

GONE HUNTIN'

Sandy L. Bauer and Leslie S. Gregory

"I would just like to know," Roger Roberts said emphatically, "that she won't mess with my huntin'! I like to do a little huntin' every fall. It's something I've been doin' since I was a kid, way before I ever met Connie."

"I don't mind *a little* huntin'," Connie Roberts exclaimed, "but Roger starts huntin' in September and doesn't stop 'til December. He's gone almost every weekend and a whole week over Thanksgiving. I want to know that Roger will be there if I need him, even if it's during a huntin' trip. I need him to be available, if I need him . . .," Connie paused, "no matter what. I need him to agree to come home from huntin' if there's an emergency or family happening that I feel requires his presence. I always take the backseat. I'm lonely and don't feel my needs are important to Roger."

Social worker Laura Adams sighed to herself. It was only her second marital counseling session with the Roberts but already she was wondering how this couple was going to see past their differences. Married for eight years, they evidently had some entrenched patterns. *What sacrifices might they be willing to make to start meeting each other's needs? Can they feel an intimate connection again? Is forgiveness and healing possible? How might faith help in this process?*

Family Counseling Services

Family Counseling Services (FCS) was founded in the 1980s as an outgrowth

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of a ministry of a local church in the Washington, DC, area. At its inception, it offered crisis counseling services to Christians in the local community. Over time, however, its services expanded as it began offering individual, family, and marital counseling services to clients of all ages (regardless of religious background or affiliation) in several geographic areas.

FCS employed approximately 100 social workers, psychologists, and other mental health professionals. Although no longer an exclusively Christian counseling organization, many of the therapists at FCS were Christians, encompassing a range of Christian traditions. Yet, other therapists were Jewish, Buddhist, or professed no religious affiliation.

Funded largely through insurance, with few cash clients, FCS experienced the effects of managed care as insurance companies paid for only a set number of sessions. Low insurance reimbursement rates and client co-payments were beneficial for insurance companies and for many clients, but meeting budgetary demands was often a challenge for FCS.

Most clients were referred to FCS through their insurance companies, Christian counseling referral programs, or by a physician, friend, or clergy. Referrals were taken by non-clinical intake staff at FCS. These staff gathered client demographic and insurance information as well as the reason for the referral. Following the brief telephone intake, clients were matched to therapists based on the clinician's area of specialty, availability, and the expressed needs of the client (e.g., preferred faith background, gender, marital, or parental status of therapist, evening or weekend appointments, payment method and ability). Therapists received a brief two-page intake with demographic information, insurance information, and the reason for referral. From this information, a therapist contacted the client to arrange an initial assessment.

Laura Adams

Laura Adams had BSW and MSW degrees and twelve years of practice experience in various clinical and supervisory positions in the child welfare field, including five years as a supervisor for a religiously affiliated child welfare agency. About the same time she began that position, she also began teaching social work practice courses part-time for a religiously affiliated baccalaureate social work program. She left the supervisory position in 2001 but, as a practice teacher, felt the need to resume social work practice again. She joined the staff at FCS in 2003 as a part-time clinical

social worker out of desire to be more directly involved in clinical practice.

Laura started at FCS uncertain about what to expect. Most of her social work experience had been as a supervisor in child welfare. Clinical work was a new experience. Laura felt a mixture of anxiety, doubt (in her own abilities), enthusiasm, fear and excitement about her new role as a clinical social worker. Although she knew she could draw on her professional knowledge, she was also hoping that her thirteen-year marriage and her experience as a mother of four children would be of some help to her, especially in her work with women, couples, and families.

Laura had chosen FCS, in part, because of its religious roots. Laura grew up in a Christian home and was saved at a young age. She had a personal relationship with God and faith disciplines—prayer, devotions and fellowship with other believers—were important in her daily life. She regularly attended a large evangelical church. Although faith was very important to Laura personally, she was still considering how to address faith issues in her new work place.

