

DON'T TRADE
THE PRESENT
FOR THE
FUTURE

The
REUNION

ROBERT H. FLORES

The REUNION

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It was Saturday morning and it was time to pick up my friend Gus for our monthly Men's Prayer Breakfast. Because we go to the same church and since he only lives 3 blocks from my condo, carpooling is a good way to keep our friendship alive and interesting. He's one of the few people I have kept in contact with since High School. I pull up to his white picket fence and honk to let him know I'm here. And, he comes.

"Hi, Rick. Sorry I'm late. I couldn't find my Study Bible, because Jeremy decided to hide it."

"That's OK. I'm early. So, how is everything with you?"

"Things are good. Work has really picked up since last month. Theresa caught the flu from one of her coworkers, so she's had to stay home for a few days. I'm just worried that the kids will catch what she has."

"I know what that's like. I think I'm just going to start wearing a respirator when I visit my clients."

He laughed.

It was about a 15-minute trip to the other side of town where our church was. And so, this was our unofficial time to discuss things apart from the commotion of a prayer breakfast. But I didn't really have anything on my mind, so I just let Gus break the silence, which he did, enthusiastically, I might add:

"Guess what I got in the mail yesterday."

"What?"

"An invitation to our 10-year High School Reunion."

"Oh. Yeah. I got one of those, too."

"Wow, I can't believe it's been 10 years already! I can't wait to see everyone."

I didn't say anything. I just kept my eyes on the road.

"Uh, you're going to the Reunion, aren't you, Rick?"

"No way."

"What?! Oh, come on. Why not? It'll be fun."

"Look, Gus, I didn't have too many friends in high school. I wasn't very popular, unlike *some* people!"

"Hey, I couldn't help it!"

"There's really no one there I would want to see."

"You don't want to see what everyone else has accomplished in the last decade, who went to college or who didn't?"

"Not really. I don't care to spend an evening reliving my high school years with a bunch of show-offs and phonies."

"Come on, Rick, not everyone was like that."

"I already know how it'll be, too. People will be rubbing their achievements in each others' faces. . . smiling through their teeth. . . trying to outdo each other. It would be high school politics all over again. Honestly, I don't want any part of that. Besides, I don't have much to show in the last 10 years."

"Yeah you do. You've gone to college and you're a successful illustrator of children's books."

"I don't know about *successful*. I mean, I make a *living* as an illustrator and I enjoy my work. But that's it. It's not a glorious career—at least not compared to doctors, architects and policemen."

"I would still consider you successful, Rick."

"Well, I would prefer not to be put in the arena with cocky individuals. I'm not going to play their game, Gus. So, I'm not going."

"You're going to miss out on all the fun. That's all I'm saying."

"That's easy for you to say. You have Theresa to go with. Who do I have to go with? No one. I was single then and I'm single now, and all the years in between. Nothing has changed."

"You know, there might be some girls attending that are still single."

"Riiight."

"You never know. You might meet someone."

"Come on, Gus. You know very well that all the pretty Christian girls were married right after high school."

He sighed, "You're right. I was really blessed to meet Theresa apart from that crowd, in college."

"And you two are the perfect couple."

"What, is that sarcasm now?"

"No. Actually, I really meant that."

"Oh."

There was silence for about two blocks. Out of all the topics Gus could have brought up, why did he have to bring up the Reunion? High school was over and done with. It's in the long-forgotten past. I mean, heck, if you're gonna have a reunion for high school, then why not have one for grade school, or *Preschool* for that matter?! Who thinks up these stupid things anyway? Maybe other people like living in the past, but I sure don't. I wanted to change this topic of conversation, but Gus was too quick for me. He started in again:

"Well, since I'm going to the Reunion and you're not, would you like me to say "Hi" to anyone for you?"

"Nope."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"OK. Just asking."

