

“Trying To Dance” or, “Let’s Be Friends;”

Matthew 10:24-39

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Whether you realize it or not, when it comes to living in human relationships on this fallen planet, we’re all just trying to dance. In grade school when I was a kid, in about 6th grade, my fellow classmates and I *involuntarily* took “Ballroom Dancing” as part of gym class. This was not easy to do at that tender age! First of all, boys and girls had to work this arrangement out a very close range; not only standing *next* to each other, but touching, too! At that tender age whichever gender you happened to be, the other gender automatically had cooties!

Then there was the PRIDE factor. If a boy miss-cued during a dance and stepped on a girl’s foot, the ridicule he would endure from his fellow male classmates was excruciating! The boys faced the “MGM Syndrome.” Back in the day MGM Studios produced movie musicals featuring the dance duo of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

So, if a lad had the misfortune to stomp a lady’s toes, the critique his “friends” would offer was, “Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did except she did it backwards and in heels,” and YOU STEPPED ON HER FOOT!? It’s not easy to learn how to dance.

Okay...*her* name was Jennifer, and it was about this time of year. *He* has just turned 16 years old, and was doing a lot of heavy breathing just thinking about this girl he was crazy about! He had a driver’s license now, and would drive by her house after school, hoping beyond hope that “Her Beautifulness,” the Lady Jennifer, would be outside...available for worship, even if only for a few moments.

If she were, he’d pull over and say, “Hi,” and nonchalantly pretend that he just happened to be in the neighborhood. Like, he just happened to be passing by for the tenth time that day, all the way on the other side of town on a neighborhood street that led absolutely nowhere. Justin, our beginning driver, finally discovered his moral backbone and resolved to ask her out.

He’d been out on dates with girls before, but this was something new because he now had a driver’s license! They wouldn’t be riding their bikes nor would they be driven by parents or riding around with older friends.

This was a whole new phase of life where you got to say cool stuff like, “What time shall I pick you up?” Of all the phone calls he had made in his life, or would ever make, this one was the most momentous, and **his high hopes made his fears all the more intense.**

Today, Justin doesn’t remember at all what he said or asked her to do, but he’ll never forget her response. Three little words... oh, and not the words that Invoke a happy dance step. Three words that felt like daggers in his heart. Three words that young guys hate perhaps more than any other words in the English language: “*Let’s be friends.*”

It’s that polite rejection that makes a guy feel like a big, neutered stuffed animal...a kind of real-life Barney the Dinosaur. Cute, maybe, but sort of pathetic, and certainly not very attractive.

The ultimate irony is that once those words have been spoken in a relationship, it becomes impossible to “just be friends.” **Most of us have enough fears and self-doubts that we really don’t need “friends” who remind us that we’re not quite good enough for them.**

The really frustrating part is that our poor, now crushed 16-year-old probably never saw his rejection coming. He was giving his all, doing his best at relationship, thinking...rather, *hoping* things were going well, when BAM!, out of the blue, an ending shows up. A stepped on heart hurts worse than a stepped on foot.

-guitar start-

We know it is quite possible, that even though life appears to be going well, you know... dancin' along...you've got the rhythm... when unanticipated sadness stops by. Even slow dances can be tough.

Song: "Tattered Old Kite," by David Wilcox

*A tattered old kite,
Must have been spring when you got flown
But there's no leaves in sight
Left here to swing up there alone
Tangled in branches, and held by a string
That once let you fly in trusted breeze
Love lifted me, I know the way it feels*

*Now I walk on the ice
The river is silent as a stone
It's the same river twice
But the one that we walked into it gone
Downstream forever, or so it would seem
When the warm summer rain so deeply flows
Love floated me, I know the way it goes*

*I can't work this key
The damn thing is jammed or frozen closed
It's a strange place to be
Trying to pry my own windows
But there was a moment, there was a match that was made
There was a key that's warm inside your purse
Love opened me, I know how well it works*

*A tattered old kite, a walk on the ice, can't work this key
To you and me*

When we were 16, like all 16 year-olds, we were, no doubt, at one time or another, impaired by a variety of social afflictions; suffering through more than one amorous misadventure. One of our greatest fears at that age was romantic rejection. Probably still is one of our greatest fears! How the stepped-on can hurt.

Today, however, our fears deal with some different issues that certainly can involve higher stakes than teenage love disappointment. Take the fears Jesus was addressing in Matthew's Gospel story.

Jesus knew his followers, his students, were very happy dancing life with him. Jesus also knew all the terrifying dances his followers would be facing: the dances of **division and persecution**. They would be **hated, tried, beaten, betrayed by loved ones, even executed**.

In Matthew's story, Jesus warns his followers that all this scary stuff lies ahead with some of the partners they will be obliged to be dancing with. Who wouldn't be afraid of such prospects?

What do we fear? What makes us scared to go out on the dance floor?

