

No More Secrets

- ✘ Confessing your sins openly and honestly is a key to spiritual victory. Don't hide in the darkness!

Secret burdens can be very difficult to bear. I know. For nearly 35 years I carried a secret—a life hidden away in my inner world that no one knew anything about. Now all of that was changing as I sat in my family room with 15 other people. Gathered around me were my wife, her parents and sister, three of my four teenage children, and several college students who were closely connected to us because of my job at Asbury College in Kentucky.

I had called this family meeting with the express purpose of confessing my sins to those I had sinned against, and seeking their forgiveness. On the outside my life looked pretty good. A successful ministry, all-American family, beautiful wife and kids. But on the inside my life was in shambles.

At home I was a perfectionist husband and demanding father, and my family was pulling away from me because of my negativity and control. An undercurrent of anger flowed just beneath the surface of many of my interactions with Marilyn and our children. This turmoil was fueled by my own irritation at myself for the recurring failures in my life and my inability to rise above habitual sin.

Now all this was changing right before my eyes.

Five days before, I had lain on the floor in the grand ballroom of the Regal Riverfront Hotel in St. Louis, overwhelmed by the incredible power of the Holy Spirit. I had been attending a conference at which, in response to a word of knowledge by a member of the conference staff, I had experienced a “power encounter” with the God of the universe. He reached deep into the recesses of my inner world and broke the stranglehold that pornography and masturbation had on my

life.

Not only was I delivered of this secret sin, but a few minutes later I also was given the grace to bring it into the light. I confessed it to my friend Jeff James, who was attending the conference, and then I called Marilyn, confessing and repenting to her for the duplicity in my life.

Now, back at home, I sat nervously amid my family and friends. I would be telling them the truth—the rough, unvarnished, unmitigated truth about my secret world of pornography use—and seeking their forgiveness for how I had sinned against them.

Shortly after I began my confession God filled the room with His presence, visiting us in power. The family meeting that began at 7 p.m. didn't end until almost 4 o'clock the next morning.

We experienced healing, deliverance and restoration of broken family relationships. Any doubts I had about God's work among us were dispelled when my mother-in-law fell under the power of the Holy Spirit after I prayed for her.

Private Sins

From the beginning, sin has always involved hiding. After Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God. David tried to hide his sin with Bathsheba—going as far as to arrange the murder of her husband.

Adam and Eve used fig leaves to try to conceal their failure, but most of us hide behind lies. To cover our sin and its consequences, we stitch together flimsy excuses and decorate them with ornate stories in an effort to keep others from discovering who we really are or how badly we have failed them. The closer someone comes to discovering the truth about us, the more creative our lies must become to keep the secret hidden.

The logical result of hiding is that lying becomes a way of life. As believers, this means our everyday lives might be filled with religious activity, but we end up proclaiming one thing and living another. We live in an artificial world constructed of a combination of blatant lies, implied lies and half-truths.

But a lie is a lie, even when we're deceiving ourselves with lines such as: "That's not so bad," "I'm only hurting myself," "No one knows."

We also are likely to embrace the lie that we are stuck and there is no way out of our problems. When this happens we are siding with the accuser of the brethren, the "father of lies" (see John 8:44). Satan will enlist us to testify against the truth of God's grace, which says He can liberate us, and stand with self-accusation, which says He cannot.

When the devil lies, he speaks his native language. And as the father of all lies he has sired lying "twins" to help him hold people in bondage.

Shame and Pride are the twins the devil uses as spiritual extortionists. They continually extract hush money—making us regularly pay from our already bankrupt lives. Emotional and spiritual poverty, along with broken relationships, are the high costs of listening to Shame and Pride when they tell us to keep our sins hidden.

Like Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum of author Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, they sing the same song with the same results. They conspire to keep us hiding and bound.

Shame says: "You better not let anyone know. What will they think?"

Pride echoes: "You better not let anyone know. What will they think?"

So we continue trying, under a shroud of silence, to work out the problem by ourselves, with no allies, assistance or accountability.

One of the lies I believed for so long was that no one could truly understand my struggle. I was a spiritual leader in my circles, and if I couldn't fix the problem, who could?

