

The Barnabas Letter

a newsletter from
The Barnabas Center,
a nonprofit counseling,
teaching and training ministry
in Charlotte, NC

Volume 16, Issue 3

Fall 2005

Husband & Wife

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By Roger Edwards:
a counselor and teacher
at The Barnabas
Center.

The Avoidant Husband

why men run from problems

A brown spot, about the size of a quarter, appeared one day on our bathroom wall. Water was splashing past the shower curtain, and causing a problem. My wife seemed to think I should do something.

"It's squishy," she said, testing it with her thumb.

"Don't!" I advised, "That'll just make it worse." With lifted eyebrow, she commented that it seemed to be getting worse all by itself.

So I said, as I left the bathroom, "Yeah, well..." which I thought was pretty definitive.

But the brown spot didn't go away. It didn't fade, dry up, or heal on its own. I saw it over my shoulder in the bathroom mirror. It followed me around the room; an unblinking Cyclops, a one-eyed judge. I adjusted the shower curtain, but it still peered at me. I needed a plan. So I decided to shower less often and avoid the bathroom when my wife was there.

Then the brown spot started to grow.

"Have you seen it lately?" my wife asked.

"Seen what?" I asked in a friendly tone. She didn't answer. "Oh that," I said, "Yeah, I've seen it." She was quiet, so I added, "I'll look into it."

Brown Spots

Brown spots. They're everywhere. Every time I turn around something else has gone wrong; the refrigerator is broken, the bank account is low or the car is making a funny noise. But the worst kind of all are the 'relational' kind, like when a friend won't speak to you, or a child's feelings are hurt. Something always seems to be going wrong in relationships.

Like marriage, brown spots show up a lot there. Usually some cold, damp words have leaked out and splashed against your spouse. At first, it seems like a small thing. You think,

"In time, it'll dry up and go away". But it doesn't. It turns purple and then a sick green. If you don't do something, it becomes an old wound. Careless words always bruise the heart.

I should look into it. I should do something. But what if it's worse than I thought? What if I don't know how to fix it? What then? It just seems easier to avoid the whole mess.

I hate those brown spots. They make me wonder if God rigged the world so it won't work¹. They feel like curses. And once you stop and think about it, you realize. 'Of course... that's what they are.' They are the thorns and thistles that God warned us about. They are the death and decay that result from our rejection of God. And now they're everywhere.

On The Run

I admit it. I'm on the run. I want away from cutting thorns and tangling thistles. They'll be the end of me, for sure. The situation feels desperate. That's why I have dedicated so much of my life to escaping problems.

Through extensive research, I have developed a whole repertoire of avoidance methods. With so many brown spots not to deal with, you need options. First, I might try pretending that problems aren't there or that they'll go away. If they persist, I escape into other 'important' work or 'needed' play. If someone tries to hold me accountable, I get irritated until they give up. Or I might change the subject or shift the responsibility onto others. And when all else fails, I scrunch up my face and wish earnestly that life were different. I work hard to escape the curses in life.

Except I have a problem. God cursed the ground on account of Adam's sin. So no matter how fast I run, I can't outdistance the ground. Even if I could fly, sooner or later, I'd have to come back down to a stark reality: it is impossible to escape brown spots.

Except I have a problem. God cursed the ground on account of Adam's sin. So no matter how fast I run, I can't outdistance the ground.

They have me cornered. They are the brown spots on the bananas I eat in the morning. They are the liver spots on my arms at mid-life. And someday they will be dark shadows on my MRI. I cannot avoid curses any more than I can outmaneuver the horizon.

Those spots terrify me. They make me feel out of control. And that experience I deeply despise; all men do. So I manage my fear by creating a tiny comfort zone. Inside that zone are the competencies (sports, money, cars, business, jokes) where I feel comfortable. Those become the things I will talk about and participate in. Everything else, I avoid. As long as I can stay inside that zone, I can maintain the illusion of control.

Then those brown spots come along and reminds me that I'm not strong enough or clever enough to control life. The message touches a nerve. It fingers the real reason I avoid problems - deep down, I believe I'm self-sufficient. But then, problems come along to expose the fact that I'm not. Brown spots silently insist that life apart from God is not possible.