In the early stages at FCS, she was concerned with learning about the agency, including understanding the paperwork and other policies and procedures. A particular concern for Laura was the assessment process that included giving each client a clinical diagnosis for insurance purposes. This was something Laura had never done. She wondered if she would recall content on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual from the human behavior course she had taken 10 years earlier. Another concern related to her ability to use effective and meaningful interventive techniques. She felt confident in her ability to build rapport, care and trust, but wondered if clients would find their work together meaningful and helpful. In short, Laura wondered, *Am I truly prepared for the work I am about to begin?*

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As her first client, Laura was given a referral for Connie Roberts, a 46-year-old female, and her husband, Roger. The referral was for marital conflict. From the intake form Laura could see that the Roberts came to FCS because it accepted their insurance and was close to their home. She also noted they had not specifically requested a Christian counselor.

Laura contacted Ms. Roberts to arrange the first session. After determining whether this was a convenient time to talk, Laura introduced herself and scheduled an appointment with Connie and Roger. She gave Connie directions to the office, gave her some basic information about the initial session and noted that their

insurance would cover 30 visits per calendar year. Laura explained that she would mail some paperwork for Connie and Roger to complete before the first session. She promised that she would meet the Roberts in the waiting room at the scheduled appointment time. Before concluding the call, Laura asked whether Connie had any questions or concerns. Connie mentioned that she and Roger were on the brink of separation because of unresolved marital issues.

Preparing To Meeting the Roberts

In preparation for the first session, Laura tuned in to her feelings and concerns about meeting the Roberts, in addition to imagining the potential feelings and concerns of the Roberts. Laura thought, *I am feeling so anxious. I don't know what to expect and I hope I will be able to meet the Roberts' needs.* Excitement also pervaded Laura, as she had a special interest in working with couples experiencing marital conflict. She looked forward to hearing the Roberts' story.

Laura thought more about her phone call with Connie. *She sounded pleasant on the phone, but also frustrated about her marriage, even hopeless.* Roger's willingness to come in for counseling was also on Laura's mind. She wondered, *Did Connie give him an ultimatum?* Laura wondered whether the Roberts had any previous experience with counseling.

Building rapport, trust and care was important to Laura as three elements of the helping relationship. She needed to formulate her role and purpose in this new setting, so she could explain this to the Roberts. She decided to use the three elements of the helping relationship as one way to express her role and purpose.

Laura planned a brief assessment for the initial session. The anxieties the Roberts brought to the first session also weighed on Laura's mind, as she expected that they were also concerned about what to expect from FCS, Laura, and from their work together. *I wonder if they will be as nervous as I am?*

Session One

Laura met Connie and Roger Roberts, a white couple, in their mid-40s, in the FCS waiting room. Connie was petite and attractive, but looked tired and worn down. Roger was of average size and build with red hair and fair complexion that looked a little flushed. *They look like a nice couple,* Laura thought, *but Connie barely shook my hand and Roger isn't making eye contact with me. I wonder what this means?*

As Laura led them into the office she said, "Please sit wherever you will be most comfortable."

The Roberts chose two adjacent chairs as opposed to sitting together on the small sofa. But Laura was so nervous that she hardly gave their choice of seating a thought.

"First I need a minute to look over the paperwork and review some things with you. Everything we talk about will be kept confidential unless you tell me to tell someone else, like your doctor, or if you are having thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else. I am also required to report concerns about child abuse. Do you have any questions about that?"

The Roberts both shook their heads no.

Laura continued, "Do you have any questions about all the paperwork you filled out? I know it is a lot to read and complete."

They both said, "No," and handed Laura their forms.

Laura quickly scanned the information on the personal data form (one of the forms that clients had to complete for the chart). Laura learned that there was a five-year age difference between Connie and Roger, with Connie being older. They had been married eight years. This was Roger's first marriage, while Connie had been married previously. They had no children. *I need to be sure, Laura thought, to explore Connie's first marriage and the reason they have no children.*

Both Connie and Roger were both employed as engineers at a pharmaceutical company. Laura recognized their home address. *A secluded and sought after community of higher priced homes, Laura mused. They likely have a comfortable lifestyle and lovely home.*

