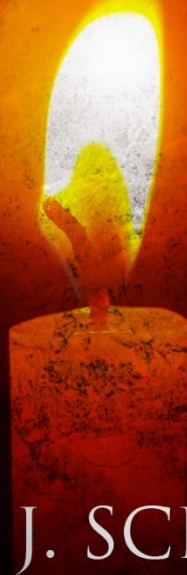


MURDER IN THE CHURCH

FOREWORD BY
CARMAN

WHEN SPIRITUAL WEAKNESS AND
ABUSIVE POWER COLLIDE



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This story is based on true accounts that occurred in a church the author led as pastor. Names,
times and locations have been changed to protect privacies.

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Day One

A Saturday One September

It began on a Saturday night. Our phone rang at about 10:15.

As pastors, anytime we receive a call after nine thirty or so, we hold our breath. But Saturday nights are the worst because of the importance of the day that follows. A late Saturday night call usually meant an empty post in some area of ministry the next day, one we would have to fill.

I was in our downstairs storage area getting ready for a camping trip I was going to be making in a few weeks, when I heard the phone rattle off its familiar series of rings. Because it was so late and realizing it to be a Saturday night call, my apprehension rose quickly, and I stopped what I was doing to listen. But all I could hear through the walls was mumbling, so I went on with what I was doing.

“Hi, Sarah,” my wife Shirley told me later the conversation began. Then she asked, “Sarah, is everything all right?”

Speaking in a calm and controlled voice, Sarah said, “Well, that’s why I’m calling. I thought I should tell you that Raymond just left me for another man.”

Shirley’s first reaction wasn’t shock. It was disbelief. Sarah’s proper, carefully spoken words, along with the unusual message she placed before my wife, caused her to think, just for a moment, that Sarah was kidding. But Shirley caught herself before she laughed, and responded, “Excuse me, Sarah. What did you just say?”

Sarah repeated herself, continuing to talk in an unusually controlled and formal voice for normal conversation, let alone for communicating the bombshell of a lifetime.

Still downstairs, I continued compiling my gear but kept one ear aimed upstairs to see if the mumbling would stop.

“I know it sounds a bit unusual, but you remember Daniel Rogers, don’t you? He visited our church a few weeks ago. Well, I told you about our dinner party tonight. Raymond insisted that Daniel attend. So, I agreed. We all had a wonderful time. Daniel seemed to have a bit of a smirk on his face for most of the evening, but I didn’t think much about it because I was having such a good time laughing and visiting with our friends.”

Sarah went on, “After our guests left, Raymond asked if he and Daniel could talk to me for a few minutes. I agreed, and we sat down at the kitchen table. That is where he told me that he and Daniel were lovers, that he has had affairs with other men, and he has discovered he is gay. He and Daniel want to go into business together, be lovers, and he wants me to start divorce proceedings this week. He left tonight to move in with Daniel.”

My wife took a long, deep breath, and then, after a longer pause, asked sympathetically, “Sarah, do you want Chris and I to come over to be with you and pray with you?”

That is when curiosity got the best of me. I came up the stairs and walked into the room just in time to see the puzzled look on my wife’s face. I could tell all was not fine.

Shirley’s mouth was open in awe. As I came to a stop and stood in front of her, her eyes told the story. As if she knew exactly why I had come upstairs, they shouted, “This call does not represent your typical emergency. It represents more—much more!”

Her eyes looking into mine, communicated a mixture of dismay, disbelief, and horror all at the same time. But I was clueless. I stood in front of her and listened with great anticipation in order to grasp some understanding of what was going on.

In response to Shirley's question, Sarah said, "No, you don't need to come over. Christina will be coming home from work soon, and I will need to talk with her. I think it is best that I talk to her by herself first. I guess I owe that to her as our daughter. I don't think I'll come to church in the morning if that's all right. I want to stay near the phone in case Raymond calls."

"I understand. Listen Sarah, we are busy all day tomorrow with a lunch and a leadership meeting, and we won't be done until about eight-thirty. We can come over then, or we can cancel our lunch after church."

"No, don't cancel anything. Raymond will probably come over tomorrow and if you are here, he might not come in if he feels ashamed in front of you. If eight-thirty is all right for you, it's fine for me too."

Then turning and looking away to regain her focus, Shirley said, "Sarah, let me pray with you."

She prayed a prayer that showed concern for Sarah and Raymond, but not with words that would clue me into the problem. Then she hung up the phone and stared straight ahead not saying a word. I waited as long as I could, attempting to allow her time to tell me the scoop on her own—perhaps five seconds.

