

Don't Let a Secret Ruin Your Life

I don't know exactly why, but many people confide in me. I can't count the times people have told me, "I don't know why I'm telling you this, but . . .," and then they share a horrible moment from their past. They finish by saying: "You're the first person I've ever told."

At a recent men's retreat in South America, dozens of guys came to the altar one evening and asked for prayer because they had been victims of sexual abuse or they struggled with a porn addiction. Most of them told me they had never shared their secret with anyone because it was too embarrassing.

After they admitted what happened—often through tears—they found indescribable relief. It was as if a 200-pound weight they'd carried for years just dropped off their shoulders.

We know what the Bible says about secrets. Whether we are hiding a sin we committed or suffering from the shame of something done to us, transparency is the path to freedom. James 5:16a says: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

The devil thrives in darkness. Satan loves it when we keep our sins, failures and embarrassing moments locked up in a vacuum-sealed emotional compartment. As long as no one else knows our pain, our enemy can exploit it.

When no one else knows about our issues, Satan whispers his lies without being challenged. His arsenal is full of accusations. He tells us: "No one else struggles with this," "You are the only one with this problem" or "Anyone with your problem is a terrible Christian—you might as well give up."

Have you heard those words? If you have never brought your

pain into the light, unlock your heart and allow the light of God's love into your darkness. The old adage says, "Confession is good for the soul," but it's good for your physical health, too. Here are nine of the most common secrets people are afraid to reveal:

1. Abuse: Some victims of abuse were warned if they ever told anyone about what happened, they would be harmed. No wonder so many people hide this ugly secret. Plus, society sometimes stigmatizes those who are abused, or victims imagine they deserve mistreatment. The only way to silence such voices is to bring your pain into the light.

2. Abortion: Our culture minimizes the emotional effects of abortion, and some people even push others to abort. Yet abortion is often accompanied by overwhelming guilt—for the woman who ends a pregnancy or for a man who is responsible for it. If you endured this experience it is best to process it, receive prayer and ask God for forgiveness and closure.

3. Bullying: Verbal abuse is extremely hurtful, especially when it involves a child. Some people have been marked for life by toxic words spoken by parents, classmates, teachers or relatives. If your soul was branded with a hot iron by hateful words, you need to discuss them and receive prayer. God can shatter the power of a curse.

4. Rejection or abandonment: I have prayed with people who were abandoned by parents or spouses. They are tempted to blame themselves—and then they hang a huge scarlet "R," for "Rejected," around their neck for the rest of their lives. And the devil is happy to chime in with his chorus: "You are worthless and unlovable." You need someone else to help you overcome this lie.

5. Sexual sin: I will never forget the moment when a man wept in my arms and admitted he had been unfaithful to his wife more than eight years earlier. He had carried that weight for

too long, and he assumed God would never forgive him. Today his marriage is healed, and he is active in ministry. Whatever sexual sin you have been involved in, the blood of Jesus is powerful enough to forgive. But don't hide it!

6. Sexual confusion: Some Christians lack compassion for people who struggle with same-sex feelings or gender confusion. But the fact is that people wrestle with their sexual identity for a variety of reasons. If the church does not become a safe place to talk about these problems, people will simply seek help from the world. If you struggle with any area of your sexuality, the Holy Spirit can give you the power to live a life of purity. But you must open up and share what you are wrestling with.

7. Panic attacks, anxiety or unnatural fears: Some people are tormented by embarrassing fears or worries. It could be something as simple as a fear of talking on the phone, or as paralyzing as fear of car accidents, yet it's hard to admit such quirks to others. So we suffer in silence. Bring your fears and worries into the light and let a mature Christian pray for you!

8. Depression: Clinical depression affects a large percentage of Americans, yet we don't talk much about it in church. People who suffer from depression often choose to hide their sadness behind a mask—since “good Christians” are supposedly happy all the time! But hiding depression is not only bad for you—it is bad for the people around you. You need to talk about it.

9. Addictions: Many Christians never grow in their faith because they are hiding a secret addiction—to either prescription medicine, alcohol, gambling, nicotine or marijuana. They have had to learn to sneak around so no one will find out—and this severely hinders social interaction. You can break free from these chains if you confess your sin to another believer.

When you decide to open your heart, don't just talk to anyone. It is best to share with a mature Christian who has a track record of confidentiality and compassion. In some cases, it is also good to join a support group with others who have the same struggles. (After some initial prayer ministry, you also may decide you need to talk to a professional counselor.)

When you share your pain, you may fear that the person listening to you will judge you, scold you or shame you—but no loving Christian will do that. They will listen, speak words of forgiveness and help you receive God's amazing mercy. {eoa}