

# REDEEMER

R E P O R T

OCTOBER 2006

## MARITAL CONFLICT: CAN'T WE JUST GET ALONG?

BY PETER CHA

Visions of marital happiness and bliss flooded my soul as I exchanged vows of unconditional love with my perfect bride. It wasn't long before reality hit me like a ton of bricks. Sure, we had great times characteristic of our dating relationship, but where were these conflicts coming from? I can think of very little that I dread more than being in the middle of my own marital conflict. I'd rather have needles shoved between my fingernails—okay, maybe not, but you get the idea. There is nothing that churns my insides more. If only we could do away with conflict...

Some of us are too quick to focus on how to fix the issue(s) at the heart of conflict ("pursuers"). Some of us want to believe that the issue(s) will go away if we just leave it alone ("avoiders"). But all too often, if our spouses don't get with our program, we're left feeling hurt and angry. Whether we're a pursuer or an avoider, we're usually focused on resolving the conflict—that is, if my spouse would just agree with me, we'd be really happy.

But maybe God has a higher agenda. In Ephesians 5:21-33, Paul makes a clear connection between loving and cleansing. God's desire for us is that we grow more and more into his likeness. He's teaching us how

to love the way he loves and conflict is the training ground.

If we get with God's program, we would pay more attention to how we *regulate* conflicts—how we *relate* to each other during conflicts, because this reveals what's ruling our hearts. If we're blaming, criticizing, stonewalling, getting defensive, and showing contempt — it's a sure sign that selfishness has crept in and has replaced love. No matter how much we disagree with our spouses on a particular issue, we are still called to love and respect our spouses.

The counseling I do (with the exception of premarital counseling) is mostly reactive counseling vs. proactive. That is, after years of hurting and injuring one another, a couple pursues counseling as a last resort. According to various studies done on marital counseling, it is estimated that about 50-75% of couples do make initial gains or improvements.

However, a *sizeable* percentage of these couples relapse after 2 years and the divorce rate could be as high as 55% according to one study. Based on another study which focused on counseling couples in their first marriage, there were two main time points for divorcing, "early divorcing," which occurred at 5.2 years after the marriage, and "later

divorcing," which occurred at 16.4 years after the marriage. These are alarming results indeed!

While doing marital counseling I've often thought that couples should have sought counseling much sooner as it would have not only helped to prevent destructive patterns but also would have helped to create and maintain constructive ones. What we need more than ever is *proactive* care in the arena of marriage—a periodic marriage check-up.

Although after 15 years of marriage I still dread conflicts, I've found that getting to the heart of conflict is a great way to grow individually as well as a couple. It's an amazing opportunity to connect and be closer by knowing more about yourself and your spouse at the deepest levels. Believe me, although my vision at the marriage altar was not realized, God's given me a better, grander vision. Thanks in large part to conflicts, and God's grace to deal with them, there is a love more deep between us than either of us imagined.

Please join me and my colleague, Sobeyda Ellis, for the Marriage Enrichment seminar dealing especially with conflicts on November 4, 2006, from 10:00AM to 1:00PM.

Registration is only available online at redeemer.com beginning in October.

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# LESSONS FROM PRAYER UP FRONT

Of the various responsibilities which members of the Diaconate are given, e.g., client work, assisting elders with membership interviews, etc., I have found praying with people after the worship service to be rewarding in ways that I couldn't have foreseen when I first became a Deaconess. Through this service of offering up intercessory prayer on behalf of my sisters and brothers, I have learned more about community, humility and the sovereignty of God.

## Community

Often, I have no idea how many people are at a Redeemer service until it is over. When I turn around, I see that the auditorium is packed. Imagine, then, how overwhelming the crowd may seem when you are standing at the front of the auditorium, looking out on this sea of bodies, waiting to see if anyone needs prayer.

Then, one person approaches me, and the church suddenly seems smaller. We introduce ourselves, they share what is on their heart, and I pray for them. I may never see this person again, or, I might see them every Sunday after that, and wave to them across the auditorium. Because I had an opportunity to learn this person's name, and get a small glimpse into their life, I feel the reality of the church being the family of God in a unique way.

This person is my sister or brother and we now have a connection that was there all along, but was abstract until she or he asked me to pray for her

or him to our common Father.

## Humility

I'm an introvert by nature, and tend to share my problems with a select few; to my shame, it's rare when I ask someone to pray for me. When I first became a Deaconess, I confess that I was a little surprised that people I didn't know would ask me to pray for them because that was something outside of my own experience. Now, each time someone asks me to pray, I am touched by his or her trust and vulnerability. I am confronted with the pride and coldness of my heart that prevents me from being more open with my own problems.

## Sovereignty

One of the best perks of being on the diaconate is the training and continuing education that we receive. For example, we receive a few weeks of theological training, and are invited to attend the monthly Ministry Community Meeting (MCM). The aspect of theological training that really stuck with me was the teaching on God's total sovereignty over our lives. Our life, our breath, our comings and goings are all under His tender control.

Then, in MCM this past season, Tim focused on prayer. One of his emphases was using the study of God's word to warm our hearts prior to praying to inform and deepen our prayer life. It took a while, as a Deaconess, for these teachings to percolate and bear fruit, but now after two years in the role, I've changed my approach to

BY LESLEE SUMNER, DEACONESS

intercessory prayer for others.

Many of the prayer requests that I get are centered around the big "Why" and "What if" questions of life. "Why does my co-worker mistreat me?" "Why does my family have to be so dysfunctional?" "What if I don't get the job that I want?" "What if I make the wrong decision about a relationship?" Previously, I would listen and then pray; that was enough, and sometimes it still is. But now, I listen and then I try to use God's word to remind us both of God's sovereignty.

