

AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

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Brenda Cobb Murphy - brenda@brendacobbmurphy.com

I sat there totally frustrated, both with myself and with my neighbor. I didn't want to invite her in the first place and now my fun Bible study had become a disaster. She was challenging everything I believed, and I was frustrated with myself for not knowing where in the Bible to find the answers.

It's crazy how the most "random" ideas can rearrange your future. There you are happily living life and the next thing you know you wake up and nothing is ever the same again. Thankfully this was a GOOD never-the-same-again. On this particular day in 1992 I wasn't expecting my life to change, I was just frustrated with my inability to present a cohesive argument. A week earlier I had been digging through a pile of old stuff and came across a Bible study workbook. I had only gotten to go once before we had moved from Georgia back to Ohio. "What a waste," I thought as I glanced through the eight-dollar three-ring-binder, "I wonder if I made a copy if Jane would work through it with me."

My neighbor Jane thought it was a great idea, "but why don't you invite Janet and Brenda (my other neighbors who, as far as I knew, weren't even Christians). No way was I inviting them, I just wanted a fun girlfriend time with Jane, and I was sure they wouldn't come anyway. But she wouldn't leave it alone so I finally invited them, and much to my dismay they both agreed to come. Suddenly, instead of two girlfriends having fun I'm now The Leader of a Bible Study. I was terrified. And that first night proved to be worse than my most dreaded scenario as Janet challenged everything, and all I could say was a lame, "Well, it says somewhere that ..." I went home that night determined to find the answers.

Something awakened spiritually in me that night, maybe because it was the first time I was forced to personally own my beliefs. I devoured the Bible but I knew there had to be more than that to knowing God. I bought the book *Conversation With God* by Lloyd J. Oglevie, hoping it would give me a clue to prayer. It talked about seven different aspects of prayer, for example, Thanksgiving, Praise, Confession, etc, but what changed my relationship with God forever was one I didn't remember ever hearing before: Silence. He said that we treat prayer like a telephone conversation where we do all the talking and then hang up without giving

God a chance to respond. That's when I began to spend twenty minutes a day sitting on my washing machine with God, the only place I could be alone. The kids (four, six, and ten) would interrupt but I figured Holy Spirit had created kids and He knew I couldn't help it.

Sitting on that washing machine was the beginning of my getting to know Jesus. Before that I was a good Christian, I loved God and had grown up with parents who not only told me of God's love but demonstrated it. I've always said that I was born a Christian because I don't remember ever NOT believing in God and knowing He loved me. However, while He was an active part of my life He was so huge and holy that I only knew Him in the throne room or through the Bible, and my time on the washing machine was spent worshipping.

However, a couple of months later I realized that I was laughing and talking with my Bridegroom Jesus instead of being in worship before a holy God. Without my realizing it Jesus had come and wooed me, and I fell in love.

We moved from that neighborhood to a big house where my laundry/office was bedroom-sized with a window, and every morning, once I dropped the kids off at school, I would pick up the house, make the beds, and then go to my office for an hour with Jesus. There our relationship blossomed, and here's why, here's the key to falling in love and talking and laughing with Jesus, and even now, many years later, it's still a choice that isn't easy for me. You have to hang out with Jesus. here's how I put it in my book of experiencing [The Wild Romancer](#):

Something else you can do is give God a CHANCE to romance you. Eat with Him, tell Him all you would tell Him if you could see Him sitting across from you. Laugh with Him. He has a great sense of humor. You want to dance with Him? Then put on worship music and dance. You want Him to call to you to come spend time with Him? Give Him a chance to enjoy your company and show Him you're willing to make time for Him. Even if you cannot come when He calls, acknowledge His presence and let your heart respond to Him. It is amazing how much you can enjoy each other while doing other things, but remember, those times are based on the foundation of time alone with Him.

Every so often I get asked how I got here, what my starting point was. "I can't just jump into where you are now," someone said recently, "can you remember what it

was like at the beginning? How did you start out your relationship with Jesus?"

Well, that is the beginning, the foundation, the relationship. Nothing can follow if you don't get to know God. Relationship doesn't come without spending time with someone, alone time, focused time. My relationship with Terry is fine with us running around doing our own thing, but that's because it's based on having intimate time together, time to talk and laugh and focus on each other. That keeps us on the same page, heading in the same direction, together. It's that simple. You will never get to know someone by reading about them and talking about them and listening to someone tell you about them.

You have to actually respond and interact, relax and enjoy God. You have to give Him a chance to say or do something, and then be willing to believe it's Him. Knowing God is creating a place for Him to come hang out with you, not a physical place but physically being still and spiritually meeting Him. And that's not easy, especially for people like me who have a hard time being still. Even if you can only give 20 minutes, work on not feeling pressured or rushed, or your mind won't let anything happen. And that's hard. It's hard to drop the world and get into that quiet place but it'll be worth it when He comes to enjoy you. Satan will try to tell you that you're making it up, that you're just stupid, anything to steal the relationship away from you. But the more you spend time with Jesus the stronger the relationship gets, and the more you trust His ability to keep you over Satan's ability to deceive you. Trust is a big issue here. It has surprised me to discover that even now in my relationship with Jesus I still have trust issues.

Here's a huge key I learned in getting to know Jesus. We all have "spiritual" senses similar to our physical senses that enable us to hear God, feel His presence, and experience Him, but unless we *develop* them they are fairly useless. Developing our senses, whether physical or spiritual, take practice. I'm a very unobservant person and I'd make a horrible detective because I'm so focused inside my head, so I'm "practicing" being more observant. I'm not *naturally* observant.