I finally prodded, "Well, what is it?"

She answered, "Raymond . . . left Sarah . . . are you ready for this . . . for another man!" I had to sit down.

Looking Back

Little did we know that call would be the beginning of a nine-day long journey for us to hell and back.

But hell began much earlier for Raymond.

Raymond's home during his early years was dominated by positive female influences and negative male influences. Raymond was a helpless and unaware victim of the dysfunctional forces associated with these early imprints upon his psyche.

During Raymond's impressionable years, he heard so much yelling and screaming from his father that his home seemed more like a battlefield than a family. When the kids did something wrong such as break a vase or smudge the carpet, his mom would come to their rescue. She would hide the indiscretion and repair the broken or disfigured item before their father could find out about it.

She wasn't an enabler; she was a savior. If she didn't take on that role, their father would fly into one of his angry tirades and terrorize her vulnerable children or her. Raymond felt it was "us against him."

When Raymond's father did witness or find out about a miscue, he would find something to hit with as quickly as he could—a strap, a belt, or something more solid. Then he would come out swinging.

While growing up, as with most kids, Raymond and his sisters were involved in activities in the school they attended, such as plays, concerts, sports, and the like. His dad never came to watch—not even once. His mother was there, but his father would never darken the school

doors. It seemed he felt that his job was to work and watch television. He felt that supporting his kids in their activities, their involvements, and their lives, was simply not in his job description.

Raymond's father also had a favorite word. *Stupid!* He used it freely to describe the things he disapproved of. It wouldn't have been so bad if the members of his family weren't the primary objects of his disapproval. Some of the standout memories Raymond had of his father were the times when he would berate his son with this destructive word. "Raymond, how could you do such a *stupid* thing?" "Your idea is *stupid*." "Everything you do is *stupid*." "Everything you say is *stupid*." "Raymond, *you* are *stupid*."

This would explain why Raymond never felt like his father approved of anything he was, did, or said. Raymond's recollection was that he never heard his father voice approving words in his direction—ever. From the time Raymond was born until his father died at eighty, this held true. Never did he hear, "Good job, son," or "Good idea, Raymond." Never did he hear, "Good try," or "You're a good kid." A more accurate remembrance of his father's words was, "Raymond, you are good for nothing."

Furthermore, Raymond never received a hug, a smile, a wink, or a pat on the back suggesting that his father felt well or proud of him.

In Raymond's memory, his father never gave him anything, bought him anything, encouraged him in anything, or complimented him for anything. He only made Raymond feel bad.

Other issues were present as well. At a certain point in his young life, Raymond decided competitive sports were not his cup of tea. This, perhaps, was the issue that once and for all, broke down what little camaraderie may have potentially existed between Raymond and his father.

You see Raymond's dad was a sports fanatic. He watched every game on television, listened by radio to the games not televised, and read the sport's section of the newspaper at the same time. He thought sports were all there was to life. He didn't have time for a son who thought differently.

In contrast, Raymond's mother was exemplary. She attended every function her kids participated in at school. She tucked the kids in at night, gave them affection, and told them she loved them. When funds permitted, she bought toys, candy, ice cream cones, and other treats for them. She did so from her own earnings, because Raymond's father refused to part with his money for such frivolous kindnesses for his children.

Compared to how he felt about his father, Raymond's mother was his hero and heroine. His sisters and mom were his friends, fellow soldiers and comrades in arms, in battle against the evil and masculine tyrant who oppressed his formative years.

In later years, when asked if he hated his father, he would respond, "No, I just feel sorry for him." This translated to an overwhelming lack of respect that Raymond held for his dad.

What Raymond didn't realize was that, somewhere down deep in the inner recesses of his soul, another kind of disrespect was also brewing—disrespect for maleness and a lack of trust for the whole concept of manhood. Along with that, confusion was developing in his heart about what a man should be. The only example he had of a man was the poor example of his father.

No one could say for sure that these feelings translated into a full-blown rejection of heterosexuality. But at the very least, it raised the level of curiosity for gayness in his soul.

One can only imagine from these early abuses, that Raymond struggled with self-esteem issues his whole life. He questioned his identity, his abilities, his self-image, and, at a certain point, his sexual identity.

His soul had been bruised. This was the beginning of the “hell” in Raymond’s life. But this whole era in Raymond’s adolescent years wasn’t the only factor influencing him to consider other options sexually.

