

Announcing the Engagement and Wedding of



Robert Gregory Goll (Luo Yang)
and

Elyse Wyn Xie (Xie Yunhong)

America

Sunday, July 23, 2006

China

Saturday, September 16, 2006

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“Yuan” “Destiny” When my family came to China in the summer of 2001 they bought a painting which featured this character. While “Yuan” is often used in the sense of blind destiny in relationships, it can also be used to describe the wonderful way in which the loving God works to bring people together and build a relationship which is built for his glory.

Elyse and I would now like to share with you the story of “Yuan”. This is not

This scroll also included a poem about two people coming from distant places as “Yuan” (God’s sovereign power) was working to bring them together.

our story, it is the story of a loving, and may I say passionate, God who delights in his children. As we now celebrate our engagement, and look forward to watching the hand of God work in our marriage, it is exciting to look back and reflect on a small part of the marvelous work which God was doing.

God Begins the Friendship

Elyse, who formerly had the English name “Louise”, and I met on September 7, 2000. At that time she was studying in my oral English class. One time I needed to buy bus tickets and asked a group of students if anyone was from Yangzhou. Everyone looked at Elyse. She and Sharon, a friend of hers, went with me to buy the ticket. The three of us quickly became good friends.

(Note: Both of these friends are now also Sisters actively seeking the Father.)

Rob: Elyse and I actually have different first memories of when we met. Hers is a little earlier than mine and is much more likely to be correct.

During this time, God’s hand was very evident as he called Elyse to himself. When we would get together she would ask many questions, questions to which I had no answer. On occasion, God would give me an answer that I know was not of myself, or have the Bible “just happen” to open to the right page, but in large part he worked directly in her life without involving other people.



2003/7/26 - Elyse and her brother have a yearly tradition to celebrate her birthday together. Her brother, unprompted by Elyse, invited me to join them.

Elyse: We were already good friends, but there was a gap between us. We couldn't have deeper conversations when the "God-related" topic came up. I did not want to offend Rob's faith but I couldn't give myself over to Jesus, whom I didn't know. When we got together to prepare for the Christmas party, Rob could get too busy to eat. So I asked him "Is that a lot of work for you?" "No, it is a joy!" Rob replied with a big smile. His reply made me think more about his God. In my school life, I was often in positions of leadership but a lot of times I did not have the true joy I wanted when serving others. I was attracted by his joy and freedom in serving others.

Elyse: The seeking and surrendering were difficult. God is good. I could not escape from hearing His calling. The commitment to Him gave me a freedom. I thought through things before the decision was made, including my future mate. I trusted God would provide in His timing. As a believer, I saw Rob as a good Brother but couldn't allow myself to see him as more than a good friend. It was hard. Many of my classmates would say Rob should have a wife when they saw him too busy with students to have time to eat:) So I was also praying for Rob's future wife. However, at that time, I did not know that God was working and preparing both of our hearts at the same time. It is interesting to look back and read each other's journals. God is romantic!

Elyse: My major at college was English education. I was always hoping to be a teacher. I tended to watch teachers' interaction in class more carefully, especially those whom I respected. I wanted to see and learn things from them. Rob set a very good example for me. I saw his passion and genuine love for his job, his students, and just for life and people in general. I respected him a lot. At the same time, he was more like a friend after class. Many Chinese teachers would not make friends (having open house, eating at dining hall, or hanging out, etc.) with students. I felt I had a lot to learn from him. I thought he would be like many other foreign teachers, coming to China to teach for a while and then going back home. I felt blessed to have this friendship. My thought at that point was to make the most of the friendship while the opportunity was provided.



Winter '00 - Decorating Rob's first Christmas tree in China.

Rob: Even from the very beginning Elyse and I had a very special friendship. Though we did not allow it to grow, we had a connection from early in our friendship.

His Spirit would draw her, lead her to himself and not let her run away. And she did try to run away. There were times she would just want to quit and would try to hide, to stop seeking, to just forget it all, but God would work in a very evident way that I cannot even begin to describe, to bring her into his kingdom. There truly is nowhere we can go to escape from the love of Christ. One of the major areas that Elyse needed to surrender before she was willing to give herself to Christ was the idea of marriage. She knew that to follow Christ was a full handing over of her life. She also knew that she would need to marry only another believer and that believing men are few in China. Before she would surrender her life to Christ's headship she needed to come to the point that she was willing to be single for the rest of her life. This was not a decision that was taken lightly.

