



Psalm 119.105

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The Counseling Session

April 1, 2007

The easiest
relationship
for me is
with 10,000
people.
The hardest
is with
one.
— Joan Baez

I take every opportunity to learn from skilled and gifted people. Therefore when my friend and fellow Tacoma pastor, Steve, invited me to observe one of his marriage counseling sessions, I jumped at the chance. The couple, Richard and Elizabeth, gave their consent in advance for me to sit in. Here's my transcript:

Pastor Steve and I step into his office and find Liz pacing the room.

- Liz: Well, it's about time, Pastor! I've been waiting here forever!
- Pastor Steve: Now, now, please sit down, Liz. Did you wake up grumpy this morning?
- Liz: No, I let him sleep in, but I tell you, Pastor (sobs), I've had it with him!
- Pastor Steve: Wait—you're not thinking of divorcing Rich, are you?
- Liz: Divorce? Of course not, why Rich's almost like one of the family.
- Pastor Steve: *Almost?*
- Liz: Well, actually, he doesn't like my relatives at all.

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Pastor Steve: Have you talked to him about it?

Liz: Yes, and he said, “Honey, that’s not true; I like your mother-in-law better than I like mine.”

Pastor Steve: Come on, Liz, you talk as if Rich were a total jerk.

Liz: Pastor, the only time my husband ever brought a ray of sunshine into my life was when he slammed the door and the venetian blinds fell down.

Pastor Steve: Well, you certainly thought Rich was Mr. Right when you first met him.

Liz: Yeah, but when I first met “Mr. Right” I didn’t know that his first name was “Always.”

Richard arrives, smiling sheepishly.

Pastor Steve: Well, Rich, I’m glad you could join us. Do you understand why we’re meeting today?

Rich: Yeah, what’s-her-name here doesn’t think I pay her enough attention.

Pastor Steve: Well, I think I can see where part of the trouble is...

Rich: Pastor, you told me that when I got married I’d be at the end of my troubles.

Pastor Steve: Well — ha, ha! —that’s true, but I didn’t say which end.

Liz: Pastor!

Rich: Pastor, Liz’s just upset because our house got burgled while we were at work yesterday, and the perpetrators made a shambles of the place.

Pastor Steve: Oh, no! Which of you arrived home first and discovered the crime?

Liz: I got home first, Pastor, but I just thought Rich had been looking for a clean pair of socks.

Pastor Steve: I hope you didn’t lose anything too valuable. Have your finances been okay?

Liz: Ha! They could be if Rich wasn’t always skipping work to play golf. Just Wednesday he announced to me at the breakfast table that he had the morning off again....

Rich: Golf was the furthest thing from my mind...

Liz: Right, then why did you say, “Please pass the putter”?

Pastor Steve: [Speaking under his breath] Golf can be therapeutic.

Liz: Hmm?

Pastor Steve: So, Liz, you work outside the home?

Liz: Yes, but my labor organization just went on strike.

Rich: Just like marriage, you know, another union defying management.

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Liz: Rich, would you stop! I'm looking for another job...

Rich: How about a job in earthquake prediction; you can find a fault quicker than anyone I know!

Pastor Steve: Now, now! Have you two always been this unhappy?

Rich: I'll have you know we've been happily married for five years.

Liz: [Sobbing] ...but we've been married for ten!

Pastor Steve: What? Now look, how long have you two known each other?

Liz: I've known Rich as a man, as an adolescent and as a child. Sometimes all in the same day.

Rich: Ah, maybe it is time to throw in the towel.

Pastor Steve: Please don't talk like that. Marriage is a fine institution and...

Rich: Pastor, who wants to live in an *institution*?

Pastor Steve: [In exasperation] Well, I can see the honeymoon is certainly over...

Liz: The honeymoon was over when he stopped helping me with the dishes...

Rich: ...and I started doing them all by myself...

Liz: I beg your pardon! Hosing off the dishes on the back lawn is not my idea of...

Rich: See, Pastor, I get a good idea and she doesn't even want to hear my point of view.

Pastor Steve: Oh, I'm sure Liz wants to hear what you think.

Rich: Nah, I don't think so. Cosby was right: "Women don't want to hear what you think. Women want to hear what *they* think, in a deeper voice."

Liz: Richard, you really don't care about me do you!

Rich: Hey, come on, didn't I get excited when you suggested we renew our wedding vows?

Liz: You only got excited because you thought they'd expired! Oh, I wish I could have been Eve!

Pastor Steve: Why's that?

Liz: Because she never had to hear about how well Adam's mother cooked.

Rich: Yeah, and Adam never had to hear about all the other men she could have married!

Pastor Steve: Now, Rich and Liz, you know that when two people marry they become one...

Rich: Sure, our trouble started when we tried to decide *which* one.

Pastor Steve: ...now look, I need to ask you some personal questions; how has your level of intimacy been lately?

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- Rich: Well, it's interesting you ask, Pastor, because last night we finally achieved sexual compatibility?
- Pastor Steve: Really?
- Rich: Yeah, we *both* had headaches.
- Pastor Steve: Oh, now, now, I'm sure Liz ...
- Rich: Let me put it this way, Pastor. The other night I walked into the bedroom and found lingerie spread provocatively on the top of the bed. I asked Liz if she was giving me a hint, and she said, "Yeah, I want you to help fold the laundry."
- Liz: Pastor, how can I be expected to feel romantic toward Rich when after 10 years he doesn't even know my favorite flower?
- Rich: I do so! Um, it's Pillsbury, right? And speaking of kitchen stuff, Pastor, I'll have you know she won't even fix the coffee in the morning.
- Liz: Well, for cryin' out loud, who was it who insisted the Bible taught that women should make the coffee, and quoted the passage to me about "two women grinding at the mill...?"
- Rich: Yeah? Who was it who retorted, "The Bible says, 'Hebrews'"?
- Pastor Steve: Wait, wait, wait, everybody, time out. We're way off track here.
- Liz: [Bowing head] Pastor, I know I've got issues. Until I got married, I was my own worst enemy.
- Rich: [Scowls, and turns to Steve] Pastor, I'm trying to plan ahead, and I sent her to pay for our cemetery plots and write our epitaphs. You know what she put on my tombstone? "Here lies my husband Richard; may he rest in peace *until we meet again*"
- Pastor Steve: [Surprises us by standing up with a pained expression on his face] Look, I'm sorry to have to end this meeting folks, but there's a seminar on schizophrenia at 10:00. I wasn't interested earlier, but now I've got half a mind to attend.

Pastor Steve disappears out the door. The three of us remaining in the room look at each other in awkward silence for a minute.

- Roderick: Um, look, don't worry about Pastor Steve. He'll be fine after a couple hours watching ESPN on his new plasma screen. Anyway, I'm sure it's God's providence that I'm here because I've got a colleague in Timothy Ministries who's very good at counseling. His name is Mike; here's his card.

