I promised long ago I would tell the story of how God brought Daniel and me together. It’s taken me a while to do so because it involves a number of things in my life, some of which are a little difficult for me to share. It’s really a testimony of the many lessons I learned through a period of my life, of how God guided me to where I am today.

If you’ve read Daniel’s testimony,* you’ll know that a preacher e-mailed him in the spring of 2001 and asked him to write me. That spring I had the opportunity to spend a month’s time studying with the seminary students in the Theological Training Program—a truly wonderful experience and one of the most precious times in my life.

When the month concluded, the minister who had been teaching us told me he had contacted a brother named Daniel in Southern California and asked him to write me. I was a little surprised, but I had suspected something when I saw my mother talking to this minister one Sabbath afternoon. I was twenty-four at the time, and I knew that was about the right age for marriage in her mind, that she was concerned about my “future.”

As Daniel testifies, he never wrote me; he even deleted the e-mail from that minister. It did not bother me very much that I never heard from Daniel, although I was curious which Daniel it was, and why he never wrote. As the book of Ecclesiastes tells us, however, God has made everything beautiful in its time (3:11), and indeed this is the case with our relationship.

INTERLUDE
That was about two years into my service as a full-time worker in the ministry. Serving God full time was something I had always wanted to do, so when the opportunity came about a year after I graduated from college, I felt both expectant and fulfilled.

I rejoiced every morning as I started the day that, as it says in the Lord’s Prayer, God was giving me my daily bread. Carrying high expectations, I also experienced tremendous challenges and frustrations. I learned that Satan is real and is always trying to exploit our weaknesses in a way that is not always apparent when we lead our lives day to day.

The apostle Paul wrote of how he disciplined his body and brought it into subjection, “lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27). This verse was a warning to me that our desire and fervency to serve is not sufficient, and that it is possible to become lost even though we have worked for the Lord with fervor.
Yet God’s grace is sufficient, and is shown perfect in our weakness (2 Cor 12:20).

A few months later and into the spring of 2002, I somehow fell into a state of depression. I think it was due to a number of factors, including the sudden death of my grandfather, but the overriding one was the frustration I felt in my service, at the lack of progress and how things just were not going according to plan. It was an overwhelming sense of helplessness that ballooned into a sense of hopelessness.

I was no longer sure of what I should be doing with my life. I had determined to commit myself wholly to the ministry, but I began to doubt my effectiveness and whether I could continue. As I lost any sense of direction, I began to feel resentful: Jesus said, “whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Mt 16:25), yet why could I only see a dead end?

I could not sleep at night and would be extremely fatigued during the day. I lost my appetite and would cry or become emotional without warning. My sister, a medical doctor, one day told me she believed I was depressed. I then realized what a state I was actually in.

There are times in our lives when we may encounter trouble or illness and because it is not shared by anyone, the pain and loneliness seem unbearable. I remember nights when everyone else was sound asleep, and it struck me deeply how I could be surrounded by loved ones and still feel entirely alone.

I can only say that prayer saved me.

Even though there were times when I doubted my faith, I somehow continued to pray, and I know that my family and others also prayed for me. Truly it is at those times that we need to pour it all out before the Lord, to pray without ceasing. I would often read the Psalms, which to me are a kind of prayer. Psalm 103:11-14 reads,

For as the heavens are high above the earth, 
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
As far as the east is from the west, 
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
As a father pities his children, 
So the Lord pities those who fear Him.
For He knows our frame; 
He remembers that we are dust.

As I faced my own weakness, I realized the fullness of God’s understanding and mercy. God knows how inherently frail and limited we are, better than we ourselves do; yet in spite of, or rather, for this very reason, His compassion towards us is immeasurable. He loves us not because of our value or what we can do for Him; all He asks is that as His creatures, His children, we fear Him. This realization brought me comfort, as I prayed, “Lord, You know me, You know my heart” and laid it before Him.

Over the course of many months, God healed me. The picture that has come to mind is of a crustacean that loses its shell, and the vulnerable, raw, shrunken body is exposed. Stripped of self, of any confidence or surety, I encountered the magnanimity of God and learned to submit my whole being to Him. Relying on Him, I discovered hope again and a constant abiding peace.

Even though my reality had not changed or disappeared, somehow it did not matter as long as I had the presence of God beside me. It was through this process of shedding and suffering that I grew into a stronger, confident shell.

Through my prayers, I came to realize that God calls us to serve not in one way, or in the way we think we ought to serve Him, but rather in all the roles we play, in all aspects of our lives. I thought of my grandmother, who had no career and in the eyes of the world no accomplishments of which she could boast, but who cared for those around her with her whole heart.

She did her best to raise us to be healthy, disciplined, and above all, to know, love, and fear God. Although she had no means of transport, she cared for widows and orphans (Jas 2:27)—broadly speaking those without family—as she could: by inviting them over for dinner; by telephoning them, especially when she had not seen them at church; and by keeping them in her prayers. She made it a point to greet and welcome everyone at church, especially visitors, even though her English speaking skills were limited.

