

The Courtship Testimony of Shane and Amy Anderson

A Divine Appointment

Shane Anderson and I met in November of 1991. We had both begun serious Christian growth relatively recently. Shane met the Lord in the summer of 1989, after lots of prayers from his girlfriend and her church. I came out of the world and rededicated my life to the Lord in the fall of 1990.

We had both moved to Austin, TX to attend graduate school, Amy in 1990, and Shane in 1991. We both moved to Austin from undergraduate schools in the northeastern United States. We had both been far from our homes, and coming to Texas was like coming home for both of us. We met at a prayer meeting held by Shane's college pastor. A girl I knew from school invited me to attend, and we were the only women in the group that night. Afterward, the students went out for coffee and cheesecake, to get to know each other a little more. That night, Shane never spoke to me, though he sat right beside me. I never would have guessed what had happened to him that night, not in one million years. In fact, he really did not talk to me for about two months after we met.

"I shall prepare Him an habitation" (Ex. 15:2, 18)

After the prayer meeting, I knew that his church, Hope Chapel, was the church I needed to join. The college group was beginning to study the work of the Holy Spirit and the operation of spiritual gifts, and learn how to be "doers of the Word, and not merely hearers." My relationship with the Lord expanded beyond what I could contain, as I finally began to understand what He had in mind for me when He made me, and began to learn how dynamic a life I could live as a Christian. I began to learn that "His sheep hear His voice," and that I could hear His heart for me if I were His sheep.

I had spent several years in the world, trying to get someone to tell me that they saw value in me, and what it was that they did see of value in me. I was on my own, and I had been raised to believe that one needed to just make one's own best guess about how to use one's talents for the Lord.

After two paragraphs of my "Christian growth" story, you are probably wondering what any of this has to do with my courtship testimony. It is vitally important, actually. At this point in my life, my parents had despaired of ever having any influence on my Christian walk. They never knew the extent of my rebellion, but they knew that I had a heart for doing things my own way, which is exactly what I did out in the world during college. So I did not have their active guidance and influence as I tried to put together the pieces of my limping faith while I was in graduate school. (I'd been saved when I was six years old, but never understood how closely the Lord wanted to walk with me.)

So one of the most important components of parent-supervised courtship was missing in my life -- I did not have my parents openly evaluating my character and progress toward the goals God had for me, helping me know what I needed to do to prepare for courtship when it came. However, I believe the Lord had mercy on me, and stepped into that place of loving discipleship for me.

You see, during the two months between when I met Shane, and the time Shane finally spoke to me, the Lord Himself was molding me into the person He had always intended me to be, a person who could participate in a courtship relationship with a clean heart. During the time I was finally learning the Father's heart for me, Shane was stewing away, trying to determine what to

do about the leading he was feeling, himself. In a matter of just a few months, the Lord was also showing Shane his giftings, the people groups he is called to minister to, and the shape and dynamics the Lord wanted for Shane's family, present and future. The Lord was preparing Shane for courtship, also.

Shane heard the Lord speak clearly to him the night of the prayer meeting in November, 1991. The Holy Spirit nudged him, letting him know that I was the one that He had chosen for Shane. We both are so grateful for the time it took Shane to get the courage (and the peace of God) to tell me about this leading. We were not ready at the time to take this leading in the proper manner. I needed to develop my relationship with the Lord, first, and Shane, who was spiritually more mature than I, needed to know that the Lord had plans for him in this area, but was not ready to walk in those plans, yet, either.

February, a month of birthday presents!

Shane finally felt permission from the Lord to share what was going on in his heart, in February of 1992. What a great "re-birthday" present I got, as we went for coffee the day before my spiritual "re-birthday," February 3. As Shane shared the things the Lord had been sharing with him, I knew in my heart that God had been preparing me, changing me into the sort of person who could come alongside Shane and do what I needed to do to support him in what God had called him to be.

The leading we had both been sensing was followed quickly by the confirmation and blessing of several of the leaders in our church. Our college pastors, Mark and Susan Buckner, and Sunday School teachers, Mike and Mary Davis, were instrumental in keeping us accountable and balanced during our courtship experience, especially because we were both over 200 miles from our families.

