

Runaway Bride

by Carole Suzanne Jackson

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In the two years we dated, I knew about substance abuse in his distant past. Now, I saw a different person—a guy who had abused drugs on and off since high school and still believed them acceptable for managing stress.

I sought guidance from our premarital counselor, and knew what I had to do. I stood before Don and squared my shoulders to brace myself for the conversation. “Let’s work through this first.”

His eyes flashed in anger. “You’ve been influenced by your friends.”

I glared back. “You fed me marijuana brownies, knowing I hate substance abuse!”

“I messed up. It won’t happen again.” He pleaded and looked deep into my eyes.

“You can’t promise to quit using illegal drugs. I can’t trust you.”

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“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

(NIV)
Philippians 4:5-7

Restored by Touch ~Reaching deep with gentle touch.

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“I won’t wait.” His voice quivered.

“You leave me no choice. Please, work through this,” I said weeping. I caressed his hand and returned his tearful gaze.

“Don’t leave,” he whispered, and drew me closer. We held each other as we wept. Though I could feel his chest heave with sorrow, fear of a bad marriage and refusal to consider divorce as an option helped me hold my decision.

Broken Engagement; Broken Heart

Two days before the set date, I officially called off my wedding. Nothing in life seemed as fulfilling without Don. I’d given up my apartment and financial stability. Don could have been the main source of income during the start of our marriage and my first year of college enrollment.

While mourning, I could imagine Don’s warmth and tender kisses. I could almost hear his laughter. These recollections mixed with the taste of gut-wrenching tears. On our wedding date, I wished I could sleep forever. My would-be maid of honor, Kathy, called to check on me. She knew Mom and Dad were giving me time to regroup before they came to town.

Kathy offered the nudge I needed to get out of the house—horse riding. The autumn sun warmed my skin and a cool breeze caressed my hair as we navigated narrow paths in single file. Bottlebrush pine scent filled the air, instead of the expected fragrance of wedding flowers and Don’s cologne intertwined with my perfume. My jean-clad knees pressed the saddle while my form-fitted white satin gown graced a closet. Horses’ hooves thudded as I longed to stride in cadence to the wedding march. Kathy clutched her horse’s bridle reins and followed me; I preferred that she’d have led me down the church isle with bridal flowers in hand. I agonized not knowing Don’s whereabouts or mental state.

Though praising God felt foreign in that wilderness of soul, I knew the power of pondering God’s attributes. Memorized Scriptures helped me form prayers. *___ Your joy, Holy Lord, is my strength. You will never leave me nor forsake me. You are worthy to be praised apart from feelings. I adore you. ___*

As my emotional pain intensified, I strained to consider God’s goodness. I recollected past situations when I’d prayed through anxiety into peace. As the horse jostled along the trail, I decided to obey Hebrews 10:23. “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” My anguish began to give way as I grabbed hold of hope.

The Joy of the Lord

I started to sense God surrounding me. The movement of the horse rocked me in the saddle. The cloudless sky proclaimed God on His throne. I acknowledged Him as tender and sweet to comfort me, yet strong to meet my needs.

Slowly my determination gave way to a twinge of elation. What a surprise when childlike exuberance bubbled. *This must be the “joy of the Lord” described in the Bible.* The Holy Spirit transformed me in the face of multiple losses.

Fits of uncontrollable weeping did resurface in the coming months. Whenever my resolve to draw close to God weakened, the temptation to dwell on my difficulties strengthened.

When I chose to focus on God, joy often emerged. Corrie ten Boom’s war stories inspired me to go to that place where God’s children rise above the horrors life hands them. She had lost everything when Nazis invaded Holland, yet she could say, “There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still.”

Exercise in Faith

God used my ordeal to secure His strength in me and develop deeper intimacy between us. So many marvels transpired as a result of prayer. Multiple provisions—housing, finance and employment—proved God was my source.

When we face possible devastation, two choices become evident—misery or faith. We can give up on life emotionally and sometimes physically or choose life from God.

God gives each of us a measure of faith: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” — Hebrews 12:2a. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” — Hebrews 11:1.

Two years passed before my general sense of normalcy returned, and I will always wonder what became of Don. He refused to restore contact with our mutual friends or me.

For comfort, I sometimes imagined resting my head in Father God's lap as though I were a small child. In staying God-focused through prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, my attitude changed from fear and sorrow to faith. Healing resulted.

Supportive friends and family also brought me comfort by listening and caring. Mom said, "Your God has always cared for you, so He will make a way now." This impacted me because she has never shared my faith.

I'm more useful to God now than I would have been had I lived happily ever after. The adventure of being deep in love expanded my understanding of relationships. The healing process sensitized me to the needs of others. As a result, I can better rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

"Long before Don and I became a couple, I began nurturing awareness of God's closeness in ordinary life moments. This prepared me for our canceled wedding day as it laid the groundwork for me to turn to God in distress.

Now, years later, through many successes and disappointments, life goes richly forward with the living God who brings victory in defeat and joy in trials as we exercise the faith He has given us.

~ end story ~

Note: Names have been changed to protect identities.
New International Version cited unless otherwise indicated.

Look Ups

Verses Carole referenced during her crisis that helped her look past her broken heart to God:

- ❖ Nehemiah 8:10b; Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5b; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Samuel 22:4; Psalm 145:3; Philippians 4:8; Romans 7:4; 8:32, 14:8; and Galatians 3:29.
- ❖ Habakkuk 3: 17-19a
- ❖ Philippians 4:5-7
- ❖ Romans 12:15, 2, Corinthians 1:3-5

A Quite Moment with God

Philippians 4:5-7

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Prayer

Father God, help me submit my anxious thoughts to you. Bring them to my awareness and empower me to replace them with thoughts of your faithfulness. Remind me of scriptures that apply to my situation. Thank you that you make a way for your children when we can't see a way through our difficulties. Enable me to choose your ways when I must make tough choices. Thank you that the peace you give guards my heart and mind. I need you, Father, and the work of your Holy Spirit in my life. I ask these things in light of Jesus' provision. Amen.

Crisis Quenchers

- ❖ Think of a crisis you experienced. How did God use that event in your life?
- ❖ What types of things do you do to keep your focus on God? How have they helped nurture joyful moments with God?
- ❖ Pray that your first response to any circumstance will be to pray, especially when you become anxious. (Matt. 6:25-32; Phil. 4:5-7; Jer. 33:3).

The roles of sorrow and suffering in God's Kingdom:

Non-Fiction Books:

When God Doesn't Make Sense, by James C. Dobson

Fiction Book:

Hinds' Feet on High Places by Hannah Hurnard. "This is a beautiful allegory dramatizing the yearning of God's children to be led to new heights of love, joy, and victory." (Amazon.com review)