

When the Art of Blowing Smoke Can Become Catastrophic

Intelligent guys are very good at it. So are religious guys. But intelligent, religious guys probably do it best.

Blowing smoke—saying things in a way that conceals the truth. Like modern-day Pharisees, they know enough of the Bible and have enough opinions about it to maintain a certain image, a smoke screen to hide who they really are.

A few years ago, I became aware of a man in our church who was having an affair. As it turned out, he was a regular at our seasonal men's gathering we called The Quest. When I lead groups like this, I automatically assume that any man who joins me on a journey toward authentic manhood has given me permission to exercise accountability. So, I gave him a call and asked if he was coming to The Quest that night. He said he was. Then I asked if instead of going to his discussion group after the session if we could get together and talk. He asked me what this was about, and I told him straight up. He was surprisingly very agreeable to meeting with me.

After the session that night, he shared a painful story of a five-year marriage where his wife was not meeting his needs, how she didn't respect him and how she didn't respond to his leadership. I told him I understood how that made him a prime target for an affair and reminded him of my teaching about the needs of men and women and, when those needs were not met in a marriage relationship, it creates a vacuum where we are more susceptible to having an affair. I said I understood how he got to where he was, but that didn't let him off the hook, and made it clear that what he was doing was selfish and sinful.

My next question was if he had trusted anyone else with what he had just revealed to me, specifically any of the men he

knew in The Quest. He said he hadn't. I said, "So, you've been attending regularly and listening to me teach, and we've covered all of this, and you know it." I asked him if he participated in the group discussions. He said he did. When I asked him what he talked about, he said, "Mostly I just share my opinion about what you say."

I gave him a strong warning. I explained that he was without excuse and, that according to the Scriptures, he should expect to be disciplined by God because God disciplines those he loves.

He tried to rationalize his choices by saying his wife no longer made him happy. He believed God wanted him to be happy and this other woman made him happy. For those reasons, he asked if I would pray that God's discipline would be bearable for him. I said, "Are you kidding me? Absolutely not! I cannot ask God to go against his Word—to ignore the sanctity of marriage and soften his stance against adultery." I wanted to punch this guy's lights out. I promised him I would ask God to do whatever was required to bring repentance and restoration to his marriage.

My wish is that I could tell you this man responded with brokenness and humility, that things turned around. But he didn't. He began to distance himself from me and from other men who would tell him the truth. This man bailed out—out of The Quest and out of his marriage. He even left the state and ran into his relationship with the other woman. Instead of this becoming a story of repentance, forgiveness and restoration, it became a cautionary tale.

Smoke-blowers thrive on the opinion level of conversations. Without transparency, vulnerability and accountability, Bible Study discussion groups can be a breeding ground for men like this—men who have a lot to say about the Bible, giving the appearance of having it all together while concealing systemic flaws like arrogance,

anger, dishonesty, immorality, selfishness, self-righteousness and an entitlement complex. The questions we should be asking are not “What did you think about the sermon?” or “What do you think this Bible passage means?” The bigger questions are “Where and how does this apply to your life? How and when will you respond to it?”

Too many of us wait until things become so hopelessly unraveled that we frantically try to orchestrate a Hail Mary pass in the final seconds of the game in the hopes of a miraculous comeback. Sharing our heart with a trustworthy friend early in the game before things reach a critical point can help us avoid the need for such desperate measures.

Is God able to rescue us when things seem hopeless? Can He turn our darkest night into light? Of course! Whenever we turn from sin and to God we will always find grace and forgiveness. But sometimes the collateral damages of our choices can't be repaired. We cannot control how others who were affected by our choices will respond.

How about you? Whom can you trust with your heart? Do you share who you really are, or do you just share your opinions and hide behind the smoke you blow? {eoa}

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