

Making a Courageous Journey

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"Anyone who sees a pastoral counselor ought to have his head examined!" Slightly modified, that's what Groucho Marx said. We laugh not only at his clever wordplay, but also because we intuitively grasp the truth hidden within his outrageous comment. The truth is that whether we seek out a psychiatrist, psychologist, clinical social worker or pastoral counselor, we'll have to find a way eventually to share parts of our story with another human being, and that's not always easy. Revealing aspects of our lives we normally keep private is sometimes to confront our deepest fears: the fear of being abandoned, shamed, gossiped about, or judged.

The story in Luke 6:6-11 about a man with a withered hand is instructive. In those long-gone days, a withered hand was believed to be a sign of God's punishment. If your hand were withered, you'd want to keep it hidden, with your sleeve pulled down over it. But in order for his hand to be healed, the man had to stretch it out in plain view.

It takes courage to share the problematic parts of our lives with another person. We should know: all of us at PCNV have had our own counseling.

And yet, for all the inherent difficulties in sharing our stories, that is how we heal: by telling our stories to one another... by seeing our stories through the eyes of another... and sometimes by seeing our stories through the eyes of The Other.

Common to all of our stories are the pains we feel because of being reared by persons very much like us, i.e., imperfect people. Perhaps we were shamed, neglected, abused, abandoned, engulfed. By whatever labels we call them, these are often the sources of our wounds. And we will bear their marks as long as we live.

None of us are exempt from such wounds. Though the specifics may vary, our stories are partly about being wounded. But they are also about our response to those wounds. Some people have run from the pain of those wounds through the addictive use and abuse of drugs. Others have gotten into patterns of behavior that are equally addictive and self-defeating. Still others have responded in self-protective ways that have, however, cost them the pain of crushing depression and anxiety. As time goes by, more and more of life is consumed by these responses to the wounds we have experienced. Eventually life loses its savor. We can feel trapped, exhausted, and even despair of life having any meaning.

Adlai Stevenson once observed that people don't change when they see the writing on the wall: their backs also have to be up against that wall.

When old responses to life's wounds exact too great a price, some people choose to respond to their wounds differently. Rather than running from them, they decide to turn

around, examine and learn from them. They learn to love the part that is wounded. They learn to value the wisdom their own pain has to give them. They learn how to transmute their own suffering into compassion for themselves and others. They learn the truth of the ancient maxim that our greatest strength usually lies in what we take to be our greatest weakness. And they discover new connections with others as they share with others both their wounds and their discoveries.

*The choice to face one's wounds is a **courageous** choice.* It is, indeed, "the road less traveled." But for those who make the choice it can "make all the difference." People who embark upon that journey usually wind up becoming more complete persons and a great blessing to others.

At Pastoral Counseling of Northern Virginia we stand ready to assist you in making such a courageous journey.

To contact us, you can call us at: (703) 449-1944

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