Connie had written, on the personal data form, that her faith was important to her. Laura wondered how this might become a part of her work with clients not specifically seeking Christian counseling. Laura thought, *It will be great to make this faith connection with Connie.* Connie listed the name of a local Protestant church, where she was currently a member. Roger wrote that he grew up Lutheran, but answered, "No" to the question of, "Is faith important to you?" Roger left the line blank where a client could list their current church or religious affiliation. Laura wondered, *Could the difference in how Connie and Roger describe the importance of faith in their life be a source of conflict for them?*

Also listed on the personal data form was the fact that the Roberts had been in counseling earlier in their marriage. Laura thought, *I need to be sure to explore this at some point.*

"Since I see that you have been in counseling before," Laura began, "you prob-

ably have a good idea of what we will be doing together. Tonight I want to hear from both of you about what brings you here so we can begin to establish some goals. By establishing goals we will better know how we are doing in our work together and know when we are reaching the end of our work. My primary job is to help build our relationship by helping you both feel heard and cared about. I am also here to help you talk and listen to one another so that you can learn to communicate better at home. I need to build trust between us because if you do not trust me, you won't be honest with me or with one another. Through all of this I hope that we will be able to work on the concerns that are bringing you here tonight. How does this sound?"

Both Connie and Roger said, "Fine."

"So," Laura continued, "who wants to start sharing what has been going on?"

Connie responded immediately, "We haven't been gettin' along. This is a problem every winter after huntin' season. I am always put on the back burner, while Roger goes off huntin'. He thinks he can go and do whatever he wants and he almost seems to forget that I'm at home all alone."

Connie continued for nearly 10 minutes explaining her feelings about being left alone while Roger was hunting.

Roger remained quiet, rarely interjecting his side of the story even though Laura looked at him from time to time as Connie was talking. *Roger seems nervous and uncomfortable and he isn't really making much eye contact. Does Roger even want to be here, or is this how things usually go in the relationship, with Connie taking over?* She also quickly realized how hard it was to mediate between two people during a counseling session. *I need to figure out a way to engage him.*

When Connie paused, Laura turned to Roger and said, "It sounds like you are an avid hunter."

"Yeah," Roger responded, "I've been huntin' every fall, for as long as I can remember. At first I'd hunt with my Dad and brothers, and now it's with my brothers and friends."

As Roger continued, Laura thought, *Well, it is obvious that hunting is a passion of Roger's. It is great to see how his demeanor has changed. He is so excited and animated.* Connie, on the other hand, had grown quiet during this time and kept her arms crossed.

"So," Laura asked, "What are some of the things you like to do, Connie, while Roger is hunting?"

"Oh, I enjoy attendin' church, readin', cookin' and carin' for my, dog, Dusty.

He's like my baby, although he's already 12 years old. He's the one good thing that I got out of my first marriage."

"Well," Roger piped in, "I love Dusty too."

Connie agreed, "Yeah, he does."

Laura asked them what they liked to do together. They easily listed several things, including snowmobiling in the winter, gardening in the spring and summer, and winemaking in the fall.

"Having these common interests seems like a wonderful source of strength for you," Laura interjected.

Connie agreed, "Yeah, we do have our good points."

"I notice that you do not have any children," Laura commented, recognizing that this might be a difficult area to talk about.

"No," Connie slowly began, "I can't have children because of infertility problems. Five years ago we saw a counselor for several months and we dealt with all that then. I had in vitro about five years ago. But, it didn't work. I guess we are happy with our lives now even though a child would have been nice. I have always thought about bein' a Big Sister, but just have never done it."

Laura wondered, *Is the issue of not being able to have children really as resolved as Connie is presenting? She seems like she is trying to convince herself as well as me. Once we have developed more rapport and trust in our relationship I should address this.*

Laura continued the session by gathering a brief family history starting with Roger. She learned that Roger was the younger of two brothers, and came from a working class family with traditional gender roles.

"My mom stayed at home and took care of things around the house and all. My dad worked a lot." Roger stated.

"Were they close?" Laura asked.

"I guess," Roger responded, sounding ambivalent.

"How did your family display their feelings of love and care?" Laura asked.

"Well, we weren't too much into that kind of stuff. There weren't many hugs and all," Roger replied.

"What about verbally," Laura continued, "did your family tell each other 'I love you'?"

