



As he had routinely done for 10 years, Rick Barnes ambled into Austin Stone Community Church on March 29, stopping to shake hands and greet friends. Then he and his wife, Candy, found their way to their usual seats in the second row. His congenial manner belied the turbulence that had erupted the previous day.

LESS THAN 24 HOURS EARLIER, he had been fired from his job after 17 seasons as head coach of the men's basketball team at the University of Texas. Yet here he was in church, singing praises to God—with passion.

Barnes' presence at Austin Stone in the Texas capital of Austin was not lost on Pastor Matt Carter.

"He was worshipping his heart out," Carter said.

Following the service, Barnes walked up to Carter with a wide smile on his face. "How are you doing?" Carter inquired.

"It's been very difficult," Barnes replied. "But I completely trust in the Lord. He has given me a peace and joy that I didn't know were possible."

His trust in God had been tested during the unsettling days leading up to his termination. And his peace was on display hours after the Sunday church service when he fielded prob-

RICK BARNES STARTS AFRESH

# GLORY ROAD

New Tennessee men's basketball coach triumphs in trial

by **Richard Greene**

ing questions during an emotional, 40-minute farewell press conference at the university.

#### CHARACTER COUNTS

Barnes' tenure at Texas ended shortly after Butler University upended the Longhorns 56-48 in the first round of last season's NCAA Tournament. Never mind that he had coached Texas teams to 402 victories and had captured three Big 12 regular-season titles. Never mind that he had become the 13th active coach to achieve 600 wins—going 604-314, with previous head coaching stops at George Mason, Providence and Clemson. And never mind that the Longhorns had reached the NCAA Tournament 16 times and made the Final Four in 2003. The new administration was simply ready to move in a new direction.

Soon after the Butler loss, Barnes met with athletic director Steve Patterson, who had arrived in Austin in 2013, and told him he wanted to have the chance to “finish the job” of bringing an NCAA championship trophy to Texas. Barnes received words of assurance from Patterson that he would return for another season.

Those words didn't hold. Patterson later gave Barnes an ultimatum: fire certain members of his coaching staff or be fired himself. Not one to abandon his longtime assistants, Barnes put his foot down—and Patterson lowered the boom.

Despite all of this, in talking with the media that day after church, Barnes remained positive and didn't criticize his former employer. In fact, his Christian character sparkled.

“I'm just grateful for the 17 years I've had at Texas,” Barnes told reporters. “We've been blessed as a staff here to have so many people and so many players who have affected our lives in more ways than we can ever imagine.

“I don't want anybody who knows me in Austin to think for one second that I'm bitter,” he added. “I don't want today to be about anything other than to say that I'm thankful. I really am.”

Throughout the crisis, Candy Barnes saw her husband standing tall, looking to Jesus and staying rooted in His Word. She and Rick celebrated their 39th wedding anniversary last summer, having tied the knot prior to the start of Rick's senior year at Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory, N.C.—their hometown. They met at the local hosiery mill her father owned when Candy was home from school at the University of Tennessee.

“In the span of one week, our earthly world as we knew it stopped, abruptly,” Candy said. “We clung to one hope: God is sovereign and with us all the way.”

She watched as Rick led their family in that very hope—including their son, Nick; daughter, Carley, and her husband, Josh Lickteig; and grandsons, Avery and Caleb, both adopted from Uganda. Together, they prayed for God's will to become clear.

“God gave us an opportunity to live out our faith in Him by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” Candy said. Then she quoted 1 Peter 1:5, a verse they leaned on repeatedly, which says that “by God's power [we] are being guarded through faith” (ESV).

But the Barnes family didn't just pray for themselves, nor were they solely preoccupied with their own

storm. They continued to ask God to shower His grace on friends and colleagues who didn't yet know Him—that they would come to faith in Christ.

And Barnes extended compassion to his Texas staff. “He showed in his humble words and in the ways he genuinely cared for all the others who lost their jobs that they could have a better hope,” Candy said.

