

The First Chapter- Clean Up on Aisle Six!

Several years ago I had an epiphany that uprooted the foundation of my world. You may think that what I realized isn't profound but I care very little about what you think. In a moment's time my life was changed and I realized that my life is not defined by success or failure, what I wear or even the people that I surround myself with. Instead, my life finds its meaning in something a little less tangible than material things, and finds purpose in something surer than any human relationship that I could ever know - a deep and meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ!

It is in my relationship with Jesus that my life has the meaning, purpose and depth that I often looked for in other things. It is because of His great love for me that I stand and it is this love that keeps me from falling flat on my face. Many people would agree with the truth of my discovery without batting an eye, but here I prove to be a little slower than most and so it took me a while.

It took me a while to understand the real impact that Christ has upon my life. It is an impact that goes beyond mere church attendance and memorization of a few Bible verses, as His presence influences every area of my life. I have walked with the Lord now for almost twenty years and have studied his Word to the point that I have earned degrees in it. Knowing this, you might think that I should know the details of these ideas just as much if not more than I know the intricacies of my face or the back of my hand. Yet these are things that no textbook can teach you. Such knowledge comes in less desirable ways.

Fire. This is the way that many lessons in life, especially the ones that count, are learned. It is a fire that purifies and makes you stronger. It is a fire that gives birth to blessings and a greater spiritual understanding. Yet it is a fire that burns like hell, as all fires do, and will bring you to your knees. It is a fire that makes you wonder why God chose you of all the people on the earth to inflict this excruciating pain! It is sometimes caused by harmful choices that you make. But then there are times that the purging flames are unwarranted, simply occurring because you dared to breathe and life happened.

As for me, I know that these flames were a mixture of my own choices and God trying me. Sometimes I wish that I could have learned these things in a much more tranquil way, perhaps by reading a nice book or by attending a pleasant seminar that served tea and cookies. Yet if they would have come about any different, I would not be where I am today – threadbare yes, nevertheless prevailing and strong!

The particular fires, or events that brought about the fire, that I speak of culminated some years ago. Since then I have had time to process what happened. I embraced healing and restoration with the people that I wronged, and forgave those who had a hand in wronging me. Yet and still, the events are fresh as if they happened yesterday and yesterday I was still bitter and cold! Something happened in my oh so comfortable world that sent me running for the hills, running to God for deliverance from a situation that I do not believe He wanted me to be a part of in the first place.

Remember the epiphany that I had – that my life’s worth had nothing to do with the people in it. Well at the time, I felt like it did. I placed so much value in several particular friendships and then all at once the security of those friendships disappeared as quickly as a groundhog on February 2nd. The moment that I needed to be loved and understood the most, I was rejected, condemned and cast aside like a Raggedy Ann Doll. Before I could even stop to catch my breath or take a moment to sort through what was going on, the relationships that I cherished more than anything else in the world crumbled into a pile of garbage, and even though it was clear what was happening, I endeavored to clean it up. I attempted to repair what was being torn apart, something that for all reasonable purposes God was obviously trying to destroy. Although my attempts were unreasonable, desperate in fact, it sure did beat the alternative – feelings of meaninglessness!

By now you must be wondering the kind of friendships were so important to me that I put myself through all hell? I must confess to you that one of the friends that I lost sleep over was a guy whom I could never decide if I truly liked or not. My interest in him was dependent on many variables: the time of day, my mood, whether someone else liked him, the song that was on the radio or whether there was a full moon. Okay, these really were not the variables that influenced my desire for him - they just prove how ambiguous and unpredictable my feelings were to the point that I did not even understand them myself. To be honest, what drove this passion for him was the fact that he was the only one giving me any type of attention at the moment. For his attention, I drove myself crazy so I could win his affection. As a result of my lunatic endeavors, I ended up rejected and hurt and so succumbed to the very results that I tried desperately to avoid. Without thinking, I surrendered the keys of the crevices of my heart to him though he did not ask for them - how could I then expect anything but for him to come in, make a mess of the place and leave me to pick up the scattered pieces.

So as not to paint myself as the victim, I must confess the other piece of the equation that added to the rupture in our friendship. At the time, I was so caught up in my own needs and selfish desires that I didn’t stop for a brief moment to consider what he was going through. I didn’t consider his feelings, his thought processes, or the events that were in fact taking place in his life because in all honesty I did not care. Even though I later apologized for my role in the absolution of our friendship for the sake of peace and doing the right thing, for years I didn’t think that I had done anything truly wrong. Today, well at the moment, I am a little bit wiser and quite a bit older, and so looking back on those events today I see the error of my ways. Now I understand that if I genuinely cared for him the way that I said I did that I would have backed off and left well enough alone.

