

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraphs

“SHOULD I LEAVE MY CHURCH?”

I rarely get a question from a complete stranger, especially one about leaving his or her church; but, as someone has said, there seem to be exceptions to almost everything! A man who *did* call me to ask if he should leave his church is a resident of the greater Columbia area, and the church to which he was referring would be well known to many of you. I wish I could claim that he chose to talk to me because of my great wisdom and incredible perspicacity (ha!), but he knew nothing about me at *all!* He was referred to me by someone else whom I previously had helped.

To protect the man's, identify, I'll call him Ted. Ted told me that he was being “chassed” by a woman in his church—someone in whom he had no interest. It seems that, on several occasions, she brought him a tasty casserole between 10:00 and 11:00 o'clock in the evening—a seemingly inappropriate time for a food delivery! Moreover, on each occasion, she was dressed in a skimpy, extremely revealing outfit. Also, instead of simply handing the food to Ted and, turning to leave because of the lateness of the hour, she said sweetly, “May I come in?” Ted's wife's job requires that she travel and so she usually is out of town Monday through Friday—a fact well known to the woman who, apparently for obvious reasons, *never* brought casseroles to the house on a *weekend!*

Ted was quite upset by the situation and was considering the possibility of leaving his church, just to get away from the woman whom he referred to as his “predator.” Since her attention was unwelcome, it made him extremely uncomfortable. For whatever reason, he didn't feel

inclined to talk with his own pastor about this personal matter, so he confided in a fellow church member who told him that the woman had “a reputation” and was considered to have a sexual addiction. Ted found out that other men in the church had experienced the same problem with her that he was having—casseroles delivered at bedtime highly revealing attire, etc. However, apart from the fact that the lady had numerous encounters with dozens upon dozens of men, both in and outside the church, she was, otherwise, a lovely, caring and marvelously capable individual. (That is not unusual among persons who have a sexual addiction. It is just that they are psychologically incapable of experiencing *sustained* intimacy with anyone and substitute multiple sexual encounters with scores of individuals instead of nurturing mature intimacy with one person of value. Consequently, even if they marry, the marriage is a disaster for the sexual addict as well as for the unfortunate other person in a loveless marriage. Apart from that lamentable situation, sexual addicts tend to be fine individuals with many sterling qualities.

Fortunately, situations such as Ted’s do not happen with great regularity, but they may be more common than some of us realize. I say that because I have encountered the problems one or more times in each of my churches. There seem to be multiple persons around us—individuals of great worth—who suffer from an illness that they did not ask to have. (I do need to note that every other predator with whom *I* have been acquainted, except for Ted’s, always has been male.)

Ted’s aggressive predator was not his only problem. He had the additional issue of deciding what to *do* about his unwelcome situation—which is why he contacted me. As stated earlier, his first inclination was to leave his church in order to ‘solve’ the second problem. But I discovered that he had even a *third* problem: he absolutely *loved* his church and felt that he had grown spiritually there more than at any other place he had ever been. Since he *was* spiritually-oriented, he wanted his decision to stay or to leave the church to be based on *spiritual* principles.

At first, I did a lot of listening as he searched for a *spiritually*-based decision, but that high objective seemed to elude him; so, I decided not to let him flounder helplessly any longer. After multiple sessions with Ted, I asked him if he would like to have some input from me that might help him to see his search for an answer from a different perspective. “Oh, God, *yes!*” he said. “*Please*. I really do need *help!*”

I shared with Ted some information with which many of us already are aware: the FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE system. When we human beings are confronted with a threatening situation, we usually resort to one of those aforementioned possibilities. The FIGHT response, to MOVE AGAINST the threatening person either physically or with words, would be motivated by *anger*. The FLIGHT response, to MOVE AWAY from the threatening individual by *leaving* the church, would be motivated by *fear*. The FREEZE response, to do nothing, would be motivated by indecision.

Since Ted is a *spiritually sensitive* person, he recognized that FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR FREEZE would *not* be spiritually-oriented responses. Rather, they would be *dysfunctional*, less than mature expressions of caring. Consequently, he wisely, I think, rejected them.

What, then, was left? What *would* be a more mature, *spiritually* sensitive way of dealing with Ted’s situation? The other possibility would be one suggested by Jesus: LOVE. But what would it *mean* to relate in love to someone whose physical advances Ted wanted assiduously to avoid? Ted’s relationship with his wife was not perfect, but he thought that it had more plusses than minuses and he wanted to protect, preserve and nurture it. Also, he realized that to *leave* the church he loved would actually be to hurt *himself*. So, he was more than ready to explore what LOVE might mean and whether or not that would be a possibility for him.

