

## Wounded Lovers Retreat



A journalist once asked, why in the world are men so consumed by sex? “Did nature simply overload us in the mating department, hot-wiring us for the sex that is so central to the survival of the species, and never mind the sometimes sloppy consequences? Or is there something smarter and subtler at work, some larger interplay among sexuality, life and what it means to be human?”

On a Saturday in April, men met to address this question at Pathways Retreat in Goshen, Indiana and put sexuality and spirituality back together as they shared about the joys and struggles of their sexual lives.

As shown in *Hungry Man*, the sculpture above, we have an empty hole within us and hunger to fill it. We long for intimacy and desire sex. Both spirituality and sexuality share a common desire: union with other. But these two aspects in life are often split apart, especially by men.

Consider two stories told at the retreat.

A husband and a wife in their forties were together in a cottage at a Mennonite spiritual retreat center. Feeling especially close in their shared contemplative experience, the woman asked her husband if he wanted to have sex. He quickly answered, “Here?” Having been taught “sex is dirty, save it for marriage,” he didn’t think this place of prayer was a place for sex. Holding spirituality and sexuality together as she did, she helped her husband see that this was a good time and place to be intimate together. While he tried, he struggled to get it up and reach orgasm, splitting sexual and spiritual intimacy as he did like many men.

In a different spiritual retreat center an older couple in their seventies were together. They, too, felt unusually intimate in this place. The man shared how they pulled

their twin beds together in their guest room. While having sex the beds split apart and they fell to the floor. Unhurt, they laughed together about what happened and said that in the future they need to bring clamps to keep the beds together! Months later as they set out for the retreat center, the wife asked her husband, “Did you remember to bring the clamps?” He shared that when they had sex this time on beds clamped together it was like a threesome—with God present in their intimacy. In this lovely case, the couple’s clamped beds illustrate healthy intimacy where spirituality and sexuality are joined.

In this Mennonite Men retreat, participants heard that they are created to be lovers—to love and be loved with sexual intimacy and passion as part of God’s design.

In *The Holy Longing*, Ronald Rohheiser writes, “Sexuality is a beautiful, good, extremely powerful, sacred energy, given us by God and experienced in every cell of our being as an irrepressible urge to overcome our incompleteness, to move towards unity and consummation with that which is beyond us. It is also the pulse to celebrate, to give and to receive delight, to find our way back to the Garden of Eden where we can be naked, shameless, and without worry and work as we make love in the moonlight.”

While this is God’s ideal, our experience usually falls far short of this. As Richard Rohr observes in his book *From Wild Man to Wise Man*, “Almost every man in western society suffers from some sexual wound.... I have never once had a man tell me that he felt his sexuality was whole, healthy and happy. It always seems to be a cross, a dilemma, a shame, a fear, a doubt or an impossible desire. Sexual issues are always at the heart of masculine spirituality. It must be tapped for good, or it will always be the ‘thorn in the flesh’ that keeps men paralyzed, addicted and living double lives.”

And so it is, we are wounded lovers who need to share in spaces like this to redeem God’s gift of our sexuality in our intimate relationships.

Testimonies from two participants in this retreat:

--“Wounded lovers are everywhere. Come share in building a community of healing and restoration. Sharing with other men in this safe space works wonders.”

--“These types of retreats are essential to our personal spiritual growth and have ripple effects in our families and church community.”