"No, but you just knew it," Roger defended.

Laura wondered, *Has this manner of relating been carried into the marriage? Roger doesn't even sit close to Connie or show any other signs of physical or verbal affection to Connie, although neither does she.* At that point, Laura recalled that they both seemed

to avoid the sofa when offered their choice of seats.

Laura continued gathering a family history with Connie.

Connie shared that she was the youngest of three children, with two older brothers.

"My parents divorced when I was an infant. My mom worked all the time and my grandmother really is the one who raised me," Connie stated.

"What was your relationship like with your dad?" Laura asked.

"Well, there really was no relationship. I never saw him much. My mom was working all of the time. Thank God for my grandmother. She's the one who taught me to cook and sew. She was just a loving, Godly woman," Connie replied.

Laura wondered, *Might this relationship be the source from which Connie's faith was sparked and nurtured?*

"What about your mom?" Laura interjected.

Connie laughed, "Well, she is another story all together. We could take up years of sessions talkin' about her. She is a bitter, angry woman. She really is no support to me. I know she loves me, but she is so angry all the time and she really doesn't seem to know how to show love."

Laura nodded and paused, wondering about how Connie's family impacted her actions in her marriage. She thanked Connie and Roger for sharing their stories and asked them where they wanted to go from here.

Connie told Laura, "I'm at the end of my rope. We never talk to each other. I am not even sure I want the relationship. I know I don't want it like it is now. We fight a lot and we never seem to be able to work it out."

"Maybe we should end it," Roger sounded hopeless.

Laura nodded, "I hear that you are both struggling with the way things are right now and how they have been. Is a divorce or a separation something that either of you want?"

They both shook their heads and replied, "No."

Laura continued, "I know things may feel hopeless right now, but I believe there is a lot of hope for your future. It is going to be a journey of ups and downs, but you already have strengths that we can build on as we work together on the areas that are causing you to struggle and making you feel like you want to end things."

Laura knew it was time to bring the session to an end, "All that you have shared with me tonight has been helpful for me to start to get to know you and what you are struggling with. I am wondering if you would like to come back next week to continue our work together."

They both nodded and said, "Yes." To Laura's surprise, Roger added quietly, "That would be a good idea."

Laura continued, "Since we are running out of time for tonight, we will talk more next week about goals. By next week I would like you each to individually write down some goals that you have for our work together. It might help for you to think of it this way, 'How will you know when we are done? What will be different in your marriage?'"

Again, they both nodded and said, "Okay."

Laura scheduled an appointment for next week. She felt uncomfortable about asking for the co-pay, but knew she needed to collect it.

"So, how would you like to pay your co-pay?"

Connie said, "Oh, we have cash, it's \$10, right?"

Laura responded, "Yes, that's right," and took the money from Connie.

They exchanged goodbyes and the Roberts left.

Laura was relieved the session was over and thought to herself, *That wasn't so bad.* She now had to begin the task of filling out the authorization form required by the insurance company, which included a history, five-axis diagnosis, mental status exam, and social system stressors evaluation. She felt a twinge of doubt in her ability to do this, realizing how independent and accountable you have to be when working in this field.

As she worked through the paperwork she reflected on how hopeless the Roberts both seemed to feel. *What might be the hurts, she wondered, that keep them from meeting one another's needs? How can I help them reconnect and want to invest energy into their marriage again?*

Session Two

In the next session, after hearing about their goals, Laura explored the source of their conflicts, as they both shared the goal of wanting to more effectively deal with their conflicts and to learn to get along better.

Laura asked, "What are your individual needs and what do you need from each other?"

"I would just like to know," Roger responded, "that she won't mess with my huntin'. I like to do a little huntin' every fall. It's something I've been doin' since I was a kid, way before I ever met Connie."

"I don't mind *a little* huntin'," Connie exclaimed and then continued angrily

and in a loud voice, "but Roger starts huntin' in September and doesn't stop 'til December. He's gone almost every weekend and a whole week over Thanksgivin'."

Laura thought, *Can the clients in the waiting room hear Connie? She is talking so loud right now. I wonder if Connie gets angry with Roger like this often?* Laura was about to interject, as she felt that she needed to somehow protect Roger, but then Connie's tone softened and her voice lowered.