By the summer prior to the fateful September, Raymond had been married to Sarah for almost thirty years. Their early marriage seemed to be vibrant enough, but over time it grew cold.

Their daughter, Christina, became their focus. Raymond loved his daughter, but his flame for Sarah was flickering badly. By the time of the woeful Saturday night phone call Raymond had not been intimate with his wife for ten years.

Raymond constantly picked on Sarah for her foolishness and her lack of attentiveness to the details of the house, such as cleaning, cooking, and so forth.

While Raymond picked, Sarah would nag at him for his forgetfulness, his lack of discipline in monetary issues, and in her estimation, his dull-wittedness. In short, virtually no expressions of love, affection, or intimacy were being exchanged between them, and attraction for each other was by this time nonexistent. They weren’t husband and wife; they were roommates; and they were maintaining a casual relationship at best.

Alone, these two very real problems were plenty to bait the trap of gay curiosity in Raymond’s heart, but there was more.

Trying God

About the time Raymond met and married Sarah, he also met some people who were Christians. These people became close lifetime friends. They brought Raymond and Sarah to church, and after a few services, when an invitation was given for people to become Christians, Raymond and Sarah both responded. Sarah felt and experienced very real emotions and changes in her life, but not so Raymond. He was moved by the message and the service, and really wanted to invite Christ into his life—which he did. But that is where it seemed to stop. He never felt moved again. He never felt the fresh, new vibrancy of the Christian “born-again” experience. Something prevented Raymond from experiencing God, growing in Him, or even knowing Him.

The human relationships Raymond developed were good, but they weren’t the kind that fostered an environment of accountability. None of his friends felt the freedom to challenge Raymond concerning his coldness toward Christ, maybe because that kind of accountability in relationships wasn’t taught back then. Or perhaps it was because those friends never got close enough to Raymond to detect it; or it could be that Raymond himself wouldn’t allow it.

Whatever the cause, these friendships forfeited further intimacy when an ugly church split occurred. Contact waned and any hope of healthy confrontation for Raymond was whisked away in the throes of relational separations.

So, Raymond was left pretty much on his own. Concerning his spiritual choices, he shot from the hip. Carnal persuasions were largely what he relied on to make his choices in most every area of his life; family, work, relationships and church. With Raymond, it was as it was in the Old Testament passage: [He] “*did what was right in his own eyes*” (Judges 17:6). As a result of this, people seemed to back away from him.

All of this computed to an alienation Raymond created in his own heart toward the only relationships in his life that could rescue him. He had sabotaged the last and final connection he had with people who could confront him about the lifestyle he was already becoming enslaved to.

Experimentation

Raymond worked for many years at a large aeronautical corporation. At a certain point, he had the idea of starting his own construction business along the lines of some work experience he had received earlier in his life. It would allow Raymond to be his own boss, and there seemed to be a great need for construction workers with all the new housing going up in our area. After much thought, he went for it.

It wasn't a lucrative endeavor. Apparently, there was more competition in Raymond's area of construction than he had anticipated. But he plunged in just the same. It brought in enough to pay the bills for Raymond and Sarah, but not a lot more and it went on this way for many years.

Often the workload demanded for Raymond to hire extra help to get the jobs done in a timely manner. But since finances were tight, he would hire day laborers and pay them a nominal wage under the table. Over the years Raymond discovered he had a soft spot in his heart for these "down-on-their-luck" unfortunates.

However, another factor surfaced in all of this. Nearing sixty years of age, Raymond found he no longer had the physical strength or stamina to do the hard work his job required all by himself. So, he began to rely on the youth and vitality of the "down and outers" he found in the different labor pools he frequented.

None of us knew Raymond had already begun to experiment with gay relationships. Sometime before the fateful Saturday night call, Raymond began visiting a pornographic bookstore down the street from one of his construction material suppliers. He started looking into smut of the heterosexual variety, but at a certain point that changed.

Then, for several months, he experimented with this new and different pleasure. Soon he was going to more than one of these bookstores, and during this time he had a few sexual encounters with other men. They didn't constitute sexual intercourse, but they paved the way, each encounter eliminating certain barriers that were acting as roadblocks to gayness for Raymond.

Then, in July, two months before Day One, Raymond met someone at one of the bookstores.

One sinister, hot summer day, when Raymond was at one of his wood suppliers checking out material costs for a future construction job, he stopped by one of the bookstores in the vicinity of the lumberyard.