Finally, during the 2001 spring semester Elyse surrendered her life to Christ. During the next year we met occasionally to discuss God's word. God used these times, as well as our different cultural understandings, to teach us both much about himself. This led to February 1, 2002, a very hard day for both us. This was the day that we decided it would be best if we no longer regularly met together and Elyse began studying with another girl. From that time on, we were still good friends, but were more reserved in our getting together. This was also when SARS hit China and the campuses locked their gates. I could come and go, but Elyse was stuck on campus so we rarely saw each other, other than in passing. Then about a year later, during the summer of 2003, God made it exceedingly clear that I was to leave Yangzhou to head to northern China to study Chinese.



Feb. '03 - Building a snowman on the one day it snowed in Yangzhou.

Rob: In reading this first part of the story it may have seemed as if only a short time had passed and that we were often together. Actually, these events took place over a three year period. There were often long stretches of a month or more when Elyse and I would not talk to each other, other than possibly a "hello" in passing and the times we did see each other it was in a large group as often as not. It was always a blessing when we did have a chance to talk, but these times were few.



Not long before leaving, Elyse and I made special plans to have some time to talk. We went to the park, and there I told her that even though I would be leaving for at least a year, I was interested in continuing our friendship and being open to where God would take us. This was the first time that there was any mention of our being more than “just friends”.



God's is always with us and molds us into vessels to be used for his glory

(Elyse starts work and Rob leaves for Changchun)

I then left for Changchun. Due to organizational rules I was under at the time I was not allowed to date a Chinese and after studying for one year I was obligated to teach for one year. This caused the one year in Changchun to become



Summer 2003 - Rob and Elyse at Elyse's College

two, as I fulfilled my commitments. This was a difficult time in that we were interested in each other, but also needed to honor our word to not date. We would talk on the phone and saw each other about once a semester during the holidays, but our lives were very separate.

This time was hard, but was

absolutely needed. During these two years

Elyse: That summer was exciting and went by so fast. It seemed to me I had no time to sit down to react and the time for us to say good-bye had come. Before Rob's leaving, I knew it would certainly be very difficult for me but I had to trust God's grace would be sufficient. Even right now, as I am typing this, I can still feel tears welled up in my eyes. Uncertainties about the future added more stress at that time. I was very excited about my new life in a new city. This excitement was very helpful to save me from missing Rob too much. I was wondering from time to time what was going on in his life and mind since we had no real commitment to each other. We did not want to walk ahead of God's timing.

Elyse moved fully from being a student to being a teacher, not only as a job, but mentally as well. God was also using this time to deepen her love for himself and others. He was using her to show his love to many in her new city. This was also a time for me to build close relationships with other guys. While in Yangzhou I had been on teams of all females and had mostly been in the position of feeding others rather than being fed. In Changchun, I had male friends that were peers. We could mutually encourage, challenge and pray with and for one another. This was a transition time in our lives and our relationship. These years provided the opportunity to transition from a teacher-student friendship, to both being teachers. This time was hard, but I don't think our relationship could have progressed much further

without this time apart. God was carefully directing our lives to have us where we needed to be relationally, spiritually and in location.

Elyse: During those two years, when we had chances to get together, we would try to make the most of every moment. I never knew I could get so emotional. The two years apart have also helped me to reach other girls better from my own experience. God's comfort became so real to me. As I started to work, I was in a prime dating time in China. I went through many thoughts, including whether I should marry a Chinese believer. Rob challenged me to seek God and to make my own choice.

Elyse: I agree. I would not trade those two years for anything. It was difficult but it helped me see how much I need God and how much Rob has meant to me in my life in many ways.

Rob: During this time in Changchun we started praying that God would “keep us at the same point at the same time”. We knew that the time apart would be hard and we didn't know where God would lead us, so the future of the relationship had little certainty. We could only trust that God was in control, that we were both seeking him, and that as we both sought him and he led us, we would be moving in the same direction. God has answered this prayer, almost to the point of being comical. There were times that after not having talked for about a week we both called each other at the same random time so that we both got a busy signal. This is a funny example, but we are grateful for God's working in our hearts as well. He directed us to desire each other, but to also gradually develop that desire and gradually deepen our friendship. He did not let either of us race ahead of the proper time.



Summer '04 - After Rob's returning from the States, we celebrated our belated birthdays together on the same day.



