

The Barnabas Letter

a newsletter from
The Barnabas Center,
a nonprofit counseling,
teaching and training ministry
in Charlotte, NC

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Secret struggles

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Hidden Hurt

minefield in the Heart

*By Mary Chapman
Mary lives in Charlotte
and has been a long time
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Center*

One recent Sunday morning, I walked into my church, and not seeing a familiar face, I took a seat near the rear of the pews. I looked around at the many people already in their seats, and paused to stare at their faces. Most were smiling, some in pleasant conversation, and still others looked sad or mad as they sat there waiting for the service to begin. I wondered, 'how many of the several hundred seated all around me were hiding something?' What was going through their mind and heart as the few moments expired prior to the worship? I wondered about hidden hurts and pains that we suffer with alone, sometimes for weeks, months, even years.

And yet, for the twenty years that I have been attending church, I have observed that if anyone asks me on a Sunday morning, "How are you?" my answer is ALWAYS the same. I answer "Fine"; then, I usually add, "and how are you?" To which they will reply (almost without fail), that they are "fine" too. I have concluded that what transpires almost every week with those greetings is pleasant, meaningless lying. It is a way to avoid feeling anxious around someone whom I fear would not want to know how I really am. But there is no such thing as meaningless lying and the hidden hurt I mask just builds up in my soul, damaging my relationship with God, family, and friends.

I know this is true because for 35 years, I have walked with hidden hurts, believing that I could not let anyone know the truth about me. For if anyone knew, then they would certainly walk away. I believe that too many people silently endure the hidden pain of addiction, abuse, relationship trouble, and deep emotional distress, telling no one the truth of what they feel deep down inside. When I think of addictions, I think of alcoholism, drug addiction, sexual addictions, and overeating.

I am overweight and I fight a battle with eating every day, because I love all the foods that are bad for me and cause me to gain

weight. I struggle to exercise too, so pounds seem to mount when I am not eating right foods and exercising. But I suffer excruciating emotional pain in lonely times due to my weight problem and out-of-control eating. For years, I would tell friends only the tip of the iceberg of my real feelings. Why? Because, I did not trust that they would still be my friends if I unloaded on them. So I held it in. This created more pain which would come out in the form of even MORE overeating.

Somewhere I fell into the habit of eating to "feel better". And for a time, I would, but then even worse feelings would pour over me. Thus goes the wicked cycle and deceptiveness of addiction. But I never told anyone, until that is, I began seeing a counselor several years ago.

I have come to understand that while I pursue my addiction, so I can "feel better", I am not pursuing God. Neither am I loving others in my family well, nor my friends. And since I am not being honest with myself about the depth of the pain and hurt in my broken heart, I am also not being honest with God, family or friends either. It becomes easy to stay on the surface. So I will ask you how you are at church, and tell you I am fine too.

There are a myriad of other reasons why you and I walk around with hidden pain and hurt. Perhaps some of you have suffered the indignity of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. You believe that no one would believe the pain and shame you feel. So you tell no one. Or perhaps you were the golden couple on your wedding day years ago, but now your marriage has turned into the same-old same-old. Except for the kids, the house and the dog, your relating is dead in the water.

Or perhaps you are the Dad of a sixteen year old girl and you can no longer talk to her. You only have her for two more years at home, and already she never wants to talk to you or spend any time with the family. You

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feel angry and disconnected from your child, and fearful for her choices when she is away from you. Or perhaps you are emotionally burdened with depression or an awful loneliness that slows down the passage of the hours and the days, during which no one ever seems to call or ask you to do anything fun. "Fun" and "happiness" seem to be merely words you used to know.

In my life, I kept secrets about the extent of my inner pain for so long because I was afraid. I had 'to be together'. I did not feel that I could ever fall apart because if I did then all of my life would come apart— from household to finances to business to family. And maybe nobody would be there for me.

Begin to Admit the Truth

In the last several years God has begun to unfold for me something I had never known, and it has to do with telling the truth. God wants me to tell the truth, and to do so, I must begin by telling it to Him and myself. Can I admit my struggle to God? Can I admit the feelings of powerlessness to the One who says in His word, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Can I begin to tell trusted friends the truth over coffee? Is the story of the Gospel true enough to handle my heart's deepest pains and hurts even when no one is around and it is the middle of the night?

My biggest fear was that the Gospel was not true "enough" for me, that God could not handle my heart's deepest hurts. And how in the world could I admit the depth of my struggle to God?