For the "Why" questions I can remind them of Joseph, his dysfunctional family, his mistreatment by his brothers, and how God worked it all to His will (Genesis 50:20). For the "What if" questions, one biblical example we can discuss is David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. This isn't typically what one would think of as an inspirational story. I like to use it to show that despite David's grievous sins, despite making many, horribly wrong decisions, and despite the fact that he didn't get the answer to his prayer for his first son by Bathsheba, God in His sovereignty still worked it all out to the ultimate good because Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, is listed in the genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:6). God can even use our sins and bad decisions to work out His perfect will.

After these discussions of God's word, we pray, and it's my hope that we both leave more encouraged because of the reminder of God's sovereignty in our lives.

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## REDEEMER REPORT

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HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM  
East 69TH (Between Park & Lexington)  
services at 10:30AM • 5:45PM

ETHICAL CULTURE  
West 64TH and CPW  
service at 9:15AM

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
Corner of West 79TH and Broadway  
service at 7:00PM

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# YOUTH MINISTRY TEAM VOLUNTEERS IN NEW ORLEANS

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BY CREGAN COOKE

In August, Redeemer's Senior High student ministry sent a volunteer team of high school students and ministry leaders to New Orleans to help in the rebuilding process the city. Within hours of our arrival it was obvious how much Hurricane Katrina had forever altered the face of New Orleans.

Nearly a year after the storm hit it was hard to imagine what the city might look like or how it would "feel." People from Redeemer Presbyterian Church of New Orleans gave us insight into the state of the city and these are some of the highlights.

In the greater New Orleans area, of the more than 100,000 homes that were affected by the flooding and tidal surge, about 96% are still empty. Many of the tens of thousands of trailers originally slated to go to home owners returning to rebuild were reassigned to go to other parts of the country for storage because the number of people returning was so low and there was simply no place to put them. In the neighborhoods where we worked approximately one in 50 houses might have had someone actually working to restore a property. Many of the homes looked to be in a state beyond repair. Entire parts of the city were basically empty. And a population that was near 500,000 residents before Katrina is 200,000 to 250,000 now.

But in the middle of what could seem overwhelming and incredibly bleak there is much to be hopeful about. Our team was the 13th work team in

2006 that RPC of New Orleans hosted. They have connected dozens of homeowners with hundreds of volunteers effectively living out the Gospel in word and deed in this critical period in New Orleans' history. In the week our team was there we were able to clear 5 homes of everything inside and demolish all the dry wall, plaster, etc. right down to the wood studs. At each of the properties we visited, the first step was to clear all the furniture and possessions left behind (almost everything had been submerged under water for weeks and left that way for 12

in coping with loss on this level and it was truly a privilege for us to be able to offer a sense of greater community to the people we worked with. We were also reminded of all the material things we have and care so much about and how easily they can be lost. One student said: "Seeing the loss of these people makes me so much more thankful for everything I have."

Our team greatly appreciates everything Redeemer Presbyterian Church of New Orleans is doing to help the people of their city and how instrumental they were in

making our trip a reality. Throughout the week their staff provided directions to work sites, tools, preparation for doing various jobs, orientation to the city and acted as liaison for us with Desire Street Ministry which hosted all 18 of us in their gymnasium.

All the residents that we spoke with

said the same thing: It will be 15 to 20 years before New Orleans is back to "normal" if ever. The rebuilding will continue for years as will the need for volunteers. The one thing our team will continue to do long after this trip is to encourage others to go and help. There will never be a more obvious need for people to respond with compassion through action than this. If you or someone you know would like to coordinate a team, or be part of an existing team going to New Orleans (coordinated by RPC of New Orleans) you can email: [redemerrelief@gmail.com](mailto:redemerrelief@gmail.com)

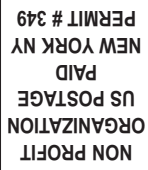


months). After this very messy and somewhat dreaded task everyone began knocking down walls and hauling out debris. For teenagers there probably isn't a more popular activity than to hand them a sledge hammer and tell them to knock down a wall.

The whole team came away extremely gratified and humbled just to have the privilege to offer a helping hand. One homeowner who made a special trip to see us before we left broke down in tears, amazed that people she didn't know from a thousand miles away would come and clean up her home. Being part of a community is so important

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## OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER ARE OFFICER NOMINATION MONTHS

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### **How Do I Nominate a Fellow Member?**

Ask the person that you want to nominate for Elder, Deacon or Deaconess if he or she is a member and willing to be considered for the office.

Obtain a Nomination form from [www.redeemer.com/diaconate](http://www.redeemer.com/diaconate) (click on Nomination Form) or pick up a form at any service at the information center.

You must fax the form with the nominee's name(s) and your signature to the church office, attention: Jenny Chang at (646) 572-0020. You may also mail it in to the office at 1359 Broadway, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10018, or place it in the offering basket during any of the Sundays in October and November.

The deadline for submitting nominations is November 30, 2006.

*You must be a member to nominate someone.*

## NEW! CENTER FOR FAITH AND WORK CLASSES: THURSDAYS AND SUNDAYS

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### **Shaping the Culture that Shapes You**

Thursday nights, September 28 through November 9 from 7:00PM to 8:45PM at King's College. Registration required (\$15).

### **Why Work?**

Sundays from 12:00PM to 1:15PM starting October 15. RSVP required.

For more details and to sign up for these classes, go to [www.faithandwork.org](http://www.faithandwork.org)