

the last word

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IT WASN'T TOO many years ago that any man who appeared in public wearing patent leather shoes was suspect. I mean, it wasn't safe to sit beside him in the bus station. But times have changed. Now I am the owner of my first-ever shiny black patent leather loafers.

For two years my wife, Jackie, has nagged me about my old, scuffed, mail-order shoes. "It's bad enough that you insist on wearing tennis shoes to church here at home," she complained. "But I'm ashamed to travel with you out of town. You always wear those 6-year old \$7.95 specials made out of plastic. If Bob Mumford can wear patent leather shoes, you can, too. You need to present a better image."

It's not that I object to a better image. It's just that new shoes always pinch my feet. Besides, it was hard for me to believe that shiny shoes would make me look more masculine.

Then a friend of mine, who runs a shoe store in our Florida town, made the kind of offer I couldn't refuse. "If you'll throw away those old clodhoppers," he said, "I'll give you a new pair of shoes." Since the one thing I hate more than wearing new shoes is shopping for them, I let my wife go pick them out. Now that's something I'd never done before. But then, I'd never worn shiny shoes before either.

The next day we were to leave for



If the shoe doesn't fit . . . wear it anyway.

an important conference in North Carolina. Jackie put her foot down when I tried to pack my tennis shoes. "Furthermore," she insisted, "I want you to wear your new shoes on the plane."

It was my first time to try them on. Even though they were the correct size they gripped my feet like vises. "They'll loosen up as you wear them," Jackie assured me as I hobbled out to the plane.

By the time we reached Atlanta, however, the pain was excruciating. We had to change planes and I

limped into the terminal. While Jackie made a quick phone call back home I collapsed into a chair. Anger, like molten lava, was boiling inside me. How could I possibly preach that night with my feet hurting so much? If I had only brought my comfortable old shoes. No, I had to be a Mr. Milquetoast, pushed around by my wife. A guy walked by. He was wearing tennis shoes—and whistling. It was more than I could stand. It was all Jackie's fault, her and her desire to

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improve my image and make me wear Mumford shoes. Well, image be hanged if it causes your feet to suffer untold agony.

By the time Jackie returned I was ready to explode. Before I could say a word, however, she pointed at my foot. "What's that piece of paper sticking out of your shoe?"

I had a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. I quickly put my hand over the area and snorted, "It's nothing."

Now she was giggling. "Take your shoes off."

I resisted, but finally pulled them off. To my utter mortification I found I had failed to remove the cardboard liners. I felt my face turn cherry red as I sheepishly pulled out the thick cardboard and replaced my shoes on my feet. Ah! Comfort! And with it a grateful prayer that God had kept my mouth shut.

From this horrible experience I have learned some profound spiritual lessons.

One: Once you have proved yourself a jackass, don't lengthen your ears by opening your mouth. Any carnal donkey will bray if his feet hurt, but it takes a spiritual man to be willing to find out why. In other words, it's bad enough to stick your foot in your mouth, but to do it while wearing shiny black patent leather shoes is inexcusable.

Two: There are times when men, especially chauvinist types like me, need to listen to their wives. Having your pride broken is painful, but to hobble around on hurting feet just to keep from losing face is stupid.

Three: Take it from an expert, if you don't stay humble God will arrange to have you humiliated.

Well, that's all behind me now, and I can even listen with patience while my wife tells and retells the story of God's man of faith and power with cardboard in his shoes. However, you will be encouraged to know that last Sunday I entered church on the arm of my wife—wearing my flashy new patent leather pumps. And surprisingly enough, my only concern was that some tennis-shoe-wearing clod might step on them and leave scratches. 