I started with small truths. I began by just telling God the truth about my day, then

about the feelings I had about some people, (which horrors, He already knows!) then about my struggles and pains and hidden areas of my heart. I can guarantee you that the struggles do not go away just because you start to tell God the truth and beg Him to change you so that you will trust Him more. If anything, my struggle has intensified somewhat because of truth-telling. I figure that must mean that God hears me, and the enemy of my soul wants to keep me entrapped in a bondage of deceit and pleasantness.

June 6 was the 61st anniversary of D-Day, the allied invasion of Normandy. Today, the beaches are sandy and clean again. But 61 years ago, every inch of progress was met with blistering mortar and machine gun fire from the Germans trying to defend against the invasion. This is the way it is now in the battle for my heart.

I compare hidden hurts and inner pain with the mines that the Germans buried on the beaches of Normandy. When the Allied troops, jeeps or trucks passed over, they detonated and killed all occupants. The enemy of our souls uses our secrets like hidden mines in our soul. He desires that we should keep hidden the severely crippling inner pains we carry with us with each day. He wants no trust placed in God. But my Savior, with arms open, beckons me to Him as a little child, and children always tell you when their finger hurts or they have a "booboo" on their leg.

I am just beginning to know the truth that Jesus is big enough for all my pain and hurt, and He will not forsake me or leave me alone in its midst.

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Secret Sin

why disclose secrets?

*By Ray Ball:
a counselor and teacher
at The Barnabas
Center.*

I gravitate towards two questions as I think of all the faithful and courageous people who have either disclosed past secrets that bound them, or revealed current struggles around food, money, sex and anger. The two questions are: “Why do we keep our secrets?” and “Why in heavens’ name would we disclose them?” I will consider the story of the Prodigal Son and several of our Lord’s interactions with Simon Peter to illustrate why we keep our secrets, before concluding with an attempt at the second question.

The Prodigal Son

It is stark to me that the prodigal son who sits in a pig sty, after having blown his share of his father’s inheritance, concocts an ingenious plan to redeem the situation. “I will go to my father and tell him I am no longer worthy to be called his son.”

We’re always moving – aren’t we? Always scheming, plotting, planning – never static, always dynamic in pursuit of what we think we need. For this reason, it is a misnomer to think of “parts” of our hearts. Our hearts are not static parts but are rather always purposeful and directional. Something may not “feel” like a choice only because issues of motivation are not clear. A better phrase then is one of “depth”-- not parts. The keeping of secrets is folly, because we are guarding our hearts by segmenting them instead of wildly giving them away.

Secrets and sin have a way of making us feel like we’re “beyond the pale,” out of the mainstream, “unacceptable” as Webster’s American dictionary describes the above phrase. If I were to be completely honest with you about who I am and who I have been, I fear you would have nothing to do with me, however, this can become a strategy to maintain my independence too.

The ingenuity of this son’s plan is to state the obvious. “I’ll tell Dad I am no longer worthy.” When the prodigal says to his father ‘I

have sinned against you and against heaven’, he is echoing King David’s words to Nathan of 2 Samuel 12:13. This biblical view of sin as sinning against someone suggests a relational nature to all sin. If all sin is relational it follows that the redemption of our sin can only be worked out in the context of relationships - primarily with God but also imperatively with one another. If we are going to change and grow and know God we’re going to have to risk being known where we are and in relationship.

Just as the prodigal echoes King David, I have a counseling client who echoes both as he discloses how he thought he would never be the man he has become. “How could I have done this to my wife, my boys? I’ve always been the responsible one. I’ve provided well, never asked anything of anybody.” And then he says something I always find profound because of how it ushers us into the numinous, “I don’t know how I can ever make it up to them.”

We can’t – you see! I am no longer worthy. But note the struggle in us to manage this transaction. We are thoroughly committed to never being this vulnerable. I call it the “swallowing the football moment”. I don’t want to be at your mercy; I don’t want to be this much at the mercy of God. So I come up with a plan to state the obvious, settle for a corner of the servants’ quarters and preserve my independence. Secret sins are like this too, whether it be physical harm inflicted on myself or binging and purging, running up credit cards or acting out sexually. Secret sins are an illegitimate and futile attempt to maintain some semblance of control over every interpersonal transaction.