"I want to know that Roger will be there if I need him even if it's durin' a huntin' trip; I need him to be available, if I need him...no matter what. I need him to agree to come home from huntin' if there's an emergency or family happenin' that I feel requires his presence. I always take the backseat. I'm lonely and don't feel my needs are important to Roger," Connie said.

"Here she goes with 'the switch'," Roger interjected loudly. "She starts off agreein' to my huntin' and then gets all mad."

Laura looked at Connie, whose jaw dropped. She looked like she had been slapped by Roger's comment. Laura felt put on the defensive for Connie. *That sounds hurtful and even sexist*, Laura thought.

"I don't want Connie to decide whether I need to come home from huntin'," Roger continued. "I will come home if I think I need to. I don't need Connie tellin' me what to do."

Laura's thoughts stayed with Connie. *I need to choose my response wisely*, Laura thought, *because Roger's statement is really making me want to side with Connie*. Laura didn't want to alienate Roger, but as a wife she could understand how these words must hurt Connie.

"How do you express these needs to one another?" Laura inquired.

"Well," Connie began slowly, "we either fight about it or just quit talkin' all together."

"What happens when these needs aren't met?" Laura asked.

This was met with a lot of silence, to which Laura conjectured, "You just want to give up." Connie and Roger nodded in agreement.

Laura wondered, *Do they see the difficulty they are having with communication, problem solving and compromise?* Laura heard their frustration and lack of desire to meet one another's needs. *How can I help them establish healthier communication patterns? I know gaining insight into these problems and beginning to heal is going to be a long process, but I am not even sure what to say next.* Relief fell over Laura as she heard Connie's voice break the silence.

"One of the in vitro treatments was during huntin' season, and Roger acted

like he wasn't goin' to come home for it. I felt like I really needed him and was just always bein' put on the back burner," Connie complained.

Roger interjected, "Why did the in vitro have to be planned durin' huntin' season?"

Connie was quick to respond, "Why is huntin' more important than tryin' to have a baby?"

Laura's thoughts began to consume her as she listened to Connie and Roger, *As a wife and mother, it is hard for me to imagine hunting being more important than trying to have a baby. Did Roger ever really want a baby? Or did he just not know how to express his care and concern for Connie during this difficult time? Was Roger hurting too when the in vitro didn't work? Although Connie had the in vitro on schedule, does she still place some blame for it not being successful on Roger and his hunting.*

"I did get pregnant once," Connie went on, "it actually wasn't durin' the in vitro, but a few months after treatment."

Sensing her hesitation Laura asked, "Do you want to talk about what happened?"

Connie responded slowly, "I had a miscarriage. I wasn't that far along."

"I can only imagine how painful that must have been," Laura said empathically.

"Yeah, it was hard," agreed Connie.

"How was it for you, Roger?" Laura asked.

Roger quickly responded, "Oh, I dealt with it okay."

Laura saw the hurts and struggle between the Roberts. *I am not sure, she thought, what Roger's statement of 'I dealt with it okay' really means. Part of me sees Roger as cold and uncaring and another part sees him as struggling to support and care for Connie, while coping with his own feelings of sadness and loss. Laura's thoughts continued, Given Roger's upbringing maybe talking about feelings and showing how he feels, particularly sadness, might not have been encouraged. Maybe this really is hard for him. How can I help bring healing to both of them about this difficult and painful loss that they both seem to still be carrying around?* Laura felt overwhelmed, inadequate and uncertain of the next step.

Noticing the time, Laura ended the session and scheduled their next appointment.

"See you next week," Roger said as he got up. Connie stood, handed Laura \$10 and thanked her as she followed Roger out the door.

Sessions Three to Five

Over the next several sessions, Connie and Roger shared more of their story with Laura, including how they met and what first attracted them to one another. They also discussed more of the issues surrounding past hurts and the dynamics of their relationship over time. Laura continued to reflect during these sessions how much it seemed they were holding onto the past and not able to forgive each other.

Session Six

Roger and Connie arrived early to their sixth session reporting that they had had an argument.