The LOVE system, as is the case with the FIGHT, FLIGHT, and FREEZE systems, is a response potential with which each of us *already* is equipped, and any one of the four systems can be activated at any time. In clinical

psychology, the LOVE response is called the “tend-and-befriend” system. But how might Ted apply that approach to the *predator* in his church if he decided to do so?

First, he would ‘X-out’ the FIGHT option (to move AGAINST) the lady as well as the FLIGHT response (to move AWAY), which would involve leaving a church that he loved. Also, out of the question would be a FREEZE response: the option of DOING NOTHING to address Ted’s discomfort. *All three* of those options would be *dysfunctional*. Why? Because they would be dealing with his predator in a way that would hurt *himself*.

Second, Ted would understand that lovingly accepting another person does *not* mean accepting that person’s unwelcome behavior! To do that, like leaving his beloved church, would mean *not* loving *himself*—not taking his *own* legitimate needs into consideration. So, the solution is to realize that love has a right to *set limits*, to articulate what behavior is acceptable or unacceptable in a given situation. That would mean his saying to his predator something like this: “I’m sure that you have many fine qualities, but I am married, and I am not looking for another relationship; so, I am going to ask you not to come to my house again. Moreover, I need you to keep an arm’s length or more distance from me at church. Am I making myself clear?” In this situation, an important aspect of the LOVE response (moving TOWARD the person rather than away or against) is *unrelenting honesty* that includes limit-setting as an appropriate ingredient. In utilizing a LOVE-oriented approach, the key is to reject unwelcome *behavior* without rejecting the *whole person*. The love that Jesus taught and sought to embody is marvelously realistic: It involves seeking your own highest good while, at the same time, seeking that of the other person. An authentic *spiritually*-oriented solution always involves *both* possibilities.

Interestingly enough, whether male or female, most individuals who struggle with a sexual addiction, especially those we might encounter in a church, *do* respond *positively* to limit-setting-without rejection of the total person and

almost always *cease* to make continued advances to an individual who clearly rejects those advances.

As I mentioned earlier, I have had at least one person with a sexual addiction in *each* of my churches, *including* CCM, and I have found in every situation that the approach I recommended for Ted's consideration has been quite successful whenever it has been applied. I am happy to report that Ted decided to give the LOVE-response of honest, confrontational limit-setting a try, and he reports that it has worked well for him. He tells me that his predator has been polite and friendly but never again has "come on" to him. Ted also has been delighted and extremely relieved to discover that his taking a *spiritually*-oriented approach could take his *own* needs seriously: He protected himself from a predator and did not have to give up something he valued deeply (his beloved church) in order to achieve his goal. A fear-based FLIGHT response of *leaving* his church would not have been a spiritually mature way of loving *himself*.

As we have seen, Ted contacted me to help him deal with the problem of a sexual predator's unwanted advances. But the principles I shared with Ted can be used in almost *any* situation in which a person is affected by someone else's unwelcome behavior—at work, at church, even in one's own family. So, I decided to share those vital and very practicable principles in the hope that they may facilitate a healing process for ourselves, as *well* as for others, that can lift our relationships to a higher, more fulfilling level.

With a heart full of love for *all* of you, I remain, gratefully,

Your pastor and friend,

John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

February, 2019

*Our gatherings in February will take place, as usual,
on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month.*

Sunday, February 10 (2nd Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. WORSHIPING TOGETHER

Valentine's Day, of course, is not a religious observance, but it can have the advantage of helping us to pause, at least briefly, to think about love and loving. Any *genuine* love experience is valuable, and we all long to have such a vital encounter; but the truth is that we human beings tend often to *sabotage* our potential for love and loving, and we often do it in ways of which we are not always fully aware.

What *causes* the tendency to engage in sabotaging our own self-interest? Frequently, the cause is our *not dealing wisely with potentially difficult emotions*—ours, as well as those of others. Even meaningful friendships, family, church, and work relationships can be affected.

Fortunately, there is spiritual wisdom that, if applied judiciously, can make *all* of our relationships better, deeper, and more fulfilling. Today, our pastor will offer some helpful insights that could revolutionize our relationships and give us much greater joy in life. The topic will be “DEALING CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH DIFFICULT EMOTIONS”—a spiritual pathway to more vital relationships. (There will be a Question and Answer and Talk back to the message following worship. Out by about 12 noon)

Sunday, February 24 (4th Sunday of the Month)

10:00 a.m. LEARNING AND GROWING TOGETHER

Your comments about the first session of our new series on using mindfulness as a spiritual pathway to greater meaning and a more significant life were *extremely* positive. Thank you! It's always good to know that what we do at CCM (in this case, combining science and spirituality) is helpful.

