Tofu Custard and Orange Peel:
How God Arranged Our "Unlikely" Match

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Even though my wife, Emily, and I began our relationship in 2002, I feel that God prepared our path long ago. The first time I met her was during the National Youth Theological Seminar held in Philadelphia in 1997. I remembered Emily because she was a member of the church in Philadelphia, and she always seemed to be running around, very busy.

Actually, she didn’t remember me. Emily and I had to show each other the pictures to prove that I was there. Emily’s dad, however, remembered me—and that would be important later. Why did he remember me? Because I helped him carry a lot of bottles of water. So I encourage brothers who are single to help out in church. It’s really amazing because from a little thing we do, we can receive great blessings.

The second time I met Emily was half a year later. At that time I was studying in Wisconsin, and I flew back to California for winter break. Unfortunately, I didn’t have a place to stay, and the church in Garden Grove was hosting a student spiritual convocation. So I attended the convocation while lodging at church.

After the convocation, they also hosted a literary ministry seminar, and I was forced to stay. During the seminar, I met Emily again. She gave me the same impression—very busy, running around.

I noticed another quality of hers: she can write well. That was the second time I met her, though she again didn’t have much of an impression of my being there. Even though I had met her twice, we didn’t really talk either time.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Three years later, in the spring of 2001, I suddenly received an e-mail from a preacher. He mentioned that a brother had told him about me, and said that I was a good brother. The preacher said there was a sister in Philadelphia church who was also very good. So he asked me to write her an e-mail if I was interested.

My first thought upon reading that e-mail was that he had written the wrong Daniel, because there are many Daniels in Southern California. But I read it again, and he also mentioned the Northridge Prayer House (which is now Canoga Park church) and I was the only Daniel there.

So my second reaction was “No way! It’s impossible—is this preacher for real?” Because to me, Emily is like tofu custard, because she is very gentle, soft and sweet, but I am just like orange peel—rough and bitter. I just felt there was no way we could be a match for each other.

Of course, that was not my main reason. I wasn’t ready at the time because I had just started working and my life was not that stable. I needed to support my family, and my sister was going to college in two years. In addition, since the prayer house in Northridge was growing, a lot of holy work needed to be done, and I thought that I didn’t have the time and effort for a relationship.
So I prayed about it, but I did not feel good about it. Since I received the e-mail from the preacher, I assumed that it was just between him and me. I assumed Emily didn’t know about it. I thought if I were to write her an e-mail she might not have any idea what was going on.

So I deleted the e-mail from the preacher, and I didn’t write to anyone—neither to the preacher nor to Emily. I just kept it in prayer and believed that God would prepare my future.

A SECOND TRY

My busy life helped me forget about the incident. I also assumed that Emily might be with a better brother already.

A year and a half later, in November 2002, a seminary student and his wife asked me to dinner, and I thought they wanted to discuss some things for the upcoming National Church Conference. That was true, but it was only part of the dinner. After we finished discussing church business, they asked me if I was still interested in getting to know Emily.

I was shocked, because I wasn’t prepared for this conversation. So I told them what I did one and a half years ago and that I thought Emily probably was not free to begin a courtship with me anymore.

But this seminary student and the marriage counselor in Philadelphia church apparently had been occupied with this holy work. He told me that he had just come back from Philadelphia, and that he had talked to her parents. He also quoted Emily as saying, “He still hasn’t written me.”

When I heard this my heart sank, because I didn’t know she knew about it, and I was very embarrassed. I didn’t know how I could write to her, even though I wanted to. At the beginning, I was pretty insistent that I did not want to start the courtship for the same old reasons. But through prayers and encouragement from the student and his wife, I decided to give it a try, without expecting too much.

I thought she would be mad at me, so I sent her an e-card and apologized to her, and explained why I had not written. Within twenty-four hours, she replied and said she wasn’t mad. Afterward, I felt better, so I spoke to my mom over the phone and asked for permission to start a relationship. She agreed, and Emily and I started to e-mail each other.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND SHARED GOALS

In January 2003, Emily came to Southern California for a church meeting. I arranged to drive her from Irvine church to Canoga Park church for Sabbath service. Since I didn’t usually drive to the Irvine area, we got lost along the way.

I drove onto a toll highway towards Riverside, which is east of Los Angeles. Canoga Park is to the north and west of Los Angeles. I was very frustrated at the time because we were in the middle of the mountains, and I had to keep myself calm.

I kept saying “Hallelujah” in my mind, until we stopped at the toll station, and I asked the toll officer for directions back. By that time, I thought she must have known that we were lost.

I’ve talked about this testimony with her after we were married, and Emily has told me that one of the lessons she learned through our relationship is, “First impressions are not always right.” What does that mean? I’ll let her share her side of the testimony.

After the service, we managed to meet at the house of the seminary student. As we chatted with his wife, I discovered that God had planted another seed even earlier.