God provides in His ways and His time

(After two years apart we are able to live in the same area and pursue our relationship)

Then, on July 1, 2005, after five years as friends and two years apart, my contract ended and I was free to date and actively pursue relationship with Elyse. This also included the freedom to return south so we could be near one another. In wanting to continue to move slowly, I returned to Yangzhou to study Chinese, while Elyse was working in Zhenjiang, about an hour away by bus. We knew that with having an international relationship, we would be very much in the public eye and we wanted to be able to spend time together without adding this



outside pressure. My sister, Laura, came to visit me that summer, and the three of us were able to spend time together. While my family had all met Elyse when they came to visit in 2001 (and, in fact, it was Elyse who helped them buy the

Rob: It is a blessing that both of us have been able to meet each other's family. This is not often the case in international relationships. It is also a blessing that my family also adores Elyse (and she them). When my family was leaving after their time in China, my mom was crying because she didn't want to leave her and my dad offered to help her if she needed help with her tuition or coming to the States in the future.

painting mentioned earlier), it was a blessing for them to be able to spend more time together now that we were clearly thinking more about deepening our relationship.



God is love and allows us to love one another

Not long after Laura's leaving, on October 3, 2005, Elyse and I went traveling to Jiangdu, a nearby city, and I



Moments after we officially started dating.

asked her for permission to love her. Before that time we had agreed to save saying "I love you", until the time when God may bring us together (not that we didn't mention how much we really "liked" each other ☺). We continued in different cities for one semester. During that semester, I gave Elyse a bracelet that I had saved in secret since my freshman year of college for the girl whom I wanted to give my life to. While the gift was small, this was a very meaningful time.

During the winter holiday, we took a trip to Changchun together

Rob: This bracelet had become one of the most precious and secret things I owned. I did not want anyone to know about it so that I could give it only when the time was right, and not have any pressure to give it earlier. In many ways, this bracelet signified the giving of my heart. While the meanings may differ, I would put it on the same importance level as the engagement ring.

Elyse: My dad became very sick not long after we officially started dating. I was working in Zhenjiang while Rob was in Yangzhou, where my family lives. Rob went to see and pray for my dad and my family almost every day while my dad stayed in the hospital. That gave me a chance to let my family, including my other relatives, know Rob better. I am so excited for my family's acceptance of our being together. Rob was very supportive and caring when I was worried about my dad's health. This bracelet was given on a weekend when my dad was already out of danger. Rob brought his guitar. We spent time singing worship songs together. Then this precious gift was given. That is a sweet memory.



A beautiful day for giving Elyse the bracelet.



Dashing through the snow over a river in Harbin.

Rob: It has been exciting to be able to enter into Elyse's life as well as to make new friends together. Since I am new to Zhenjiang, most of my friends and co-workers only know us as a couple. At the same time, I have been grateful that most of Elyse's friends have been very welcoming. We have had one party here together with Elyse's small Sunday group, and are looking forward to another this Easter Sunday. It is nice to see our future home already being used for outreach and deepening of relationships.

with Jamie, another friend of ours, to introduce Elyse to some of my good friends who had heard much about her. Not long after the trip, I moved to Zhenjiang to start my new teaching position (this had been planned before the trip). Finally, we were in the same city and able to work (and play) together and to begin to unite our purpose and vision. In

Elyse: I heard about Rob's life and friends in Changchun a lot. It was really nice to be able to meet them in person as a couple. Jamie is a very good friend of mine. We three had a lot of fun together on this trip. I am very glad to have her approval of Rob.

the past, we had had common vision, and common friends, but with living in different cities our daily focuses had been different. Now we were able to begin unifying our work and lives.



*God's ways are higher than our ways and
He gives us more than we could ever ask or imagine*

On March 11, 2006, Elyse and I, who enjoy exploring together, went traveling to Danyang, another nearby town. This is where all of the glasses in China are made so we bought glasses and sunglasses at a good price (and from a store

Rob: Before traveling to Changchun I had invited Elyse's dad to a tea house and there asked him for permission to marry his daughter. The fact that our dialogue would need to be in the local dialect added to my uncertainty of just how to go about asking him. I was excited for this opportunity, but understandably nervous. He expressed a few concerns, but was also very supportive. An international marriage will be accepted in China, but is far from as common as would be found in the States. I am grateful for the acceptance I have received from Elyse's entire family.

owned by Christians).