It was then and there he met Daniel Rogers. That day, Raymond crossed over from experimentation into a full-blown gay relationship with this complete stranger. No doubt, Raymond's guard had been let down from the many tough luck cases he had hired with no backlash.

And Daniel seemed like such a nice guy.

He wasn't a large man. He stood only five feet ten inches tall. Nor was he heavy, only weighing about one hundred and eighty pounds. But he owned a solid frame—healthy, toned, and muscular. He had dirty blonde hair, but it was shaved to perhaps a quarter inch in length all over his head, with a slight receding hairline.

Daniel's face revealed a hard life. Though he was in his early to mid-forties, he looked perhaps ten years older than he was. He seldom smiled, which caused people to feel it could constitute danger to stare at him for more than a few seconds. His eyes always seemed to be wide open and round, but you could feel him squinting at you in mistrust just the same. In a crowd he didn't portray himself as one wanting to be noticed. Instead, he seemed to slide from corner to corner and place himself near doors he could slip out of if he needed to, as if he were afraid of people; or worse yet, had things to hide.

Prior to meeting Raymond, Daniel Rogers had not worked in the type of construction business Raymond was in. But he was a hard worker and a perfect profile of the down-on-their-luck kind of individuals Raymond was used to digging up. But this was different—very different.

First, there was the gay relationship between Raymond and Daniel. This profoundly complicated the situation. Raymond found himself a bit lovesick. For the first time in years he was having fun with love, although a severe kind of guilt was tainting all his feelings. He was neck-deep in a type of love he knew nothing about.

At the same time, Daniel was a surprise relief for Raymond. He was strong and healthy physically. As a result, he was able to do a lot of the hard work that was becoming especially difficult for Raymond. In addition, because Daniel was Raymond's lover, Daniel took on the role of protector. He made Raymond feel, if he allowed Daniel to be involved with him and his business, he would make sure Raymond never had to risk hurting himself with heavy work again. All of this was very appealing to Raymond and played into his imminent decisions concerning his relationship with Daniel.

Next, there was the severity of Daniel's hard-luck circumstances. He wasn't just a man down on his luck. He had been in prison and was released only a few short weeks before meeting Raymond. He had spent the last several years in a state institution for some very serious crimes, and his prison sentence had dissolved all his connections. Daniel Rogers was friendless, moneyless, jobless, and almost hopeless regarding future options.

To add to the difficulty of his plight, he was saddled with extremely oppressive parole requirements. Furthermore, he had no transportation and no assistance amid a profoundly desperate place in his life. He needed more than help. He needed a savior...much like Raymond.

These were all tough concerns, however, the issue of Daniel Rogers' life that made his connection with Raymond more different than any other Raymond had ever encountered was the control.

Daniel was sick. Yes, he was streetwise. And yes, he was gay. He was also desperate. Above all else, however, he was an out-of-control controller, and would allow no person to control him.

Daniel was a master of manipulation and oppressive power. Raymond didn't see it at first, but as their relationship stretched into weeks, and as they became more entangled emotionally and sexually, Raymond found he had met his match. For as intimidating and controlling as Raymond had become over the years, probably the result of anger from the early abuses in his life; Daniel Rogers was stronger. He was more cunning, more subtle, more overpowering psychologically, and more manipulative than Raymond could ever be even when he was at his worst.

In less than two months Daniel Rogers had convinced Raymond to leave his wife and beloved daughter, move into an apartment with him, fully furnish that apartment, pay for

the rent and move in costs, begin divorce proceedings with Sarah, make him half owner in Raymond's construction business, and turn Raymond's business cell phone over to him.

Sarah had no idea concerning the power Daniel was wielding over her husband; and, Raymond was also clueless as to the darkness that lurked inside the heart of Daniel Rogers.

Dinner Party

A week prior to Day One, Raymond and Sarah decided to have a few couples over to their house for dinner. They scheduled it for seven o'clock on Saturday evening about three hours prior to Sarah's call to my wife. On the morning of the dinner, Raymond announced to Sarah that he would like Daniel to come to the dinner party that night as well. Sarah was not at all in favor of this. She had begun to feel uneasy about Daniel and all the time Raymond was spending with him. By this time, Raymond had leaked the truth about Daniel's criminal past to Sarah in a verbal miscue. After the lip-slip Raymond swore her to secrecy. It all heightened Sarah's concern about Daniel; but every time she even lightly broached the subject, Raymond would embarrass her for judging Daniel and make her feel ashamed for bringing up her fears in the first place.

