

## What I Learned From Shea

Franklin Church of Christ  
Edwin Crozier  
August 26, 2007  
AM Assembly

### The Story:

On August 3 I received an e-mail that simply said, "Dear Preacher, Can you please send me scriptures on baptism and salvation. My name Shae Adair (sic). I am trying to search this out and am looking for help. Thanks so much." Over the next week and a half I had multiple e-mails and phone conversations with Shea. I learned that she had a Southern Baptist background but had been prompted by a friend to rethink her position on baptism. She had a few questions, but was mostly concerned because her husband was opposed to this study. The more convinced she became, the angrier he got. He began by questioning her submission to him and ultimately moved out, threatening to leave her permanently if she was baptized for the remission of her sins. However, against all odds, she was willing to follow through on her new conviction anyway. On Saturday, August 18, she was traveling to Nashville and wanted to know if we could meet face to face. Marita, the kids and I met Shea at the building. After talking for a few minutes, she said she wanted to be baptized. What rejoicing. It was wonderful. We were all so happy for her. We watched the introductory video to "Your First 10 Days as a Christian" and then sent her on her way bidding her Godspeed, hoping her husband would settle down and see reason after a few days and that she would connect with the young lady with whom we had set up contact in Huntsville, AL and, through her, connect with a congregation.

She called me at about 5:18 pm saying she was almost home and wanted me to have a prayer with her since she was about to see her husband. I did. Then I didn't hear from her again. I began to worry when I called her Sunday afternoon and didn't get an answer. Then, just before our Sunday evening assembly I tried to contact her again. However, Shea did not answer the phone. Her sister did. In the conversation she told me that Shea had told her husband she had been baptized, he lost it and beat her up. I was completely deflated. It was hard to even preach last Sunday night. Later that evening, Stephanie called again to say Shea had lost her baby and had so much damage internally she had to have a complete hysterectomy, she was bleeding internally and they couldn't figure out why. On Monday, Shea was unconscious and they weren't sure which way things would go. I couldn't believe it. I was about to have met my first modern martyr. I could only hope that some good would come out of it and her family would be prompted to examine this faith for which Shea was willing to be abandoned by her husband, hospitalized and possibly even die.

However, some things were not adding up. A Huntsville policeman could not find any information about the police report, warrant or arrest of John Adair, the abusive husband. Further, there was no record of Shea Adair being admitted to a hospital in Huntsville or having surgery there. Something was not right. But this was too unbelievable. Nobody could make this stuff up. There must be a very simple reason for this. Tuesday morning, having found out a specific hospital and intensive care unit, I traveled to Huntsville, met up with a brother there and we scoured the Surgical ICU of Huntsville Hospital. We were told that no Shea Adair was admitted, there wasn't anyone in the hospital under a protected status and no one had come in on Sunday night with those surgical procedures. No family was in the waiting area who would respond to the page. Then we received the call from another preacher who had experienced the exact same circumstance last year and he knew of another congregation where it happened as well. The woman he described matched perfectly the woman I had baptized. The story, though slightly different, was a replica. It was too similar to be ignored. As guilty as I felt even thinking it, I had to admit, I had been duped and had passed the charade on to others.

In the worst case scenario, there is an individual who maliciously pranks churches, extorting our emotions and making light of our faith and our own suffering. In the best case scenario, there is an individual who suffers from an addictive relationship disorder called Factitious Disorder. Those suffering from this syndrome fake illnesses and sometimes even cause their own illness without an obvious external gain such as money. The goal is usually emotional, trying to gain support, sympathy and attention or power from being able to control and manipulate an authority figure. This condition can be caused by "personality disorders; child abuse; the wish to repeat a satisfying childhood relationship with a doctor; the desire to deceive or test authority figures; and the wish to assume the role of patient and be cared for."<sup>1</sup> Thus, we have either been preyed on by a malicious sinner or a suffering addict. In either case, Shea, or whoever she really is, needs our prayers now more than ever.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.bookrags.com/Factitious\\_disorder](http://www.bookrags.com/Factitious_disorder)

Despite the obvious deception, Shea has taught me some things and, for that, I am thankful. I would like to share these lessons, some positive and some negative, with you and then briefly discuss where we need to go from here.