That evening after returning to Zhenjiang we went to see "The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe", which we have been looking forward to since before we even knew it was being filmed. This story is one of

Elyse: True love waits. This waiting is not an act of being passive. Instead, God has actively prepared us spiritually, emotionally and physically for the "right one" in His "right time". We are both grateful for the lessons and joys we have reaped in this seeking of our friendship. We are looking forward to being open with each other in future life and to knowing more about each other. As we walk the journey towards our final Home together, we will not be alone. God knows our needs and provides us the best!

our earliest connections in that I had recommended it to Elyse, and others, as my favorite book so she read it and we had good times of discussion. I had been praying for a nice day that day, but it rained for the entire day until late in the evening. Since it was cold (though no longer raining), we walked

back to her warm dorm room and there I asked her to marry me. Before we had even met each other we both knew we wanted to save our first kiss for engagement, this

Elyse: The developing of our friendship was very natural. From an impossible thought of "marrying a foreigner" when I first questioned my interest towards Rob to gladly accepting Rob's proposal, God has used the past few years to show His way step by step in His timing.

Rob: A tourist visa for a fiancée is one of the hardest visa's to obtain. While Elyse was waiting for 4 hours for her interview she was focusing on our scheduled reading of Psalm 20 "May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. We will shout for joy when you are victorious and will lift up our banners in the name of our God. May the LORD grant all your requests." The next day our scheduled reading was Psalm 21 "You have granted him the desire of his heart and have not withheld the request of his lips. You welcomed him with rich blessings." We are grateful for God's provision.

added a special touch to our engagement day. It also added a peace to know that our relationship was built on a deep appreciation of each other as people rather than being built on physical touch.

Since our engagement, we have been blessed with God's provision of a very difficult to obtain US visa and are working on planning two wedding celebrations. We will sign the marriage papers in June in China and then have our wedding ceremony in America on July 23rd, followed by our wedding ceremony in China on September 16th. Our lives and relationship have suddenly jumped from slow and careful to actively pursuing our life together. Figuring out the details can be overwhelming at times, but it is exciting to be making these decisions together.

Rob: Some of you may be thinking that it was fine for us to wait to kiss until we were engaged, but that it either isn't for you or it isn't possible for you. I will let you know it isn't for me and it isn't possible for me either. We do both strongly desire each other and it would be much easier to give into that desire than to fight it, but I am so glad we have fought it and that we are continuing to strive for holiness as we head into marriage. This waiting has given honor to each other. We cared about each other enough to wait even when it was extremely difficult. It has helped keep us from the distorting effect of untimely physical closeness. And it has kept kissing from becoming common so that we need something else for excitement. I have heard of those who have set their standard even higher and many lower or with no standard at all. I would strongly recommend considering what standards you will set for those of you who are not yet married.

God has given us wonderful families for whom we are tremendously grateful

We are very grateful for both of our families during this time. Traditionally in America it is the bride's side who works out wedding details and in China it is absolutely the husband's side. Well, as it is, we have reversed that role (which is much more common in America than in China) and we are grateful for our families' willingness to help us work out the details when it shouldn't be their responsibility at all.

Rob: I am very much looking forward to introducing Elyse to my friends and relatives. She is a woman who loves her God and has a passion for His Word. She also loves those around her and has become a big sister to many.

Ways to RSVP

1. Email: RobAndElyse@gmail.com
2. Call Lynn Goll at (440) 238-9235

Celebrating God's Gift Together

We are excited to be able to celebrate our wedding together with you, our family and friends in America. **Our wedding ceremony will be held on Sunday, July 23rd at 3pm at Grace Church in Middleburg Heights, Ohio.** The ceremony will be followed by an informal time of fellowship at the church. This invitation is being extended to everyone who has received my newsletters through the years. **If you will be able to attend please RSVP by July 1, 2006.** We are looking forward to this being a celebration of the gift God has given to both of us.

Please do **bring your digital camera** to the wedding!

Elyse: Life is so good. It has been hard for us to stop and write. It is even harder for me to try to shrink a long story into several pages. We are so much looking forward to seeing and talking with you in person. Especially for me, I have only met Rob's family. I know many of those who are reading this don't know me at all. It is encouraging to know we are serving the same God in different places and to know we will meet someday!

Wedding Gifts

Our life is looking to be one of frequent moves. For this reason we are requesting that any gifts be financial rather than actual items. We do not want to have things to carry with us.



A bowl of porridge a day keeps the doctor away
(especially with the one you love!)



Celebrating our five week dating anniversary.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

All pictures in this newsletter may be seen at <http://spaces.msn.com/members/RobertGoll/>