

the back page - Sheth LaRue, Senior MDiv.

One of the best conversations I've been a part of in seminary was a group of students sharing about our relationships that didn't last: divorces, abruptly-ended engagements, and forced-but-failed marriages. While the stories were heavy and full of heartache, they were surrounded by an abundance of joy and hope: heartache because no one plans on ending a relationship after investing in one; joy because those involved were able to recognize a bad relationship; hope because they knew it wasn't the end but an opportunity to begin again.

We tend to avoid a number of discussions in life because they're just too difficult to talk about, or we discuss them in hushed-tones - 'whisper subjects' - that we refuse to speak of in normal tones because of shame and superstition:

"He has (volume drops) \*cancer\* (volume raises) and it doesn't look good"

"She (volume drops) \*lost her baby\* (volume raises) and won't be coming in this week"

"They're (volume drops) \*getting a divorce\* (volume raises) so don't invite them."

Many people think the shame is in the subject matter itself - divorce, fetal demise, terminal disease - but I say the shame is in not discussing the subject. It's a shame that we refuse to discuss these subjects (and so many others) and choose to sweep them under the table. It's a shame that so many people live in shame because they've never been able to talk about their experiences. It's a shame that we pursue so much good in life that we overlook (dare I say deny) the bad in life.

That night around that table as we talked, we met one another on a spiritual level - we have rarely had opportunities to share these stories with other people. As we laid out our stories - some fresh, some ancient - each of us was able to find points of shared experience and points of realization; we were able to see a bit of ourselves in others and the veil of shame began to lift as we understood we weren't alone, we weren't the first, we weren't failures.

I'd like to encourage us as a community to dive deeper into our stories and find moments when we can share them with one another. And I'd like to encourage us all to know that there is no shame in our stories - they are a part of who we are and have been pivotal in bringing us to this moment. May we have courage to share our stories and grace to receive them from others.

much love. sheth.