



I'm talking today about YOUR PRIVATE LIFE. Nobody is happy out this really. Nobody really wants me to do this. What right do I have to get up here in public and air all the details of your behind-the-scenes life? It is your life, isn't it? It's not mine. And it is private, isn't it? It's not something you publish so that everyone will know all the inner habits and secrets that you have kept to yourself.

Unbeknownst to you, I spent the whole week following you with hidden cameras, catching all of the hidden moments of your life when you thought nobody was looking. I have taken the most dramatic moments, those highlights of your hidden life that would draw the most ratings, and prepared them in a series of video clips. Today, this morning, during the service, I will publicize your private life. It's hard to talk about your private life unless we all know what it is. So, yes, I'm going to expose all those hidden things of yours. Won't this be fun? For you this may be about as comfortable as hugging a cactus but since the title of this message is "Your Private Life" and it's not called "My Private Life" I'm just going to sit back and enjoy. Now, which one of you should I start with first... Hmmmmmm...

Before you rush the stage and stone me, let me lay some groundwork for why I'm going to expose your private life today. You'll see in your notes, in the bulletin, that I want to ask three simple questions about your private life and, in doing so, I hope to come to one conclusion that will help us understand what your private life is about:

Is your private life really yours?

We assume that our own private life is ours and not somebody else's. But is that really true? As far as our own life is concerned we seem to believe that we have the right to keep things to ourselves that we don't want other people to know about and that that should be okay. What's mine is mine and my life is mine, isn't it?

We have a serious conflict here. Jesus seems to think that our life is his. All of John chapter 17 is a prayer from Jesus where he refers to people as "his own" and he calls people "mine." Jesus thinks we are his. In Luke 14 Jesus says that he expects us to give up everything for him. We surrender and become his. You could try to keep hold of your own life, to control it, to seize it and try to run it, but Jesus says that's useless. He thinks your life is not really yours. In fact, Jesus thinks that your life is his and that it's to be lived in service for other people, not so that the world can revolve around you. Jesus thinks your life is about God and about others. Romans 14:7-8 says "For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." The passage goes on to say that when you belong to the Lord then you live for others because that's God's heart for you.

Look, you are very special. You are a person in whom God's wants to reside. God knit you together with painstaking care and love. God loves you so much he created you so that he could be with you. He wants to live within you. You were created to be his residing place, his home. God wants to be at home in your hearts. He wants your life to be his. And whether you feel depreciated in value or like the market has overextended itself on you, the truth is that Jesus cherishes you and wants you to be his. He wants to have you as his very own. He created you for that purpose. 1

Corinthians 3:16 asks, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul asks, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own."

This is where the conflict within us lies. We don't want to be owned by anyone other than ourselves. This is my life. As the great philosopher Bobby Brown once said, "It's my prerogative." So if our life is to be God's home, does this mean we aren't free to do what we want? That we have to play by God's rules? Well, yes. That's right. But which one leads to freedom? Keep our life for ourselves, or letting God have it?

Luke 9:24-25 says that whoever wants to seize their life will lose their soul... What good is it for a person to gain the whole world, and yet forfeit his very self? As we live as God's people, then we gain abundant life from God. As the inside of our lives is being shaped and directed by God, then we begin to live in the way we were created to live. If we go against that pattern by trying to steal our life away from God's hands, that's when we start to feel restrained in ourselves and we feel strained with others. We were created to share our life with God forever; to give him ownership of our breath, of our thoughts, of our days; to give him rule in our hearts; so that we could truly have life. That's what we were created for. If we go against what we created for, we will have conflict within us, we will have a divided heart, a heart that struggles to pump.

As parents, we try to establish this pattern in our home with our children. That's the goal of every parent, right? Children are expected to live according to the patterns set up at home. Kathy and I tell our kids over and over again, "Look, if you follow the ways we have given you, then you will live free and enjoy life and your relationships will be abundant." But every time they go against those patterns, or cross over the boundaries, or exhibit destructive behavior, or seize the shape of their life in their own hands without us, their success rate goes down and their self-joy becomes restricted. Their life doesn't flow quite right. As our children, they should live according to our ways because they are in our hands. We as their parents are striving to shape them and love them and enable them to fully live. They are our kids. We are entrusted with the responsibility to give them life to the fullest. To the degree that we do that according to God's ways, if they reject our hands, if they resist our shaping, if they think their life is theirs alone and that we have no right to interfere, if they think their private life is no business of ours as their parents, then they will never learn to live free.

Our seven year-old recently asked me if he could drive the car. It's a manual, a stick-shift, by the way. I said no, I can't let you drive the car. First of all, you don't know how, second of all, it's against the patterns established in our home, and third of all, you're seven with an adventurous-streak that scares the breath out of me. He was mad at me. "You never let me do anything!" he yelled at me. Well first of all, I said, that's not true. I let you do a lot of things... if that's not true I'll take away the Wii. Second of all, this is a silly conversation. Third of all, someday after you mature and I teach you how, you'll be driving soon enough all over the place. Trust me. "Well," he said, "sometime I'm going to take your keys and drive off to my friends." I said, "Okay, but I have to warn you, I don't think that will end well."