Today, Dr. Shapiro, a professor of psychology and an internationally recognized *expert* in mindfulness will be our guide as we are introduced a method that, if practiced, can transform both our body and our mind in a way that has the power to lead us toward a much more fulfilling life than that to which most of us have become accustomed.

Also, John will make a presentation that can expand our awareness of a more meaningful life that often escapes us.

(Out by about 11:30 a.m. Anyone who does not have other plans is welcome to join the Lunch Bunch to enjoy food and fellowship at a local restaurant.)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PARTY!

Those of us at CCM are not strangers to multiple opportunities for good food and great fellowship. Our wonderful Covered Dish gatherings are legendary. We've also joined delicious food and togetherness to celebrate a *number* of special occasions. Sometimes, we've had a speaker, at other times we've simply gathered for cherished camaraderie. So, from our inception, we've placed a high premium on meaningful companionships and the value of social interaction.

So, once again, we are planning a celebration! Unlike some of our past get-togethers, this will be a simple one—just an opportunity to celebrate the fact that we have been a meaningful spiritual family in Columbia for—can you believe it?—*20 YEARS!* In March, we'll begin our 21st year together!

We might call this particular time together a Gratitude Celebration for the opportunity God has given us to be a progressive spiritual fellowship in the greater midlands area. So on March 10th, the second Sunday of the month, we'll gather at DiPrato's (325 Pickens Street) for an anniversary brunch. Since there are no private rooms there, we won't have a speaker—just a lovely celebratory meal together.

Those of you who are familiar with the incredible popularity of DiPrato's know already how crowded it is on weekends, so reservations are absolutely necessary. We don't want anyone to be left out, so please *remember to sign the Reservation Sheet at the CCM Welcome Table on Sunday, February 10th or 24th*, and we'll be sure to save a place at the table for you! (February 24th is the *deadline* for registering.)

Party, party! See ya there!

THANK YOU, THANK YOU!

We have received a lovely note from Mary Ann and Evelyn Clary thanking us for their Christmas remembrance. But a ‘thank you’ can go both ways. In return, we thank *them* for the wonderful job they do to enhance our worship through the medium of music. Mary Ann and Evelyn, we value you more than you know!

Since, instead of owning a facility, we rent space in attractive 7 Oaks Park, we are immensely grateful to all of you “good Samaritans” who come early to help us set up before worship on Sunday mornings as well as lingering to pack up movable items after worship is over. What would we do without you? Many, many thank yous.

WHOEVER YOU ARE, WELCOME TO CCM!

AS FOLLOWERS OF THE PATHWAY OF JESUS,
WE ARE A SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP IN WHICH WE
SEEK TO GROW IN LOVE FOR GOD, SELF, AND
OTHER PEOPLE IN A WAY THAT AFFECTS ALL OF
OUR RELATIONSHIPS, ACTIONS, AND DECISION
MAKING, THEREBY HELPING TO MAKE THE WORLD
A BETTER PLACE IN WHICH TO LIVE. WE WELCOME
WITH OPEN ARMS, MINDS, AND HEARTS ALL WHO
DESIRE TO CONNECT
WITH US.

***WHEREVER YOU ARE, THE DIFFERENCE
IS WORTH ANY DISTANCE!***

Our Telephone:

Senior Pastor: (803) 331-9999. Our mobile cell phone is more reliable than our landline phone, because it is on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If no one answers, it usually means that our pastor is in a meeting, in a counseling session, doing regular spiritual mentoring, or is involved in some other form of ministry; but he will return your call as soon as possible, so please be sure to leave a message.

Our Websites:

CommunityChurchMidlands.com (Also .net, .info and .org)

or

CommunityChurchOfTheMidlands.com (Also .net, .info and .org)

Our Mailing Address: P.O. Box 6946, Columbia, S.C. 29260-6946

Our Location: CCM usually gathers on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month, and any changes will be noted in our monthly newsletter. Please join us at the gorgeous Seven Oaks Community Center in beautiful Seven Oaks Park, 200 Leisure Lane (between St. Andrews and Piney Grove roads, just off I-26 West). When you enter the spacious parking lot, you'll see the main entrance to our newly renovated building on your right. Once you are inside the Reception Area, our meeting locality is on your left. For updates on our programming, to verify meeting times, to learn about changes in scheduling, or for any pastoral need, please feel free to call 331-9999, night or day.

ALWAYS, WE'RE HERE FOR YOU!