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Behind Closed Doors

by Leslie Ann Jones

IT SEEMED HARMLESS AT FIRST. But just one look at the magazine she found in her father's nightstand spiraled into an addiction Callie battled for years. Flipping through the magazine led to exploring pornography on the Internet, and despite her attempts to stifle the urge to look, Callie couldn't muster the strength to walk away.

Callie is not alone. Most people struggle with one secret sin or another, whether it's pornography, like Callie, or something else. Every Sunday morning, closet alcoholics, angry abusers, and sexy temptresses fill the pews, but secret sins extend beyond these issues to more subtle varieties of temptation. Harboring bitter thoughts and cultivating evil intentions are every bit as dangerous as other secret sins. Don't fool yourself into believing that your sin isn't as bad as someone else's.

The simple truth is that sin is sin—

whether it's a secret sin, a "big" sin (like murder), or a little white lie, in God's eyes, all sin disrupts the relationship He wants to have with each of us.

So, who are you when you're all alone? Callie's youth minister used to say that you can find out a lot about a person by what they do in secret. Your pristine public image is nothing but a sham if your private life is grimy and dirty. That's what Jesus was talking about when He compared the Pharisees to whitewashed tombs in Matthew 23:27.

The allure—and danger—of secret sins is their private nature. But the truth is that secret sins aren't secret at all. Nothing, not even what you do when you're in your bedroom alone, is hidden from the eyes of God.

Can you imagine talking to God about it? Maybe not. But since God knows and sees everything, your shameful secret is not hidden from Him.

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This is both good and bad news. It's good news because the ice has been broken. You can't shock God. He already knows. It's bad news because God requires holiness, and secret sins don't exactly fit into a pure lifestyle. Although Callie's struggle with pornography lasted for several years, her recovery began when she confessed her sin to God and truly opened her heart to His healing touch.

Would you be mortified if other people found out about your secret sin? If you can't imagine doing it in the middle of the cafeteria at noon, then chances are it's inappropriate. The shame associated with secret sins keeps many people from seeking help, but most of the time, gaining the courage to talk about the sin is the first step to overcoming the temptation. When the sin is no longer a secret, it's much easier to deal with, something that Callie learned when she confided in her best friend.

Do you know who you are? Claiming your identity as a sinner saved by grace can work wonders for self-esteem that has been crushed by lost battles with temptation. It's easy to believe that you're nothing but a worthless loser when you repeatedly get caught in the same old sin, but your actions don't define you. God does.

If you're a Christian, you have been *justified*, a fancy way of saying that you've been made just as if you had never sinned in the first place. When Callie started reminding herself that her sin had been paid for and she was a child of God, she began to become the person that God created her to be. Although the road was long, Callie found that the most effective way to deal with her addiction to pornography was to replace it with something better—a desire for God and His ways. **EC**