

## ***Confession from the Pulpit***

by Ken Sande, President of Peacemaker Ministries

### **Hoping to impress someone**

I couldn't believe my pastor was going to air his dirty laundry from the pulpit. *How can he do this? I thought. I've finally gotten Cindy to come to church—this will not impress her!*

Cindy was a secretary at the law firm where I was working as an intern during law school. I had been inviting her to church for nearly three months, hoping that she would come to know Christ through the teaching and fellowship there.

But as soon as we took our seats, my plans began to fall apart. Pastor Woods stepped to the pulpit and said, "Before we begin our worship today, there is some unfinished business we need to deal with. Would Kent please come up here?"

*Oh, no!* I groaned to myself as I remembered last week's adult Sunday school class. Pastor Woods and Kent, one of our elders, had gotten into an intense debate. They had both resorted to sarcasm, which left the class sitting in an awkward silence. Apparently Pastor Woods had stewed over it all week, and now he was going to admonish Kent in front of the whole church.

### **A public confession**

But that was not what my pastor had in mind. When Kent joined him at the pulpit, Pastor Woods said, "As most of you know, Kent and I had an argument during Sunday school last week. Our emotions got out of hand, and we spoke to each other in a sinful way."

My stomach sank as I thought of the impression Cindy would get from this very personal scene. *Of all the days to bring someone to church, I thought, why did I pick this one?* I was sure this incident would scare Cindy away.

Pastor Woods put his arm around Kent's shoulders and went on. "We want you to know that we met that same afternoon to resolve our differences. By God's grace, we came to understand each other better, and we were fully reconciled. But we need to tell you how sorry we are for disrupting the unity of this fellowship. We both ask your forgiveness for the poor example we set last week."

Many eyes were filled with tears as Pastor Woods and Kent took turns praying. Unfortunately, I was so worried about what Cindy must be thinking that I completely missed the significance of what had happened. Making a nervous comment to her, I opened the hymnal to our first song and hoped fervently that she would forget about the whole incident.

### **A surprising response**

The rest of the service was a blur, and before long I was driving her home. I made light conversation for a few minutes, but eventually Cindy brought up what had happened. "I still can't believe what your pastor did this morning," she said. I tried to steer the conversation to a safer subject, but her mind was fixed on what she had witnessed.

"You know, I've never met a minister like yours. I have a hard time controlling my tongue, too, but I've never been able to admit it like he did."

She paused for a moment, deep in thought. Then she turned to me and asked, "Could I come to church with you next week? I'd like to hear Pastor Woods preach again." With surprise and delight, I agreed to pick her up the next Sunday.

Cindy returned three weeks in a row, eagerly listening to our pastor explain our common struggle with sin and the solution that only Jesus can give. His example that first Sunday gave his message great credibility. By the third Sunday, Cindy had seen and heard enough. On a bright spring morning, she believed the good news about Jesus Christ and put her trust in him as her Savior, Lord, and King.

### **Putting on an act**

My immature response to this incident illustrates a common weakness in the church. All too often we think that the best way to lead someone to Christ is to make it look like the Christian life is always going well.

Therefore, we always put on a smile in church (even if our hearts are aching), we act like our friendships and marriages are fine (even if there are walls between us), and we try to make it look like our children are well behaved (even if their hearts are in total rebellion). But most of all, although we acknowledge that we are sinners, we *rarely admit that we have sinned*.

No wonder unsaved people cannot relate to us. Although they too may try to cover up their troubles, they are often painfully aware of their own failures, heartaches, and hopelessness. But when they look at Christians, they often see us as people whose lives seem so completely in order that we could not possibly understand their struggles with life.

Our "Christian act" makes us seem unreal and unapproachable to other people. Worse yet, it obscures the only real solution to our problems and theirs. When we cover up our ongoing struggles with sin, we miss the opportunity to present Jesus as Savior.

### **Our weakness, His strength**

But transparency is not easy. Pride, self-righteousness, and worldly ideas about how to impress others make it difficult for us to be honest about our struggles with sin. This is especially true with people in positions of leadership, whether in the church, the family, or the workplace.

Therefore we have a choice. If we try to impress people with *us*, they will have less opportunity to be impressed with Jesus. But if we humble ourselves and "confess our sins to each other" (see James 5:16), people will be able to relate to our weaknesses and join us in trusting Jesus.

Adapted from [The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict](#) by Ken Sande (Baker Books, Updated Edition, 2003).