My mind began to wander. There would be no one there that I would want to say "Hi" to, right? I mean, c'mon! I had nothing in common with those people. I could count all my close friends on one hand! I wasn't interested in anyone and no

one was interested in m—.

For a split-second her face flashed across my eyes. All the “what ifs” quickly flooded into my mind. Gus could see I was deep in thought.

“You OK, Rick?”

“Yeah. I mean, no. . . I mean,” I sighed. “Well. . . there was that *one* girl.”

“Hah! I knew it! What’s her name?”

“You probably never even met her.”

“What’s her name?”

“She was a brunette and kind of short.”

“What. Is. Her. Name?”

“Her name was Natalie.”

“Natalie? Natalie Wilson? Dark brown hair, short and kind of shy?”

“*What?* You *knew* her?” I scanned his face to see if he was joking with me.

“Not on a personal basis, no, but she was in some of my classes. Come to think of it. . . she was pretty.”

“She was pretty *and* she was into art. I never found out if she was a Christian or not, though. . .”

“Tell you what, Rick: I’m going to look for her at the reunion and I’m going to tell her that you’re still interested in her. You never know what can happen.”

“You can’t tell her that.”

“Why not?”

“Because she never knew. I mean, I kept all my feelings inside.”

“Then what’s the point in me telling her “Hi” for you? She probably won’t even remember who you are!”

“She’ll remember. *She’s* the one that used to look at *me*. *She’s* the one that was giving *me* the clues, even if I was dumb enough to ignore them.”

“What clues?”

“Believe me, Gus, there were *clues*.”

“Such *as*?”

“Well, I had a few classes with her and it didn’t really matter which class it was—she’d always be smiling at me from across the room and I would smile back. At lunchtime, her and her friends seemed to always be whispering about me—in a good way—when I would walk by. I would, of course, wave back at them. Other times, we would happen to pass each other in the hall and she would smile at me, as if she wanted me to initiate conversation her, but I just kept walking. In art class, she would walk by my table to see what I was working on. Sometimes she would even compliment me on my art projects and I would cordially thank her for her compliments.”

“Dude! And you never *said* anything about your feelings to her? You never *investigated* those clues? You were too shy, weren’t you?”

“Well, yeah. But, really, I just didn’t believe that I would find “the one” in high

school. I mean, I was only in junior year. I had my whole life ahead of me. As pretty and nice as she was, there *had* to be other women out there.”

“I take it you don’t feel that way anymore.”

“Well, having worked with a lot of female clients over the years, I have to say that there has never been anyone as genuinely beautiful, happy, intelligent or talented as Natalie was. And, funny thing is, I’m saying that having not even dated her.”

“Man, you’re depressing me, Rick,” he said as he shook his head.

“Well, it was probably a mistake to let her go, but I did. So, that’s that. I mean, I probably would have done several things differently in high school, if I had the chance to—more friends, more involvement, *asking Natalie out*. . . Things would have been a *lot* different if I didn’t think there was ‘something better out there.’”

“Why don’t you do something different *now*, then? Why not go to the reunion? Theresa and I could even pick you up.”

“No way,” I chuckled.

“Chances are, you might see Natalie.”

“Oh, come on, *Gus!* That was 10 years ago! Do you know what the chances are that Natalie is a Christian, is single, is going to the reunion *and* is still interested in me?! You’re talking crazy.”

“I’m not crazy. You are—for not seeing this golden opportunity. This could all be part of God’s plan for your life. You’ve been single way too long.”

“Well, regardless of this ‘golden opportunity’, I refuse to go.”

“That’s fine. I can do this without you.”

“Wait a minute. . . do *what* without me?”

Gus looked out the window and casually continued, “I think you still have the hots for this girl and I’m going to do everything in my power to bring you two together.”

He smiled and folded his arms.

I shook my head, “Good luck. She’s not going to attend.”

“Yeah she is.”

“She’s not going to be a Christian.”

“Yeah she is.”

“She’s not going to be single.”

“Yeah she is.”

