

SWINGERS AND ME

By Shaun Groves

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It was just a rumor until a few days ago. The couple who lived in our house before us, it was speculated, had an odd marriage. Every other Friday before they moved out our home's last tenants crossed the yard to the driveway wearing skimpy leather outfits, each of them carrying duffle bags. Two days later, our neighbors reported, they were back home and back in business casual.

Small slip-ups in front yard conversations hinted at their strange secret life. Reports from friends of friends of neighbors claiming the husband canoodled with women other than his wife and that his wife took trips with other men only fed the insatiable curiosity of the neighborhood.

Then the couple split. We moved into their house. And the tales of their bizarre goings-on were passed on to us like ghost stories told around a boy scout campfire. "And then..."

But they were just stories spun by gossips with boring lives and too much free time.

Until, Becky, my wife, discovered a catalog of sorts hidden under our bathroom's sink. It was taped there beneath the vanity and forgotten about by its former owners. She opened and read the headlines. "Gay Getaways." "Swinger Cruises." "Alternative Lifestyle Retreat Centers."

Suspicious confirmed.

When the couple sold us their house a few months ago we'd commented to each other on how warm they were. Never greedy, they bent over backwards to help us afford the place. Folks next door told us what ideal (and odd) neighbors the couple had been to everyone over the years: loaning their car to a couple without, bringing meals to a new mom every night while she recovered, offering financial help to an elderly couple waiting on retirement benefits to kick in.

Warm. But flawed.

And then there's me, most of my life spent keeping all the rules, making sure that no one could pin a fault on me, that no suspicions or doubts ever arose about my piety. I worked to make sure no rumors of misconduct ever circulated. I sweated what movies to watch, what music to listen to, and who to watch and listen with. I stressed over whether my hair should touch my collar and my ears should be pierced. I didn't dance, drink, smoke or chew or

run with those who do. I toiled to be faultless.

But tell me a sob story about running short on cash or being without a ride to work and I'd probably have nodded robotically, promised to pray and offered no real help in the end.

Flawless. But cold.

And this has me thinking about the time Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." A Greek would always talk about thirst and hunger in the genitive case. They would say literally "I hunger for *of* bread" or "I thirst for *of* water." They meant they were hungry for a *piece* of bread and thirsty for a *glass* of water. A little. Some. But Jesus spoke about hunger and thirst in the accusative case. He made a deliberate change in the language of the day, one that's full of meaning for us. He blessed those who say "I'm hungry and thirsty for *all* of righteousness." All. No less.

I'm wondering then if the swingers and I have more than a house in common. I, with my cold legalism, am not all that different from the kind licentious couple who once slept in my bedroom. We've both gone after only a slice of righteousness - different slices, sure, but both missing out on a great deal Jesus has prepared for us. William Barclay convicts us both, writing that "neither an icy faultlessness nor a faulty warm-heartedness" is the whole of righteousness. But love *and* obedience are both essential ingredients to righteousness.

Blessed, content, needing nothing, are we when we go after faultless *and* kind right thinking and living. We'll be filled.