

“MARY SMITH ON THE SCHOOL BUS, JR. HIGH.” I WAS STUNNED...

This summer I was meeting with my discipler and we were covering *Confessing Sin* and *Reconciling Relationships*. As I got more into the study on *Reconciling Relationships* one of the questions was, *what steps are involved in preparing for reconciliation?* It then covered what do to *when you are aware of your sin against another*: die to self, forgive the person in prayer, take responsibility for your own sin and then confess to the Lord any fears in seeking forgiveness. **The other step was how to prepare when you are NOT aware of how you have sinned against another.** So, I prayed for the Lord to show me where I had/have sinned against another and was not aware of what I had done, or if I had justified what I had done and stuffed it. As I prayed and sought the Lord, He spoke to me very clearly, “Mary Smith on the school bus, Jr. High.” I was stunned.

I then thought back nearly 47 years ago to a girl, my age, who rode the school bus and was taunted daily by others for most of the ride from her home to school. She was not attractive, always had a bad hair day, frumpy, bad teeth, glasses – certainly not as “perfect” as the rest of us. Though I was never a part of the group that taunted her, I was also never her friend. I was fearful that if I became her friend or stood up for her that I would get the same treatment or worse and in Jr. High that was just not something I wanted. As I now prayed, I realized that even as a child, the sin was *PRIDE* –

- my *fear* of rejection and of *exposure* by others,
- my sin of *self-protection* as I tried to minimize my own behavior in my treatment of Mary
- my wanting to avoid conflict and of being *judgmental* in how she looked compared to myself and others,
- my putting self before God and others.

I went to church and had accepted Christ as a child and deep down I knew that this behavior was not acceptable, but I felt helpless to do anything about it – fear and pride had me. I rode the bus with her for three years and though I may have offered her a seat on the bus, I never offered to be her friend. Now as I continued to weep and pray before the Lord, I prayed that if given the opportunity to be her friend, this time I would be and would seek forgiveness for not being a friend to her 47 years ago. I told the Lord, “I don’t know whatever happened to her, if she is alive or dead or where she lives, but I know that you know all about her and if you will allow our paths to cross, I will be her friend.”

In the late summer, I volunteered to lead a group of 9-10 other women who would meet once a month for fellowship and building relationships. I was given a list with the names of my nine ladies prior to our first get together. We met that night and of my group of 10, four of the ladies were not able to attend. I called those four the next day and left a voicemail message telling them that I would be the person leading their group and where and when our next time together would be. One lady, Mary Edwards, called me back several days later saying she was unable to make the meeting but would be coming in October. I told her I had a card for her to complete and how could I get it to her. As I was in the choir I could meet with her after church that coming Sunday. She told me she was in the choir and that I could give it to her at our Wednesday night

practice. Great! We'd look for each other on Wednesday. I didn't see the person that I saw in the pictorial book, so I asked the lady in front of me if she knew who Mary Edwards was and she whispered to me, she is 2 people down from you. I sat back and nonchalantly looked that way and she was looking at me. I said "Mary?" and she shook her head. I gave her the card and told her I would meet her after choir practice.

When rehearsal was over I waited for her and as she was next to me I introduced myself to her. As I spoke to her I looked into her eyes and when she opened her mouth to speak I knew who it was – it was Mary Smith! I knew the voice and I "saw" her!! But I was confused as she apparently was single and her name was Mary Edwards. I touched her arm and asked with a shaky voice, "What was your name before Edwards?" She replied, "Mary Smith." I had tears welling in my eyes for she had no idea what God had just done! I gave her a hug and said, "We went to school together; we rode on the same bus". She asked what my name was and I told her and she smiled and said that she remembered me. We spoke a bit more and then we left to go home. I was beside myself as I drove the 20 minute trip home. I laughed, I cried, I praised God! It was 47 years ago...I am convicted of my sin this summer...God brings her into my life in the fall...we go to the same church...we sing in the choir...both altos...God knew.

My CTO workbook noted that for reconciling relationship "if you don't have any way to contact the offended party, pray for a means to find that person. God knows where he or she is". Yes, He certainly does! God gave me her name in the early summer and knew then where she was and what He was about to do. I had been going to church with her since January but He never let me "see her" until I heard her voice and then God removed the veil from my eyes.

She and I have met now a few times and have talked. I told her that she was not going to understand, but I wanted to ask her forgiveness for not being her friend on the bus, for allowing my self-protection and fear, my sin, to keep me from being there for her. She told me that I had never caused her any hurt and that it wasn't necessary for me to ask for her forgiveness. I shared with her that even as a young person, I knew that what was happening was not right and my fear of rejection and my own pride, sin, kept me from standing by her and I was sorry and asked again for her forgiveness. She gave it. She then wanted to know how all of this came about and so I shared with her the story and how God answered my prayer.

As I begin to study and read God's Word, I always pray a verse that was shared with me years ago from Psalm 119:18 - "*Open my eyes, that I may behold (see) wondrous things in your law (word)*". I did not see that happening at first, but over time, the Lord has been so faithful to show me truths from His Word. Psalm 119:130 says, "*The unfolding of your Word gives light, and imparts wisdom to the simple.*" His Word is truth and I have seen Him respond to a prayer that though sincere, a part of me truly didn't think it could ever happen. I am in awe of Him as I meditate on what He has done and how my prayer was answered. He reminds me, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen 18:14)