Shane had never been exposed to the idea of courtship, but I had when I was growing up. After I rededicated my life to the Lord, I asked my father to re-assume this level of authority in my life. At that time, he felt he could not do so, and so I had to use my own best judgement about male/female relationships, and just make sure Dad met them the next time he came to visit. But the Lord knew I needed a lot more protection this time, and He spoke to us about not to go out again until we had met my parents face to face and shared with them what was transpiring. Two weeks later, we went to see my parents, and shared with them how "serious" we believed our relationship was.

I would not recommend this step of action to any just couple interested in courtship. Our situation was unique, in that my parents were not readily available to screen potential suitors in general, and I needed to communicate to my father that I really needed him to "step up to the plate" for me, and thoroughly examine Shane's heart, as I felt sure that this would be my last chance to have Daddy do this for me. I wanted his love and protection so badly in this area, that I needed to make sure he understood that this was not a dating situation in any form whatsoever. But the ideal situation, in my opinion, would be that both the male and the female would be in such a strongly accountable, submitted relationship with their parents, that the man would be the first person to initiate discussion of intentional courtship, and he would discuss it with both fathers before discussing it with anyone else, including his potential mate.

What Our Courtship Looked Like

At the end of the weekend, Daddy did agree to watch over us. He began writing Shane letters, which I still have not seen, and probably never will, letters full of written character assignments, meant to develop Shane in areas of weakness and test him for his character strengths. I also know

that they contained my father's assessment of my character, positive and negative, and his advice for avoiding marital pitfalls he knew might lie ahead for us. This letter writing continued from the beginning of our courtship, through our engagement, until our wedding.

Our courtship consisted of: 1) Shane's written projects with my dad; 2) visiting our families several times; 3) continued spiritual growth, both individually and in group ministry opportunities through our church; 4) jointly holding a group Bible study in Shane's apartment; 5) finding practical ways to serve each other in appropriate ways (Example -- bringing coffee to Shane during midterms ministered to him on the level of our friendship during courtship. Something more along a wifely role -- say, doing his laundry, would not have been appropriate, as I was not yet his wife. We had excellent guidance in the area of maintaining appropriate boundaries from our church leaders and more mature friends.); 6) continuing our degree programs; 7) attending the Basic and Advanced Seminars of the Institute in Basic Life Principles. (We recommend these seminars wholeheartedly, as they were instrumental in bringing up topics of discussion in our courtship, and in helping us learn Scripture which assisted our decision-making in many aspects of family life. In fact, it was during the Advanced Seminar that we both individually heard the Lord speak to us about home-educating our children, and were challenged to consider allowing Him to fill our "quiver" with as many children as He chose, not we. These decisions took a considerable amount of "mind-renewal" (Rom. 12) for us to embrace, and that renewal primarily took place during dinner breaks at the Basic and Advanced Seminars! The seminars also contain far more detailed information on courtship and the Scriptural basis for parental oversight of the selection of a mate, and the courtship process.)

We agreed from the beginning of our courtship that the nature of our relationship before engagement needed to be outwardly-focused. While we never kept timecards, we agreed that we needed to focus more on our relationships with members of our same sexes, and stay focused on the larger ministry we were accomplishing through our college group. Our focus during courtship was growing together spiritually, learning how God wanted us to work together in His kingdom (although we did do "fun" things together both in groups and alone, on the advice of our elders). After engagement, we spent more "free" time alone with each other than we did in courtship.

Steps beyond courtship

As we took each successive step of spiritual growth, we gradually felt the Lord give us new permission to advance our relationship, and that is how the timing for engagement and marriage was determined. After we had made the progress He desired in growing together in ministry and in study of God's Word, then He gave us permission to become engaged, and become more emotionally close to each other. Our engagement was our time to learn how to "live with each other in an understanding way," where Shane got to learn what it was like to have a "sister" he'd never had, and I got to learn more about having a "brother." We learned a lot about our personality differences, and how to overcome them, during our engagement period. Shane was also prepared in his ability to allow someone to depend on him for minor details of care. Shortly after we were engaged, I developed an undiagnosable joint pain throughout my body. I needed him to do many things for me, from opening car doors, to helping me with grocery shopping. He had grown up in a family of independent people, and we feel that the Lord was using my weakness to perfect Shane's strengths as a husband. The joint pain dissipated just before we married, apparently when its season of usefulness was over.