Sarah had also begun to entertain suspicions about Raymond's and Daniel's relationship. *Could I be jealous of Daniel's and Raymond's friendship and the time they spend together?* She thought. *Nonsense!* And she would quickly tell herself . . . *that's silly.*

At other times, even if it were just for a moment, she would wonder . . . *could Raymond and Daniel be lovers? That's impossible! Not Raymond!* She would even smile at how ludicrous that prospect sounded and just as quickly dismiss the idea.

When Raymond informed Sarah that Daniel would attend the party, Daniel was standing on the front porch outside their house.

"Why does he have to come?" Sarah barked at Raymond.

"Do you have a problem with Daniel?" Raymond retorted quite a bit louder than Sarah had spoken and loud enough for Daniel to hear through the screen door.

They argued about it for a few minutes and finally Raymond put his foot down and said, "Well, he's coming whether you like it or not," and walked out the door.

There were also other things Sarah had begun to notice that didn't seem right but was unable to put all the pieces together.

First, it seemed Raymond and Daniel were never apart; not just during the day when daylight permitted construction work, but in the evening as well. Occasionally, they would be at the Gil's house, but usually they were elsewhere.

When Sarah would ask where he had been, Raymond would typically answer, "Daniel and I were doing some business planning."

Sarah thought this peculiar since Raymond had never had these kinds of planning meetings before with any of his laborers in all the ten years he had been working in his construction business. Besides, never before had Raymond gotten this close to any of the workers he had hired.

In fact, at different times Raymond would say, "It is probably good that I don't get too close to the guys I hire from the labor pools, because I don't know anything about them."

Wisdom demanded it. Now, here he was, violating his own safety code with Daniel. Sarah thought this strange as well.

All these things concerned Sarah about Daniel, but she conceded to her husband's request about the dinner party with many inner reservations. She was beginning to resent what she perceived to be an unwelcome addition to the Gil family lifestyle, and she felt it strongly that day. She had not yet said it aloud to Raymond but resolved that she *would* very soon.

That evening, the guests were to arrive around seven. Raymond showed up with Daniel at quarter of, and they were waiting in the living room as company came to the door. Raymond welcomed the guests and introduced them to his friend. Sarah tried to appear busy in the kitchen because she didn't want to sit and converse with Daniel.

Dinner went fine. There was laughter, stories, and gracious compliments about the food. Daniel and Raymond seemed a little quiet, but for the most part Sarah forgot her discomfort with Daniel.

A little before eight, however, Raymond announced he needed to take Daniel home for something. This raised Sarah's stress level and weighed down her mind considerably until they returned. They were gone for about half an hour.

When they returned, the atmosphere of the dinner party changed dramatically. Both Raymond and Daniel were quiet and stone-faced, almost as if they had been in a fight. Sarah even searched for redness or bruises on Raymond's face, thinking they might have struck each other, but saw none.

The night wound down quickly after that, as did the comfort of their guests. They said their good-byes and by nine-thirty, Raymond, Sarah, and Daniel were left alone in the Gil home. Sarah went immediately into the kitchen to clean up and the two men followed.

Raymond said nervously, "Uh...Sarah, before you get into that, could you sit down? We have something we need to talk to you about."

There was a small, rectangular table against a wall with three chairs around it in the kitchen that served as a breakfast and quick-meal site for the three Gils. It was a perfect setting for Raymond's announcement.

Raymond began, "Sarah, we have something to tell you."

Sarah has always loved to entertain. Over the years she and Raymond would have people over for dinners, parties, and get-togethers; and after the gatherings were over, she would be on a kind of "high" from the good time she had experienced. This night was somewhat that way as well.

Despite Raymond and Daniel's half-hour absence, the dinner had been filled with fun and fellowship and caused Sarah to forget most of her personal issues with Daniel. As she sat down with the two of them, her alarm was not sounding. Instead she was still enjoying a sense of merriment in her heart from the evening. This made Raymond's announcement even more of a mind blower.

Raymond went on, "Daniel and I have been doing a lot of talking and planning concerning the business, and . . . uh . . . we . . . I . . . have decided to make Daniel a half owner in my business."

The merriment in Sarah's heart came to a sudden, shocking halt.

Raymond's business, though it had done so meagerly, had supplied their livelihood for a decade. What would a partner do to their family's economics? Besides, if there were ever to be a partner in Raymond's business, she thought it should be her. In her mind she was trying to decipher the message and compute the mathematics of what that would mean. But she

didn't have time, because the next jarring pronouncement came right on its heels. Raymond didn't give her time to catch her breath.