What I have just described to you, however, is not unique in itself; it was not an isolated incidence. Unfortunately I have just described to you the exact pattern that has typified just about every other relationship that I have carried on with the opposite sex. I have revealed to you the precise formula of nearly every other relationship where time and time again, I gave myself over emotionally, mentally, and physically in

hopes of receiving anything that resembled love. It is the pattern of almost every other relationship where I tried to extract significance but instead ended up maimed by the very obsession that I allowed to define me!

Not identifying this as the pattern, I got angry quite often and wondered what was so repulsive about me that I kept finding myself in these pseudo relationships that took so much out of me. I wondered what was so wrong with me that I continually attracted and pursued men that were bound to hurt me by day's end. Was it the way that I carried myself? Was I just too strong or too spiritual for most? Was it the way I dressed or the things that I said? After some time I realized that none of these factors contributed to my plight. Instead the situation at hand was the result of an internal matter of the heart that I had to deal with. I began to see that I was so emotionally unhealthy that I attracted relationships with men that most people in their right minds would not be with, and neither would I have if I was in at least half of my right mind. Yet in the name of companionship, I placed myself into such circumstances, knowing deep down in my heart that it was the wrong place for me to be.

I did not need to be where I was the summer of 2004. As ridiculous as it sounds, I found myself loosely involved with a man who was married. Prior to this, I would have sworn to you that this was sin and wouldn't have given such a person a second glance. Yet, instead of looking away when he started to walk in my direction I turned my ear and gradually started to listen to him. I listened as he shared with me the intimate details of his life and his marriage, things that I had no business knowing about.

In spite of my resilience and determination to do what was right eventually I compromised. He talked a good game and was persistent so that I began to buy the load of crap that he was passing off as truth. In the vulnerable state that I was in, I allowed him to serenade me with poison. Though I knew it was wrong, I was able to temporarily fight off the guilt by telling myself that it would be okay once he was divorced.

I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I had no business with a man who was married or even a man who was divorced. I am convinced of this just as strongly today as I was back then. However, I allowed myself to go there simply because he paid attention to me! Late night phone conversations, a sneak date here and there, and just the way he looked at me made me want to abandon all of the beliefs that I governed my life by and adopt a set of new ones! Before I knew it, I found myself in a relationship with this man that really didn't exist at all but in a very real sense did. No one else was aware of the fact that we began to carry on like this because dating exclusively was not an option, and even if it was, I don't think that he would have wanted to. What he saw in me was an opportunity to satisfy his own desires even if it cost me my dignity, my respect, and my ability to reason.

For the reason that he was so caught up in his own needs, he was not there for me at all. The most amazing thing, however, was that I knew that he was not there for me but I continued to allow myself to be sucked in because he was the best thing that I had going on in my life. He gave me the identity and purpose that I desperately wanted. It was nice to feel wanted and nice to feel gratified even if it was just for a passing moment. A passing moment is definitely what our relationship turned out to be as all of a sudden, without

any warning, it came to a bitter end. Although I was completely torn up inside when this chapter in my life closed, I knew all too well that my love life was in dire straits. I began to understand that there was something to this self-destructive pattern of hurt, deceit, and rejection that I continually found myself in.

One Saturday shortly before our relationship came to an end, I found myself among a small gathering of people at church. If I remember correctly, the occasion that warranted me being there was the monthly leadership meeting. All around me people were laughing and engaging in pleasant conversation. Even though I also participated in this exchange, God was doing something on the inside of me that no one else could see. I felt as if I was Ebenezer Scrooge, caught up in a vision where I was able to get a glimpse of what my life would turn out to be if I did not deal with my situation soon. I pictured myself years later in my ministry and in my family, yet ruined because I did not deal with the repetitive strongholds in my life. I was frightened by what I saw; yet grateful that God loved me so much that he warned me so that I could choose a different path. I knew that it would take a lot of work to unlearn the self-destructive patterns and purge myself of their effects, but this was an issue that I could no longer ignore.

