

PARADIGM SHIFT

When I was 8 years old my mom took me into a room in our house and locked the door behind us. I didn't know if I was in trouble or what, because I knew what she knew—I was doing poorly in school. In fact, my teacher had told me repeatedly that I wasn't engaged in the learning process at all, and I had a hunch she would tell my mom. Well, she did, but my mom didn't intend to spank me. She had a different solution in mind. She was going to tell me the truth. Because she knew I was messing up in school because I was totally stressed out about what was going on in our home. The only thing I could think about all day, everyday, was the screaming and the violence and all the pain she was going through. My dad would regularly go ballistic and beat her. My three younger siblings and I would hide under the covers in my bed terrified as we listened to the horrible sounds through the thin walls of our small house.

My mom had me sit on a sofa and pulled up a chair close to me. She put her hands on my knees and looked into my eyes. I could tell she was nervous. But out came the words that blew my little boy mind. "Charlie is not your dad," she said.

What! Of course he was, wasn't he? I mean, I called him dad, and she had always referred to him as my dad. I was majorly confused. Then my mom reached into her purse and pulled out a photo. Flipping it around, she placed it in my hands. I found myself looking at the face of a man I had no memory of. "This is your dad," she explained. "His name is Johnny. And Ty, I want you to know that he never hit your mommy."

Wow! In that moment of realization, something clicked inside of me. I knew what she was trying to tell me: "Charlie is not your dad, Ty. What he's doing to me is wrong, and you don't need to identify with him as a father or be like him."

That was my first big paradigm shift in life, and it completely altered me. But this was merely preliminary to a far more significant paradigm shift that would come years later. Witnessing my mom's abuse instilled in me a strong sense of justice. But this high sense of justice posed a problem for me on another level. By the time I was a teenager, I was painfully aware that the whole world is filled with evil and suffering, and it troubled me deeply, especially whenever I would hear someone talk about God.

PARADIGM SHIFT CONTINUED

“God?” I would think to myself, “Come on! What a ridiculous notion. How could anybody really see what’s going on in this world and believe in God?”

I reasoned something like this: If God exists, then certainly He would use His almighty power to stop all the evil and pain in our world. But since He doesn’t, that must mean the world we live in is just the way He wants it to be, in which case He isn’t good. And if He’s not good, then why would I want anything to do with Him. I guess I wanted a Rambo or Terminator type God, a God who would lay waste to stop evil people from doing evil things. I wanted a God of sheer justice and absolute control, until one day when a whole new idea entered my mind: What if love, and not control, is God’s ultimate goal for our world?

If that were true, a whole new framework of understanding would naturally follow.

I remember sitting in my bedroom. Seventeen years old. Surrounded with rock & roll posters. Lines of coke on a mirror.

Suddenly, I realized that love cannot exist without freedom, and that freedom allows for both good and evil. Love, by its very nature, must be voluntary. A world in which wrongdoing would be impossible would be a world in which love would be impossible also. So if love were God’s end goal, freedom would be the only way to get us there. Immediately, within this new perspective, it became plausible to my mind that a God of almighty power and perfect goodness could actually exist with a world like ours on His hands. The simplicity and explanatory power of this perspective was extremely enlightening and radically liberating for me. My paradigm was shifting again, this time regarding God.

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