- Are we afraid that our families are disintegrating and we are powerless to stop it?
- Are we afraid of losing our jobs, of being "downsized" or of simply not making enough to make ends meet?
- I work in retail: are companies afraid of losing coveted "market-share"?
- Are we afraid of being robbed, of someone taking things we have worked hard to get?
- Are we afraid of computer "identity theft"?
- Are we afraid of getting pregnant, or of not getting pregnant?
- Are we afraid of sickness, of cancer, of AIDS?
- Are we afraid of death, our own death or that of a loved one?
- Are we afraid of becoming in some way disposable...irrelevant?

At the root of these fears is the fear of loss.

Every fear we have is grounded in the knowledge that we have something or someone to lose.

I can lose the job, the family, the house, the money, my computer records, my freedom, parenthood, health...life itself. It's all at stake.

Rejection and loss are the basis of our fears...and losing anyone or anything can make redemption so hard to recognize.

Though there may be good reasons to fear rejection and loss, in the end Matthew's Gospel is telling us they are not much more harmful to us than a 16-year-old's experience of romance gone bad.

From an adult perspective, we know now romantic trial-and-error was all a part of growing up, you know, **part of learning to be more secure in ourselves than what others thought of us.**

We know...now, that there is life beyond romantic rejection...as well as, life beyond losing the house, the job, the market-share...even beyond losing the best friend.

CHAT: "Meeting At McDonald's"

Tim: A divorced dad who's remarried and trying to understand his past mistakes and make things right with his former wife.

Beth: Tim's former wife, who struggles with offering forgiveness and would rather forget the past.

Setting: Small restaurant table.

Tim: *(enters, sits at the table)*

Beth: *(enters – Tim stands, they both sit)* Hi, Tim. So where are the kids?

Tim: Oh, I called Mom on the way over to get them and she said she'd meet us here and drop them off. I guess she baked a cake with them and wanted to let them put frosting on it. It should just be a minute or so.

Beth: Unless they eat the cake.

Tim: I hope not. I told them they were having dinner with you. But Michael's always starved after soccer... You know, he's doing well this year. A lot better. Have you noticed?

Beth: Better than last year.

Tim: Much better. He's actually not afraid to kick the ball.

Beth: I think he's getting his confidence back.

Tim: Yeah. That's so good for him. I was worried for a while that he...You know, since the...

Beth: He's had a couple of years.

Tim: I guess we all did...Beth...I've been doing a lot of thinking lately and...

Beth: I don't really want to get into this right now, Tim. The kids will be here any minute and it's just not...

Tim: Now hang on. I don't want to "get into" anything. I've just been...

Beth: Then don't bring it up at McDonald's with...

Tim: Look, I'm trying to apologize here! Can you just give me like a minute to grovel and it'll be over...I promise.

Beth: We've said everything that needs...

Tim: No, we haven't. Or maybe you have; but I haven't.

Beth: *(reluctant silence)*

Tim: *(sigh)* Beth, I want to say I'm sorry.

Beth: Apology accepted.

Tim: No, listen. I've been able to see now that I was way wrong...in those years before the divorce...I was a pretty lousy husband, and I treated you very poorly. And I never appreciated you for who you were.

Beth: Tim ...*(gesturing as if to stop)*

Tim: No, it's true. Even the divorce. You didn't deserve all that. And I want you to know that I think...you're a great person. and the best mom...and if I'm ever in the same situation again...

Beth: Tim, it's the past, okay? You have a better marriage now. And we've both learned some things. Maybe it's good that...

Tim: No, it will never be good. It was wrong for me to push for the divorce like I did. And nothing will ever make that right. I was wrong, period. And I want you to know that.

Beth: Well, nice of you to tell me after four years.

Tim: Beth I'm trying to...

Beth: The divorce was agony, Tim. You don't have to tell me that. You weren't just wrong. You were evil...and it almost killed me. Almost, but not quite. Eventually I made it. And I learned a lot about myself. **And that never would Have happened without you doing...what you did.**

Tim: But I still regret it.

Beth: And you should. And it's good that you do. But I dealt with that a long time ago, and now you want me to jump back into it.

Tim: I'm not saying go back. I'm happy with Lisa. She's is great for me. And I have learned a lot...I'm just so sorry you had to pay the price for my learning it.

Beth: Tim, that's life. We do good, and God uses it. We screw up, and God uses it. Either way, Christ fits it in. I don't how Jesus does it, but he does. So what do you do? You have to let go of it...the bitterness. I don't know if you could tell, but remember Cathy's wedding last year?

Tim: When you dropped the salad plate in that lady's lap?

Beth: Yeah, how we laughed so hard out in the hall?

Tim: Of course. It was the first time I was able to laugh with you since the divorce. You were different somehow. I could breath around you.

Beth: I realized then that I had moved on. I'd quite blaming you for my life. You were just a part of a bigger picture. Not that I would wish that on anyone. But I'm stronger now.

Pause

Tim: You are an amazing woman, Beth.

