

Before there was an us, we were just two broken people with a past. Brandon's past—I grew up in poverty with my mom and older sister. My dad, an alcoholic, disappeared from my life all together when I was 10 years old. It would be another twenty years before we reconnected. As a teenager, I took advantage of a lack of boundaries and discipline and began indulging in drugs and alcohol. Soon after, I dropped out of high school. After college, many of my addictions to drugs persisted. At the age of 21 my soon-to-be first wife was adamant that I would have to choose between her and the drugs. Fortunately, I chose her. However, without having God as our priority and marriage guidance, we slowly began moving apart. We foolishly decided that having a child would improve our marriage and, while we love our daughter more than anything, the struggles continued. I was determined to never be like my dad, so we sought counseling on and off. But what we needed to do was accept God into our lives and marriage; which never happened and we eventually divorced. Amy's past—I grew up in a loving, God believing home but God was never an active part of our lives. My parents divorced when I was 9 years old and throughout my youth I searched for ways to know God, but always struggled to find that deep connection with Him that I was craving. After college, I began a relationship with a man who I would eventually marry without my parents or anyone else's knowledge. A month or so into the marriage a switch was flipped inside this man. He became extremely verbally abusive, had multiple affairs, and then the abuse became physical.

I remember one night feeling so alone and thinking, "This can't be my life at 22. How did it all go so wrong? How could you do this to me God?" This moment is when I turned away from God because my anger at him took over. How could he abandon me? Later in life, Hebrews 13:5 became a lifeline for me, "Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you." What came next was me making a vow to myself to never let someone else have control.

*"How did it all
go so wrong?"*

Fast forward a couple of years. I met Brandon at a Christmas party and a couple of years later we got married on a private island in Belize (yes, my parents knew this time). It was paradise in every way. However, paradise slowly began to fade. As newlyweds with no past experience of what a Christ centered marriage looked like, we were struggling as a blended family and all the craziness that encompasses that, demons from our past, and within a few months I was pregnant. All the stresses of everyday life, two kids ages 2 & 4, a teenager, Brandon's job, me being a stay-at-home, all began to take a toll on our marriage. There was no time for us (or so we thought). We made it a priority to raise our kids knowing God, but we were both struggling on how to deepen our own personal relationship with the Lord. When you are relying on your own strength and control to be the perfect parents and Godly

spouses, it all becomes overwhelming very quickly. Our nights consisted of a game of tag, your it (“it” being your turn with the kids), counting down the minutes until bedtime instead of enjoying them, and then us retreating to do our own things once it was quiet. I filled my time with social networking, reading, and catching up on some shows. Brandon would pour a drink and begin to unwind by shutting it all out. Our relationship to the outside was ideal but inside our little home was turning into failed expectations, resentment, unforgiveness, and bickering. Who would want to spend time with a person that causes all of that? Thus, causing us to retreat further from each other and that canyon of hurt and anger grew bigger and bigger. Both of us were silently screaming, “Help us God!” God heard our desperate cry and what unfolded next is only because of God’s grace and love.

When I first heard about re|engage, I thought, “Yes, this is exactly what we need! If I can just fix Brandon, all will be good.” Unbeknownst to me, Brandon had the exact same thoughts, only with my name replaced in that sentence, but hey at least it got us to go to re|engage. The first time in our closed group with five other couples was extremely intimidating. The thoughts that ran through my head were, “Wait, y’all expect me to tell these strangers the guts of my personal and intimate relationship with Christ and my marriage? Will they judge me? I must stay in my own “hula hoop” and search my own soul and faults? I can’t talk about everything that is wrong with Brandon? Don’t they know he is the problem?” Talk about wanting to bolt! But as you know, God has a plan and part of that plan was the people in our group, the re|engage course, prayers that were said, and our commitment to each other. We dove in knowing that God had us. “Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your

ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6. During the course, I remember someone giving the example of a triangle. You and your spouse are at the two bottom corners and God is at the top of the triangle. It symbolizes that, as your own personal journey with Christ grows, it will bring you and your spouse to more oneness with each other and with God. This example has stuck with me and how true it has proved to be. Concurrently, I was taking *Search for Significance*, which allowed my relationship with God to flourish in a whole new way. I could finally let go of control and give God the reigns. Wow, what a year of looking deep into who you really are all at once... scary, emotional, enlightening, peaceful. Letting go of control, offering forgiveness, showing grace, and communicating about expectations and conflicts were all key elements that we worked hard on. Slowly a shift happened. Old habits were dying, we were building each other up, wanting to spend more time together, and making the Lord and “us” a priority. For the first time, we began to pray together in the mornings and evenings. A change was taking place.

Tears are flowing as we write this because re|engage was truly life-changing. We now have the tools to continue to strive for the marriage God intended for us to have. Now the question for you is...Do you want a change? Isaiah 40:31 says, “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

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