

My palms were sweaty, and my heart was pounding as I reached for my phone. I don't talk on the phone very often, but because of what I had learned over the past few years, I knew this needed to be an actual conversation instead of an email or text message. "Hello?" he answered, obviously driving. "Hey, Jared, it's Rebekah, do you have a minute?" Since we hadn't seen each other since our high school graduation, a conversation in person would have been better but Jared lived over a thousand miles away from Denver in Spokane, Washington and we had no plans of seeing each other. The days leading up to this phone call had been filled with many anxious thoughts. "Should I really ask him for forgiveness or just let it go? What if he rejects me? Had my words caused more hurt on top of the hurt I knew he had already experienced? Did my rejection bring back terrible memories of our friendship in high school?" At the end of the day, I knew I couldn't ignore the still small voice that encouraged me to ask him for forgiveness. "Trust me" said the voice, "I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for." I knew I needed to seek reconciliation and open the door to possibility, which I had closed a few months before with a few curt words, spoken out of fear and self-preservation.

Two years before this conversation with Jared, my life looked very different. After eight years of marriage, I discovered my husband was having an affair with one of his co-workers late one night by glancing at his phone and seeing text messages not meant for my eyes. "Dear, Jesus" I thought, "this can't be happening! We're the 'cool couple' who never fight! We were meant to be! He would never do this to me!" These thoughts, and a million others, flew through my head as I numbly sat on our bed, listening to him brush his teeth in the bathroom. As I got ready for bed, I avoided his gaze and said nothing about what I had just seen. "Goodnight," he said. "Goodnight," I responded, but I knew it wasn't going to be a good night. As soon as I heard his breathing slow and become steady, I quietly got out of bed, grabbed his phone and locked myself in the bathroom. Sitting on the floor, feeling dazed and confused, I read through months of conversation with the other woman, becoming angrier and angrier

the more I read. I fitfully tried to sleep in the guest room, to no avail and finally got up my nerve: I turned on some music, turned on the light in our bedroom and sat and stared at him until he woke up, grumpy and baffled. "Are you having an affair?" I asked. "What?" he queried, "What time is it? Can we do this tomorrow?" "No," I responded, "I want to talk about this now, please answer me." After what seemed like an eternity of silence, he responded. "Uh," he laughed anxiously as he shook his head, "I... I... guess..." "What are you going to do to make this right?" I asked. All he could say was, "I... I... don't know." Heartbroken, angry, confused, curious, terrified, self-righteous, abandoned, rejected, and not sure what to do, the next few months were a blur of emotions. I hoped he would come forward on his own, start asking for help, admit what he had done, or at least tell me why. None of these things happened, and all I could think to pray was, "help!" And the still small voice encouraged me, "I am your strength and your refuge. I am an ever-present help in time of need."

After a few months, he finally agreed to go to counseling. Week after week, our counselor gently prodded, "Rebekah is the only one who has said anything. Would you like to say something?" "Ah..." he would mumble, followed by long stretches of silence. "I don't understand... why... why Rebekah is making a big deal out of this. Can't we just go back to the way life was before?" Again, and again, the counselor explained how trust works, what empathy is, and what was required to make a marriage work, but the conversation sounded like a broken record playing in an empty room. We had made a vow to love and cherish through sickness, poverty and hardship but for reconciliation to take place, wrongs had to be exposed, discussed, processed... I had hope for forgiveness and reconciliation one minute and crushing disappointment the next. Marriage is hard with two people, but it is impossible with only one and the life we had together came to a standstill. Desmond Tutu once said, "Forgiving and being reconciled are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth." And, after months of the same conversations without truth, without

confession, without sacrifice, without a partner to work toward, my prayer remained constant. “Father, show me what to do. Show me how to stay or when it’s time to walk away.” Though I often felt alone, I wasn’t, and the still small voice continually reminded me, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for I will be with you wherever you go.”

“Go home” said the still small voice. “Home?” I thought, “That’s crazy. I haven’t lived there in months, besides, it’s twenty minutes away and I only have an hour lunch break.” I knew I needed to go though, so after arguing with myself silently for a few minutes, I left work and drove home. My stomach was in knots as I unlocked the front door and hesitantly walked into the empty living room. After wandering around for about a minute, I saw what I came for: the pile of laundry was on the chair, its contents neatly laid out, so the clothes wouldn’t get wrinkled. At the very top of the pile lay a small, black camisole – obviously a woman’s and definitely not mine. I was familiar with the rest of the clothes underneath it, all men’s, size small, since I had been washing and folding them for the past nine years. “Okay” I thought, as a tear ran slowly down my cheek, “it really is over.” “It’s time to let go, you’re released,” said the voice. I was crushed; my husband’s desire for other women, and a perceived freedom overpowered his desire to rebuild the trust we once had, yet, I was comforted: “I heal the heartbroken and bandage their wounds. I count the stars and assign them each a name. I am great, with limitless strength; you’ll never comprehend what I know or do.”

