

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

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ne of the most crushing forms of aloneness is to be alone in the knowledge of our sin, our guilt, our failures. To share these with a deeply trusted Christian friend or counselor can release the guilt, allow you to experience the freedom of being forgiven by God, and help you gain clarity of the ways to move toward change and growth.

Commit to pursuing one of the following next steps when it comes to “being known.”

- If you cannot presently identify such a trusted Christian friend, commit to making that a matter of regular prayer. Pursue it. Ask God to help you search out that person or to help you further cultivate an existing friendship.
- If you believe you have someone in your life who could help you come into the light, schedule a time to meet with him or her. Your next step might be sharing with them one or two of the hidden faults or temptations that you identified in the “Alone with God” section of the Bible study. How did they respond? Is it with a balance of truth and grace? Does their feedback reflect wisdom and discernment? If so, ask if they would be willing to play this role on a more consistent basis. Give them permission to become a “Nathan” for you.
- If you are already in a relationship that has many years of trust and you feel full confidence in the relationship and the person’s maturity, schedule a time when you can bring your entire life into the light with them—present sin, struggles, and secrets, as well as any that are

still nagging you from the past. Some people do this by writing what it is that they want to confess on a sheet of paper (or several sheets, if necessary!) and then having their friend burn it as an expression of the triumph of God's forgiveness. In any case, be sure to allow the person time to respond and assure you of God's full forgiveness and ongoing support. Consider scheduling time on a periodic basis with your friend to stay current with issues and temptations.

NOTE: How do you become a safe person to someone who asks you to be their confidant? Probably one of the most crucial aspects is confidentiality (Prov. 11:13). If you are the

type who can't resist the temptation to pass on sensitive information, don't receive a person's confession. On the other hand, be aware that no one should expect you to make unconditional promises of confidentiality. Destructive patterns of ongoing sin and refusal to take constructive steps may call for additional intervention.

In the spirit of Galatians 6:1 ("... watch yourself, or you also may be tempted"), be sure you are not coming off as arrogant. This is no time to pretend you're above temptation. Identify with the person. Even if the sin is not anything that attracts you, all of us know what it's like to do what we'd rather not (Rom. 7:15), so

you've been there too. Listen thoughtfully, and don't rush to give advice. Don't worry about fixing the person at this point. He or she may need help in clarifying a constructive course of action, but don't rush into that before the pain and shame have been revealed and you've joined with the person's feelings.

You also become a safe person by caring enough to follow through. Future meetings, notes of encouragement, phone calls, prayer support, loving accountability—commit to whatever it takes to assure the person you will not only hear the problem but walk with them on the path toward freedom.

Sometimes your role will be to encourage a person to seek professional counseling. People can be reluctant to go to a counselor, but many times that is the most appropriate step to take. Let the person know there is no stigma attached to people who use the resources of a wise and competent Christian counselor. It will probably be greatly appreciated if you continue your support while the person works there too.