They are a futile attempt to maintain a semblance of control over the divine claim on our affections. We are made for intimacy with God and for intimacy with each other but in a fallen world where people have failed us and God has placed us under his discipline of futility and enmity, intimacy is difficult at best but

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mostly miraculous. I am not sure which is worse (having experienced both), the searing exposure of the kiss on the neck, the ring on the finger, the purple robe and extravagant party of the Father, or the numbing resentment of the older brother.

Simon Peter

This is another reason I keep my secret although the least credible. I worry I won't be handled well – you won't know what to do with me and I will encounter the judgment of the older brother. Which in a way that will make more sense later, brings us to Peter. Luke describes Jesus "eagerly desiring" to eat Passover with his disciples "before he suffered."

In the poignancy of this moment, from which we now draw out communion, the disciples begin to dispute which of them was the greatest. Ugh! I don't know if you have ever been around a group of ambitious people but they don't strike me as a great group of people to disclose your secrets to. "*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you Simon that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*" But rather than being curious, Peter pushes back, "*Even if they fall away I will not*". And then he becomes more indignant, "*Never!*" after Jesus warns of his imminent denial. I hear great sadness and compassion as Jesus says "*This very night you will have betrayed me.*" The pugnacious, blustering son is full of good intentions but too much bravado.

And so Peter watches the suffering and death of Jesus from the corporate box of his own gut wrenching failure and devastation. I think there are two types of people in the world. Those who know of what great failure they are capable and those who don't yet. How striking then the manner Jesus uses as he seeks Peter out for restoration. Straight out of the blocks He asks "Do you truly love me more than these?" Ah, the comparison thing. By beginning "more than these," Jesus fingers Peter's greatest failure and shame, striking at the heart of his bravado. How shallow his jostling for position, his at-

tempts to impress must now appear in light of all he has witnessed. Peter knows he has been "sifted" and only prevailed because of Jesus' intercession – all the more fully understood in its physical and literal sense now. When Jesus says "Feed my lambs" he echoes for Peter the earlier prophesy "When you turn back strengthen your brothers." Two times in Peter's first epistle he links sincerity and purity, or being "pure minded and self controlled" to "loving one another deeply."

Why Disclose Secrets?

So why in heaven's name would we disclose? We should disclose primarily because we can – because there is no condemnation. When we don't, we suppress something about God –that is, the drama of the magnitude of his mercy and his grace. The "Do you love me?" of Jesus reverberates still and our actions reveal the ambivalence of our struggle to trust one another and him ultimately. We can disclose because we long to be loved deeply but more importantly we long to love others deeply. Our secrets and secret sins again are a way to sabotage this intimacy which is too scary and out of our control. This "one-anothering" is far more disruptive because it is harder to receive love, grace and mercy than to give it. In fact we are not loving anybody if we're not receiving love grace and mercy - we're managing them.

Secrets, then as well as being futile attempts to manage intimacy, inhibit us from experiencing grace and mercy and subsequently sabotage our greatest joy, our highest calling, to love others. This is to say, to fellowship in the sufferings of Christ because anyone who commits oneself to love another knows something of agony, of failure and of paradox.

Let's not be surprised by of what we are capable. Let's acknowledge our futile attempts to manage the divine and begin to risk being known in relationships so out of our experience of grace and mercy we can "love one another deeply." Come on out into the light and enjoy the "one-anothering."

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Fig Leaves

why we cover ourselves

"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

By Roger Edwards:
a counselor and teacher
at The Barnabas
Center.

When Adam and Eve heard the sound of God walking in the garden — they hid. But why? How could God be too close? It was He who had breathed into their nostrils the warmth of life. He had shaped their bodies with His fingers. Yet when they sensed Him near, they ran away. Though made to bear His image, they could not bear His gaze.

So begins the human story outside Eden. And so it continues, for when we sense God's approach, we hide too. Fear has replaced trust as the defining motive of human behavior. We deny it; we pretend it isn't there. But fear (of being seen for who we are) now controls us. We live afraid of the eyes of God; we live afraid of the eyes of others. And so we hide. Such is the human heart.

Why Do We Hide?

The desperation to hide began when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and realized they were naked. A fundamental shift occurred in the nature of the soul. Immediately they began to cover up; immediately they began to hide. Now everyone does it. It is automatic. It is epidemic.

But don't make the mistake of thinking the epidemic is about the epidermis. It is much deeper than that. It isn't even about physical nakedness. No, the desperation is due to our profound sense of being spiritually unclothed. We hide because the soul is naked.