Beth: No, don't say that. You know there was a time when I would have died to hear those words. But that time is over. Tim, it's over.

Pause

Tim: Well, here's the kids. They show up at the darnedest times, don't they?

Beth: *(standing)* Well, enjoy dinner. I've got diner waiting.

Tim: So, you'll bring 'em back Friday night sometime?

Beth: Yeah...and time? For what it's worth...I know what you're trying to say and...thanks, I guess.

Song: "Unequal Love," by CSR

*Like a whisper on the wind
Sometimes the wind don't want to hear about it
Like a sailboat on the sea
Sometimes the ocean just don't care about it
There are many, many feelings
that can tear your soul apart
But the pressure of unequal love is hard
'Cause the price you've got to pay
Is that the pain won't go away*

*Did you ever stay too long
With a lover who was cold for you
You had the feeling it was wrong
But you loved so hard, there's nothing you
could do
There are many, many heartaches
When you're up against the wall
And all the love you give won't come back at all
And no matter what you do it really hurts
to know the truth*

*When you have a change of heart
'Cause you found that you can trust somebody
They'll take the arrow from your heart
It's you they'll love, it's not just anybody
There are many, many reasons not to play
the game at all
But in the mean time you are bound to rise
'Cause your wounds are going to heal
You're going to learn just how to deal
With unequal love*

Matthew's Gospel reminds us that from the perspective of our Lord and Savior Christ, there is life beyond this paralyzing fear of rejection and loss. In the scheme of things in God's kingdom, there are much more important things to be concerned about.

Jesus the Christ offers us the ultimate perspective of God's kingdom, and from that eternal perspective, we will all realize that being faithful to Christ wherever we meet him in this life is much more important than the fears of rejection and loss...those fears that

- drive us to cling to what we ultimately must lose;
- keep us from going where we must go;
- keep us from doing what needs to be done;
- keep us from who we need to be.

Imagine what the world would be like with a Christ-body, you know... church that was unafraid of losing worldly praise and esteem, as well as all its possessions, its buildings, its tax-exempt status, its politically-protected position, and its freedom to assemble! What would you have with a church like that? You'd have the church in China; which is experiencing exponential growth!

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul..." (**Matt. 10:28**).

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+10:28) We typically picture the one we should fear having horns and a pitchfork.

Okay, let's start by believing we are good dancers so we can learn a more accurate picture.

This way, how well we dance won't matter.

Just imagine, finding redemption while learning to dance! That'd be as crazy as finding resurrection at a funeral!

Pause-look...

We ultimately have to fear only ourselves, for only we can choose to reject the redemption Christ offers. In any and all of life's scary situations, only we can select faith over fear.

In this world filled with the demons of sickness and violence and loneliness and oppression, we are understandably afraid of many things; just as the original disciples Jesus taught would have been fools not to fear the events he foretold them.

The Good News is that, in our fear of rejection and loss, Jesus pronounces the very words our 16-year-old fella doesn't want to hear: "**Let's be friends.**" Sure he does, in **John 15:15**,

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+15:15) Jesus says, "*I donot call you servants and longer, because the servant doesn't know what the master is doing; but I call you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from the Father.*"

Coming from Jesus, these are words of honest affirmation and promise; revealing a desire for intimacy and involvement. friendship that he insists on giving us LIFE over death itself. In other words, **none** of our fears need have a hold on us; not even death! Just like an adolescent heartbreak, when we remain faithful to Christ Jesus, our fear will fade into insignificance. Sure it will; fear cannot last in the redeeming Light of eternal life! All we got to do is choose to dance life with Jesus...

Song: "Trying To dance," by David Roth
It's three in the morning I'm tired and sleepy
But not quite enough to turn in
I think I'll just prop my feet on the sofa
And wait for the world to slow down
The tiniest noises the furnace and airplanes
My puppy who yawns down the hall
Oh, I know the feeling alone and defenseless
And senseless and silly and small

Chorus: But if I promise to try and stand up straight
Do you think you might give a chance
Thought I stumble and all when I tell you
I love you
You know that I'm trying to dance

It's three in the morning the faucet is dripping
It reminds of the way we behave
A trickle of feeling a splash of emotion
On a ocean without any waves
I'm testing the waters, I'm putting a foot out
But I'm tumbling in right over my head
I'm sinking and scrambling for safety
And falling flat on my face instead...**Chorus**

So many problems around today
Seems so silly to be worried about love
But if love isn't right for me this way
Then I can't be worried about anything else

So, it's three in the morning, I'm waiting for sunrise
Guess I'll catch the one at 6:45
I will sit on the sofa and think of the time
When our music and love were alive
We used to have quite a rhythm and romance
A regular couple of pros
But the closer we dance I grew clumsy and awkward
I was stepping all over our toes..**Chorus**

Tag: Though I stumble and fall when I tell you I love you
You know that I'm trying...
You know that I'm trying...
You know that I'm trying to dance.