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Shattered

Zach Barlow

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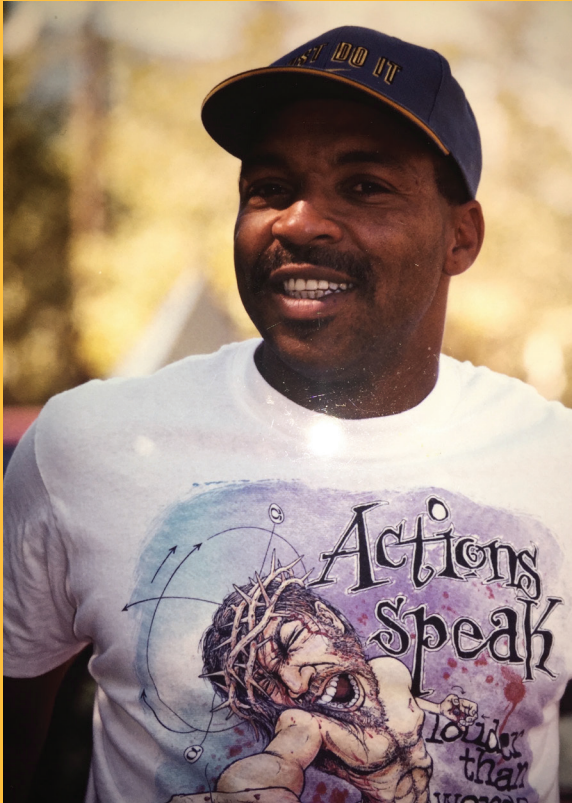
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Barlow: Shattered

Shattered

Zach Barlow

Layout by Denise Romero. Left photography by Michaela Marano. Right photography courtesy of Zach Barlow.



My name is Joseph Leon Barlow.

I tread carefully. Because as my feet grow, I learn that my steps
may crush something else.

A creature of God, a little beautiful thing that deserves life as
much as me, if not more.

I wish to never destroy anything, ever again.

The fear of being the last giant any ant sees has the power to
paralyze me.

When the fear has bubbled and frothed and is spilling out
of the top.

"Here, I was safe, and so
was the rest of the world.
Here, I could be at
peace."

I go to where I know I am accepted.
To my comfort. To what has always been.

The bottoms of these bottles look the
same.

Yes, it takes some effort to get there, but
when I do, I am met by the woman who
has always made me feel like a man.
She caresses me and tells me, "Everything
will be okay."

"There is nothing to fear."

"Don't step anywhere, and you will crush
nothing."

"Put your feet up and rest with me for a
while. I will make it all go away."

One day, after the fear had bubbled,
I came to the bottom of the bottle and
saw only empty glass.

*Maybe she is away tonight with an-
other,* I thought.

Maybe she will be in tomorrow.

But more and more I sought her to find
nothing.

Only the empty glass, the road, the dust
on my feet, the ones I had to leave behind in
order to get to her.

"She hasn't left you, friend," a voice spoke
up to me. "She has only moved houses.
She now lives at the end of this needle,
inside the vein in between your toes.

That is where you can find her."

I told the voice no, I could not embark on
that journey.

It was too far away from the ones I loved,
and too dangerous.

A route back to my home was not clear,
or promised.

But as the days passed me by,
and my feet continued to grow,
the fear within me bubbled.

It bubbled and frothed, and wished
and washed, until I felt as though I might
explode.

Maybe one night, I thought to myself.
For old times' sake.

*It would be nice to see her new neigh-
borhood.*

*It might be only right to see what
she's been up to.*

*What kind of friend would I be if I
didn't?*

Her new home was magnificent.
She was so beautiful. More beautiful than
I remembered. She held me for so long, I
could tell she'd missed me.

All my fear had vanished. She put my feet
up and told me I would not smash a single
thing here. Here, I was safe, and so was the
rest of the world.

Here, I could be at peace.

I began to go and visit her at her new
home more often.

It was farther away than her last.
But it was always worth the journey.
It was here that I fell in love with her.

When I got home, the journey left me so
exhausted that I always had to rest.

I would sleep through birthdays; I would
sleep through soccer games; I would sleep
through play recitals; I would sleep through
fatherhood.

But what could I do?
I was in love.

Then one day, when the fear was boiling
and frothing like an ocean storm,
I decided to pay my love a visit only to
find that once again, she was not there.

Again and again, I tried to find her in her
home.

Her home was empty, and she had once
again left me.

I was so devastated that I couldn't control
my body.

I would shake uncontrollably and vomit
at random.

I would sweat ice and shiver while it felt
like I was on fire.

I was so heartbroken that I felt for sure
that this was where I would die.

Then a voice said to me, "She has not left
you, friend; she has once again moved."

"Tell me, please, tell me, where she is. I
will go anywhere.

I have to find her, or else I will die."

"She is in the church, behind the words
and phrases the pastors speak, in between
the pulpit and the pew—that is where you
can find her."

***Another journey. One that I have never
embarked on. One that I must if I will
find my one true love,*** I thought.

"This journey, however, cannot be taken
alone. You must take your family with you, if
you are to find her; only with them can you
truly find her comfort."

Simple enough.

I will gather my family and together we
will venture forward into the church to find
Lady Comfort, so I can no longer be afraid.

"I hate you," my son said.

"I want a divorce, and I'm taking the
kids," my wife said

"I don't know who you are, and I don't
care to get to know you," my daughter said.

And so here I am,
staring at a road I cannot travel.
Because those who would travel with me
I have left, or they left me long ago. My love
has gone, my family has gone, and all I have
now is the road, the dust on my feet, and my
fear of stepping in the wrong place.