I realized that I am called to serve God every day, through my roles as a daughter, sister, friend, co-worker—and yes, as a wife and mother.

**READINESS IS ALL**

Often we desire to be in a relationship out of our own need: to enjoy the pleasure of someone’s company, to have someone to go out with, to be cared for by someone. Certainly there were times during my struggles when I wished that I could find someone, settle down, start a new chapter in my life. I sought and prayed for a soul mate to be the solution to my problems—the proverbial knight in shining armor. Now I realized those yearnings denoted I had not been ready at all.

Having reached the point when I was prepared to serve another and give of myself, my prayers to God on the matter also changed. In the past I had set my heart upon certain qualities in a mate, but now I acknowledged that only God knows a man’s heart (Jer 17:9, 10). “Lord, You know man’s heart, You know what is best,” I prayed. “Let it be someone who truly loves you. Help me to love him and...”
serve him in whatever capacity I can.”

In November, we hosted a seminary student at our house and the topic of my “future” came up. I found out that he knew the minister had talked to me about Daniel, and I told him that Daniel had never written me. In December, I received an e-greeting from Daniel, and the abruptness and awkwardness of his message did not impress me very much. When I shared it with my mom, she encouraged me to keep an open mind.

The following month I was scheduled to travel to southern California, and so it was arranged that I would visit Canoga Park church, and Daniel would pick me up. On the way to church, Daniel got lost and we ended up on a toll road heading toward the San Bernardino Mountains. Perhaps due to his anxiousness to get to church on time, there was silence between us the rest of the ride.

After the morning sermon, Daniel was making announcements, and he appeared quite nervous; I was experiencing what I can only describe as a sinking feeling inside. Did God really want me to shed all expectations—in this matter, too, to “lose myself”? My experience, however, had taught me to rely on and pray openly to Him, and so that afternoon I prayed earnestly to God, “Lord, if this is Your will, open my heart.”

**I saw how God had, in His own way, supplied my “wants” above and beyond my expectations.**

After service, I expressed my uncertainty to the seminary student’s wife as we headed to their apartment, where Daniel would later meet us. She encouraged me to “give this a chance.” I remained somewhat disengaged as we sat in the kitchen and she and Daniel chatted, and even felt a little annoyed as he answered his cell phone during the conversation. As I watched him talk over the phone—it was his mom—I very consciously felt a change of heart.

It was as though God had flipped the switch, the light had turned on, and I saw him in a different light. After the phone call, Daniel turned to me and asked about an elderly brother from Philadelphia. We realized that it was my grandfather, and I found out that Daniel had accompanied my grandfather during his visit to Hong Kong several years ago. I recalled how my grandfather had appreciated the warm hospitality he had enjoyed during that trip. This “coincidence” further encouraged my change in outlook.

That evening, during our first date, we talked about our goals in life and realized that we shared the same aspirations. Daniel was firm that his first priority was in serving God, above all other pursuits. I suppose from that point on, I knew that he was the one.

Over the following months, as we spoke over the phone, I found myself falling very much in love. I saw how God had, in His own way, supplied my “wants” above and beyond my expectations. Even as I came to know our differences, especially after we were married, I have looked upon our relationship as something God planted, this love as a gift from God. That has made it all the more precious.

**THE FOUNDATION OF LOVE**

That spring, I also began to job hunt. A chance conversation led to a phone interview, and as things progressed, I prayed that if it were His will, that God would guide all things to go smoothly. In April, Daniel traveled to Philadelphia and we became engaged. The week after, I was flown out to California for an in-person interview and was offered the job.

Daniel drove up to Merced and we considered the possibility of moving there. This too, was an instance of shifting expectations—for one, I had always been adamant that I would never live in California. Yet each step had progressed so smoothly, and everything just felt right. After I flew home, however, Daniel expressed his reservations over the phone. I was shaken, because I had come to feel that this was God’s will, and this was our first occasion of difference of opinion.

After our conversation, I knelt down to pray, and through prayer was led to another lesson. 1 John 4:18 states there is no fear in love; as I meditated on this, I came to realize how our love for God is founded upon and manifest by our faith in Him. How can we say that we love God if we do not believe in Him and put our trust in Him? Similarly, my love for Daniel must be founded on trust in him. So I learned to set aside my own opinion and said to Daniel with a calm and open heart, “I trust you to make the right decision for us.”

This is a lesson I’ve returned to time and again in our new life together in Merced. It isn’t always apparent what God has planned for us, and certainly there have been challenges living so far from what is familiar. Part of me knows it is the training—this life in the “wilderness”—that God has sent us into the world. The test is living out the lesson that trusting in the Lord, just as serving Him, is a conscious, active choice we make each day.*

*You can read Daniel’s side of the story in Manna 53 pages 28-31, “Tofu Custard and Orange Peel: How God Arranged our ‘Unlikely’ Match.”