The vision that the Lord revealed to me led me on a quest to unearth some things about my struggle in this area. I started this quest initially by reading this book and then by reading that book until I had grown fed up with reading. This was because every book that I picked up approached the situation a little differently and did not come close to addressing the root causes of where I found myself. Some of the books that I read told me to stay pure and holy, and in all actuality I believed that these were necessary admonitions. Yet they did not teach me how exactly how I was to remain in such a state. Besides my problem with purity went much deeper than this because even though I had a strong desire to be pure, holy and blameless before my Father in thought, word, or deed, this was not always the case no matter my intent desire to do so.

Other books told me that I should just abandon the idea of dating altogether, yet if you remember many of the guys that I had problems with were not actually guys that I dated. For this reason, books that suggested that I abandon dating proved to be a little problematic. In a period of two months or so, I read through nearly half a dozen books that promised to diagnose my problem and remedy the situation so that upon completion of reading them I would emerge from the pits of destruction a different person. Yet, months after reading them I stood in my situation pretty much the same. The only difference is that I now hold a certificate that says “Congratulations, you finished reading my book!” I was very much informed and yet I remained unchanged.

In the midst of my trying to find the answer by sifting through these very informative books, I remember telling God that I needed a break. One Tuesday afternoon in the middle of February, a most horrible month to live through in the Midwest by the way, I sat in my college apartment weeping before the Lord. I wept because I knew that I was in trouble and figured that if God could prevent me from being attracted to anyone for just a moment that I could take some time to work through my issues. Here was my rationale: I figured that if I didn't like anyone that I wouldn't get into any more trouble and plow right

through this stronghold. If He could just cover my eyes and harden my heart towards even the appearance of men for just a little bit, I could get better and emerge from my hibernation, if you will, ready and willing to fight off the devil and carry on a healthy, loving relationship living happily ever after!

Years later as I reflect back on that day and the request that I lifted up to God, I realize just how ridiculous I probably have sounded. If I was able to tap into what was going on in heaven the moment that I made that request, I am sure that I would have heard God let out a hearty laugh as it did not make any sense at all. To honor what I requested God would have needed to either take away the human element that he designed to be a part of me, kill me off, or turn me into some type of sub-human breed or something, perhaps an alien! Attraction to the opposite sex is a natural phenomenon that God has blessed us with, or cursed us with depending on how you are looking at it. As for me, I think that God gave me a double portion of that blessing because as long as I can remember, I have been absolutely boy crazy. Therefore no matter how persuasive my rationale seemed to me, I would have to grow in the midst of the very thing that brought me the most trouble in the world.

What I am really trying to say is that God could not and would not stop me from being human even if in doing so I would not fall into another disastrous cycle of relationships. After praying that prayer, I found myself almost immediately drawn like a moth to a flame to another man. Just as I prayed, “God send them all away,” I found myself being pulled toward someone else. He was someone who in the past I fought against being with because he did not measure up to my standards of appearance, attitude, intelligence, spirituality, maturity and so on. Although he was a good guy and still is, he was not the one for me. If I realized this in the past, understanding that he was so contrary to what I needed, why did I all of a sudden find him simply irresistible? It is amazing to me how one can so easily and so quickly lower their standards over night for the sake of some resemblance of companionship and love.

Understanding that the books that I was reading were not really all that effective in helping me work through my stuff, I started to see a counselor school right around the time that I found myself attracted to this new love interest. Over many tears, and many sessions, I told my counselor about him. I expressed how I was beginning to fall for someone who in the past I despised because our personalities, likes and dislikes were so opposing to one another. I shared with him the fact that I was trying to resist this but continually found myself drawn to him which I did not understand. After giving me time to air out all of my dirty laundry, my counselor came to the conclusion that the only reason I wanted to be with him was because he was the only one there paying me any mind. His conclusion although very correct wounded my pride. How dare this man, who barely knew me, accuse me of attaching myself to someone just for the sake of attention? He dared to accuse me of such, however, because he knew it was the truth and upon him saying such, I knew that it was too. But I digress.