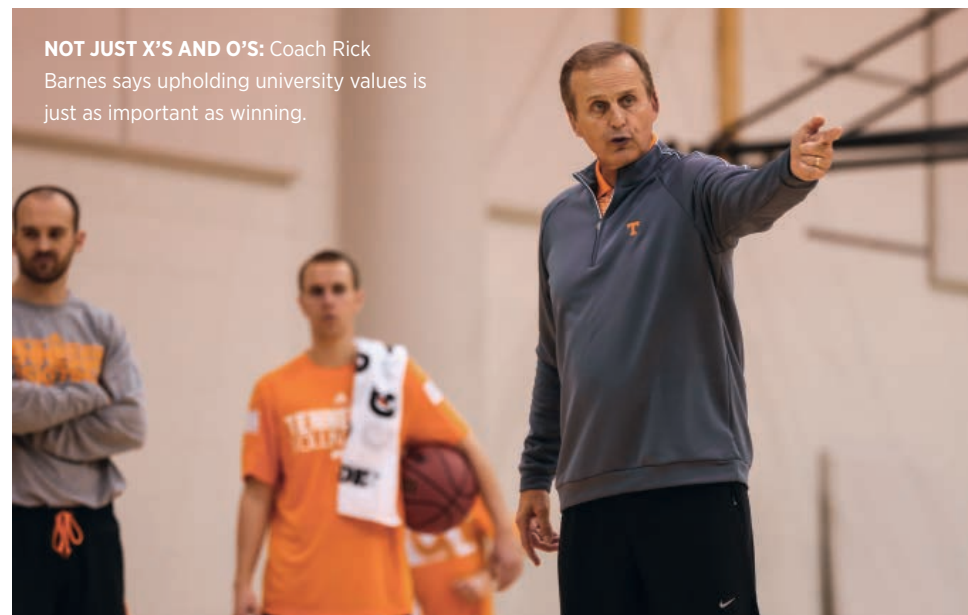
#### FROM FIRED TO HIRED

Barnes didn't stay unemployed for long. The University of Tennessee came calling, and the veteran coach accepted the chance to start afresh at a different UT, in a different shade of orange.

The Volunteers were in the hunt for a new men's basketball coach after firing Donnie Tyndall for NCAA rules violations at his prior job. Tyndall's tenure had lasted just one season. Barnes is Tennessee's fourth men's basketball coach in six years.

Upon hiring Barnes, Tennessee athletic director Dave Hart said in a statement: “Rick Barnes is an elite basketball coach in every respect. Rick brings an extremely impressive track record of excellence, as well as much-needed stability, to our men's basketball program. This is an exciting day for our Tennessee family.”

Now, months into his new job in >>



**NOT JUST X'S AND O'S:** Coach Rick Barnes says upholding university values is just as important as winning.

» Knoxville, Barnes has been able to step back and reframe his perspective on how his tenure in Austin ended as well as other lessons he's learned along his faith journey—that first began when he was a troubled teenager.

Sitting on a corner couch under two huge glass-covered photos of former Vols basketball greats Dale Ellis and Allan Houston, Barnes told *Decision*: “As much as we wanted to stay in Texas, God didn't want us to stay in Texas. He used other people as vehicles to accomplish His will. He's sovereign. We believe that with all of our hearts. We believe God sees things that we don't see and has a plan for everything.”

A plan involving being uprooted and re-planted in East Tennessee and the rugged Southeastern Conference.

“I love Texas and always will, but I have fallen in love with Tennessee,” the 61-year-old Barnes said.

That means a homecoming of sorts for Candy, who graduated from Tennessee with a degree in biology in 1975.

“We're excited for what God has planned for us here because we do believe He's in charge,” Rick said.

#### THE ROAD TO REDEMPTION

Early in his life, Barnes was in charge, or at least he thought he was. Grow-

ing up in Hickory, N.C., the fourth of five children, Barnes struggled from the beginning in the classroom. He failed the first grade. He just flat out disliked school and studying. But he had an all-consuming fire in his belly to be a ballplayer—first on the baseball diamond, then on the basketball court.

“I was probably in the first or second grade when I walked barefoot into the Kenworth Elementary School, where I saw my principal, Gene Miller, shooting hoops,” Barnes explained. “He tossed me the ball and that's where I made my first shot. I've loved it ever since.”