Self-sufficiency then, is the true root of a man's avoidance problem. It may look like I am merely insecure. But underneath, I am insubordinate. Outwardly, I am the stereotypical man who won't admit he doesn't know what to do. But inwardly, I am the Archetypical Man who won't admit who he really is.

Problems remind me, in small ways like home repair and in big ways like death, that I need God. I run from the message. I rebel against it. You see, I'm not merely avoiding difficulties, I'm running from the truth of how God made me. Yes, I am definitely on the run.

The Smile

Meanwhile the spot, the one on my bathroom wall, kept growing. When it reached approximately the size of Vermont, I sat on the tub, summoned my courage and touched it with my forefinger, which immediately sank to the third knuckle. Not a pleasant feeling. But I couldn't pull it out quickly, for fear that all of Vermont would come with it. So there I sat.

Just about then my wife walked in.

"It's not too bad," I said, trying to sound knowledgeable. She looked at my finger. "But, as you can see," I added, slowly withdrawing my buried digit, "I'm investigating." It didn't

come out too well— my words I mean. I didn't sound knowledgeable at all. I sounded like a man in deep denial, and I seemed to be stuck there.

And I might be there still - except for an unexpected turn of events. My wife did something totally uncalled for that helped change things. She looked at me with her kind brown eyes and smiled. It wasn't a smirk, nor a sarcastic grin. It was genuine. And warm. I'm sure, because I looked twice. 'That wasn't exactly fair,' I remember thinking. But it's what she did.

I tried to defend myself. I tried to keep that smile out. But it connected anyway. And something that had been disengaged became engaged. Suddenly, I felt compelled to tackle the whole brown spot scenario. How this happened is difficult to explain.

Before I knew it, there was a pile of wallpaper and crumbly sheetrock at my feet. A gaping hole was in the wall exposing studs and electrical wires. "Remember the Alamo!" I called out to no one in particular, "Damn the torpedoes!" I was past the point of no return. I was going in.

A few days later (or was it weeks?), I had replaced the sheetrock on one whole wall and the ceiling, installed an exhaust fan, and rewired the light. I even put down a new vinyl floor along with a new toilet and sink. How could this happen? What had changed?

It certainly wasn't an upsurge of my competence level. To camouflage my mistakes, we had to use a bold wallpaper pattern and the toilet rocked no matter how I tightened it. I had not suddenly become a proficient handyman. No, it was my heart that had changed.

The Real Problem

My heart - where the real stain is - had been washed by something stronger than my dark pride. And that could only be one thing. For there is only one thing in the universe stronger than a man's pride. It is God's grace - pure and simple. Grace, in the form of my wife's smile, was given to me. But it was from Him, a reminder that day of the unmerited favor that He gives everyday.

I didn't even see it coming. God's tricky like that. He breaks in through the back door, as it were. Husbands expect frontal assaults. We are on the lookout for our wives rolling their eyes,

(Continued on page 7)

You could say that it is amazing what a man will do for even a small smile. But the more profound truth is what amazing grace will do for even a small man.

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The Controlling Wife

By Cindi Bolton
Cindi is married to Breck,
lives in Charlotte and has
been a long time friend of
The Barnabas Center

Control. It's a popular word in today's culture, usually used in conjunction with the word "issues" or "freak", nice little descriptions for one's little personal ticks and obsessions. It's even sounds somewhat cute and affectionate, in an exaggerated kind of way, as a term of endearment for someone who has special difficulty curbing their need to control their environment, including the others around them. But whenever that word is used in the same sentence as the word wife, the tone goes from cute to ugly in a matter of mere seconds.

"Now, I'm not saying you're a controlling wife!" Roger Edwards, of the Barnabas Center, quickly offered as a disclaimer when he asked me to write this article. I laughed, assured him I knew something about the subject and accepted the job. Interestingly enough, when I told friends and family that I was writing on this subject, they all coyly responded with similar cover ups like, "How would you know anything about that?!?" As I pondered their responses, I realized I must be really good at this control thing if they haven't noticed I've been doing it for years! (At least, all but one of them hasn't noticed!) You see, I was born and bred in the South, so it was a part of my heritage to hone my controlling skills; I can be quite adept at looking very sweet and genteel while I drive my armored tank over you toes!

