

IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS



This isn't good. . .the thought came to me as I responded to a pastor's 30 year-old daughter who was secretly avoiding telling her parents that she and her separated husband were still having relation with each other 'on the side'. The marriage was only a few years old and the husband had committed adultery. Angry and wounded, she moved back in with her parents but refused to let go of her hubby. Making excuses and hiding the truth of her continued relationship from her family was becoming a way of life.

“Why should I tell them or anyone what I am doing or not doing?” was her challenge to me. “It's no one's business what I do or don't do.”

This is oftentimes the motto of our culture “it's nobody's business!” But is it? Are secret practices of people we know and love “none of our business?” Do significant others have a right to the truth of who you are and what you are doing? Or better yet, is it good for a person to maintain secrets or even a double life. My answer to both questions is the same: **If you hide, you're probably unhealthy.**

Let me explain. First of all I believe there are times when it may be wise to hide one's behaviors from others. If your behavior is not illegal, immoral or self-destructive, not exposing your life to an unsafe person could be necessary. Such a situation requires knowledge that the other person's inappropriate reaction may lead to tragic results. Advice or counsel is always recommended when choosing this path.

However, hiding secret behaviors from people close to us hinders relational intimacy and healthy connection. Relational health is based on a trusting foundation of truth and acceptance. It is created by the sharing or baring of who we were and are with another person (See Genesis 2:24-25); and not having them shame us in response, but rather accept us by loving the sinner and hating the sin. Without the risk of total transparency, there is no possibility of healthy connection. The one caveat is that the listener must not reject, shame or disown us for our transparency. That person can disagree or even correct, but they should not break off relationship.

In most cases people hide their behavior out of the desire to maintain an acceptable public persona. They're afraid of what others will think if they tell the truth. They fear rejection and are motivated out of shame. Shame is the sense I have about myself that I am less than and defective. It is believing that the worst about me is true. Rejection by others becomes the public validation of my private shame. The pastor's daughter secretly believed she was defective. She feared she would never be able to have a man love her and be faithful to her. Her parent's anticipated disapproval would only confirm her shame.

The anonymous programs have an insightful saying: "You're only as sick as your secrets and shame." James 5:16 shares "confess your faults one to another and be healed." And Prov. 28:13 declares "He who conceals his sin will not prosper..." The definition for emotional and mental health includes the following statement: "The ability to face reality of self, life and others as it is, not as you wish it to be, is the foundation of sound emotional health."

The pastor's daughter was not facing the reality of her situation in a healthy manner. Seeing her husband may or may not be a healthy thing to do. But living a secret life and lying and deceiving her parents and others is definitely unhealthy. It's an outward reflection of her inward shame. Too often "it's none of your business" is in reality a defense against needing to face yourself and God.

So what should you do if you're hiding; if you find yourself practicing hidden behaviors and you are afraid to tell the truth and let others know what you're doing and thinking:

1. **Don't keep hiding - find a knowledgeable and 'safe' person.**
 - A knowledgeable person is someone with a gift of wisdom who will properly assess your situation and tell you the truth. They are not an ally who is there just to agree with you and make you feel good about yourself. They are there to truly help you figure out what is really going on and what you should do about it.
 - A 'safe' person is someone who will keep your confidence and care about you. They will put your best interest over their own. They will care enough about you to tell you the truth in love and not shame you or reject you. This can be a friend or relative or they could be a pastor or counselor.
2. **Share honestly and completely.** Honest transparency is half the battle. When we share with another our deep fears and shame, it helps break their power. Our exposure lessens the shame. It becomes easier to experience God's grace and love and come to peace within ourselves. Compulsive behaviors, fears and sinful practices thrive and gain more power in our lives when they are kept secret. Remember: "we are only as sick as our secrets and shame"!
3. **Trust God to help.** God gives grace – undeserved favor or assistance – to those who are humble and he resists those who are proud (James 4:6). Honestly sharing with another person your deepest fears and shame is a humble thing to do. It is a pride-less act that acknowledges our shortcomings before another person. The result will be God's favor working on your behalf.