

After a few minutes, however, I realized that I was doing all the talking. In fact, Mary had not said a word since we left the theater.

“You seem pretty quiet,” I noted, driving along.

A DIFFERENT AGENDA

“Yes,” Mary noted tersely, with a slight hiss that suggested an agenda quite different from my own.

At the stoplight, I paused uneasily. Measuring my breath, I turned to face her. “Is...I mean, is something wrong?”

“Do you really want to know?” Mary shot back, her eyes narrowed.

The words, “Beam me up, Scotty!” leapt to mind. With another breath, however, I pressed on. *Father, stay with me here!*

“Well... yes,” I said trying not to sound hesitant as the light turned green. “If there’s something between us we need to talk about, let’s get it out.” Maneuvering out of traffic, I pulled over. “OK, what’s... going on?”

“It’s about what happened back there at the theater!” Mary declared.

“Back at the theater?” I echoed. “I guess I don’t...I mean, what happened back at the theater? The show was great—I thought you enjoyed it.”

“I’m not talking about the show!” she fired back. “It’s what happened at the intermission when we were standing there talking out in the lobby.”

“When we had some cookies and were just chatting?” I asked, confused.

“All right,” Mary burst out, exasperated. “I’ll tell you. It’s about that woman you looked at there when she bent over.”

HOT FLUSH OF SHAME

Immediately, a hot flush of shame swept over me, and a sound not unlike air rushing out of a punctured inner tube escaped my lips. “Ohhhh....”

Grasping for redemption, I sat up. “Look, I’m...I’m really sorry about...”

“I don’t want apologies or explanations,” Mary interrupted. “I just want you to listen to me about this.”

“OK...,” I offered uneasily, managing a thin smile and sinking slightly back into my car seat. “Go ahead. I’ll...do my best to listen to you.”

“Now, that woman you looked at was a lot younger than I am,” Mary began tentatively. “But let me tell you right now,” she continued, gathering steam, “that when I was her age, I looked a lot better than she does!”

“But I’m not that age any more. I may not look as good now as I did then, but I think I still look pretty good.”

SOMETHING FELT CRUSHED

“Indeed, you do,” I noted genuinely, catching her drift. “You look great, honey.”

“I want you to know,” Mary continued, waving me off, “that the main reason I look so good now is that I work hard at it, and I do that because I want to look good for you. And when you looked at that woman like that, something inside me just felt like it was being crushed.”

Mary paused. “That’s all I wanted to say,” she said finally, leaning back and turning her face away.

Lowering my eyes, I sucked in, exhaled carefully, and sat speechless. *Oh, Father, help! What have I done?*

I shifted awkwardly. At the theater, it had all seemed so insignificant, but the hurt in my beloved’s voice arrested me. I hadn’t really done anything at all with that woman. But Mary was not talking to me about that woman, only about what I did to her.

NOT MOSES BUT JESUS

By Moses’ yardstick, I was clean, innocent. In a flash, however, I remembered Jesus’ words, “anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).

My mind raced ahead after a defense. But with his no-nonsense definition, Jesus had denied me all excuses.

“I...I know you said you don’t want to hear apologies,” I allowed, “but I do want you to know I’m really sorry for looking at another woman like that. It was wrong, and it hurt you. You do work hard to look good—and I mean it when I say you look great to me. I honestly don’t know why I would bother to look at anyone else—there’s sure no need to, as beautiful as you are.”

As Mary turned back to face me, I sighed in self-dismay. “You know me—I’ll get on it tomorrow and call my prayer partners to pray this through. I don’t want to hurt you any more like that.”

Together, we sat, quietly uncertain.

WOULD YOU FORGIVE ME?

After a moment, I lifted my hands, palms up, and shrugged helplessly. “I’m not saying I deserve it..., but would you...forgive me for looking at that woman the way I did?”

Mary’s eyes dropped for a second, then met mine. “Yes,” she murmured. “I forgive you.”

I took her hand. “You’re the only woman for me,” I said, because it’s true. “The only one I ever want—more than I knew how to ask for.”

I don’t remember what I said after that. But by grace, the Father took what we were able to give Him of our brokenness, and our evening ended later on a wonderfully gracious note while our son slept.

FROM ROMANCE TO LOVE

Valentine’s Day, after all, is not just about romance.

It’s about love.

Perfect people might seem easier to love than real people. But the truth is, perfect people can’t be loved, because in God’s Kingdom, love has no meaning apart from sin.