So even though I prayed, and screamed, and cried, “God no, don’t do it to me, oh no, don’t do it Lord,” I found myself liking this guy. I fought it for the longest time because I didn’t want to be at that place

once again. Against all good sense, I finally gave into my passions and admitted it, I guess, to myself that I indeed liked him. And so, what now? Well, I did what any girl would do! Actually I did what any girl should not do unless clearly instructed by the Holy Spirit. Then if we feel that we are being directed by the Holy Spirit, we best make sure that it is Him and not the pizza that we ate at 2 in the morning speaking. We should also make sure that it is not our hormones speaking, because ladies, lets face it, we have needs just like men do. We have a desire to get down and dirty just like everybody else, and there is no use trying to sugarcoat that just because we are saved, sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost! We cannot sugarcoat this truth because even though we are filled with the Spirit of the Lord, our hormones and desires persist!

I know you must be asking yourself what it exactly was that I did and if you would be patient, I will tell you. I remember the night so clearly. There was a full moon out and the stars were shining ever so brightly. Outside of the window birds were chirping and there was a Mexican guitarist softly stroking the cords of his instrument, singing "*Besáme.*" As he serenaded us, we sat at his kitchen table, gazing into each others eyes and confessed our undying love for each other. And yet, if you really believe that happened you have not been following what I have been saying.

The reality of that evening was that I told him how I felt. I was confident that my feelings would be well received, as at one point in time he did have feelings for me before I crushed him like a bug beneath my stiletto heels. His response came no where close to what I anticipated as instead of jumping for joy and turning cartwheels as I envisioned, he simply said "Ok, we will see what happens!" "Maybe!" "Let us see how it turns out!"

Instead of allowing what I felt at the moment show on my face, I sweetly smiled all the while gritting my pearly whites! I was infuriated and considered sticking my fist right through the wall. In all actuality, I wanted to stick my fist right through his skull, pull out his brain, and then throw it out the window so that darn Mexican guitarist would stop singing. I hope my sentiments are not too graphic for your liking.

In hindsight, I think that I would have been better off by writing him a note saying, "I like you, do you like me" and included a "Yes" Box and a "No" Box and left the "Maybe" Box out. What in the world was I supposed to do with "Maybe?" I must admit that I do not how to deal with ambiguity very well. In my mind, a state of ambiguity does not give clear directions and leaves a person all alone to conjure up in their minds whatever they can about what is really going on. For a person like me who has so many strange ideas and thought processes to begin with, a state of uncertainty is just dangerous. I start stressing, I start guessing and just really end up doing some really stupid things. Such a state for me is so death-provoking that I would liken it to leaving a toddler with a chainsaw or leaving a man alone in a den of lions or worse, snakes. The results of such are comparable to leaving me alone with thoughts that are not submitted to God - just about anything is subject to happen! Okay, so it's not that grave but I thought the analogy was humorous and it helped me illustrate my point. The moral of the story here is that ambiguity must be put as far away from me

as possible as if I am left alone to come up with whatever I think in the situation, I refuse to be held responsible of the resulting outcome. Wait, God still holds me responsible. Dang!

In all actuality, uncertainty is something that I am learning to embrace. As I increase in years and in the wisdom of the Lord, I am beginning to understand that there are many things in life that I am just not going to know. When I was a child, life was quite predictable. I woke up, I ate, I went to school, I did my homework and then I went to bed just to repeat the very same cycle the next day. I had clear guidelines that showed me what I was expected to do and I also knew what to expect of parents and other authority figures in my life. I did not have to live in a state of ambiguity because everything that I needed to know was already mapped out for me. Yet now, I am on my own and there is not a map anymore and I have to figure out much of life on my own. It drives me crazy because I want to have a plan, a detailed plan and sometimes I just do not know. God is teaching me to take my focus off of the map and place it in him, the one who creates the map. If you know anything about God, like me, you understand that He does not provide us with the full picture but gives us step by step instruction as we trust Him and go. It is a process that I am not always comfortable with but such is life in God.

Caught in a situation like this, many people would have dropped the whole thing all together and spared themselves from a whole lot of unnecessary hoopla. I would like to congratulate these people, perhaps you are one of them, because you have what I did not have when it came to matters of the heart: good sense! For some irrational reason, I interpreted his response to mean that we were going to hook up eventually - it was just a matter of time before we actually did! Since I took his response to mean this, my actions and my mindset reflected this assumption as well. I flirted, I wanted to be close, and I pushed others away who might have been interested in me because I thought I was doing the mating dance with someone else.

Yet I grew frustrated! I grew frustrated and angry because I felt that we should have been moving up the relationship ladder. After a few months, things were just as stagnate as the day I told him how I felt if they were not in fact retracting. As a result of my impatience, I brought up the matter constantly in hopes of invoking some sort of response out of him. I beat the topic of “us” to death thinking that it would cause him to apologize for not being upfront, only after confessing his undying love for me, the girl that he had not yet committed to dating.

