

## Week 33: The Healing Is in the Emptying

I keep secrets from my wife.

On an early autumn afternoon, the kids were released early from school due to a heat wave and old buildings with no air conditioning. While debriefing the shortened day, they mentioned that momma had taken them to an ice cream shop the day before after the early dismissal. It seemed like a random comment, but I'm sure it was strategic. They know how to work me. Of course, I knew they didn't need the sugar two days in a row, and I knew we didn't need to spend the money, but who doesn't want to be the cool-dad, especially when you're married to a woman who's always the cool-mom?

So, we piled in the car.

When we got home, I collected the empty ice cream cups, and I buried them deep in the garbage. I actually *did* that. Rearranged some dirty paper towels over the top of them. Like I was six years old again, sneaking a spoonful of fudge swirl from the freezer at 6am. However, when I was six, I didn't have three accomplices to spill the beans. When my wife got home and asked about our afternoon, I didn't mention the ice cream. But my partners in crime did. And I cringed. I cringed a little because I got caught. But I cringed a little more because love isn't a place for secrets.

It's a place for pouring them out.

It is easy to live our closest relationships like we might get grounded at any moment and, instead of doing what it will take to stay in *love*, we mostly just try to stay out of *trouble*. Like the spouse who orders every NFL game on cable and then holds his breath, hoping his wife doesn't wonder why the networks are showing the Tennessee Titans for the third week in a row. Or the spouse who binges at the department store and then swipes the credit card bill from the mailbox, like a high school kid beating her parents home to the report card in the mail. Or the friend who doesn't tell Friend A that she went out for dinner with Friend B for fear of upsetting Friend A.

Sure, these are small secrets. But small secrets multiply. And grow.

And as they say in AA, our secrets make us sick: the bills that are getting paid a little too late because there's too little money to pay them, the addiction we know is getting a little too addictive, the heart that is getting a little too hard and a little too cold, the resentment that is quietly building. Relationships can quickly become a garbage can in which we bury our secrets, like clandestine cups of ice cream.

So, I wish I'd lined those cups of ice cream right up on the counter.

I wish, when my wife arrived home, I'd said to her, "We got ice cream today, because when I found out you took the kids yesterday, it stirred up all of my

insecurities. I think you're a really good parent, but I'm not so sure about myself. You're good at having fun, and I'm good at getting frustrated by the mess the fun creates. You're good at being spontaneous, and I'm good at worrying about what won't get done while we frolic. If you were my mom, I'd love being with you, but if I was my dad, I'm not so sure how I'd feel about me. So, I tried to be fun and spontaneous, but to tell you the truth, I was mostly just trying to keep up with you."

I wish I'd poured out my secrets all the way to the bottom.

Yet, that's the nice thing about secrets—they don't go away on their own, and it's never too late to empty ourselves of them. It's never too late to tell each other not just what we've *done*, but also *why* we did it. It's never too late to make our actions known and our hearts seen.

True intimacy is not the absence of privacy or the absence of boundaries or the absence of a separate self—in fact, we need to have our own spaces and limits and identity. True intimacy is the absence of secrets. True intimacy is what happens when the floor of our relationships is covered with our garbage, because we are dumping it all out and figuring out how to clean up the mess together. It may take a while and it may be gritty work, but we will find ourselves healing the whole time. Because it isn't what we've done or who we are that makes us sick. It's our hiding that does that.

May we reveal ourselves.

May our places of belonging be full of our garbage.

And may we, finally, be emptied of the secrets that make us sick.