

'How Can He Forgive?'

Shannon Ethridge had just started her junior year in high school. She was driving herself to school one morning. She took her eyes off the road for just a few seconds to adjust her rearview mirror when she hit something in the road.

To her horror, Shannon saw a woman lying in the road next to a mangled bicycle. By the time an ambulance got to the scene, the woman in the road had died from her injuries. Shannon was in grief and shock. She immediately began considering suicide. Why should she live, she wondered, when she had killed an innocent woman?

She discovered that the woman she had hit was named Marjorie Jarster, whose husband, Gary, was out of town. A neighbor had the heartbreaking task of calling him to tell him that his wife had been killed in a senseless accident. That neighbor then called Shannon to tell her of his conversation with Gary Jarster.

He reported that after being stunned by the news, Gary's first reaction was to ask how the driver was, whether she had been injured. Then he had asked for Shannon to come see him the evening before Marjorie's funeral.

Shannon was so afraid of meeting Gary Jarster. What could she possibly say or do to make up for killing his wife? Would he hate her? Have her arrested? How could he even be in the same room with her after what she had done to him?

But the evening before the funeral, Shannon went over to meet the Jarster family. Shannon cried as Gary Jarster opened his arms wide to hug her. Then he told her about his wife. She had been a devout follower of Christ who had worked with the Wycliffe Bible Translators to translate the Bible into obscure languages so that as many people as possible all over the world could hear the word of God. As he described her, "There was no limit to how much Marjorie loved the Lord."

Then he said, "You can't let this ruin your life, Shannon. God wants to strengthen you through this. He wants to use you. As a matter of fact, I am passing Marjorie's legacy of being a godly woman on to you. I want you to love Jesus without limits, just like Marjorie did. I want you to let Him use you for His glory."

Shannon would later learn that Gary's insurance company wanted him to sue her parents, but he refused. The district attorney wanted to press charges against Shannon, but Gary insisted that all charges be dropped. He wanted Shannon to get a second chance at life, a chance to live in God's grace and mercy.

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And that is exactly what she has done. Today, Shannon Ethridge is a best-selling Christian author, speaker and counselor. Without Gary Jarster's forgiveness, Shannon's life could have been ruined. Because of that forgiveness, Gary had bestowed a new legacy on Shannon, and her life is a beacon of hope to others.

We, too, have been given a new legacy. Because of the death of Jesus on the cross on our behalf, we can have a life of freedom and peace with God now, and the future hope of living eternally in the glory of God. But these blessings are only available to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter

