



Heart to Heart

A quarterly newsletter of Open Hearts Ministry

Autumn 2001

Why a Small Group Ministry?

by Sandy Burdick, Ministry Director

When a person is wounded by abuse why not just read the Bible and pray? Or how about counseling? Wouldn't that be enough? I often hear a victim say, "I have confronted the abuser and forgiven. Isn't that enough?"

All the above are part of recovery, but we must remember that abuse is a relational sin. Someone has sinned against you; used you for their own self-gratification. This is best healed in relationship with people who understand the dynamics of abuse and provide a relationship that is healthy and compassionate.

The small group is an experience of the "one another's" of the Bible. We are asked to love one another, exhort one another, pray for one another, confess our sins to one another, etc. In a worship service at church we all look in one direction and listen, sing, praise and pray. In small groups, we turn our chairs to face one another and we speak, listen and respond to one another in a personal way. We are part of a body and healing takes place in the body when the parts accommodate one another, lean on one another and provide a place of healing that is safe, just like a cast that protects a fracture for a season.

One of the major effects of abuse is shame and identity confusion. Shame wants us to isolate, hide and push other away. In the small group we respond as God responds in the scripture and we move toward a person in shame to cover them with words that expose the lie of shame and affirm their identity in Christ

Small groups are about building relationships with people who we invite to know us: our struggles, our shame and our dreams. Being loved in the midst of what has caused us to hide is an experience of grace: being embraced in our woundedness. This is where healing occurs, much like the embrace of the father when his son returned home from the pigpen. Many victims believe the lie of the pigpen: I am worthless, condemned, and have hunger that will never be satisfied. In this parable the Heavenly Father reveals Himself as One who waits for His child to believe that only He can satisfy the hunger for relationship and only He can provide food that satisfies. The small group can mirror the heart of God to those who are living in shame and false guilt. Like the prodigal, they will experience a celebration within their small group when change occurs. They will experience the "party" that follows repentance.

Only Jesus can forgive the ways victims act out because of the abuse by sinning relationally: fear of loving involvement because trust has been broken. A small group models unconditional love, exposes sin and stays in relationship when disappointment has occurred. Principles and ways of relating that are healthy can then be carried into the family and church setting to bring hope and healing to our broken world.

*Our Mission:
"Ministering
to the
abused
through the
love of Christ
and
equipping
others to do
the same."*

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(Fredrick Buechner said, "We all have two stories to tell. One is the story of Jesus, and the other is our own story. They are really one and the same. If you want to talk about faith, if you want to talk about revelation, talk about your life with some depth...examine your deep experiences and describe them as they are." We asked Bill and Elaine Stoub, a couple whose lives have been touched by this ministry and who are in turn helping others as group leaders and ministry team members, to share how God has worked in their lives to redeem their stories.)

Bill and Elaine's Story

Bill: I was the oldest of twelve children. My parents had us all in fourteen years. Being the oldest grandchild on both sides of the family meant I had the corner on attention. I became the "third in command." I learned to be a bully, a tough guy with little or no feelings.

I attended private Christian schools where I heard early on that "Billy is not doing his best, he can do better." Depression began in those early years that turned into anger later.

At age twelve I began working in a "real job" after having paper routes for several years. Work was honored, reinforced and applauded in my family. Work became who I was, but never seemed to be enough or good enough. As an adult I would become addicted to work. It gave me a place to hide.

Elaine: I was the last of six children. I don't remember witnessing much anger in my family, but neither do I remember seeing physical signs of love such as hugging or kissing. I never questioned my mother's love for me and never thought much whether my father loved me or not. I was very disconnected from my father all my life.

I learned very early that my worth came from what I produced and how I served others. My mother put an ad in the newspaper and I was hired out to strangers at a very early age, somewhere between 10 and 12. As girls in the family we were raised to believe that men were to be honored and served first. I got the message that no one was as important as the men.

I knew Bill for a few years and then asked him for a date to my Senior High Banquet. We were a fit - he wanted to be pursued and I pursued. After daily letter writing through the rest of his college days and his army days we were married. Bill was very possessive of my time and me. Consequently I stopped working within three months after our marriage and three months later we started our family.

Bill: I was having some difficulty staying with jobs. I walked out of the family business, angry with my father. I had a small business lined up, but that fell through so Elaine, our now two children and I returned to a house that was sold with no job. I brought chaos to my family.

Elaine: Bill was predictably unpredictable, isolated, moody and lonely. Sometimes he wanted to be mothered, sometimes he didn't. Lord only knows I know how to mother him. Finally I approached Bill with the thought of getting some help for our marriage. He felt I was exaggerating the issues. I was left sad, lonely and exhausted.

Bill had a war going on against those who loved him and needed him. He was often in retreat and unavailable. I found myself letting him stay in his war and trying to find my own

peace somewhere else. While I longed for relaxing and fun vacations with the kids, vacations were usually stressful and I would vow never to go on a vacation again. I set myself up time after time. I begged for more of him for the children and myself but he just didn't get it. I had to lower my expectations.

We really needed a safe place to go to deal with our pain. We suffered and so did our children. After 28 years of marriage I left our home. This was totally out of character for me. I was so exhausted, angry, hurt and hopeless and felt I had failed our sons and daughter. Had I not been so co-dependent, our marriage would have been over long before. I was at the bottom and I knew it.

Bill: The chaos I had brought to my family now was very heavy on Elaine and she left our home for three days. This was the proverbial

"whack with a 2x4 on my head." I knew something was dreadfully wrong, but didn't know or understand what it was. Before Elaine came back home I called a therapist for an appointment. I remember thinking shortly after starting regular therapy visits, "Do I want to stay married?" I wasn't sure I wanted to do any changing. Finally a decision to stay married provided the energy to proceed with some four and a half years of co-ed group therapy.