Every time I brought up the subject matter, the only response that I got was, “Well, we will see. I am still not sure.” I wanted to say, “Well, we will certainly see once I knock my foot upside your backside.” Side note: In all seriousness, I am not this violent. In all actuality, I cried. I so badly wanted some spark to emerge between us and could not understand why he still had not made up his mind. It seemed like I was not gaining any ground at all and that the more and more I pressed the issue, I lost whatever ground that I did have.

I needed for him to make up his mind about me. There were too many conversations, too many times for him to still not be able to tell me where he stood. Never mind the fact that I had rejected him in the past for somebody else. Never mind the fact that he was afraid of getting hurt and afraid of where he was

going in life. I needed to know where the relationship was going so that I could proudly proclaim that I had a man, so that I could identify myself by this relationship. He needed to make up his mind about me so that I could feel secure and safe. Never mind the fact that he was not secure in himself and so could not really add value to me if he wanted to.

Even though I loved God, the one lie that I allowed to consistently bombard my thinking was that when it is all said and done, a person's identity is essentially tied to who they are with. Does that sound drastic, maybe a little bit over exaggerated to you? I would have to disagree if you thought so. Take a look at Mother Theresa. Although that woman did many mighty things in her life how often do we pity her because there was no man in her life? I know I do, and so I pray, please God, let me serve you, but not like that. Or maybe instead, look at Hollywood stars like Rihanna, Britney Spears, or Jennifer Aniston who are criticized because of their relationships and how God-awful they seem to end. Can you honestly tell me that the definition of identity in our society does not equate to who is in one's life? You may ask why I did not give any male examples-the unspoken paradox here is that women seem to have it worse!

A funny thing happened. In the midst of all of my drama and mess, my pastor approached me and asked me if I would preach in the main service one Sunday morning. I was greatly excited about it; at least I was excited until I found out that he wanted me to preach on the topic of singleness and relationships. Was he serious? Had he been hit over the head with a hammer? Why could not I preach on revival, or on faithfulness, or on why I think the Green Bay Packers are a better team than the Minnesota Vikings, or on anything else remotely different from singleness. I had to even question God, what was he trying to do to me?

In preparation for this sermon, I knew that I could not speak from a place where I could pretend for a single moment that I knew it all and was an expert in this area. Like a child can read the time on the wall or a man can read the change in seasons, the people in the congregation would have been able to read me like an open book and would have known if what I was preaching was indeed something I was practicing or at least was attempting to. Besides that, they knew me, they knew who I was and my shortcomings in this area and so for me to get up there and pretend like I had it all together would have turned them off completely!

So then I knew what I would not say, what I could not say but that did not lead me any closer to that which I would. I would not stand up there and tell them that I had it all together and that I never struggled with being single a day in my life and that if they just sought the Lord they would never struggle either. If I would have said that, I feared that God would have struck me dead as he did Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to the Holy Spirit in Acts 5. Even still that left me to question myself and to question God - what kind of word did I have the right to deliver to His people? What could I possibly say when I had not yet earned even a kindergarten certificate in this area and kept failing the same test over and over again? What word of encouragement, instruction or warning could I possibly deliver when I had not yet become?

In the past when God has given me something to share, I noticed that the times that I have had the most success were the times when I spoke from a place of vulnerability and a place of personal hurt. The times where God has used me the most to communicate a piece of truth to his people was when I was going through the same thing idea that he wanted delivered to his people. I understand the rationale behind why ministers should not really preach out of what they are currently going through, but instead speak on areas where they have already experienced victory or things in which they have already mastered. Yet if this is the criteria in preaching, I guess it would only be appropriate to deliver a message on reciting the alphabet or on counting, because God is consistently working on me in every other area. Not one area of kingdom truth have I mastered, not one area have I yet perfected.

I get the fact that people want to hear from the experts, those who have already experienced success in whatever it is that they are communicating- be it leadership, walking in holiness, or playing badminton. At the same time, I believe that people need to hear from someone who they can relate with, someone who is going through the midst of their fire presently. It lets them know that their struggle does not mean defeat and that they do not have to be destroyed as a result. For that reason I inevitably decided to preach from a place of my own weakness and out of my own folly. I encouraged people to become Mr or Mrs Right instead of trying to find Mr or Mrs Right and that hurt because as I was exhorting God's people, God was exhorting me the more. As I encouraged the congregation to come up higher, God was challenging me to do the same if not more. A double-edged sword indeed!