“This is what love is,” as the Bible defines it. “It is not that we have loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven” (1 John 4:10).

As Jesus demonstrated, God’s love is the most effective healer, designed especially for us broken, flawed, and bound-to-hurt-you human beings.

On that note, I called a prayer partner the next day. “It’s not the first time this has happened,” I told him. “I want to get to the bottom of it all so it doesn’t happen again. Let’s ask Jesus what’s going on, and how He’s praying for me to stop it.”

PAINFUL MEMORY

As we prayed, a painful memory came to mind of a related event as a boy. I asked Jesus to come into that memory and show me what He wanted me to learn from it.

In His Name, I set the cross between me and the one who wounded me. Jesus then showed me the deep wound in that person’s own childhood that had led that person to wound me, and thereby to invite a spirit of lust into me.

In order to put an end to that wounding and that spirit’s work in both of us, I forgave that person—as Mary had forgiven me (see John 20:22,23).

In the name of Jesus, I renounced the spirit of lust in me and cast it out. I asked for the blood of Jesus to cleanse me from all its effects, then asked for His Holy Spirit to replace it with greater love for Mary.

For several minutes afterward, I sat quietly, basking in the Father’s grace.

And then, at last, I saw the truth that set me free.

LUST DESTROYS MANHOOD

The world tells men that looking lustfully at many women pumps up your masculinity. But in fact, it destroys manhood, insofar as it keeps you from focusing your masculine attention on the one “suitable companion” God has chosen to help fulfill His purposes in your life (Gen. 2:18).

In any case, lust sabotages intimacy because it portrays the woman as an object, eliminating her heart and character. If a man allows himself to do that with women, he'll eventually see his wife as an object as well.

That unholy distraction from the woman's character and heart marks it as an agent of your Father's enemy (see 1 Jn. 3:8).

FEAR OF INTIMACY

What's more, I saw that my wandering eye was rooted not in anything about Mary, but rather, in a fear of intimacy from my childhood wound. When I would start to open my heart to her—as, for example, on that promising Valentine's evening—the fear in that old wound would rise up. To avoid it, I would look at other women in order to disconnect from Mary and short-circuit that old pain.

Once I had connected my pain to the real wound that caused it as a child, however, I no longer needed to project it as a man onto Mary. I could begin to trust her more deeply, to know her more genuinely, and to love her more freely—such as I'd never before experienced in a relationship.

NOT TO HIDE BUT TO HEAL

Here's the Good News: Jesus came not to hide our wounds, but rather, to overcome our shame and heal them (Rom. 8:1ff.). That's what frees us from our sin nature to love Him and each other.

Sure, as long as we live in this broken world, its brokenness lives in us, and we will have temptation. If you let Jesus into your wounds, however, He can overcome its effects.

“In the world you will have trouble,” He told His followers. “But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Still, we're not puppets. We reflect the Father's love insofar as we mature in our faith. Once Jesus has done what only He can do, that is, we have to step up as adults and do what we can do to stay free.

As James reminds,

(T)he scripture says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” So then, resist the Devil and he will run away from you. Come near to God, and he will come near to you (James 4:5-7, Prov. 3:34).

When you get it all wrong, that is, the Father's love can make it all right.

I know, because on a Valentine's Day I'll never forget, my Abba Father taught me that through a woman's love.

P.S.

Just in case I might forget, several months later I was reading the *One Year Bible* and realized that my birthday was coming up on August 29th. *What Scripture*, I wondered excitedly, *is my Father's Happy Birthday message to me?*

You can check it out for yourself, right at the very beginning:

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. (Job 31:1)

RESOURCES

at www.abbafather.com (top left links)

"Fathers & Daughters: Healing the Father-Wound in Women" (dvd, cd, mp3)

"The Father and the Man: Of Fathers and Daughters" in *Healing the Masculine Soul*

"Sexual Bonding and a Woman's Heart," (by Mary) in *Pure Sex: the Spirituality of Desire*

"When You're Hot, You're Hot; When You're Not...It's Time to Talk about Sex" (by Gordon) and "Letting Go of Judgments" by Mary) in *Loving to Fight or Fighting to Love: Winning the Spiritual Battle for Your Marriage*

"Sex & the Single Christian" and "Teaching Young Men about Sex" (mp3)

10 Things She Said That Made Me Want to Marry Her. by Gordon and Mary (not yet published)

Tax Deductible Donations: <http://www.chesedministries.org/>