Yet it wasn't like this in the beginning. Originally the human soul was secure because it was covered. That was the natural and created state of Adam and Eve. There was no unease, no terror. But wait a minute, you might say. Doesn't the Bible say that God made them uncovered? Doesn't it say that 'they were naked and unashamed'?

Yes it does. But the point of that verse isn't about the absence of garments. It is about the remarkable absence of shame. Adam and Eve never experienced the fear of exposure because they were internally clothed. There was no need for outward coverings because

their hearts were adorned with God's grace and favor. They lived in the utter confidence of knowing who they were and whose they were. God's covering rested upon their shoulders like royal robes of light.

Under God Over Creation

Because of this, there was no insecurity in Eden. The man and woman didn't have to posture, embellish, name drop, or put on airs. There were no petty put downs, no excuse-making, or blame-shifting. The order of reality was clear, benevolent and good. God was the Lord of heaven; Adam and Eve were lords of earth.

God gave them dominion *'over'* the creation. He gave them the world to rule, fill and enjoy. There was no bravado, no boast in their role. It was simply and gloriously true. But the corollary truth was that they were *'under'* God. Their authority was a derived authority. They took care of the garden; God took care of them. They ruled over creation; God ruled over them. *Under* God and *over* creation; that was their place, that was the created order. They didn't have to pretend that they were anybody or anything else than what they were. It was good. And they lived unashamed.

How Fear Began

This all changed because of a lie. Satan, disguised as the serpent, came to our parents with a potent lie, potent because it was half true. He told them that the created order could be changed. If you take the fruit, he said, "Your eyes will be opened and you will be like God". His message was simple and devastating: *'you don't have to be under God anymore'*.

So Adam and Eve took the fruit and ate it. And the serpent's prediction came partially true; their eyes were opened. But it wasn't wisdom that widened their eyes, it was shock and horror. Satan had shown them a door that supposedly led to freedom. But when they stepped through, the door swung closed behind them and they heard the sick sound of

GE 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

GE 3:8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

GE 3:10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

the bolt being thrown. It was then that they realized the awful truth. They had indeed escaped the house of God, but their robes of light had caught in the door. Their attempt to become God had failed. But they had succeeded in something far more terrible. They had gotten 'out from under God'. Now they were naked and alone.

Their immediate reaction was to scramble back under something. And almost anything would do. In this case, it was fig leaves, and the more the better, for they sewed them together. But even a whole suit of leaves wasn't enough. When they heard the footsteps of God, they ran under the foliage of not just one tree, but a whole forest. They were desperate for their nakedness to be covered, desperate to be under something.

The Human Story

The story of Adam and Eve is our story. Two reckless compulsions drove Adam and Eve. Two reckless compulsions now drive us. The first is the brazen urge to get out from under; to be above all. When this inevitably fails, the second compulsion takes hold and we make the equally mad dash to be covered again by something, by anything.

We live in a perpetual cycle of trying to rise above the Creator, by making gods of ourselves, only to fall below created things, by making gods of them. We want control; we want to be covered. So we grasp for the coverings we think we can control. For Adam and Eve, it was the leaves of the fig, literally speaking. But for us, it can be literally anything, figuratively speaking.

Our fig leaves might be money. So we sew together green dollar bills, thousands, maybe even millions. But there are never enough to secure the heart. We find that the thing we want to purchase cannot be sold. Grace can only be given.

Our fig leaves might be our labors. So we stitch together accomplishments. But the fabric of even our best effort is too thin against the chill of inadequacy. And we fall slave to the delusion that significance can be gained by doing just a little more, just a little faster. But peace never comes by trying harder.

Our fig leaves might be our personality. So we paint our faces with false expressions. We cover fear with a smile and easy demeanor, thinking we will gain acceptance. But you cannot be accepted without being known. And you cannot be known by counterfeiting who you are. Pretense cannot make up for the loss of glory.

Search as we might, no earthly idol can provide divine covering. Without God, we are hopelessly naked. No matter how much we pull around us, we still tremble whenever we hear His footsteps close by.

The Boy Who Ran Away From Home

We are like the boy who has run away from home. He decides that he has had enough of his father's rules. In dark determination, he chooses to live as he pleases. "No more vegetables. I'll stay up as late as I want." So he raids the pantry, and gathers a few possessions into a bag. He walks angry miles, chewing stolen cookies and nursing his fantasy of freedom.

