

Did You Think You Were the Only One with Problems?

There was a whole passel of sour looking fellows in the room that night, looking like deer caught in the headlights. Even Pastor wore a plastic smile, and he was the one who'd recommended this twelve session marriage building seminar.

The class began innocently enough, with some little teaching about how we're to love our spouses and all. I kept from nodding through most of it, but then, to my horror, they announced we'd end each night's session with some sappy little share-fest. Oh brother! How in the world had I let my wife talk me into this?

Thankfully we fellows weren't the only ones suffering. I noticed several wives taking light jabs to the ribs for spouting off during their confession session. When it came my turn, I managed to grunt something to the effect of, "Yeah, ahh... Well, ahh... Sure, I'm for all that stuff. I guess..."

Believe me, I did good compared to some of the other fellows. One big guy named Jim was brutally honest.

"I don't have anything to say," he croaked in a voice low enough to trigger a tsunami. Then he folded his arms and nodded to poor sucker who was next.

"Now that's worth the price of admission," I giggled under my breath.

After a couple of weeks people began to loosen up. I mean really loosen up. They were shedding their steeple people exteriors left and right. I'll be honest; I was getting a little nervous. What if Angie disregarded my warnings and told off on me?

Eventually, I must admit, I could no longer deny the teaching was helpful, even if it was causing Angie and me to argue all the way home each night. I was even enjoying my turn during the snitch-fest at the end. Most of all, I was reveling in the fact that Angie and I weren't the only couple at the Church who still had a few issues to iron out.

Maybe that's what finally helped old Jim to break his silence. One night, out of the blue, he uncrossed his arms and spoke a couple of sentences. Okay, so it was only an angry response to one of his wife's earlier accusations, but it was a start! The next week he did it again. Too bad it was our last regular class. Jim might have accidentally bubbled over pretty soon.

For the final night they planned a fancy marriage vows renewal shindig. They asked each of us to invite as many people as we could and prepare a few words to say about what we had learned in class. I was nervous for a week. I could only imagine how Jim felt.

When that night arrived we all got married again. That was the easy part. Waiting for our turn to speak was nerve grinding. Everyone did fine though, saying wonderful things about the program, eloquently trying to persuade their family members to get some help too. We all held our breath when Jim was called to the podium.

To our surprise, that big fellow lumbered up and snatched that microphone off the stand like he had been waiting for this moment all of his life. I don't recall all of what he said over the next ten minutes, but it starting with, "I came into the class thinking I was the only one who had problems..." By the time he finished preaching, family members were practically climbing over each other to get back to the sign up sheet.

It certainly was a night to remember, and one that helps me realize why I'm often so open and transparent in these stories. I believe people need to know Christians suffer the same temptations, trials, and hardships as everyone else. Unfortunately, we often sin like everyone else too, despite having all of God's help. Yes, we all fall short of God's glory. One of the biggest ways is when we try to pretend we are holier than thou.

Christian's are not superior people. We're just plain folks who finally got honest enough with ourselves to recognize our need for help, and finally accepted God's invitation to hide ourselves in Christ.

God is calling you today. Why don't you climb into the ark and be saved with us? Ask Jesus to be your Lord. (*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when He freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed His life, shedding His blood...* **Romans 3:23-25** NLT)

But Anyway- Big Jim is one of my best friends at Church now, though I can hardly get a word in edgewise around him. He's also one of the most devout Christian men I know. He's the real deal. That class really helped him come out of his shell. I guess he just needed to know we Christians are all in the same boat.

-Guy Sheffield 1-08-08