"Do you want to talk about the specifics of the argument or do you feel you were able to resolve it?" Laura asked.

Laura felt anxious as Connie and Roger sat silent at first. Finally, Connie responded by asking Roger, "Do you want to start or should I?"

"Go ahead," Roger deferred.

"Roger wanted to have sex last night," Connie began, "and I was so tired. Roger became angry and sulked when I told him I was tired."

"Well," Roger interjected, "you're always tired."

"Yeah," Connie acknowledged, "I am tired a lot."

Boy, can I relate to that, Laura thought, particularly as a mother of four young children. I'm exhausted too!

After a long silence, Laura asked, "Is that all that the argument was about? Because, if you are tired at night, what about having sex early in the evening. Would that be possible for you guys?"

"Yeah that is somethin' we could do," they both agreed in unison.

Laura prodded, "What about my question about if there is something more to the argument? Because it seems to mirror previous discussions we have had around your struggle to meet each other's needs." Laura paused and then asked, "Roger, what are you thinking right now?"

"I guess I need to learn when to leave Connie alone." Roger replied.

"Is this what you want, Connie?" Laura asked.

"No, I am sayin' that I was tired and that sex isn't the only way to feel close." Connie said.

"Connie, what do you think Roger needs?" Laura asked.

"Sex, like any man," Connie responded quickly.

Laura saw Roger shift in his seat and make what Laura thought to be an understandably annoyed sigh.

Connie continued, "Don't get me wrong, I enjoy sex when we have it, but not when I am tired and no matter what Roger says, I am not always tired."

Laura responded, "Sex is one of the ways that a couple can be intimate and feel close. It is also something that can pull couples apart. Withholding it is often a way to get back at one another or to keep one another at a distance. I realize this might be difficult to talk about, but I am wondering what you think about this?"

"Honestly," Connie responded, "I do sometimes reject Roger's advances when I don't want to have sex, because I am hurt or mad at him and not just when I am tired."

"Yet, do you see how this could be one way to feel close?" Laura asked. "When you are hurting and upset you don't feel connected to Roger and so you withhold sex. You don't end up getting the closeness with Roger that you need and the result is that you feel even more disconnected."

"Yeah, but I just don't want him to think that everythin' is okay when it's not," Connie admitted.

How can I help her see that open communication and forgiveness will build more of a connection? Connie just seems to want to hold grudges.

"Roger, do you understand that Connie doesn't want to have sex when things don't feel right between you? When Connie doesn't feel emotionally connected with you, like when she is upset with you, she is less interested in sex." Laura explained.

"Yeah, I know," Roger conceded.

As the discussion continued, Roger and Connie seemed to gain some insight about their lack of intimacy, but they were still missing vital pieces. *Where does forgiveness come into play?* Laura wondered.

Since it was almost time for the session to end, Laura summarized what they had discussed and reviewed their homework for the week that related back to the fight they had.

After the session Laura began to wonder, *How can I help Connie and Roger feel an intimacy again? Is it possible to shift their selfish focus to a focus on each other? Do they want to experience healing in their marriage? They have such a difficult time with communication and telling one another what they need with all of these approach-avoidance tactics. How can I help them feel connected again?*

Laura shifted her thinking and began to wonder, *Would Connie's faith be a po-*

tential source of support and a way to help them reconnect? Since Roger does not place the same significance on his religious beliefs as Connie, would Roger see his spirituality as a source of support and help or even as a way of connecting with Connie during this marital crisis? Should I even explore the spiritual realm, as this will likely be positive and helpful for Connie, but potentially uncomfortable and alienating for Roger?

Session Seven

"We have talked in the past," Laura began, "about the importance of church in your lives. I'm wondering how this might help you feel united?"

Both nodded but neither said a word.

"I know, Roger, you've told me you do not attend church regularly and faith is not important to you," Laura said.

"That's right," Roger replied. "I don't attend church right now, except on holidays."

"I attend church regularly," Connie interjected, "except in the winter when we are away a lot. Church is really important to me. I pray all the time and it is helpful to me."

