

Getting the Dreaded Call

My husband and I have been trying to decide if we should keep our land line or go with our cell phones only. It would be lovely to be rid of the telemarketers who congratulates us by saying: “You have won a three day trip to Las Vegas” or the dinner time calls wanting an opinion on a political issue. Think with me for a moment about phone calls of another nature – ones that changed your pathway in life. It is a phone call that creates an unexpected detour or a change of trajectory. Perhaps you can recall one of those “detour” calls.

Was it a call from the Human Resource office directing you to attend a personal meeting with the head of the department at 3:30 on Friday afternoon?

Or a call from the Doctor’s office. Stating that although you have an appointment next Tuesday, the test results are back and the Doctor wants to see you tomorrow morning.

Or perhaps a call from a brother or sister that went like this: “I am at the hospital with Nana. Things are bad. You need to come as soon as you can”.

Or from your son or daughter. “Mom, Dad, I am at the police station. I am in trouble. Can you come down here and help me?”

I had such a call. My call was on a Wednesday night just after 11:00 PM when the news of the murder of my sister was reported as a Home Invasion. A robbery that had gone terribly wrong. My sister had been beaten and stabbed and there were signs of a robbery. That call rocked my world.

I had been a Christian for as long as I could remember. Upon reflection I believe the best way to state my relationship with God was as a “one toe over the line” Christian. I attended church regularly, was active in church activities and professed to be a Christian. And yet I had a shallow trust in God and I was missing a deep relationship with Jesus.

All the classic symptoms of grief overwhelmed me during the weeks and months that followed that call. I was having stomach pain, I was angry and very hard to be around as the details of the murder unfolded. Because 10 days after

my sister's death my brother-in-law was arrested for her murder. I felt deep sadness. I felt betrayed by my brother-in-law who had been a part of the family for thirty-five years and yet had killed my sister. I also felt - betrayed by God. How could He let this happen to my sister? She was the deeply rooted Christian I strived to be. She was an honest authentic Christian.

I recall standing at the kitchen sink, no doubt with my hand on my hip, saying out loud. "God, were you not paying attention? What happened to you being faithful to protect her? Did you blink when this terrible thing happened to my sister?"

A few months after my sister's death, I signed up for a grief recovery class at my church. It was the first one ever offered. I learned many things over those weeks of the course. The first night, I cried uncontrollably for two hours. I went home and told my family. "I am in real trouble. I don't know how to grieve and I am so mad." I was given permission that night to say out loud – I am angry with my brother-in-law and I am angry at GOD!

Anger, I learned was a normal reaction in many grief related situations. But you see, I had developed my own brand of anger. I had allowed anger to become the center piece of my being. I call it now, "smoldering rage". As a Christian woman, I thought I was not allowed to get mad. So, I buried the deep hurt, anger and sadness but it became toxic. It permeated every part of my being. Physically, my body was telling me it was hurting with stomach and headaches. Emotionally, I cried a lot! Spiritually, I questioned my trust in God. Intellectually, I struggled to think clearly at work.

I also learned about free will. I had to understand that God gives us free will. He loves us so much that we get to choose to love him or choose to reject him. We get to choose right from wrong. My brother-in-law had used his free will to choose. He chose a sinful life which resulted in the murder of my sister. But the greatest lesson I learned was God's faithfulness which could be best seen through thankful eyes.

God's faithfulness was un failing in those early days. The night of the murder, an investigator reported to the house immediately after the 911 call. The investigator had just completed an intense training session on evidence gathering. His observation at the crime scene combined with the evidence found the next

morning led to the arrest. He began to collect “Red Flags” as he called them when he arrived at the crime scene. The officer had taken notice of the way my brother-in-law was dressed, his emotional state and how he responded to questions. When it was time for his statement to be taken, the investigator spotted inconsistencies in the story as well. Details gathered that night pointed the officer to dig deeper into the suspicious story that was being spun by my brother-in-law.