The most important spiritual sense to develop is listening. You can't get to know someone if you never stop talking. It sounds easy, but in today's world it is hard to find people who truly listen, either physically or spiritually. Terry and I were listening for a girl in the Asbury College chapel once, at midnight, an hour from home. I knew she was wondering why we didn't say anything when we had asked if we could pray for her, but we just sat and listened. After a while we could give her a specific word for her life, and talk about things that God had showed us about

her. Instead of us guessing what God wanted to say to her or praying something generic, we could tell her what we felt God wanted to say, and it was amazing how blessed she was over the way God spoke specifically into her life.

Another time we were in Nashville in a meeting where, with the pastor's permission, we asked a woman on crutches if we could pray for her foot. Without knowing anything about her we "listened," and Terry told her that he felt that God had shown him that she had unforgiveness issues with her brother. She broke down crying, saying how God had told her that He wouldn't heal her foot until she dealt with those issues and that the key to her healing was forgiving her brother. It was awesome to see her set free.

There are several things I've learned just by hanging out with Jesus. We all know God is inside of us and that His presence is everywhere, yet our mentality is usually that He is up in heaven, causing us to raise our hands or at the very least pray "up." But I realized one day that it wasn't like that anymore, I was aware of Him as if He were a physical person with me. In a meeting recently there were empty chairs to my right and at one point I realized that I'd been laughing and talking to Jesus in the chair beside me and that the people behind me were probably thinking I'd lost my mind! After that I felt terribly self-conscious and worked to control my grins and nods and lips moving. Getting to know Jesus doesn't take away from His holiness and worship-inspiring awe, but He is begging you for more than that, He wants to know you as a Friend and Husband.

In general, when I'm enjoying Jesus (or Holy Spirit or Daddy-God), trying to make my mind blank doesn't work. Even when I'm really tired and I'm just sitting and absorbing His presence I see Him by me, holding me or just sitting together in a companionable silence. Instead of trying to keep your mind blank and not let any thoughts "intrude" try imagining that Jesus and you are doing something together. For example, someone told me once that he wanted to experience Jesus closer but it was hard to just sit there "waiting." I suggested that the next time, instead of trying to keep his mind in that waiting mode, imagine taking Jesus to a favorite place and showing it to Him, telling Him all about it and why it was this person's favorite place. The next time I saw this person he told me excitedly how he'd taken Jesus to the river where this person had spent much of his childhood and shown Him around, and it had been a wonderful time together.

The point of using your imagination is that it's a springboard into Jesus' presence,

where you learn to interact and relate. Even if it IS your imagination the whole time it doesn't matter because Jesus comes with you into your imagination and enjoys time with you. Jesus is real, whether your imagination is or not. But what you'll find many times is that Holy Spirit changes what you're doing, from being your imagination into the spiritual realm, and you'll find things happening and things said that you wouldn't have imagined. Often you don't realize this though until you write the experience down or think about it later, even if you're sure at the time that you made it all up.

Writing down the things you experience with God is so priceless I can't say enough about doing it. It becomes a wonderful tool, whether it's looking up dates or remembering the details of a dream or what exactly God said to you that day. By having it written and dated you can put the puzzle pieces together and see all the ways God has been working in your life and speaking to you, and you'll be amazed at how much God has been directing you. Even if you don't write the experience in detail at least jot down the date and the highlights.

"How do I start being with Jesus, I mean in the beginning," my friend asked. "Here's the thing," I told her. "Take a minimum of ten minutes a day and get alone with Jesus, even walking (not driving, you can't relax and focus). Just go for a walk, or sit on the deck. Then imagine that He's with you as if He were physically there, where He'd be sitting or standing or walking by you, and in your head (or out loud) carry on a conversation. One-sided is fine, as long as you're listening as well as talking. Point out the birds, the flowers, tell Him something funny. Think of something you'd like to tell a close friend and tell Him. Tell Him where you like to eat out and why, or what your favorite food is. Treat Him as if He were a best friend and just ramble, He loves that. Just get used to Him being with you in a physical way and doing things with you, of seeing Him as if He were physically there with you.

If you sit down to do bills talk about it. "I hate bills. Did You ever have to fool with bills, or did Judas, being the treasurer, handle all the money stuff? Who decided when to spend money? I suspect from what we know of their personalities the disciples weren't that intimidated by You. They probably had all kinds of suggestions of where to eat and what to spend money on. Hey, I never thought about it, but did You give money away? Like to needy people, or did You just touch them and their finances change. When the ark was at Obed-Edom's house he was blessed (The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for

three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household. 2 Sam 6:11) so now that the ark dwells in us, the temple, WE get blessed! Yay!"

So carry on conversations, start getting used to Him being involved in the daily talk-to-a-friend kind of things instead of on-your-knees-in supplication and worship. Stop praying and talking up to the sky and respond to Him beside you. That's the beginning. The other things are fine, the Bible reading, the devotionals, the study and disciplines, but to know God you have to spend time with Him and build a relationship with *Him*. It's important to know God's "Your Royal Highness" side but He also wants you to know Him as His spouse, on a first-name basis, when He's NOT in the Throne Room.

We're each on our own journey, but I can tell you this: you'll never love life and enjoy it more than walking it with Jesus as your spouse.

And then share the fun stories with me!