

September 24, 2006

My husband and I just spent two days with Gary and Elvira Delaplane. My husband arranged for us to go to their home for intensive counseling after I asked him for a divorce. We have been married almost 11 years, and have a beautiful 18-month-old son. Of course I didn't want to divorce, I simply felt there was no way to heal what was left after years of us bungling up so many aspects of our marriage. Escaping seemed the only way to find emotional and mental peace.

We have both been Christians since childhood, but neither of us had been in a time of heavy spiritual growth for some time. Our marriage has never been anchored in biblical teachings. We had rarely ever prayed together. Our parents did not model Christian marriage to us. We had tried to make it work using our own strength, and we failed. Thankfully, my husband immediately turned to God the day I asked for a divorce. He prayed constantly, read the Bible as well as anything else he could get his hands on about saving our marriage. I was pretty numb. I felt like his revived spiritual life was just a way to manipulate me into staying, that the changes he was making would only be temporary. But at the same time, my feelings started to sway back and forth between going and staying.

Ritchie had a list of things he wanted us to try. He wanted us to go to a four-day marriage retreat for couples on the brink of divorce. I didn't want to waste the time or money - or deal with the headache of arranging childcare for such a long period of time - since I really felt divorce would be our final destination. I could tell it meant a lot to him, so I told him I would compromise and go to a two-day retreat of some sort. Long story made short, we ended up planning to spend those two days with the Delaplans.

Even two days before we went, I was certain we would divorce. My heart became more willing on Wednesday night. Ritchie had asked me to pray again, which just seemed so bothersome at the time, even though every time we had prayed together in the past several weeks, I had felt at least a glimmer of hope and peace. That night we prayed, and then we talked. I felt my heart softening. It scared me. I didn't want to become vulnerable to this man again.

The next day (the day before we met with the Delaplans), I started out the day still dreading the two days of counseling ahead. But by lunchtime, I was feeling really different. I called a friend of mine and told her that I thought I was going crazy, because I now wanted to make things work. She told me I wasn't crazy, and we discussed some of the changes Ritchie and I could make to improve our situation. One of those things was for Ritchie to go back to working at the office instead of in our home. There is some truth to absence making the heart grow fonder, and being together 24/7 was rather smothering for me. I really did not want to ask Ritchie to do this though. I didn't feel I could ask him to make such a big sacrifice for me, because I know how much easier it is for him to work

from home. Well, I got home, and within a few minutes of arriving, Ritchie told me he had decided to go back to the office full time. I cried. I asked him why he had come to this decision, and he said God had told him that he needed to do it for me. This event - a miracle to me - completely prepared my heart for the next two days.

We are lucky to have both arrived at the Delaplane home on Friday morning with willing, open hearts. We were ready to hear what God wanted to tell us. We were instantly comfortable with Gary and Elvira. Being with another couple made such a difference. I think if we had been with just a man or just a woman, it would have lessened the experience for us tremendously. We talked about the true meaning of intimacy based on scripture. It was a very interactive format, with open conversation at all times. We talked about emotional needs, identifying and defining the ten that we all have, discussing that we all have a few that are more important to us individually. Gary and Elvira were candid with us throughout the day about their own marriage. Gary went through their genograms in the afternoon, showing us how behaviors and hurts of previous generations affect us in so many ways, mostly by determining the emotional needs that will be the strongest for us individually. Ritchie and I did an exercise on the first day to explain to one another what one of the ten emotional needs would look like to us if it were fulfilled in our marriage. It not only taught us about what the other needed, but also encouraged us to look into our own hearts and discover what we need from one another.

The second day we spent a couple of hours each on our own genograms. We learned about ourselves and each other - found out new things about our families, and gained clarity regarding each other's wounds from the past. We all four talked - explaining, asking questions, commenting, and making connections. All four of us laughed and cried. It was enlightening and freeing. It made me proud to see that Ritchie has already tackled some really big demons that have been haunting his family for generations. It gave me new understanding into my in-law's lives, and into my own family as well. We also discussed our emotional cup - how the negative from the past takes up all of the room in our cup, leaving little room for the good that God has to offer. We learned how letting the bad go would open up room in our cup for God's love to overflow.

At the end of the second day, we discussed the importance of confession and forgiveness; and we learned how to accomplish it in our marriage. We learned about Godly sorrow - of realizing the sadness our actions had caused God and our spouse. We learned about not rationalizing our actions, simply to admit that we were wrong; to acknowledge how it must have made our spouse feel; and to ask forgiveness. We learned to grant forgiveness, even if our hearts balked - because God will provide the feelings of forgiveness in time. We learned that we had to talk about each of these things specifically, and once we have given forgiveness, to really let it go. And then, we practiced the process. It was powerful on both the giving and receiving ends. I felt so understood by Ritchie.

Our hearts were open and yearning for how to accomplish a Christ centered marriage when we arrived that Friday morning. Gary and Elvira gave us the information and

encouragement we so desperately needed. I am so thankful that they are being obedient to God and serving Him through this ministry. I can only imagine the impact this experience will have on our lives, and those of our family and friends.

I know that this has been a pivotal experience for our marriage. It really almost feels like a new marriage, free from the weight of the past. We haven't completely healed, and we don't know what it will feel like to be Christ-like in our roles as husband and wife through the daily grind just yet. But now we know how to get there, and how to stay there no matter what obstacles are put in our way. Our marriage is new in Christ, and *we are rejoicing!*

Molly and Ritchie White
Columbus, GA