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Christian paradox: strength in faith comes from weakness

I worked with a guy several years ago who told me that, except for his job, everything was perfect. His life was perfect. His wife was perfect. His son was perfect. He really meant it.

Well, for me, and for most of us, life isn't so perfect, and our relationships aren't so perfect. In virtually any relationship, there is almost always at least one issue that is very divisive, one issue that isn't talked about because of the potential to cause trouble. Sometimes, I have discovered, this issue relates to God, in the sense that two people can have fundamentally different ways of seeing God and of relating to Him. This can cause particular pressure in marriage.

Maybe one spouse goes to church and the other doesn't. Perhaps one spouse loves to read spiritual books and attend retreats, and the other spouse is basically uninterested when it comes to religion or believes that spiritual life doesn't require such effort.

I've always wondered what to tell married people or anyone else who has to contend with a seriously divisive issue. Then, recently, I came across a letter, and I thought the author of the letter expressed himself with a special grace on the subject of contending with his wife on a sensitive subject.

The author, let's call him Dave, was married to Susan. Dave had an intense religious experience which, in his words, awakened him from his spiritual slumber. He began to pray and to study the teachings of the Catholic Church. The Holy Spirit



Tim Sullivan

Family Life Director

led him to desire a reversal of his vasectomy. When he shared this desire with his wife, she became very irritated. He brought the subject up a few more times, but there was no change in her position.

At this point I'm going to use Dave's own words, and I want you to keep in mind that this approach can apply to any person who is confronting a difficult issue with someone else: "Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I quit talking to my wife about having the vasectomy reversed, and instead prayed for my own conversion. The Lord spoke to my heart and told me it was my sinfulness that was preventing my wife from experiencing conversion. God made me realize how I was closed to His infinite mercy and grace. Just as my wife didn't want to receive all of my love, I was limiting God's infinite love for me.

"He made me realize that as he had been so patient with me, I should be patient with my wife. He was asking me to love my wife as He loves me.

He told me to embrace my wife like he embraced the cross. He asked me to humble myself and become my wife's servant. He asked me to join all of my hurt and pain with His.

"Through this process there were times that I wished I was on a cross, rather than endure my broken heart. In the midst of this pain I experienced a closeness with Jesus that I had never experienced before. It was just as St. Paul said, 'My outer self is being destroyed, but my inner self is being renewed each day.' As I died to myself, an ocean of mercy swept over me. Instead of being angry at my wife, the more I hurt, the more my love for her grew. 'When you are weak, you are strong, for my grace is made perfect in weakness.' [from 2 Corinthians 12:9]

Eventually, David's wife relented, they began praying together, and their marriage reached a new level of joy. His vasectomy was reversed. Susan became pregnant and is due in January of 2000.

If we think somebody we know needs changing, the first step should be to examine ourselves and begin to change our own behavior and how we treat the other person. If we are rejected, we are only drawn closer to Jesus, who knows all about rejection. He will bring about the change that we are powerless to accomplish on our own. In the words of 1 Peter, "... even if some disobey the word, they will be won over by ... your reverent and chaste behavior."