Hounded day and night by my failures, I concluded my situation was so unique and my failures and sins so grievous that no one could even identify with me, let alone help. I knew what the Bible said—that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (see Rom. 3:23)—but I believed no one could understand what I was wrestling with.

The writer of Hebrews tells an entirely different story from what I believed: “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:13-16, NIV).

Before God, there are no secrets and no places to hide. But does He understand our struggles with sin?

According to verse 15, He was tempted in every way I was (yet didn't sin). Therefore I can go before Him with confidence that I will find mercy in my time of need—and ample supplies of grace.

During the years I struggled, I held to the promise of forgiveness in 1 John 1:8-9: "If we say that 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" (NKJV).

I describe these verses as the "vertical pathway to forgiveness." I had walked this path so frequently, though, that it had been worn almost to a rut. I longed for the day I could be truly free and not have to drag myself wearily back to the mercy seat because of the same old sins.

In my efforts to confess my sin to God, I had shed tears at altar rails on three continents. I had made bargains with Him I couldn't keep. I had poured out my heart to Him, pleading for deliverance. But I had always returned to the same old sins.

Before my experience in , I had tried to deal with my sin issues privately with God. Fear, shame and pride kept me from bringing my struggles into the light and telling anyone else. I not only had lied to my family, but also had lived in self-deception (see 1 John 1:8).

But after I shared with Jeff what God had done for me and then called Marilyn, the miracle of James 5:16 began to work in me. "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (NIV).

This dimension of forgiveness became a key component in my healing and deliverance. After I had brought my confession into the light, the enemy no longer could use the fear of someone finding out to keep me bound.

Confessing to others can be called the "horizontal pathway to forgiveness." Vertical confession (to God) and horizontal confession (to one another) form the shape of a cross—and when combined, the completed work of the cross becomes real in our

own experience.

In my situation, the confession of sin unlocked the closed hearts of my family. They no longer saw me as the Mr. Perfect I pretended to be but as a fellow struggler in need of the grace of God. And I have watched as hundreds of times my story has opened the doors for others to say, "It's my story, too."

Hiding No More

The Christian landscape is littered with the ruined lives of leaders and followers who fell into sin and became victims of the fallout when their private sins were made public against their will. I wonder how many of these fallen might have finished well if they had chosen to tell others of their struggles.

One time during an interview I was asked, "Tell me, Harvey, are Christians hypocrites?" I replied that I believed the accusation was a fair one.

The word "hypocrite" was used in ancient Greek drama to describe an actor. Many Christians act as if their lives are healed, as if they have it perfectly together, when they actually are broken, wounded, sin-saturated pretenders afraid to risk being known for who they are.

I went on to answer the interviewer that the church should be a hospital, a place where broken and wounded people come to be healed and patched up by God. Then I told my own story.

God is never shocked by anything we do. All our days are already written in His book. In spite of all He knows about us, He still chooses to love us and invite us into a relationship with Himself.

If we too fostered an atmosphere of love, acceptance, healing grace and open confession, then the church would operate more like an emergency room for the fallen than a museum of the

successful. We would never be surprised to find sick and suffering people in a hospital, would we? Neither should we be surprised to find sinners (that's us, friends) in God's house seeking a soul cure.

Charles Wesley's hymn "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing" includes the verse: "He breaks the power of canceled sin / He sets the prisoner free." Our sins were dealt with for eternity on Calvary. There is nothing more we can do to add to the efficacy of Christ's blood.

A strong dynamic is set in motion when we confess our sins to one another. Sin's power breaks because shame, fear and pride no longer can hold us hostage.

When we humble ourselves before our brother or sister, we can receive prayer and comfort—and hear someone "with skin on" remind us: "You are forgiven in Jesus' name."

I have held numerous sufferers who have sobbed their way through confessions of sin and brokenness. And I have been able to look them in the eye and say with authority, "Your sins are forgiven, just as mine have been forgiven."

Harvey Brown Jr. *is president of Impact Ministries in Wilmore, Ky. He is featured on the DVD, Living in the Freedom Christ Gives: Finding Healing and Wholeness in a Sexually Broken World. It is available at .*