

January 2020

A Group Like No Other

I suppose our story is not much different than so many who hesitate to embark on this journey they call recovery. We just did not want to do it. It was that simple. We read in all the materials that real recovery involved groups and groups involved people and people meant exposure! We said no to all of that and became rebels if you will, determined to prove we could do this on our own. God was so kind to us as he gently led us to a very different place. Here is how that happened.

Jim:

In January 2018, my wife Cyndi reluctantly showed me something she had found online. She said something about it involving a guy who was a pastor and pilot and he had issues, sexual issues. I'm not sure what drove me to do it, but after reviewing the materials, I ordered the entire set of DVDs' called The Conquer Series. For five nights both Cyndi and I watched the series and from that moment on the entire trajectory of our life shifted. I then purchased all the "recovery" materials and for one year I attempted to do the work on my own. As much as the materials helped me to understand my sexual addiction, I still wasn't making much progress in my recovery or restoring my marriage. I felt stuck and I was stunted by my lack of accountability since I had no one to challenge me to face the really hard stuff. It was a lose-lose situation. After all, the person with the problem can't also be the person with the solution. It just does not work. As much as I knew I needed to join a group, as all of the literature suggested, I was hesitant (no - RESISTANT). The thought of joining a group was just too risky. Opening up to total strangers about my secret life, what it was doing to me, my relationship with God and my marriage – NO WAY. I had too much shame. What would people say? What would others think of me? Although I wasn't making it and my addiction was destroying my marriage, I was not about to "voluntarily" expose my secret life to others.

As is true in much of life – "Desperation trumps Reluctance". By January of 2019, I had worn Cyndi down in my recovery. She was discouraged by my lack of progress and felt as though my attempts to heal were not genuine. I knew I needed to find a group and get involved with other men in recovery if I was going to beat this thing. That's when I contacted Tom Weaver via e-mail. He responded just minutes after I hit the send button and within 2 hours, he had contacted me by phone. That was definitely what I call a "God Appointment". I reached out to Tom, a total stranger, out of DESPERATION, yet God knew my RELUCTANCE and honored my leap of faith with Tom's quick response.

Joining a group became my accountability lifeline. Those men have kept me true to myself, to God and to this process. I now share my victories and struggles with men who have similar stories with sexual addiction. The shame I once felt no longer holds any power over me. There has been so much freedom in hearing other men's stories and struggles knowing that I am not alone in this war. We may be fighting different demons in our lives, but we are all in the same battle.

Recovery to me means life – a life of freedom from my sexual addiction. It took some time but I came to realize that the only way I was going to make progress in my recovery was by getting involved in the "Community of other Sexual Addicts". Not to wallow in my shame, but to be encouraged by others in recovery, in healing, in overcoming my nemesis of sexual addiction that has haunted me and kept me from truly living since I was 8 years old.

Recovery has not been easy, it's a lot of work, hard work, but the payoff for me is a healthier marriage and a life that is no longer plagued with shame. Cyndi has said that exposing the truth is a "shame buster" and she is so right. Today I am much closer to becoming the man of integrity that I desire to be and as I continue on this recovery journey, I now believe that is an attainable goal. I also know that I would not be able to face my addiction, with the amount of courage and determination that I now have, if it were not for the comradery and unfailing support of the other men in my groups. I live this truth "MEN MAKE MEN".

Cyndi:

It was nearly two years ago that I handed Jim the recovery materials that I had found online. I remember telling him that this was his problem, his recovery and that I wanted no part of it. Especially the part that involved joining a group. I assured myself that because I was the one who had been hurt by his addiction, I was justified in laying it all on him.

A year went by, and even though Jim appeared to be doing the recovery materials, our problems only intensified. I kept accusing him of not doing the "real" work that he needed to do in order to recover and he kept telling me that he needed to be in a group. I kept resisting but in March 2019, I agreed to go to a conference in Maryland. Jim had been talking to a guy named Tom Weaver who was in charge of the retreat and had an online group that he wanted Jim to join. We thought going to this conference in Maryland would be a great way to break the awkwardness of the unknown. So, we went. It was there that I saw and briefly met Michele Weaver. She invited me to join one of her online groups for women. In my heart, I was fiercely resisting but she wrote my name down and within the week she contacted me. I was amazed that she even remembered me. After that, I found it hard to say no.

I can honestly say that since meeting Michele my life has not been the same. She would say to me that there is no hope or healing in silence. That is so true and because of that, I have learned that there is a difference between being a private person, which I thought I was, and living in isolation and fear. I had cut myself off from the world because I felt like no one person could possibly understand my mess and the shame of it all made me want to hide. I am now part of several groups where I have found not only a safe place to share my story but a community of beautiful, brave women to share this journey with.

Through it all, the groups have been a lifeline that has kept us going during the most difficult of times. These groups are like no other group that we have been a part of or have had the privilege to lead. They have become a truly safe place to grieve our losses and sadness, share the most intimate parts of our stories, and then move on from all of it. The work that we do in the groups and more important, outside the groups, is some of the hardest work we have ever done both individually and as a couple. In the last year, we have considered, on more than one occasion to quit. Almost every step we took was filled with one challenge after another, and even though it has often been a difficult road to navigate, we continue to do the work.

The truth is, neither one of us was healthy entering into this relationship we call marriage and so it has become not just Jim's healing journey, but mine as well. We are each having to unlock and deal with our own pain and how and why all it started in the first place. We are uncovering what is behind the addictive behaviors, his and mine, and allowing God to heal us. I am learning to accept the fact that I am

married to a man who is not the man of integrity I thought I married but no matter what he chooses to do, I know that I will be alright with or without him.

It has been quite a journey and we are nowhere near the end. But we keep going because we have learned that so many incredible blessings come when we get to the other side of wherever it is that God is taking us. Then and only then, are we able to celebrate the amazing growth in our life and marriage that we never thought or imagined was even possible. Not long ago, I heard Jim say that now more than ever before, he is determined to finish what he started. How blessed I am that we have both committed to recovery and we are looking forward to the future with hope and anticipation of the redemptive work that God will do in both our lives.

It is during these moments of assurance that I am convinced of God's hand in all of it.