### Discussion:

- I. Shea taught me about evangelism and fear.
  - A. If you are like me, we all hope for the person who just drops out of the blue and is converted with almost no work at all. We hope the prospects will come to us. All we have to do is offer a nudge here and a nudge there and voila we have a new Christian. Perhaps there really are some stories like that out there. However, the reality is Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples..." (**Matthew 28:19**). We wish it told the prospects, "Come and let us make you disciples." But it tells us to "Go." Even if this story with Shea had been true, she would have been one in a million. We can't baptize the one person in the world who comes to us and then think we have done our job in evangelism. Shea has reminded me. Our job is to GO.
  - B. Further, in **II Corinthians 5:11**, Paul said, "Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others" (ESV). Regrettably, however, many Christians tacitly say, "Knowing the fear of rejection, I keep my mouth shut." But an interesting phenomenon happened in this story. The day and a half I thought the tragedy was true and I was trying to spread the news far and wide I kept hearing a repeated refrain. "I've never heard of anything like this happening." If I heard it once, I heard a thousand times. It dawned on me. Why are so many of us afraid to talk to people about Jesus and His gospel? The fact is, we have never heard of anything like this ever happening in the U.S. (maybe other countries, but not here). If we heard these kind of stories every other day, I could understand our fear. However, we have never heard anything like this and the one time we have heard it, it has turned out to be false. Of what are we afraid? When we stand before God in judgment and He asks why we didn't "Go", what will we say? "I'm sorry, Lord, I was afraid they would call me a name." "I'm sorry Lord, I was afraid they wouldn't invite me to the parties anymore." "I'm sorry Lord, I was afraid they wouldn't let me hang out with them anymore." "I'm sorry Lord, I was afraid they would say we thought we were the only ones going to heaven." How much water do we really think any of that will hold?
- II. Shea taught me to be more willing to be an example of faith.
  - A. One question that gets asked over and over again is how someone could pull something like this off for any amount of time. I know how it works. She is calling people and giving them a story they want to believe. Because we wanted to believe it, she didn't have to convince us. She merely had to play along with what she knew we wanted to believe.
  - B. We wanted to believe that someone in a denomination actually studied their Bible for themselves. We wanted to believe that in her study she learned we were right on baptism. I know we didn't necessarily want to believe her husband would abandon her if she obeyed, but we wanted to believe there was someone with enough conviction that she would obey God even with that threat. I know we didn't want to believe that she had been beaten so bad that she had miscarried and now lay dying in a hospital because of internal bleeding. However, we wanted to believe someone had such strong faith she would stand by her faith no matter what happened.
  - C. That thought has struck me. We want to believe there really is someone out there with that amount of faith who can be our example. I wanted to believe that. While I was preaching last Sunday night, I was already planning my sermon for today. It was going to be about Shea and her faith, the modern day example of faith under fire. I wanted that example. I wanted to believe that. However, we found out that story was not to be believed.
  - D. Where will we then turn for our examples? How about to ourselves? How about we build up our faith so much that we will obey God no matter what happens? How about we grow so much in faith that when we come under fire we stand out as an example of conviction? Paul told Timothy to be an example in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity (**I Timothy 4:12**). I was easily taken in because I wanted to believe Shea could be that example. Instead, I need to be that example. We need to be that example. (No, I'm not saying we should actively seek to be beaten or become martyrs. However, we should be this example of faith to which brethren can look.)