"See," Roger continued, sounding exasperated, "this is the thing I just don't understand . . . Oh, forget it, I'm not gonna go there."

I have no idea if this is going to be positive or negative, and it might hurt Connie, but Roger needs to continue sharing his thoughts if we are ever going to get anywhere.

"Roger, go ahead and share," Laura encouraged. "It sounds like something important."

After a brief pause, Roger continued, "I am not tryin' to put her down or anything, but I just don't understand how she can go to church every Sunday and then act that way."

"What is 'that way'?" Laura prodded.

"Well, you know, it's the 'switch' I have talked about before," Roger remarked, "and when it turns on she gets mad and the things that come out of her mouth, you know, cursin' and all."

"He's right, I do get mad and curse," Connie admitted. "I know it's wrong and I feel bad about it. I pray and ask God to help . . ."

"It doesn't make sense to me," Roger interrupted, "I can't understand it."

"I'm sure it doesn't make sense to God and that He doesn't like it either," Connie volunteered.

"Fortunately," Laura inserted, "God sees past our imperfections."

But even as she spoke, Laura wondered whether Roger felt this comment was directed at him. *Should I spend some time now talking about forgiveness, as one way toward healing and a feeling a unity?*

After a brief pause, Laura turned towards Roger and said, "I'm guessing that if you see Connie cursing and not living in a godly way that it is hard to see the benefits of her going to church."

"Yeah," Roger acknowledged, and silence pervaded the room again.

Laura remarked, "Can you think of ways that your faith might be a source of cohesion?"

Connie thought for a while and then said, "Well, I would love to get Roger to read Christian books with me. I read them all the time and they are really helpful, but I know that won't happen. It would be great if he would come to church with me."

"I just don't see the point in goin'," Roger shrugged. "I should move my membership to Connie's church, but I just haven't yet."

"I am wondering if you don't see the point," Laura responded, "because you don't see certain things in Connie's life and she goes to church regularly."

After Laura said this she wondered, *Should I have just said that? Am I implying that going to church means we will behave in certain ways? Am I just giving Roger more fuel for his argument?*

"Yeah," Roger responded quickly, "I just can't see how she goes there and is the way she is with the cursing and all."

"I don't disagree that it is wrong and I pray about it," Connie responded.

"Since you mention praying, what about that, is that something that you ever do together?" Laura questioned.

"We haven't," Connie said hesitantly.

Laura thought, *Roger is shifting in his seat. He isn't making eye contact with me now. I am touching on those uncomfortable issues again.*

"These can be uncomfortable issues to discuss," Laura interjected beginning to feel uncomfortable herself.

Roger nodded, confirming for Laura that he was not comfortable and that she had touched on a sensitive area. Laura's thoughts began to race and she felt her heart beat right along with those thoughts, *Should I explore this nod? He seems uncomfortable. I am feeling uncomfortable, too. Maybe I should just go back to restating why we are discussing the issue of faith and not process his nonverbal cues. But, will this seem evasive, uncaring or defensive? What would be helpful at this point?*

But Laura proceeded, "Again, I bring this up because I think it is important to consider all aspects of our lives as we work together and to explore the ways these aspects bring cohesion and strain."

There was silence from Connie and Roger.

Laura's nagging, racing thoughts returned, *The session is almost over and I am running out of time to pull all of these loose ends together . . . Why aren't they responding? Is it because I have touched on a taboo? Am I even making sense? How can I stay connected with both Connie AND Roger and bring the session to an end?*

Laura continued, "I also believe that the argument you had last week regarding sex provides another opportunity to incorporate concepts from your faith. That is the idea of forgiveness and it's something I want to talk more about in the next session."

They both replied, "Okay."

As Connie and Roger left her office, Laura was not sure how to help them through their current impasse. Laura thought, *They seem to keep adding bricks to a wall that they are building between them. With each hurtful word and unmet need another brick gets added.*

Laura pondered, *How can I use the idea of forgiveness to help them? They are both hurting. Is reconciliation and healing possible? Are they ready for this? Are they willing to offer forgiveness to one another? How do I even go about suggesting this? There are so many hurts and pains from early in their marriage to today. Is forgiveness really a possibility?*