

Chapter 12 - Be Open

1. Take a few minutes to reflect on the story.
 - A) My research on ancient trade guilds revealed secretiveness verging on paranoia in regard to their trade secrets. Most of us are far more likely to face this kind of secrecy among family and friends. Consider some of the pressure you've experienced to keep things hushed up.
 - B) In my retelling of Lydia's story, we see her rejoicing in the freedom which knowing Christ brought into her life. Think about your response to this. Does the idea of openness, honesty and vulnerability thrill or terrify you?
 - C) More often than we imagine, when we invite God to reveal Himself to us, we are overwhelmed by the sense of freedom that comes with finally having accounts settled with God. Why do you suppose Christians find themselves slipping back into a life of secrecy?

2. As we begin, be assured that I won't pressure you to write down, (or discuss, if you are in a group) anything which may have negative repercussions in your life. In some environments, harm can come from being too spiritually open with people who can't handle it. However, I do want you to think about things in your life which you would love to reveal and "get off your chest" if you were in a safe environment. Feel free to make any notes you're comfortable making.

3. I have friends who have been appropriately open about sins over which they felt great shame (things like abortion, sexual sin, addictions and the like). When you hear someone open up and talk about how God is delivering them from sin, how do you respond to them? Why?

4. Think about yourself and your Christian community. How safe would others feel to be vulnerable with you? What would hinder them from feeling safe?

5. No one is likely to open up if they feel they are going to be judged and condemned. Think about the difference between accepting a person and approving of their sin. Every church is made up of repentant sinners, yet many Christians try to give the impression that they live in constant victory. What are some of the consequences to the fellowship of covering up our struggles and failures?

6. Consider how keeping our struggles and failures under wraps plays into Satan's hands. How does it lead to greater, and potentially more damaging, sin?

7. Pretending to be virtually sinless to our brothers and sisters in Christ discourages them in several ways. It also leads to self-deception. We begin to see our sin as "not such a big deal" and give up the struggle against it. This harms our relationship with God. We lose intimacy with Him and the power of His presence in our lives. Identify some of the blessings of leaving this downward spiral.

8. The things we've looked at in the last two chapters have the potential to release amazing power in our lives. Perhaps you've resonated strongly with these calls to glorify God first and foremost by what you project to others. Putting away masks is very empowering. When we come clean, we can finally receive forgiveness for our sin, thus breaking its power over us. We can begin to minister to

others as they see what God is doing in us and dare to follow our example. We can worship with a freedom that is otherwise unknowable, not with just our mind or emotions, but with our spirits. Take a few minutes and search your heart. What would it take to motivate you to be open to God, to your family, to your community of faith about those things that keep you from experiencing the joys of deep fulfilling relationships? If you're comfortable, write down your resolve, perhaps in the form of a prayer, regarding becoming more open (if not, at least think it through and verbalize it privately).

9. As time passes, return to this page and jot down what you've learned, both positive and negative.

For Group Leaders:

As a leader, you've had to search your own heart. Perhaps you've been pushed into the deep water of confession and openness with your group as you lead by example as well as principle. Pray for divine wisdom as you approach this session which has the potential to touch the lives of your group members so deeply.

Do everything you can to foster a safe environment in the group. You've been together long enough to have build some confidence with each other. Encourage them to be appropriately open (let me draw your attention to the "Potential Pitfalls" section).

Be sure to reserve a good amount of prayer to rejoice with those who are rejoicing over their new freedom and weep with those who weep over their ongoing struggles with sin.