But what about kissing?

One big issue, especially for Christians who have been out in the world before they meet and begin courting, is the issue of physical involvement. We made one mistake about this (kissing after that first coffee when Shane shared his intentions with me). But the Lord was merciful, and immediately convicted us not to get physically involved at all before we were engaged. Our counsel during engagement was to "keep everything at the hands and face." (An excellent book on the subject of Christian physical intimacy, for those considering courtship, or for those experiencing discord in their marriage relationship, is *Bonding*, by Donald Joy. The chapters dealing with post-wedding intimacy should be saved for individual, not joint, study the week before the wedding, and not earlier.) We believe that the counsel we received, and our experience in this area during courtship, laid a foundation for the tearing down of strongholds regarding our past relationships, and we believe it also afforded us a healthy, non-tempting environment in which to discover the Lord's ways regarding physical love between a man and his wife.

Some will believe it was too restrictive, some not restrictive enough. But we believe that the Lord knows better than we do what constitutes safe pasture for each individual couple, and that the ultimate safety comes in being accountable to Him, to parents and to other counsel in this area, as in all aspects of courtship.

Christ in us, the hope of glory

In conclusion, I want to express the importance of an ever-deepening relationship with God through the redeeming work of Jesus and the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit, to the success of any courtship experience. Had we not heard the Lord's voice regarding HIS intentions to join us in marriage, our experience might just be another "dating" experience with a Christian pridefulness of form. The key to courtship must be that both suitors and their parents are in agreement that the Lord seems to be pairing the couple for marriage, and the reliance on Him for His leading, training and timing. And His guidance does not stop at the instruction to pursue marriage. He continually guided us into experiences and studies which prepared us for our particular ministry to each other as husband and wife. Had either of us decided to tell Him No! at any of His instruction, we perhaps would not be married or whole today.

There were many times during our courtship when conflicts came, and we had to tell ourselves, "This is the person God has given me, and I need to submit this conflict to Him, for Him to change both of us into people who walk worthy of this awesome gift!" And when offenses come, even now in marriage, we rest daily in knowing that the Lord picked our spouse, and not us. So we know we did not miss God's perfect will for our mate, and we don't wonder "What if I had just chosen differently?"

In fact, our marriage is a perfect example of how the Lord takes note of our desires, no matter how "worldly" they seem, and provides for them. Long before I met Shane, I had spent an entire devotional telling the Lord what my heart's desire was for a husband. I knew that, coming out of impure relationships, it would take a very special man to love and accept me, and I knew that I was so lonely that I might make a big mistake in my social life, if I did not examine and study the qualities of a Godly husband who could live with me in an understanding way. So I spent that time making a list of character, life-style, and preference qualities that would make a mate to fit just for me.

I found that list, long forgotten, just before our wedding. Each and every item on that list, from acceptance of my past, to an appreciation of the arts, to a need for my spiritual gifts as I knew

them, every item on that list was fulfilled in Shane. For his part, Shane never made a list, but did comment to the Lord during our courtship that I was even more Shane's type than Shane had even known what his type was! Knowing all these things, the path we took toward each other, and God's presence in the intimate details of our lives, is the glue that holds our marriage together despite all that comes against those who live Godly in Christ.

It is our prayer that our testimony helps parents and children who are considering courtship to understand what the Lord intends for the marriage relationship and the part that He wants to play in the selection and development of mates for all He has chosen to give the gift of marriage.

Parents may feel free to adapt this testimony to the level of understanding of their children. I ask that the basic principles I share not be changed in a way that would alter their meanings or intents, and I ask that the actual factual details of our courtship not be altered in a way which would change their veracity, although some may choose to exclude certain details to make the sharing more age-appropriate.

Praying for many blessings as you seek God's best!

Amy Anderson

August 24, 1997