

Keeping it 'Real'



by Alfred Ells, M.C.

I deal in failure. Much of my time is spent working with leaders, husbands, wives, who have failed; people who have made a mess of life or those who the mess has affected. The painful part is that failure has many victims. Like ripples in a still lake, the moral failures of a pastor deeply affect many people. The first general reaction is one of disappointment and shock. "How could he have done that?" Even months later it's "I still can't believe he did that!"

Whether it is a pastor who has failed, a husband committing adultery or a daughter caught in the trap of drugs, the reactions are universal. After the initial shock the question shifts to "What made him do it? Why in the world would he do such a dumb thing?" The 'what' and 'why' become the focus. Everyone wants some understanding some insight that can explain away the pain and disillusionment.

Obviously, I can't list every reason a person crosses the line. But I can offer an insight into the dynamic that precedes almost every failure: a lack of transparency.

Secret, hidden thoughts and desires precede every overt action. We really do think before we act. Often the thoughts can be 'in the back of our mind' slightly remote and yet fully accessible if we focus. Moral failure comes from entertaining illicit thoughts and temptations and then transitioning into a plan of action. In other words, we entertain wrongful thoughts and images well before we act upon them. We trick ourselves into allowing the salacious thoughts by denying how deeply serious and damaging the tempting thought is...and...by not being transparent with others regarding our inner thought and fantasy life.

The anonymous programs have a saying: "You're only as sick as your secrets and shame." This is a great insight. Being authentically transparent allows another to speak into the tender, shameful and secret areas in a manner that offers reality, change, and healing. We have a harder time deceiving ourselves when others are allowed into our secret thoughts.

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 - good mental and emotional health begins with what

is real. We all are tempted. We all harbor secrets thoughts, fight shame and don't want to fail. We all need help.

"Why in the world would he do such a dumb thing?" can be answered in great part by the fact that he did not live a life of transparent vulnerability. He did not take the preventative step of living in authenticity with at least one other person who could have helped bring light to his inner darkness. He failed a long time ago and will fail again if he doesn't change.

If there is one truth I can tell you for sure it's this: caring, supportive, 'safe' relationships are essential to success. Whether through an accountability group or through ongoing meaningful sharing with another, a safe friend will tell you the truth about yourself and God's view of the circumstances. A friend also encourages. Jonathan, David's close friend, "encouraged him in God" (1 Samuel 23:16) when David faced adversity in the wilderness at the hands of Saul. My good friends have been with me through thick and thin, temptation and pain. They've helped make me successful.