Life in this small mill town was tough enough for the Barnes family, but it became even harder when divorce rocked their world, leaving Mary Barnes alone to take care of five kids. Rick was about 4 years old at the time.

But nothing could prepare him for the pain that would come in 1968 when his mother took a telephone call and collapsed in tears, having been told that her daughter, Sandy, had been killed in a car wreck on her way to Myrtle Beach on her high school senior trip. Rick, then between eighth and ninth grades, was especially fond of his only sister, who regularly helped take care of him and younger brother Gary.

“When she died, I really went

off the deep end,” Barnes said. “I made up my mind that I truly didn't care, and I'd do anything to get into trouble.”


Rick was spiraling out of control when he had life-altering collisions with a handful of caring teachers, coaches and administrators, who loved him. Their tough love shook him to the core and set him back on the right academic path. But it was God's love that changed his heart.

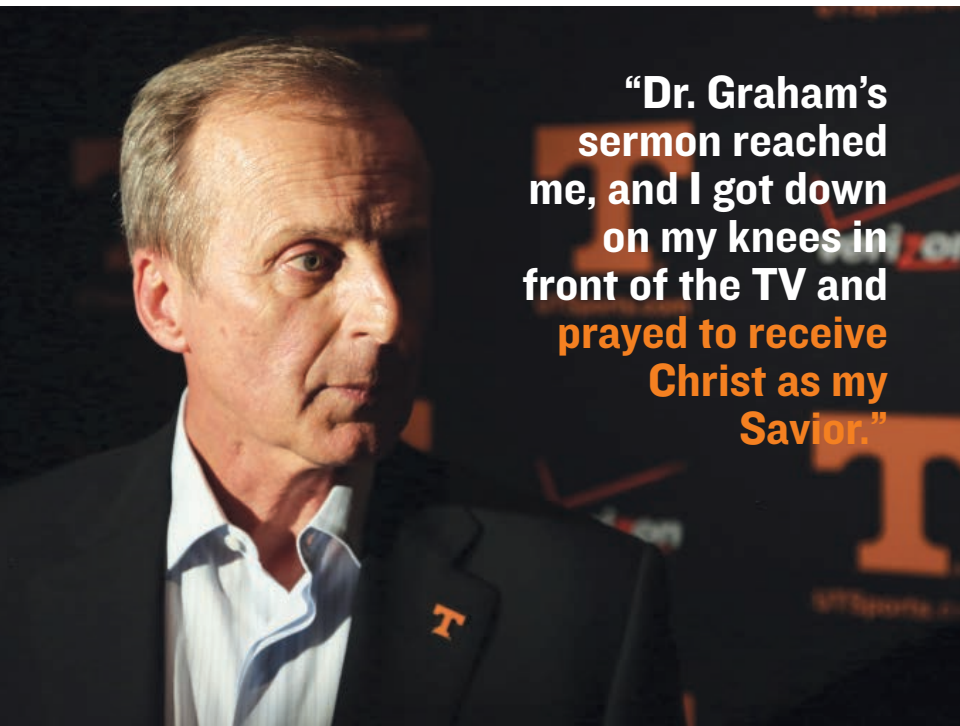
Having attended church with his mom and having witnessed a godly example set by his grandparents, Barnes believed in God but had never surrendered control of his life to Him. That moment of truth came one night when he rushed home to do what he had done so many times before—to watch Billy Graham on TV. But this night, the message hit home like never before.

“Dr. Graham's sermon reached me, and I got down on my knees in front of the TV and prayed to receive Christ as my Savior,” Barnes said.

The influence of Billy Graham also extends to Rick and Candy's son, Nick. Just a few years back, while reading Mr. Graham's autobiography *Just as I Am*, Nick told his dad that he was sensing a calling from Christ, and Nick has since dedicated his life to serving the Lord full time.

As a new basketball season unfolds this month, Barnes yearns to continue to live by Philippians 1:6, a verse that helps him keep focused on Jesus: “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

“That's especially true when the world grabs me and I find myself drifting away and not being the person God wants me to be. I need to trust the Lord to keep doing His work in me and then whatever I do I will bring glory to Jesus Christ.”  ©2015 BGEA



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