Glancing quickly in Daniel's direction and then back to Sarah, Raymond said, "Since I met Daniel, I have discovered that I am not heterosexual."

When Sarah tilted her head and looked at Raymond perplexed, he said bluntly, "I'm homosexual, Sarah. I've been experimenting with this lifestyle for some time now, and I have had more than one encounter with other men over the past few years. I am gay, Sarah." But the bewildered look on Sarah's face didn't reflect her confusion with the terms. It reflected the confusion in her mind with how it could be.

Raymond looked quickly over at Daniel again but didn't look back at Sarah. Instead, he looked down and to the side as he said, "Dan and I have become lovers, and I am moving out of the house tonight and into an apartment with him."

Sarah's mouth flew open, and she felt her eyes become as round as saucers. Inside her head she could feel all the wheels moving and grinding, shearing off gears, and trying to send messages to her mouth to speak, but couldn't form any words.

She only had enough presence of mind to glance over at Daniel. He wasn't looking at her though, or around the room in shame. Instead, he was looking at Raymond, and with his eyes, seemed to be giving him encouragement and approval.

She looked back at Raymond, still with no words to speak. Sarah sensed a scream churning deep within her and probably would have released it if she had been given the opportunity to allow it to develop. But Raymond didn't afford her that opportunity. Rather, he hit Sarah with a third staggering proclamation.

He said, "Sarah, I know this is all a shock, but there's one more thing that is going to be necessary because of all this. You need to file for divorce, and it needs to be in the next week."

Sarah really didn't know what to say. Anger, retaliation, or disgust weren't what rushed to her mind, and the scream never materialized. Instead, she said calmly, "Well, Raymond, if that is what you feel you need to do, then, I guess that is the way it will have to be. You had better get some things together so you can leave."

Raymond, feeling a bit bewildered himself that Sarah didn't shout and throw things, moved quickly. He pushed his chair back from the table and hurried down the hall to their bedroom to grab some needed items. Daniel stood up and placed himself in the entryway between the kitchen where Sarah was sitting, and the hall leading to the bedrooms. He appeared to be acting as a barrier between the two spouses he had just split up.

It seemed to Sarah that Raymond must have grabbed up only the most necessary items that he could gather in a few minutes because he was coming back down the hall in a very short time. When Daniel saw him coming, he slipped out the front door. Sarah just remained at the kitchen table, staring straight ahead—unable to speak—unable to move.

As Raymond turned toward the front door, he paused to look at Sarah. As their eyes met, Raymond said, "I'll get the rest of my things tomorrow." Then, with an expression that looked to Sarah like guilt and remorse, he stepped into the kitchen to where Sarah was seated, leaned over, and kissed her lightly on the cheek.

"I'll talk to you tomorrow," he said. With that, he returned to the entryway and walked out the door.

Sarah stood and stepped over to the kitchen window. There was enough light coming from the house for her to see Raymond walk quickly toward his van. He disappeared from

sight, however, as he left the weak beam of light being projected from the window and stepped into the darkness. She heard two car-doors slam and the engine start. The headlights came on and Raymond's van backed out of the driveway.

Sarah sat back down at the kitchen table and again, stared straight ahead. One lone tear came to one eye, but that was all. It was as if her confused emotions at the time were begging to be expressed, but some unknown force inside her took immediate control and abruptly prohibited their release. The one tear stayed in her eye and just dried up.

As she sat there, she thought . . . *After so many spats, angry words, cold stares, and verbal jabs; of all the times that I imagined his leaving or my leaving, I never thought I would feel like this. This is what it must be like to feel numb.*

But Sarah wasn't numb. She was in shock—genuine, panic-stricken, traumatic shock. She waited a few minutes to collect her thoughts, and then reasoned, "I'd better call Pastor Chris and Shirley." She dialed our number as she glanced at the clock. It was quarter after ten.

Shirley and I were unable to find words to contribute to a discussion about the news we had just heard. We stared at each other, shaking our heads in bewilderment for several moments, not that the news about Raymond was possible but that we had never seen it coming. I think Sarah's phone call left us in our own kind of shock.

We were too amazed and confused to talk much about what we had just heard, and it was a Saturday night. We needed to get some sleep before the next day. But we also felt, considering the seriousness of the situation, it was inappropriate to talk about anything else. We were able to muster enough presence of mind to pray together for the Gil family, but no other conversation seemed proper. So, we went off to bed.

That was Day One