It never ceases to amaze me how God decides to use imperfect people; people who do not have it all together, people who are sloppy, people who are messy, people who are broken and people who are bruised to bring about his purpose and perfect will. Throughout history, he has used murderers, prostitutes, infidels, robbers, adulterers, fornicators, all types of crazy, deranged people and I am in that number! It does not give me a license to sin and purposefully mess up, but his grace, undeserved grace, makes me want to do better. He uses the things that are foolish and weak to bring to shame the things that are wise, strong and make sense. I am not always quite sure why, but I will take it.

For some unbeknownst reason, I thought that after preaching God would all of a sudden straighten me out, fix me up, and present me perfect to the world, having proved to be a conqueror in this area. I am not sure why I thought this, I just did. I just preached this perfect message and so I thought my worries were far gone. Oh not so but how I wish that it were true! Yet if it were true there would be no story, no humor and instead of you reading this, you would be reading "3 Easy Steps to Dating God's Way." As a matter of fact, it was shortly after the delivery of this message when God decided to overturn the tables in my life, exposing the clutter that I allowed to amass underneath. Finally God was purging me, and extracting all that was unnecessary out.

King David made the process of purging sound so inviting in Psalm 51 with his poetic language: *cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean, wash me and I will be whiter than snow.* His words make this process seem

like nothing more than a quick walk in the park. Yet when God started this process in my life, I realized that what I thought was a nice, scenic park with filled with wonderful waterfalls, Weeping Willows, and blooming flowers was not that at all. Instead it was filled with thorns, thistles, boulders, burning coals and wild animals that threatened to shred me to pieces. Now that I think about it, it probably was not even a park at all but the valley of the shadow of death. After passing through this shadow, I wish that King David was alive so that I could go and speak to him about this particular psalm. I would ask him to change the words so that it would read as follows: *cleanse me, burn me, abandon me, beat me, humiliate me, kill me God and I will be clean* because essentially this is what happened to me.

Let's come back to this love interest that I was entertaining at the time. After many long months of playing the guessing game, one day I just got tired. Someone once said that things do not begin to change in our lives until we get tired with how they are affecting us. I got too tired, I grew too weak, and I could no longer keep up with the dance I was projecting much longer. I lost my breath, my footing, and could no longer keep up with the rhythm of the music playing in my head. Out of nowhere, I came to the conclusion that this dysfunctional relationship was all out of sorts. I was finally able to see the writing on the wall, and understood that he did not have any intentions of ever making a commitment to me and so I wanted out. I did not just want out of the "I like you, and maybe you kind of, short of like me" aspect of our relationship but I wanted out of the whole crock pot. I did not want to be friends, I did not want to hang out, I did not want to talk because it hurt all too much and I was sick and tired of putting my heart out there, just to get it back all stepped on and bruised. I was absolutely and completely disgusted.

At the same time, I was hurt by my decision to sever the whole relationship. It was a comfortable friendship as it provided me with at least some level of identity and security. Yet security no longer seemed as important as it once was, instead peace of mind became more appealing. I had grown tired of the lies, the deceit, the confusion, the heartache, and being stuck in the position that he had placed me in his life and although drastic, I wanted to quit it all. It seemed like this was best, like this was what made sense and I could not get that decision out of my mind. I intended on following through with it, I intended on seeing this resolution.

Needless to say, that did not happen. At least it did not happen when I initially wanted it to happen and how I wanted it to happen. After sitting down for a nice long talk and airing out all of our issues that we both had with each other, something compelled me to hang on. Something compelled me to keep the relationship, to retain the friendship and it ultimately ripped me to pieces. For a moment, I guess, we were still friends or something of the sort although I surrendered the idea of "us" to the flames. Even so I continually sensed the distance, the awkwardness between us and I think he did to. I think that we were both hanging on to a relationship that God himself was trying to destroy, a relationship that had just deteriorated and was beyond repair but that we struggled to maintain simply for the sake of being nice, sweet and cordial.

Yet it was no longer safe, for either him or I and it was evident in our actions, our speech and our impatience towards one another.

