

Honesty and Truth Will Always Overcome Darkness

Ten years ago, my young husband's heart valve broke around the time we moved to Seattle. We were in the fortunate situation of having access to a very good heart surgeon at a very good hospital. After the surgery, the surgeon came out to talk with us and was upfront about a mistake he had made. While trying to repair the flap of the heart valve, he lost a piece of tiny equipment he was using to secure the flap.

He was never able to find the missing piece in the heart and ended up having to completely replace the heart valve with an artificial heart valve instead of the more desired outcome of repairing my husband's own heart valve. He explained the problem clearly along with the potential concerns. We were just glad at that point that my husband was stable.

However, about an hour after the doctor left us, my husband crashed and had to be raced back into surgery. I recount some of this in the opening of *Practical Theology for Women*. It's likely that the lost piece of equipment caused a heart attack, but even after the 2nd surgery, the doctor was still unable to find it. My husband was in critical condition for a bit, but he eventually recovered.

In all of that, it never occurred to me to even consider malpractice. When the surgeon made a mistake while trying to do the best for my husband, he was open and honest with me about it. We remained on the same team, even during his mistake.

Years later, while reading Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink*, I understood a bit of the psychology of what happened in that moment. In *Blink*, Gladwell discusses malpractice rates and the momentary decisions doctors make that tend to lower their

rates of malpractice. The basic thing Gladwell notes that predicts malpractice rates is the length of time doctors spend explaining situations to their patients, even negative situations of the doctor's own causing.

The longer doctors spend with patients and more open they are about potential and actual problems, the lower the malpractice rates against them. That was exactly my experience. Our doctor was open and honest about potential problems as well as his own actual mistake, and that up front transparency on his part reinforced that we were on the same team with the same goals. I would go back to that doctor in a heartbeat (no pun intended) if we were in a similar situation.

The choices we make in a moment involving honesty and transparency about OUR MISTAKES have incredible long term consequences. This isn't just a secular phenomenon but an important Bible principle. God, after all, is the Master Psychologist. Malcolm Gladwell didn't note these statistics about doctors and malpractice suits in a vacuum.

In a world created and ruled by the sovereign God of the Universe, transparency over our mistakes is a wise choice. God sets this up clearly in His Word, and even secular society notes this truth. We, as believers, are called to operate in the light with other believers, and we are called to operate in the light with unbelievers and our accusers.

I John 1:5-9 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I was particularly moved by this Biblical truth while working through Ephesians 5 for By His Wounds You are Healed. In it, I said this on Paul's words about exposing sin to the light in Ephesians 5:8-14.

A few years ago, the elders' wives at the church I attended planned a women's retreat entitled "Exposed," taken from this passage in Ephesians. I was a women's ministry leader at the time, but to be honest, I dreaded going to this retreat. The title did not in any way naturally draw me. Personally, I did not want to be exposed and did not care to be a part of something that had set that as its agenda.

Then I went to the retreat. Each woman that spoke gave brutally honest testimony of where she had been in her darkness, how God had brought her from darkness to light, and all the ways God was still meeting her in her failures. Each one was exposing themselves, bringing their ugly pasts and some of their ugly present into the light. It ended up being one of the most powerful retreats with long lasting outcomes I have ever witnessed.

As each speaker spoke on God's redemption of her particular sin (sexual addiction, self-absorbed vanity, gluttony, among others), women started understanding that hiding their sin, shame, and guilt was not the answer. Woman after woman started admitting her sin, exposing herself by walking out of the darkness and into the light. While that can be terrifying and cruelly damaging in the wrong context, in the light of the gospel, it was beautiful, redemptive, and uplifting.

When Paul says (in Ephesians 5) to take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness and instead expose them, we probably all think of an instance of someone maliciously revealing someone else's sin or shame. When people in darkness rip at others in darkness, there is no good that can come from it. Exposure of sin apart from the gospel is cruel, leaving devastation and hopelessness in its wake.

It took that women's retreat for me to finally understand how radically different God's call to exposure is. In light of the gospel, I do not have to fear exposure. Instead, God says bring all of the nooks and crannies of your sin and shame to me. Let me shine the light of the gospel into even your deepest and darkest place of fear and guilt. And when these things are exposed to the light, they first become visible (according to Ephesians 5). Then they become light. What radical transformation!

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup's blog** . Wendy is an author and blogger. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*