I had a mistress of thirty years. Her name was Reliable Disposal, Inc. I loved her and gave her all she needed and so did the family, one way or another. She was my passion. With her I had full control. I could hide in her and I loved it! The family got what was left. I was not approachable when I was hungry, angry, lonely, tired, sleeping, reading the paper, watching TV or working on business at home or at work.

I had become a perpetrator of verbal and emotional abuse. I was again the angry bully who had abandonment issues and who would intimidate Elaine, keeping her and the kids on edge. In the process I had abandoned her and the children.

Elaine: Change for Bill and I was slow and laborious. We weren't young and a lot of unhealthy behaviors were deep set. Being able to label our issues and problems meant a lot to both of us.

In 1997 I finally felt the courage to go to a week long SALTS seminar to learn to be a support group leader for survivors of abuse. I had never gone to anything over night or away from

What to do if...

...one group member monopolizes the group by talking too much?

Here are a few suggestions:

1. Start the meeting by saying, "We really want to hear from everyone at each meeting. I'll watch the time and if necessary, I may tell you we need to move on in order to include others."
2. Draw the person away from himself/herself to be curious about others. Say, "Thanks. You've given us a lot to think about. Why don't we stop and see how the others respond to what you are saying?" Don't be surprised if the person has nothing to say to the others when you shift the focus off of him/her.
3. You might need to address the issue directly, but don't forget we always need to ask permission when we expose something. If granted, ask, "What happens when you are still?" or, "Is there something you are trying to avoid/reach through talking?"
4. If none of the above work, it may help to move toward the person physically to shift their focus on you. A nod of your head could quiet them or a touch on their arm could be enough for them to realize they have talked long enough. Then move on.

...one group member remains silent throughout group?

You could invite him/her in by saying, "I've noticed that you have been quiet this evening and I know that you have something to give to the group. Would you consider speaking to us now or being first to speak to the group next week?" You may be surprised at what comes out and when.

Remember everyone is counting on you to not allow either situation to go on too long. As leaders we need to move our groups along for the benefit of all members. You will need all your creative juices flowing to keep all group members included.

by Mary Jane Hamilton

Are you starting a new group? Would you like us to pray for you as well as pass along helpful information and resources, and be there as a mentor to help you as you walk the journey of recovery with others? Would you like to have your contact information on our website, so that people in your area can find your group? Send us an e-mail or give us a call.

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home. I didn't trust Bill with the kids. Bill had a hard time supporting me in my new ministry, since I was becoming less co-dependent and more passionate.

Surprise! Guess who joined me in what is now our passion? Bill and I are finally a team this side of heaven! Remorse over lost years has been hard on us. We have needed to remember that God forgives and we have needed to forgive ourselves as well.

Bill: I am very sorry for the 28 years of our marriage that were so so injurious to Elaine and our children. As I have faced my own childhood pain, God is using my story in a redeeming way in my life and the lives of others.

We cannot change the beginning chapters of our life book, but we can make better choices as to how our last chapters will read. We are grateful that our hearts are being renewed and we are in turn gratefully serving in a way that could only become possible after facing our life experiences. Had we not been willing to deal with our issues, I'm sure we would not be able to share a story of hope, and hope is our gift to you. God bless you on your journey as He heals your wounded heart.

Important Dates to Remember

September-October - **Small Groups** starting up around the U.S.

September 15 - See us at **Time Out for Women** in Grand Rapids, MI

September 22 - Our 2nd annual **Walk/Bike-a-thon fundraiser**

October 1-6 **SALTS Texas**

October 30 - November 4
SALTS Austria

March 9, 2002 - **Seminar with Dr. Dan Allender**

April 30 - May 5, 2002
SALTS Maranatha

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Executive Director's Report

by Mark Bonham

Our vision statement begins: "To see men and women from among the diverse people groups around the world equipped to walk with those wounded through abuse...". In the past year we have moved forward on several fronts to see this vision accomplished. We have worked at helping our friends build the ministry in Austria. They will actually run the first SALTS in the German language at the end of October. Men's groups are included. We will be there to help, but the team there is really taking ownership of the ministry.

We continue to build our relationship with the Native American population working with mission agencies in the U.S. and Canada. People from the Navajo tribe will join us at SALTS Texas. Initiatives in the Black, Hispanic and Arab cultures are beginning. God willing, one participant at SALTS Texas will be from Nigeria.

Now the Lord has brought Lima Jamir from New Delhi, India to us for an 8-week internship.



Sandy Burdick, Mark Bonham & Lima Jamir

Lima comes from the second most populous country in the world where 16% of the world's population resides. We have received appeals from India for help in a country where abuse is such a common experience, but neither Lima nor we are aware of anyone offering specific help in this area. Lima is a Ph.D. student who has it on his heart to offer a path for recovery to his people. He was willing to delay a professorship to come to the U.S. and learn from us. Only God knows where this will lead,

but we continue to pray that someday every people group will have access to a safe place for recovery on the journey to a restored relationship with God, self and others.

By God's grace and your prayers and financial support we will see more and more men and women meet the Wounded Healer and know the power He has to change lives.

"All their captors hold them fast, refusing to let them go. Yet their Redeemer is strong; the Lord Almighty is his name. He will vigorously defend their cause so that he may bring rest to their land..." (Jeremiah 50:33, 34)

How to partner with Open Hearts Ministry:

Our ministry exists and grows as concerned people like you pray and give. We encourage you to consider making OHM a part of your regular giving. All gifts are acknowledged with a tax-deductible receipt. You can give by check, credit card, or we can easily arrange electronic bank transfer. Simply contact us at our address/phone on this letter and we'll be happy to get you started! Your support is needed today for staff, administration and scholarships.