While many of the painful memories leading up to my divorce are seared in my mind, my process of healing is not. Healing didn’t come in big, dramatic moments. It came, one minute at a time, as I trusted the still small voice to lead and comfort me. It came through kind and generous friends who let me live in their basement while I got back on my feet. It came from hours and hours of prayer and reading the Scriptures. It came sitting on my couch eating salted caramel gelato and crying. It came through a stubborn determination to embrace life and all it had to offer. It came on the hiking trails of the Rocky Mountains, and while running along miles and miles on the banks of an irrigation canal. It

came by showing up and being seen. It came through attending a Divorce Care class, a class on Finding Joy, a relationship workshop, and learning who I was. It came through the realization that my failure to ignore my own weakness contributed to the breakdown, and thinking I was fine. It came when I knew I wanted to learn from my mistakes and live a life of wholeness, health, and fullness of joy, which doesn't happen without regular confession of my own faults and a determination of self-responsibility. So then, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you will be healed.

Though my process of healing will never be over, my season of intense grief started to come to an end and rays of light began to shine in once again. Life had joy and meaning instead of constant pain and, almost unbelievably, I had started to think about what life might be like opening my heart to a romantic relationship again. My desire for marriage and children had not been diminished. My renewed joy showed itself in many ways, and I reconnected with friends from my past, one of which was newly single himself and who had walked through a similar situation. I had known Jared and his family since we were fifteen, but we had not been in each other's lives since high school. All of a sudden, he and his parents and siblings were showing up in my social media feeds; "liking" most of my posts and even commenting on a few. After being so raw and vulnerable, the attention they gave to my life story all of a sudden was terrifying. Even though we lived thousands of miles apart, the pressure I felt was immense and in conversation, I told Jared, in no uncertain terms, I would never date him. He was gracious, kind, quietly accepted my words and gave me space. Our lives moved on, but in the quiet reflection of several months I came to realize the words I had spoken out of fear had the potential to negatively affect me for the rest of my life and I made up my mind to ask Jared for his forgiveness for my careless words. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

"Hello?" he answered, obviously driving. "Hey, Jared, it's Rebekah, do you have a minute?" "Hey, Rebekah! Yeah, I do. This is perfect timing, I'm just driving back from visiting family in Portland, what's up?" "Um, well... I'm sure you remember a few months ago when I told you I wouldn't date you. I

realize now that I was wrong and should have never said that. Will you forgive me?" I asked, as my voice waivered. "Of course, I will" he graciously responded. What I didn't know then is that God used this moment to change the direction of our lives as we cautiously started talking over the next few months. We talked about everything from our hobbies and whether we wanted kids, to deep theological topics that we disagreed on. We talked about our failures and dreams and spent time with our families who were excited about spending time with old friends and thrilled that we were dating. We explored Denver together, visited breweries in Billings, ran a half marathon in Yellowstone, celebrated the Fourth of July with his family at their cabin in the Montana mountains, attended a family wedding in Washington state, met at my parents' house in New Mexico to celebrate my birthday, and explored Spokane. Before we knew it, the summer was almost over, and we'd depleted our savings accounts flying to see each other. At this point in our lives, we were both very clear about what we wanted in life and were not interested in playing the field or in a long-distance relationship. After some deliberation, we decided what we wanted to do. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

After working a full day, I boarded the 6:30 flight out of Denver telling no one where I was going or what I was doing and excitedly buckled my seatbelt. Colorful carpet, the slight smell of cigarette smoke and the clang of slot machines greeted me as I stepped off the plane in Las Vegas where my true love would land about forty-five minutes later. We exchanged vows on a sidewalk under the cheesiest "Las Vegas" sign I had ever seen with a photographer as our witness and some rowdy well-wishers honking and waving as they drove past. It was the best decision of my life as we embarked on a journey to discover real love; a patient, self-sacrificing, humble, loyal love that I had never known in my first marriage. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Sometimes I look back at the ten years I spent in my first marriage and have to remind myself that it wasn't wasted time. I learned what it felt like to lose my voice and regain it. I learned how to set boundaries and stand up for myself instead of being a door mat. I learned how to recognize the signs of narcissism and manipulation and run the other direction. I discovered my own strength and courage in the face of my worst fears. I learned that the discomfort of confessing my wrongs is worth the long-term growth. I learned what love looks like and what it doesn't look like. I learned about God's faithfulness, even though the outcome was not what I originally prayed for. I learned the beauty of embracing "Plan B" after "Plan A" completely fell apart. And most beautiful of all, I learned to rely on and know the still small voice that is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth.

And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a still small voice. (1 Kings 19:11-12)