During the conversation, I asked Emily if an elderly brother from Philadelphia Church was doing all right. In the summer of 1996, when I went back to Hong Kong for summer vacation, there was an elderly brother traveling from Philadelphia to China, who stopped in Hong Kong.
At the time, I didn’t even know who Emily was. Since I was free on summer break, the preacher asked me to take him around.

After I told her the story, Emily told me that the elderly brother was her grandfather. She said that her grandfather had talked about a nice brother who had taken him around Hong Kong. She finally knew that it had been me. Indeed, God’s plan is truly amazing.

After chatting, I took Emily to dinner, and after dinner we took a walk. As we walked, we immediately began to talk about our spiritual goals. She told me that serving God was very important to her, and that she would still serve God even after she got married. When I heard this, I checked off the first item on my mental checklist.

In the past, I had seen a lot of youths in church who lost their fervency for the Lord after starting a relationship. I didn’t want to be like that—I would rather stay single. I used to call myself “Daniel Paul” to keep my distance from sisters in church. But that was the past.

As we talked that evening, God seemed to check off all the items on my checklist. I was pretty sure that she was the one, that we would be compatible. At the time, I didn’t think about our differences.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COURTSHIP

We began to talk over the phone after that. We couldn’t talk much because she was on the East Coast and I was on the West Coast, and it was hard to find a time that would work for the both of us. Most of our conversations were about our background, family, and church.

In April 2003, I was laid off, so I had time to fly to Philadelphia and visit Emily and her family. During that week, I attended the spiritual convocation in Philadelphia; people thought I had come just for that event since nobody knew about our courtship.

After the convocation, Emily took me around her hometown. She said one thing during that trip that confirmed my feelings that she was the one. She said, “Bring me with you when you serve the Lord.” I thank God that He gave me a very good helper.

Two days before I left for California, the thought of engagement crossed my mind. I called my mom again for permission, and she was surprised because it had only been four months. My father was especially surprised because I had told my mom not to tell him about the courtship, since he tends to worry a lot. I wanted to make sure that everything was right before I told him about it—but it all happened so fast. Thank God, they were very happy.

The next day, the day before I left, Emily and I had lunch with her mom. At the end of the meal, I asked her mom if I could marry Emily, and if we could arrange for an engagement. I think my question surprised Emily, her mom, and even myself. Her mom replied with a laugh—I guess it was a happy laugh.

After lunch, Emily and I went to shop for the engagement ring. I proposed to her in front of a convenience store as we were standing at the intersection, waiting to cross the street at a red light.

That’s how God arranged our marriage. After we were engaged, everyone heard the news, and most of my religious education students couldn’t believe it until I showed them the pictures.

I really thank God for His arrangement. Throughout this experience, I truly understand what it means when the Bible says to seek His kingdom first, and everything else will be given to us.

An Important Principle

At the beginning of our relationship, I mentioned to Emily that I had a principle. I told her that I wouldn’t hold her hand before our wedding. A kiss was definitely out of the question.
Since East Coast people seem to like to hug each other, any hugging would be limited to friendly hugs, and only on special occasions, and only for a few seconds.

She was surprised. She felt it was unbelievable, so I explained to her why. When I was a Junior 2 student in my religious education class, my classmates and I made the determination that the next person who held our hand would be our spouse. So we kept this determination.

Also, I truly wanted God to attend our wedding and give us His blessing. Yes, we can have a wedding in church, but it doesn’t mean that God will be attending. I looked forward to the blessings of God because, as our preacher and teacher in Hong Kong counseled, a life without God’s blessing is very pitiful.

Once I explained this to her, she seemed to accept it. That’s how we managed our relationship before the wedding. During our wedding day, we really thanked God that we did this, because it can be considered the most memorable day of our life. For, whatever we did, it was for the first time. We felt so close to each other.

THE BLESSINGS OF MARRIAGE

Gradually, after the wedding, we both felt that the blessings of God were upon us. His blessings are the differences that we have. If I ask anyone who knows us, they can give us a list of differences without a problem.

On the other hand, I feel these differences are truly God’s blessings. For example, Emily likes to read. She majored in literature. She reads and thinks a lot, but because she thinks too much she gets herself in trouble.

But for me, the only thing I finish reading is the Bible and church publications. I hardly think at all. So sometimes I can help release her troubles.

Emily is a librarian; but when I’m around a lot of books, I get a headache. I study better at home than at the library. I’ve improved, though—I’m almost finished with the second book she gave me to read.

I’ve learned that our true match is when we have differences, because from the differences we can learn from each other and help each other improve. The more differences we have, the more blessings we have. If everything about us were the same, then one of us would be unnecessary. So I thank God.

I praise and thank God He has given me the most wonderful gift in the world: that is, a wonderful wife and her family. May all the glory be unto His holy name.