So the subject is, unfortunately, right up one of my alleys. And though the title sounds akin to a Stephen King novel, (remember Misery?), the truth is that the theme of the controlling wife

plays out in homes across the country, in the daily lives of most women you know, including me. Even though Jesus has redeemed me and my heart has been changed, I am still a daughter of Eve, and am prone to the very natural reaction to attempt to change, tweak and fix the things in my life that cause me grief. There are many reasons for this, so it's no wonder we take control of our lives and the lives of others around us. We are trying to avoid what we're fearful of, to get what we are hopeful for and to feel some sense of power over what seems so beyond our reach.



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Marriage is a prime example. I came into mine with great hopes of experiencing immense joy, deep love, affirmation, security and tenderness (in essence, perfection!). And though I married a wonderful man, what I experienced was the reality of the fallen world--

that I had married a sinner, and so had he. Fear instead of trust, began to rule my reactions, and became the dominating motivator of my behavior.

Does this sound at all familiar to you? When I ask myself what I'm fearful of in marriage, it's easy to come up with a long list, but here are the main ones: fear of being alone, fear of the unknown, fear of not measuring up, fear of not being good enough, fear of appearing needy, fear of being hurt and rejected, and fear of betrayal. I don't know about you, but that's a rough list and I don't like to experience any of those things even once, much less repeatedly as it so often can happen in marriage. So, I find solutions to manage those fears by trying to "fix"

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the problem, exerting some control over the things or persons that cause me pain or discomfort.

This commitment to avoiding my fears is girded by the misbelief that God cannot be trusted. Therefore, I must do something, anything, to make this risky relationship a bit less painful and disappointing, a bit more, well, controlled. I have two favorite tactics. First, I build walls around my heart to keep it far from my husband's potentially dangerous reach. Then I shoot down his attempts to love me, keeping him at the level I want him, which I'm sad to admit, is beneath me. The genius of my dual tactic is that I can punish him for his faults or remind him of failures on the one hand and successfully avoid being vulnerable on the other. I can stay away from needing anyone, especially someone who is going to fail me. There, don't I sound safe?!?

Control is powerful in the hands of a woman. My friend Katherine makes a point of checking her "power" at the door when she and her husband differ on a decision. Her reason? She knows she can get her way by using the powers vested in her—her control-- to override his thoughts and desires. Pretty nice of her, isn't it?

But in the end, what does all this control get us? I might succeed in protecting myself from the things I fear. But do I get more of what I want, what I need? Am I more hopeful for more intimacy and security in the future? Did that sense of power I felt fulfill me?

Control's walls might protect us from the people we have shut out, but the result is that we are even lonelier than before. I controlled to get what I want, but I end up getting less of the goodness that God longs to use my husband to give. We may feel more powerful, but we often lose our softness. And what happens to our husbands when we exert our con-

trol, our power? We quite possibly break down some of the strength and respect in the man God intended for us to love by trying to shape him into the person we thought he should be.

Are we really ever more fulfilled by controlling others? If so, it is only temporary. Rather than trusting God's plan, just like Eve, I think I know better than Him. So I buy into the deception just like she did.

Unfortunately our defenses come at a price. The long and the short of it is that when we become a controlling wife, we show we trust ourselves more than we trust God and end up more distant from communion with Him and our husbands, which is what we truly hoped for in the first place. "To be vulnerable is to voluntarily place yourself, for the sake of a larger purpose, in a situation that could bring pain. You see something at stake—your own spiritual growth or someone else's—and you are willing to risk your heart in a vulnerable way." (Paula Rinehart, *Soft Women, Strong Hearts*, p. 93.)

I really want to be deeply, immeasurably loved, and my attempt to control others takes the beauty out of the redemptive work of Christ in my life, and prevents me from encouraging that in someone else, all the while hardening my femininity, disrespecting my husband and choking any taste of heaven the Lord would give me on this earth. Control, like a siege on an ancient city, shuts down all sources of life and goodness going in and allows only a few sneaky citizens to escape the deathly grip of the siege.

It is ironic isn't it? We have the beauty of the perfect love offered us, yet we still cling to what we think is safe - only to end up losing what we really need. Christ taught the opposite way; you gain your life by losing it.