“She’s not going to still be interested in me.”

“Yeah she is.”

“You’re unbelievable,” I sighed. “I don’t know how Theresa can stand you.”

“She’s used to it,” he laughed.

Thank goodness! We *finally* made it to the church parking lot. I couldn’t take Gus’ badgering anymore. It was time to end this conversation.

“Um, you’re not going to mention Natalie to any of the guys, are you?”

“Of course not, Rick. I wouldn’t embarrass you like that.”

He had that smirk on, like he could embarrass me if he wanted to, but he really wasn’t going to. That’s a relief. I really didn’t want to be badgered anymore about my past mistakes. The whole point of me not going to the reunion was to not relive high school. And yet, because of Gus and that stupid invitation, I managed to relive it anyway on our trip over here. Whatever.

We grabbed our Bibles and headed inside.

A few weeks later, I was in my bedroom/art studio, spending my evening working on an illustration that was due in a few days. My dog was lying in the corner of the room, sleeping. It also happened to be the night of the Reunion. Oh, and I knew it was the Reunion, because I couldn’t focus. Whether my bedroom was too blaring hot or my mind was too blaring with memories—at any rate—I needed a break from my work. I dried my brush and decided to take a break. As I stretched my back, I gathered my thoughts.

I happened to glance over at my closet. I knew what was in there. I slowly walked over and pulled out a box labeled “High School Stuff”. I gently blew the dust off the lid and removed it. There lay my Senior yearbook, complete with our blue and gold school colors. Pulling it out, I flipped to page 104. After all these years, I still had this page memorized, for that was the page that Natalie Wilson’s photo was on. I couldn’t tell you how many times I had looked at that photo. I had spent many a night just thinking about her. Over time, I eventually just put the yearbook away, because I couldn’t keep torturing myself with her memory. Her face was a reminder of what I *didn’t* do. Honestly, I don’t know why I never took the chance to ask her out on a date. I guess I just thought that there would be a better woman out there for me *someday*.

I flipped to page 216—another memorized page. On it featured two landscape paintings side by side. One had my name under it and the other had Natalie’s name under it—the closest we’d ever be together.

A pitiful sigh escaped my mouth as I stared blankly at the yearbook’s cover. It’s funny: you can make one bad decision and live with regret the rest of your life. I’m sure my life would have been different if I would have just talked to her, gotten to know her, or, even wrote her a note. Who knows, we probably would have gotten married. I sometimes wonder if God can redeem even people’s stupid decisions of the past, or, will He hold them in contempt because they didn’t grab His blessing right in front of them. On the other hand, maybe God still does have someone out there for me and I just wasn’t meant to marry Natalie. At any rate, I’ll just have to wait and see. As far as Natalie Wilson is concerned, well, that chapter is certainly closed.

I tossed the yearbook on my bed and decided to sift through the rest of the box. I discovered some paperwork, some art contest awards and some old comic strips I used to draw for the high school newspaper. There were several drawings that I had

not seen for years. The earlier drawings were not as refined as the later drawings. As an artist, you usually get better over time, by learning from your mistakes. Perfection is always your goal as an artist, but sometimes it feels like you'll only be happy when you reach that mastery level; the journey almost seems irrelevant. There's always some new level to attain to.

I packed everything back into the box and put it back in the closet. Sitting on the edge of my bed, I glanced around my room. All around, I could see the world that I had created for myself. My bookcases were lined with reference material, art books, Bible commentaries, children's books, sketchbooks and, of course, plenty of copies of my published manuscripts. Along the carpet were containers and filing cabinets of art supplies, brushes, paints, paper—all neatly labeled and categorized. Nothing was ever out of place.

I've strived for perfection my whole life. It's been my goal. I've wanted to be the best illustrator I could possibly be, having put myself through college and working long, late hours for my whole adult life. It's weird: I feel like I've lived for the future my whole life, but as soon as I get to the "future" then there is another future to run towards. Somewhere along the way the present stopped being interesting to me; it was all about the future.