A couple of weeks after we decided to continue in our dysfunctional relationship, the proverbial straw was laid that broke the camels back completely. Against all good sense, I decided to do something that I know that I should have not done. It was not that what I did was a sin, nor did it hurt anyone. Yet, my actions revealed just how fragile our friendship was and so finally it broke. In my decision to act, I saw things I just was not ready to see and was forced to handle a situation that I did not have the strength to bear on my own. For the reason I could not bear it on my own, I tried to share the load with a couple of others, him included. In the end, I found myself on the bathroom floor surrounded by a pool of tears mixed with blood because I cried so hard that my nose bled. I cried because I was disappointed that I was so out rightly rejected and my feelings minimized for selfish reasons, mine included. I cried because I did not think that I had the strength to face the future that lay before me. Ultimately I cried because I knew that this was a situation that I could have avoided weeks ago if I had bowed out of the friendship.

After this explosion of sorts, I was faced with a daunting challenge. For so many months I was so consumed by him that I cut the ties to other important friendships. Even though I am generally a quiet person, I thrive in the midst of friendships and relationships with people the best. I like being sharpened by the challenges of others and I appreciate having those close knit bonds with people where I can just pick up the phone and ask the person on the other end if they would just like to go chill. In the severing of our relationship, other friendships were affected as well so that I did not know what to do. I felt like the odd one out and believed that every one was pointing their fingers of accusation at me, laughing and jeering over my simplicity and stupidity. I allowed my imagination to get the best of me once again and drove myself into this deep, dark hole of self pity and self loathing.

Instead of allowing bitterness to ruin my life, I began to ask myself a couple of questions. How would I really apply the principle of forgiveness and restoration that God commanded his followers to adopt through the teaching of his Word? How would I genuinely forgive those who hurt me? How would I keep myself from harboring feelings of rage or resentment or vengeance for my own sake and my own health? Although my questions may sound selfish being that one of the guiding reasons why I wanted to forgive him was for my sake, if I stop to think about it, what happened between us was probably not even a second thought in his head. Yet if I chose to allow his actions to affect me, they would continue to eat away at me like a malignant disease, while he gets to go away free. So how do I do it?

During this tumultuous time in my life, I thank God for the people that he sent my way to usher in healing and restoration. One such person was a woman I befriended who became a mentor during a time that I really needed her presence to help keep my head above water. Shortly before this erosion of sorts took place in my life, she gave me a very valuable book. In previous conversations with her, I shared that this whole relationship thing was an area of great struggle in my life and she suggested a book that had been of

great assistance in her own life. Although I was a little uneasy about reading it since I had already paged through so many that promised one thing or the other, I was equally excited to try something that would give me the right answer and lock in a man for me in no time. I was in for a rude awakening as from the minute that I started reading it I could tell that it was not like anything that I had come across in the past.

Unlike the books before that addressed surface level issues, this one dug at the very core of my being and pulled excessively at the root causes of my self destructive patterns. Within the first pages of me reading it, I was encouraged to take a six- month sabbatical from dating. I felt like throwing the thing, the book that is, out of the window and letting the cars have their way with it. The audacity of the author! How dare she suggest that I take a sabbatical from dating? Could she not see that I had a relationship in the making? Could she not understand that in my taking a six-month sabbatical, I could potentially lose the one good thing that I had going on for me? What if in me doing this, he would grow tired and uninterested of waiting for me to mature and become the true woman of God that I needed to be. In spite of all of my fears and apprehensions, on May 21st, 2005, I made that six-month commitment.

Before you stop to congratulate me and start jumping up and down or before you stop to shake my hand and commence to turn cartwheels and back flips in my honor, you must know and understand that it was not an easy trek. When I first started this six month journey, it was amazing! I was determined to spend all this time with God so that I could hear from him concerning this area of my life. I even started journaling and memorizing scripture that dealt with the issues pertaining to my liberation process. I was serious about getting my mess together so that I would not have to live from crisis to crisis, playing defense instead of the offense. I wanted peace in my heart and I no longer wanted to be anxious when it came to this area of dating and relationships. So I began this six-month trek head-strong, all the while dying inside because a part of me wanted to wallow in this pool of chaos that I had on the side, afraid of what I would look like to other people if I did not have any relationship at all. I was afraid of what I would think of myself if I had nothing. I was afraid of what it would look like if people really knew that I had just completed the third of another disastrous relationship in one year that would once again prove to everyone including God that I was a failure here.