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Intimacy

in marriage

*By Palmer Trice
a counselor and teacher
at The Barnabas
Center.*

Intimacy – every married person wants it and very few seem to get it.

It's a lot like the lottery.

- There is a big prize – so big I can hardly conceive of what it would do for my life.

- It's worth a try. I know that it would be good. I know it would be really good. I know that it is what my heart longs for. But I am not sure exactly what it is. I know it when I see it – I think.

- But I don't want to invest too much because the odds are that I won't get it! We all know that the chances are great that we won't win the lottery. The odds are stacked against us. Even when there are multiple winners, our chances are slim. Yet the hope of something more makes it worth a little investment.

Most of us long for intimacy in our marriage. But we probably have a hard time describing it. Oneness is sure part of it. Another aspect is the lack of shame and a freedom to be me. Yet true intimacy is even better than that. It is the freedom to be me, whoever I am. But it is also

having you really want and love me. Sometimes the expression of that love is physical – a touch, a hug, a kiss, or more. Sometimes it is sexual and sometimes not. Sometimes that love is given because you enjoy and delight in who I am, my gifts, my foibles, my idiosyncrasies. And sometime that love is given in spite of who I am being.

You offer me grace when retaliation or judgment would be more in order. You extend understanding when you could well have become defensive or vindictive. And when my heart softens, I know that I have been loved intimately.

You and I really want intimacy. We know it will be rich. We know it's worth a try. And so we do try. We fall in love (and that sure feels like intimacy). In the beginning, there are fireworks for many of us. We feel close, we come alive, and we want more of what we are experiencing.

So we get married, but then things change – sometimes slowly, sometimes abruptly. The touch is not quite so alive. Simply being together no longer brings the same rush that it once did. And at this stage we feel further from the intimacy that we longed for.

We know that intimacy is what our heart longs for. But what does it look like in this new marriage relationship? Marriage – it offers stability yet sometimes comes with boredom, it gives closer access yet often greater distance, it inspires greater hopes yet yields greater disappointment. We know intimacy is worth pursuing but what does one do with all the risks and pitfalls?

Intuitively, we know that its pursuit will cost a great deal. The more one invests in lottery tickets, the better the chance of winning. Yet the odds are so stacked against us, we wonder if it might just cost too much?

What is the cost?

You cannot experience real intimacy with a hard or tough heart. To experience that kind of gentle touch, my relational nerve endings must be alive and sensitive. But this is dangerous. It exposes me to much greater risk of harm. So vulnerability is one cost.

Another cost is confusion. I want something that I have trouble naming and often don't know how to tell you to give. I want something and tell

“Most of us long for intimacy in our marriage. But we probably have a hard time describing it.”

you – and then wonder why you don't give it. Is it because you don't understand? Don't care? Forget? Sometimes things seem so right. We are close, doing the little things, paying attention – and then the closeness disappears. Why? Can we even try to talk about why? The pursuit of intimacy will go through this kind a questioning.

But the greatest cost is the painful discovery of my own self-centeredness. I begin to see (as I try to love) how much I resist doing so. Too often, familiarity does lead to taking another for granted. Too often, the quirks that were once cute become sources of tension that legitimize distance and frustration. Too often, the work required to regain closeness doesn't feel worth the effort.

So how is intimacy found? How do you

make your way through all the costs and risks? There is a pathway to intimacy and it is a simple truth. I am more likely to find intimacy when I give it. This is the paradoxical nature of love. You get life and love when you give it away.

Wanting intimacy isn't wrong. It opens the door (a vulnerable door) for that special person to give it to me. Wanting intimacy tells me a lot about what you long for from me and can be a great guide in giving it. And wanting intimacy with your spouse opens the door for greater intimacy with God.

The ultimate hope is not in acquiring love but in giving it freely to another. That is when we will find it – with God and then hopefully with people.

(Continued from page 3)

slowly shaking their head, or criticizing us. So we bolt our front doors; plugging our ears, sealing our mouths, closing our eyes. We feel secure in our little defensive zone. But it seems we are always forgetting to lock that back door.