- III. Shea taught me we are not a denomination, but we are a family.
- A. We are an independent, autonomous, self-governing congregation. As **1 Peter 5:2** teaches we are independently governed by our own elders who only have oversight within our congregation. We are not in an association, denomination or governing relationship with any other congregation anywhere. We have no boards, no legislatures, no conventions, no conferences. Yet we know there are lots of people all over the world who are doing the exact same thing we are, serving God the same way and with the same goal to just do what we find authorized in Scripture. When I wanted Christians to pray for this woman, I did not call my Pastor, my bishop, my cardinal or my convention representative to try to pass on the information to all the other churches related to us.
  - B. I simply told Christians, who told Christians, who told Christians, who told Christians and people were praying and asking to help from Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Connecticut, Texas, Florida, Virginia, West Virginia, Arizona, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Illinois, Ohio, Washington, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Kansas, New Mexico, California, Minnesota, Oregon, Maryland, Oklahoma, Missouri, Louisiana, up in Canada and even all the way into Australia (the internet is an amazing thing). These are merely the places I can say for certain. I wouldn't be surprised a bit if we tracked down people who were praying for this situation in almost every state. **Mark 10:29-30** says when we come into Christ's kingdom we may have to leave father, mother, brother and sister behind, but we gain a hundredfold in brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers. We are not a denomination, but we are a family.
- IV. Shea taught me why we need this family and why I'm glad I'm part of it.
- A. I feel very sorry for Shea. I almost feel more sorry for Shea right now than I did when I thought she was lying in the hospital having miscarried and possibly dying because her husband beat her for her faith. Physical pain hardly compares to emotional. I guess I could be wrong about whoever Shea really is, but a common reason for this malady is the lack of a support group. She likely has no one to be there for her when she needs a shoulder to cry on. She has reported to me a huge family that is very close and takes care of its own. However, folks in large families who take care of their own don't have to play these games to feel loved. We have come in contact with a woman who doesn't know what it is like to be loved. She doesn't really know what it is like to know there is someone you can call and lean on. She doesn't know what it is really like to have a safety net of people who are there to help here through the good and bad times.
  - B. She doesn't know what that feels like. But we do. Right here within this congregation we have about 140 people to whom we can turn. **Colossians 2:2** talked about Christians having their hearts knit together in love. That is what we have here within the Franklin Church of Christ. At least that is what those of us who have actually connected with other people here have. Further, Shea expected us to have that. Really, in a sense, this whole bizarre occurrence has been a backhanded compliment of churches of Christ, even non-institutional churches who are constantly and falsely labeled as unloving and uncaring. I don't know if Shea has targeted denominations as well or even institutional congregations. However, I know she has picked three non-institutional churches of Christ to become her source of support and comfort. She wouldn't target us if she didn't think she would receive love, sympathy and attention.
  - C. We don't have to make up fantasy worlds to get pseudo-love. We have our real world and our real church and we have real love. I'm glad to be here and be part of it.
- V. Where should we go from here?
- A. *Pursue love anyway.* **1 Thessalonians 4:9-10** tells us to grow in love more and more. I am most concerned that this whole experience will harden us to love. I think it is ironic that last Sunday evening, right after we had been told we had a sister who had been beaten for her faith, I happened to preach from the Parable of the Good Samaritan. One of the points of that lesson was that we make ourselves vulnerable and we take a risk when we love others. Last Sunday and Monday, we loved. We had no idea who this woman was, but we loved her. On Tuesday, that love was crumpled up and thrown in our faces. It would be easy to pull back on our love for people, especially Shea herself. But despite how people use, misuse and abuse us, we need to

love anyway. In fact, even Shea needs our love more than ever. Perhaps if Shea had been able to receive real love, she wouldn't need to try to manufacture it by lying to us.

- B. *Act with mercy and compassion anyway.* When you have been taken for as many rides as I have, you start to get a little cynical. Our response to people in need becomes, "Get a job." Our response to folks who want to cry on our shoulder is, "Buck up. Get over it." Our response to folks who struggle spiritually is, "Grow up and quit being so weak." Too often we have acted with compassion and folks have taken advantage of us. We need to act with mercy and compassion anyway. As **Matthew 5:7** says, only the merciful and compassionate will receive mercy and compassion.
- C. *Teach the gospel anyway.* There are a lot of insincere people out there who really don't care what God's word says. There are even people who treat it so lightly that they will make light of our faith and toy with our emotions. Sometimes, we might get so fed up and so convinced that nobody wants to really hear the truth today that we just give up. We, however, have to remember that our job is not to give the increase. Our job is just to plant and water the seed (**I Corinthians 3:5-7**). Therefore, whether we actually baptize anyone ever again or not, we need to teach the gospel to as many as we can anyway, no matter how they respond.

**Conclusion:**

On one level, I wish none of this had ever happened. On another, I'm glad it did. I've learned a lot from Shea. I hope we all can.