



Something Is Wrong

*All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.
– Isaiah 53:6*

In Handel's *Messiah*, the lines "All we like sheep have gone astray" are sung to some very lively music. The bouncy melody sounds like a runaway sheep playing a game of "can't catch me." I can just see that sheep kicking up her heels and skipping from forbidden rock to dangerous ledge – until she is stranded and frantic for the Shepherd.

Then the music changes to slow, mournful chords: "And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." The sheep's perverse pleasure turns to sorrow and repentance.

I was like that runaway sheep. Running away from what? I did not know. I was playing a game of "you can't



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reach my heart” – until my life crashed in a nervous breakdown. When the Shepherd showed me that He had borne my grief and carried my sorrow, I let Him reach the locked place in my heart.

My mother has told me that when I was a small child I did not like to be held or snuggled. As a teen I was quite pleased with myself for showing my independent spirit at so young an age.

When I was fourteen, my grandma died after living with our family for many years. I did not shed one tear at her funeral. Mom said I should learn to cry for my emotional health’s sake. I could see no sense in grieving or having a soft heart that felt sad about losing Grandma. Sure, Grandma left behind many happy memories and good laughs. But Grandma also caused extra stress on our family since she lived under the same roof. I could not accept the mixture of feelings, so I chose to dismiss the good memories and accept the relief that the stress had come to an end. In hindsight, I recognize a hard heart unable to handle a wide variety of emotions if they came mixed in the same package.

As a youth I enjoyed the company of young fellows as much as any teenage girl did. But if a boy showed any interest beyond friendliness, I became fiercely vocal. The youth heard many emphatic declarations that I would never marry and of course never date. My conscience bothered me when some suggested I was a man-hater. I knew God had commanded us to love. Yet there was a gratifying feeling in being mean to young men and especially to those who showed any spark of interest in me. I did not know why I reacted that

way. Something felt wrong, but I denied it. Someone has said that hurting people hurt people. I was hurting inside and did not know it. "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6).

When I was asked to serve in Guatemala as a nurse at the El Chal clinic, I was thrilled to go for several reasons. My childhood missionary nurse dreams were coming true, and serving the Lord among such colorful, captivating people was very fulfilling.

My other reasons for going were a little harder to define. I found a sense of atonement in the sacrificial lifestyle that was a necessary part of living in a third world country. I was not just serving. I was *sacrificing*. I was atoning for my shame.

What shame?

In being a missionary, I felt protected from men. "No, I can't date you or marry. Can't you see that I am busy for the Lord? I don't have time for such trivial things." I was the run-away sheep. Running away from what?

But one shy young man was not intimidated by the "no" I gave him in our teen years at Bible school. Our paths crossed again on the mission field. Being a missionary in Guatemala did not distance me from the danger of dating as much as I had hoped it would. Five years after our meeting in Bible school, he asked again to begin a courtship. I again said "no." I felt strongly that God wanted me to stay single to work as a missionary nurse.

When I closed my clinic door and evacuated Guatemala after John Troyer was murdered (read *Awaiting the Dawn* by Dorcas Hoover), my heart told me a strange new thing.

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Missionary commitment was no longer a valid reason to say “no” to dating. Suppose that young man came around again in another five years. Would I consider dating him then? The idea made me panic. Was that really what God was asking me to do?

Why did I panic? If I was so dedicated to God’s will when He called me to stay single and work as a missionary nurse, why did I balk and run when He called me to be a wife?

I evaded the deeply burning question. It got shoved under a pile of junk. There it stayed for years, at the bottom of a chest in my mind with a heavy lid locking it in.

After working in my homeland of Canada for two years, I was asked to serve as a missionary nurse again, this time for a mission in southern Belize.

Belize! An electrifying sensation went through me. That certain shy young man had served four years there while I worked three years in Guatemala. But I knew that he was presently in the States. If I worked in Belize, I would not be working near him. I consented to go, though I realized I still might meet him some time in my two-year term of service because he made frequent trips to Belize bringing equipment and supplies for the mission.

I was scarcely settled in my new Belize jungle home when my ears picked up a name as missionaries were chatting. “Verton is bringing a truckload of things next month. He should arrive by the first Saturday . . .”

My head reeled and my heart raced. I had thought God wanted me to be prepared in five years, not now! I had felt God wanted me to change my unexplainable resistant attitude

toward dating (and toward Verton in particular) after five years. That was still two years away, and I had signed up to serve those two years as a nurse for this mission.

The flurry of excitement around the mission when that truck arrived was nothing in comparison to the whirlwind of mixed feelings inside me. And that is how our courtship began. I did not feel ready emotionally. As our courtship continued, the war of emotions inside me increased. When Verton expressed his growing love, I lashed out at him. He wanted to know why, but I did not know myself. I felt a confusion inside that I could not explain to him or to myself.

After a year of dating, I went home to Canada to prepare for our wedding. My contract for the second year of nursing was cancelled. We would return to the Belize mission field after we were married and continue our mission commitments then.

Verton waited ten years for our wedding day. I thank God that he had the same strong convictions I had for a “hands-off” courtship. It made a scary experience much safer for me. Yet I did not feel safe. Even on our wedding day I was in a turmoil of fear. I did not know what I was afraid of or why I was afraid. Both of us felt God had led us together to marry. The unexplained peace of God in my *spirit* assured me I was following God’s will, although my emotions kept sending me confused messages that marriage was dangerous and harmful.

Because of all those unspoken fears in early marriage, we developed some unhealthy ways of communicating and coping with each other’s feelings. I still held on to some anti-masculine sentiments that confused me. I chose to stuff them