The investigator was doing his best work when he asked my brother-in-law to retrace his activities from the night before. He noted times and distances and checked them against the building logs where he said he was during the murder. The investigator noticed a dumpster behind the office building where my brother-in-law worked. He called the crime lab to have the dumpster picked up and processed at a secure location. In the dumpster was a plastic bag which held the evidence which was later the basis of the conviction. The dumpster was not picked up by a trash hauler the night of the murder, as it normally would have been. The driver called in sick. That dumpster would have been sent to a landfill. The mother lode of the evidence would have been lost forever. They found the knife, pipe, the stolen items and five rubber gloves which had fingerprints of my brother-in-law and my sister’s blood on the gloves. Many of those details were not disclosed to my family for almost a year.

God protected the evidence and he prompted the investigator to carefully evaluate and investigate the observable details of the case.

The court date was set three times before it finally began in October, two and a half years after my sister’s death. About six months prior to the final trial date, I prayed with other members of my family five nights a week at 10:00 PM. It was during those nightly prayer times that I began to be thankful for what God had done. I saw with thankful eyes His amazing provision and faithfulness. We always included in our prayers the judge, (we did not know who it would be – but God did), the jury panel, (again, they were not selected until two days before the trial began but God knew who they were), for those that would testify and for the two state employed prosecutors who presented the case. They were men of faith who worked hard to present the evidence in a compelling way. My brother-in-law spent two million dollars for his defense. There were seven attorneys in the

courtroom every day. They rolled in stacks of file boxes of “evidence” every day as a back drop to the attorney’s presence. If you know the story of David and Goliath, the big guys against the little guys – that was the courtroom drama.

At the end of the trial, my brother-in-law was found guilty and sentenced to thirty-two years in prison. He is still in prison. God’s fingerprints – His hands of protection were all over the investigation, the courtroom testimony and the verdict.

The impact of that grief recovery class did not end after six weeks. In those weeks I have learned new coping skills to deal with my anger. I learned that my choice not to forgive my brother-in-law was crushing me. I had to forgive to be able to be content again. I knew if God forgives me of my sins, through the gift of Jesus who sacrificed his life for me, I needed to forgive others too.

I have been inspired to look further into the lessons of grief. One of the leaders of the grief class said. “Sharon came to class and she never went home”. As I began to research writings on grief I found most of the material up to that time was secular in nature. You may know the name Elizabeth Kubler-Ross who wrote ground breaking materials on grief. Her work, however, was with people in hospitals who were dying, not with the survivors of a tragic loss. The “God understands your grief experience. He felt grief too because his son, Jesus died” was not being shared with those who grieved. The concept of God’s comfort and faithfulness – was missing. I began a grief recovery ministry that has been a part of my life for almost 20 years. I have shared God’s model of grieving with thousands of grieving people who have suffered losses such as death of parent/s, child, spouse, experiencing a miscarriage, divorce, job loss, death of a beloved pet, illness, impact of addiction and abortion. I am certified as a Greif Facilitator. I have spoken at national conferences and written two Christian based books on grief. The bible says. *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and are called to his purpose.* I, to my utter surprise - was called.

Imagine for a moment there is another call for you. It is an open line to God. He is waiting to hear from you. By speaking, you can change – perhaps for the second time in your life --- the trajectory of your life. God, because he loves you so much sent his son, Jesus to teach all of us how to live and most important

to die for our sins. Jesus took on the sins of all of us so that we can be in heaven for eternity when we die. Granting you free will to choose Him, you can ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit so you can live now as a witness to others of God's love.

I want to restate this truth - God is faithfulness. I see his faithfulness with thankful eyes. I am thankful for the driver who did not come to work, as the evidence would have been lost. I am thankful for the recent training the investigator had just taken. I am thankful for the jury who listened and discerned the evidence to determine the verdict. I am thankful that I have forgiven my brother-in-law and do not carry the burden of un-forgiveness. I am thankful for the peace that I live out every day. I am thankful that when you and I feel abandoned, angry, sad, loaded up with guilt and resentment or any other negative emotion, God can change all that. He can be glorified in the midst of the most awful circumstances.

Answer His call. You will find God is faithful.

God Bless you.

Sharon Fox

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