But he doesn't get far before night falls. Ironically, it is the darkness that opens his eyes. He realizes how uncovered he is. He finds himself alone, hungry and afraid. So he crouches under a piece of cardboard and tries to refuse the memory the things he threw away; his mother's table, his father's hearth and the blankets on his own bed.

This is what has happened to us. We have all run away from home. Now we are naked and searching for cover. The story is tragic.

Not The End of the Story

But it is not the end of the story, for God has written more. In His story, the Father unbolts the door and leaves his house. He searches, calling for us, "Where are you, son of Adam?" "Where are you, Daughter of Eve?" And when our Father finds us? He does what we cannot expect. He rejoices. He kisses us and restores the royal robe across our shoulders. There is a party, a restoration. We were lost and now are found. Such is the story of the divine heart.

If we but trust Him, we can drop our cardboard idols and come out from hiding. We can exchange our crumbling fig leaves for the soft garment of grace. We can replace our excuse-making with confession, our tortured rationalizations for truth-telling, and our boasting with praise. There is no need to hide or cower in our Father's house. He covers us with forgiveness and shelters us with love. No bravado, no boast, it is simply true.

Once we believed Satan when he told us that we could become gods. Will we now believe God when He tells us that we can once again become human? This is the question upon which everything hangs. This is what the Christian life is all about. Will we believe the astonishing idea that we can come home?

2CO 5:2 Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, 3 because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 4 For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

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Upcoming Opportunities and Current Events

Date	Event	Facilitator
Monday, Tuesday, or Thursday evenings from 4:30pm-6pm and 6pm-7:30pm. Groups are on-going.	Barnabas Adolescent Counseling Groups - are comprised of up to 6 teenagers of similar ages and needs, providing a confidential place for teens to find comfort and connection. Groups for male teens, and female teens (w/a female volunteer).	<i>Kevin Wimbish, counselor for the adolescent ministry.</i>
Starts Sept. Tuesdays 5:30 - 7:15	Honor's Path 1- A Group for Men - ministry to sexually addicted men who want a better path. Please call (704-365-4545) or e-mail (info@thebarnabascenter.org)	<i>John Pierce</i>
Starts Sept. 7 Weds. Nights: 7-8:30PM	Healing Hearts a group for women - a biblically based, professionally led, confidential, closed group context where women can find their heart again, receive support and wrestle with the difficult realities of being harmed by sexual abuse.	<i>Lisa Godman</i>
Starts Sept 8, 2005	Honors Path Women's Group - for women in a relationship with a man who has struggled with sexual compulsivity or in a relationship that is recovering from sexual betrayal.	<i>John Pierce</i>
Sept 12, 2005	Barnabas Golf Classic Fundraiser - see box on page 3	
Begins: Week of Sept. 12th Ends: Week of Nov. 14th [10 Weekly sessions]	Barnabas Training Level 2 - This training extends experience of the model of caring learned in Level 1. This is for individuals who want a context to gain skills and confidence through role play, care for others, and personal feedback. Prerequisite: BT Level 1	<i>Barnabas Staff</i>
Oct 7th - Oct 8th : Friday evening 6:30 - 9:30pm, and Saturday, 9am - 4pm.	Barnabas Training Basic - This seminar provides the foundation for involvement in the lives of others as a 'Barnabas' (Encourager). Come learn a practical, Biblical perspective on life's difficulties, skills for asking heart questions that move others towards Christ.	<i>Barnabas Staff</i>
October 14th - 16th -backpacking weekend w/ 3 week follow-up group.	Quest Weekend — Men's adventure weekend and follow-up weekly group meetings. Includes adventure, backpacking, conversation, study, and reflection.	<i>Pete Bondy</i>
October 14th-16th	Heart to Heart CLF-Marriage Weekend in Charlotte. This weekend is not open.	<i>Palmer and Roger</i>
Begins November 2nd Ends January 18th Bi-Weekly over 12 weeks. [6 times]	Barnabas Training Level 4: Peer Supervision - A confidential small group context for participants involved in caring relationships. Participants share situations, and gain feedback. Prerequisite: BT Level 2.	<i>Barnabas Staff</i>
November 4-6, 2005	Heart to Heart —Open Marriage Weekend in Charlotte hosted by Christ Covenant Church.	<i>Palmer and Roger</i>