

Reflections Grief to Grace Participant

I want to take a moment to write some thoughts and reflections from my participation in the *Grief to Grace* Retreat I attended in November of 2008.

First of all, a little background about me. I am a 55 year-old man, married for 33 years, and the father of 5 children. I was born, raised, and a practicing Roman Catholic my whole life.

My wife and I have been very involved with the church through music ministry before and throughout our married life. We have tried to keep Christ at the center of our lives, marriage, family and work. He has sustained us through many years of joy, sadness, good times and bad, lean and full, trials and blessings.

Through this journey there has always been a deep struggle within me regarding a feeling of shame and unworthiness. It was never the kind of thing that was overt but rather always an undercurrent running through my life. It created in me a deep sense of loneliness and isolation. I found it extremely difficult to develop deep and meaningful relationships with others, to share feelings or be myself around others. I was not socially uncomfortable to be in groups of people because I did enjoy having fun, laughing, hearing and telling stories, making others laugh and having a good time.

When it came to intimacy, I was painfully challenged. It was as if I was trying to walk with no legs! I knew where I wanted to go but wasn't capable of getting myself there. It would always be a huge effort to crawl just a short distance. I was in a quandary over this because I am a person who feels things very deeply yet when it came to expressing what was inside I had such a hard time getting it out.

I'm an intelligent person who can discuss many topics on a variety of subjects with ease and often chose to exist in the realm of the mind because it was much easier to exist in that realm than matters of the heart.

After receiving counseling both individually and as a married couple over the course of several years, I learned a lot of things about myself, about good communications, developing intimacy and other tools. Even though my relationship with my wife had grown immensely, it was still a challenge to continue to nurture the relationship on a consistent basis and outside friendships were still hard to cultivate as well.

The most important thing that happened through the counseling was the realization that I had been raped as a 7 year-old and multiple times afterwards as well as suffering clergy abuse as an adolescent. Even though I received professional counseling for it, I continued to suffer from the feelings of shame, isolation and loneliness. It seemed that these things were never going to change.

Over the next 10-12 years the struggle had continued until I finally heard about *Grief to Grace*. My wife attended the retreat within the past year and returned a changed person.

As she shared with me about the retreat and what she experienced while attending it I knew that I should attend it as well. The manner in which the retreat was conducted resonated with something in me that said “this is what I need to complete the healing process.”

I was not disappointed! What happened at the retreat was truly amazing! I knew that Jesus would have to meet me at the point of injury in my life and lead me through His own suffering and death to bring healing for me and that is exactly what happened through the retreat. The exercises and living scriptures were powerful vehicles to impart

the grace necessary to bring healing. The retreat provided the environment for me to feel the hurt like I never did before. I could talk about the hurt and explain how it had affected my life before but never was I able to allow myself the ability to feel it to the depth that I did over the course of the retreat.

Giving voice to the pain and grief was so important because then it could be coupled together with Christ’s own suffering and death. Until this time in my life I was unable to make this connection due to the guilt and shame I felt as a result of the abuse because I felt somehow that it was my fault. I doubted that the pain would ever end and that I was trapped in feelings of loneliness, despair, hopelessness and continuing to feel exploited, unable to trust, or wondering if I would ever experience happiness.

I have been delivered from a great burden as a result of this retreat. Resurrection has occurred in my life as a result of this experience! I can share very frankly about my experience as well as opening myself up to others about who I really am. I know the tender loving care of God in a new and refreshing way and I look forward to my life and what the possibilities are that lie ahead.