

I Inhaled

by Mike Genung

"When I was in England, I experimented with marijuana a time or two, and I didn't like it. I didn't inhale and never tried it again."

-Bill Clinton, during the 1992 presidential campaign.

Many have had a hard time swallowing Bill Clinton's famous "I didn't inhale" line. It conveys a tone of cover up, of a politician trying to side step his actions. During the presidential campaign in 1992, "I didn't inhale" quickly became a national punch line for the evasion of responsibility.

Conversely, Clinton's vice president, Al Gore, freely confessed to smoking pot during his junior and senior years in college. Few remember Gore's admission. Why? Because when Gore told the truth without making excuses, the issue was dealt with and over.

Whether Clinton actually inhaled or not, telling the uncompromised truth makes a big difference. If Clinton would have said something like "Yes, I tried pot, it was wrong and I didn't go there again", it would have barely caused a flap. In our permissive culture of today, many young men and women have experimented with marijuana in their early years. "I didn't inhale" made Clinton look like he was hiding something—and tainted the perception of his character.

He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.

Proverbs 28:13

Most men are terrified of exposing their weaknesses and failures. We want to be seen as those who have it all together, the strong ones. We don't want others to know how ugly, selfish, depraved—and fearful—we really are inside. The risk of condemnation along with the potential blow to our pride keeps us in isolation. We Christians can also be guilty of hiding behind ministry, Bible knowledge or "being good enough" in an endeavor to make ourselves look so spiritual that we throw others off the scent. Yuck.

When a man who isn't used to transparency starts talking about his struggle with lust, it's not uncommon to hear statements like this:

"I only looked at porn... I didn't masturbate."

"It wasn't an X rated movie, just an innocent love scene between two consenting adults."

"It was only a harmless look at a beautiful woman. They're God's creation so why can't I enjoy them?"

"I was testing my porn blocking software to see if it would work."

"I just masturbated without looking at porn or fantasizing; there was no lust involved."

"I don't understand why this is such a big deal to my wife, after all, it's only pictures."

In other words, they didn't inhale.

I have to confess to worse than "I didn't inhale". The first time I attended a support group for those who struggle with sexual sin, I lied about how long it had been since I last acted out. I had binged on porn just hours before coming to the meeting, but told the group it hadn't been for days. My shame got the better of me and I couldn't bear to admit it had only been a few hours since I'd masturbated to pornography.

"Those who conceal their transgressions will not prosper." Hiding sexual sin gives it access to the throne of our soul. Like a wicked slave master, Lust takes an inch and then screams for more, until we surrender to it—repeatedly. Simultaneously, Lust's ugly sister, Shame, sets up camp next door to condemn us of our soiled laundry. Together they work in tandem with Pride to keep us paralyzed in fear from exposing the truth.

For freedom to occur, all of the darkness must be exposed to the light of transparency and honesty, until Lust and Shame wither away. This exposure must be relentless; vague confessions such as "I acted out last night" aren't enough. Taking a 10 second peep at porn is entirely different from an all night binge that included multiple acts of masturbation. Explicit details should not be shared, but all pertinent facts of what happened must be brought to the light. No hiding allowed.

If reading this makes you squirm, don't fear; the crucifixion of pride is a good thing.

But he gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

James 4:6

Death to pride gives life to humility, which pleases the Lord. Humility cries out "I need help, I can't do it on my own", while Pride balks at acknowledging weakness. Pride justifies, evades and side steps, while Humility says "I have no excuse, my wretched flesh loves this sin; Lord please help me!"

God helps those who are humble and honest enough to admit their life is a fatal tragedy, as Oswald Chambers calls it. Compassion awaits the broken, as do healing, grace and love.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Psalms 51:17

Speaking of which, wasn't it God's deep, passionate love and acceptance we were really looking for in lust? Porn offers a sick distortion of the Real Thing. I've never heard a Christian man tell me "I had a great time looking at porn and having sex with myself last night", but I have seen the love of God change a man to the point where he lost his appetite for sexual sin. Once we've tasted the Real Thing, the counterfeit loses its appeal.

For Lust and Shame to die and give way to the Real Thing, bold, ruthless honesty must become a way of life. There's no other way.

"But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 18:13-14

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Bio: Mike Genung struggled with sexual sin for 20 years before God set him free in 1999. He is the founder of Blazing Grace, a ministry to the sexually broken and their spouses, and the author of *The Road to Grace; Finding True Freedom from the Bondage of Sexual Addiction* (www.roadtoGrace.net).