Then God walks in on us. At the very moment our fingers are deep in trouble, at the very moment we are ardently maintaining that there really isn't a problem, God looks at us, and does something totally un-called for. He offers grace rather than condemnation. It isn't fair, but it's what He does.

The Moral of The Story

So what is to be learned here - that wives ought to be more generous with their smiles? No that isn't it (though it wouldn't hurt). The real lesson here is for avoidant men to admit who we are. We must admit we are dependent beings — made to joyfully receive life from God. Then we must rouse our faith turn and seek out the eternal smile, the inexhaustible smile.

Men have believed the improbable lie that they can live apart from God. When life's problems contradict that lie, men avoid the evidence by avoiding life. But men can reengage life when they believe the improbable truth - that God is for them. He has accepted them on the basis of His wide and bright grace. No amount of brown spots can separate us from that love.

Grace makes pride look foolish and dependence look like relief. It cuts through a man's pretentiousness and replaces it with humility. What a relief! I don't have to pretend to be superman, instead I can simply be a man - limited, faulted and a sinner.

Grace further enables the faith to receive the status of beloved sons. And if I am a son, if "God is for me," as Paul writes, "then who can be against me?" If God is really for me, then I can risk re-engaging with the world with all its problems and curses. I can risk loving because I have been loved.

So hang on Honey. I've got some growing to do. I've got some fears to get past and years of excuse making and blame shifting to change. I've got to build my trust in God's love. But I promise you this, if God is for me, then brown spots or not— I'm going in.

RO 8:31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all this?

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

“But the ultimate hope is not in acquiring love but in giving it freely to another. That is when we will find it – with God and then hopefully with people.”

“Grace, that amazing kindness of God, makes pride look foolish and dependence look like relief. It cuts through a man's pretentiousness and replaces it with humility.”

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Upcoming Opportunities and Current Events

Date	Upcoming Opportunities and Current Events	Facilitator
Weeknights. Groups are on-going.	Barnabas Adolescent Counseling Groups- of up to 6 teens, providing a confidential place for comfort and connection. Both male and female groups (w/ female volunteer).	Kevin Wimbish, adolescent counselor
October 7-8, 2005- Friday evening 6:30 – 9:30pm, and Saturday, 9am – 4pm.	Barnabas Training—Basic- A seminar for those wanting to be equipped to help others who are experiencing life struggles. Provides a conceptual model and practical relational skills that open the heart. Held at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte.	Hosted by Hope Community Church
October 14-16, 2005	Heart to Heart Marriage Weekend- Charlotte Leadership Forum	Palmer and Roger
October 14 – 16 backpacking trip followed w/3 wk group.	Quest Weekend— Men's adventure weekend and follow-up weekly group meetings. Includes adventure, backpacking, conversation, study, and reflection.	Pete Bondy
November 4-6, 2005	Heart to Heart Marriage Weekend— A marriage enrichment weekend designed to meet you where you are and move you toward loving more. Hosted by Christ Covenant Church	Palmer Trice and Roger Edwards
January 2005	Spiritual Formation- A women's group focusing on better hearing the voice of God, and the personal invitations and affirmations of the Spirit through the study of Scripture.	Lisa Godman
January 18, 2006 - 15 Weds, 7:00-8:30pm	Healing Hearts— A women's group for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse	Lisa Godman
January 18–15 weeks-	Emotions- A women's small group teaching God's purpose for emotions and learning new skills to handle emotions that becoming overwhelming and life restricting.	Lisa Godman
January 20-21, 2006	Barnabas Training Basic- A seminar to teach a practical Biblical perspective on life's difficulties as well as skills on how to ask questions that penetrate to the heart.	Barnabas Staff
Begins November 2 nd Ends January 18 th Bi-Weekly.	Barnabas Training Level 4: Peer Supervision- A confidential group for participants involved in caring relationships, to share situations, and gain feedback. Prerequisite: BT Level 2.	Barnabas Staff
Begins January	Honor's Program– A Group for Men– ministry to sexually addicted men who want a better path. Please call (704-365-4545) or e-mail (info@thebarnabascenter.org)	Barnabas Staff
Begins Late January	Honors Program Women's Group– for women in a relationship with a man who has struggled with sexual compulsivity or in a relationship that is recovering from sexual betrayal.	Barnabas Staff