Sure, there may be something better out there for me—a house, married life, children—but does that mean I rush through the blessings God has given me *now*? I mean, He has given me so much. Ten years ago, I never would have thought I would be living my dream career, and, now I am. I never would have thought I would complete college, but I did. He has been here with me every step of the way. It's rare that I actually thank Him for it.

I looked down at the carpet and got down on my knees.

"God, I want to thank you for the blessings you've given me. You have given me so much and I truly don't thank you enough. Being content is something very difficult for me, but I ask that you would please help me to enjoy the life you have given me now, rather than rushing through it. I'm tired—tired of running around trying to get to the "next level". I'm tired of my perfectionism and never appreciating what you have given me. I will do what you want me to, Lord and serve You regardless if I'm single or married. Lord, if you have a woman out there for me, please bring her to me. But, only in your timing. My heart's desire is to be in Your will, in whatever stage of life I am in. I love you. Amen."

I got up and shut the light off. I noticed the light was hitting my wood floor and the shadows were making a cross shape. God is good.

A week after the high school reunion had come and gone, I was walking my dog in Gus' neighborhood.

Gus walked out his front door, "Well, Rick, Theresa and I went to the reunion."

"That's good. Did you have fun?"

"Yeah. It was interesting seeing people I haven't seen in a while."

"That's nice."

"By the way, I saw Natalie."

"Wha—you *did*?"

"Yeah."

"And?"

"And what?"

"And, did you tell her I was still interested in her?"

"Yeah."

"And what did she say?"

"She said, 'Rick *Who*?'"

"No, she didn't!"

Gus laughed, "Alright, alright, I was just kidding with you, man."

"So, she *did* attend. . . Is she a Christian?"

"Oh yeah."

"Is she single?"

"Most definitely."

"Is she still interested in me?"

"Well. . . that's kind of hard to say. She said that she wanted a man who had the guts to give her the attention she needed. And then. . . she said she wanted a man who was willing to make the first move regardless of the consequences."

This wasn't sounding very promising. I knew I had dropped the ball on both counts.

"And then. . . she gave me this."

Gus handed me a blue napkin.

"What's this?"

"Open it."

"This is her phone number?"

"The ball's on your court now, Chief."

The end

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights. . ." — James 1:17a

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." — Philippians 4:11

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST



What is the Gospel?

The gospel is the undeserved salvation of all mankind from sin and eternal death, accomplished only by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ of which is made real to an individual's heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the gospel is God's plan to rescue us, sustain us and grow us up in Him for all eternity. The famous passage John 3:16 explains the gospel:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

The gospel's foundation is only based upon what Jesus has done; not what we have done. It is God's free gift to us. Heaven is for those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior. People think that getting to heaven is some long, drawn-out process in which you have to try and follow the Ten Commandments or be a do-gooder or go to church or something. But it's really not complicated at all. See, salvation isn't about getting to God on our own terms or pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, it's about God reaching down to us and offering us salvation free of charge.

Paul says in Ephesians, *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"* —Ephesians 2:4-5

Our sins won't allow us to get to heaven on our own terms; it is only God's rich mercy that He has made a way for us. God demands no less than perfection, and only perfect people get to go to heaven. Based on works, none of us would make it; only Jesus would. But, God has provided a way to give perfection to us through Jesus. Jesus is the exclusive, one-way to the Father. He says this in John 14:6:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Either that statement is true or it is not. Every Christian knows that it is absolutely and irrevocably true. Ask Christ to reveal himself to you today. It's your choice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Robert H. Flores has been telling stories since early childhood. He is a graduate of Riverside Community College and has worked as a graphic designer for almost 20 years. He enjoys writing stories and sharing the gospel in creative ways. He is the author several books, booklets and tracts. He lives in Southern California with his wife, Jennifer, and three children.



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