You are child of God. Your private life is God's to shape and to pattern after his heart. And if you reject that idea, your private life isn't going to be that fun. In your pursuit of freedom you are going to feel restricted and restrained and antagonistic and ashamed and you're just going to want to sneak it around and it's not going to end well.

Is your private life really yours? No. It's God's to shape and God's to prepare for the blessing of others.

Is your private life really private?

We like to think that our private life is to remain private. A politician or a major sports hero who gets caught having affairs might make a public statement like, "In this difficult time of my life and my family's life, we would ask you to respect our privacy." Well every reporter blows that request off. There is no way any privacy is going to be respected. We like to think that our private life should be private, but do we really believe that? It's interesting that when someone else gets caught doing something wrong, we expect them to fess up and divulge everything they've done wrong. I mean, Tiger Woods is a golfer. A golfer. He hits a little white ball around the grass. And yet people are saying he needs to have a public press conference where he deals with his marital infidelity before he should be accepted back on the golf course. Seriously, does what he does in the privacy of his own life impact whether or not he can hit a sand wedge? Wait a second, I thought you thought that your private life was private?

We seem to have a double standard here. We assume that as long as what we do in private stays private, then we are entitled to keep it private. But there are two problems with this idea:

Problem number 1: Your private life is not private because your private life is known by God. Psalm 44:21 asks, "Wouldn't God have discovered [what you've done], since he knows the secrets of the heart?" Proverbs 5:21 states, "For a person's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all the person's paths." Your life never really was private, ever. To God's eyes, your private life is a window. He sees everything. He's not a paparazzi. He's not following you around in secret with cameras looking to dig up the dirt or catch you in the act, "Ah ha! I knew it! I had a hunch you were up to something evil." It's not like that. God is out in the open about it. He can't help it. He simply sees all things; he knows all things. And there will come a day when what God sees and knows will become seen and known by everyone. Jesus said in Luke 12: "The time is coming when everything will be revealed; all that is secret will be made public. Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be shouted from the housetops for all to hear, [and I would add] whatever you have texted to your mistress will be publicized by TMZ. Look, nobody is happy that your private life will be publicized. But part of the problem is that we assumed that a private life is private... when it never really was. God sees and God knows.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve did something wrong and they tried to cover it up. They didn't want God to know, so they hid and they covered up their bodies. Before sin, everything was out in the open. As the great philosopher, Cosmo Kramer, once said, "I'm out there, Jerry, and I'm loving every minute of it." But ever since then, we have turned inward, we have become quite capable of thinking we can hide things. But God knew what they had done. And when he presented himself to them, Adam and Eve put on leaves started making excuses. We were naked, Adam said, so we hid. And so God asked them, "What's wrong with being naked- that's how I made you? Did you mess something up?" From the beginning, people have tried to

hide and keep private those things that they don't want others to know. Adam and Eve, male and female, created in the image of God, had nothing to hide, until they did wrong and then they became addicted to privacy. We're just like them. We like to pretend that we can cover up our privates, but we really can't. God sees. God knows. Your private life is public knowledge to God.

Problem number 2: Your private life is not private because your private life impacts others. What you keep private actually effects people. Think of the tension that existed in the Garden as a result of Adam and Eve trying to hide their sin. The whole of creation was impacted. Sin changed the game; over just one screw-up. We can't be too hard on them; how many times each day do we sin and try to cover it up? How many times do we change the game because we try to hide what we've done?

What you keep private and to yourself effects others. Think of the marriage where the husband is addicted to pornography. Think of how that impacts the way he views his wife, the way it impacts their sexual relationship, the way it builds temptations of thought and action that run counter to the promises he made in his vows. Think of the way his wife is not receiving the lavish-ment of love and the encouragement of her beauty that she deserves from her husband. And still, the husband pretends to himself that he's faithful because he hasn't physically touched another woman and it hasn't really hurt anybody because it's done in the so-called "privacy" of his mind and own body. If he ever was to be caught, it would change the game. And so, the husband, every time he erases the history on the browser, covers things up with fig leaves. But he has not covered up the impact.

We know the book of Proverbs is about wisdom, but do we know that a huge portion of this book deals with hidden sexual sin. If there is one thing that trips up wisdom, it's the lusting libido. All of chapter Five, chapter Seven, and numerous other verses throughout the book deal with this hidden problem.

If someone were to ask you, "What do you have hidden in your heart?" What comes to your mind? What would you not want to reveal? What do you have hidden in there? When we're asked that question, we assume it is a negative answer: "What are you hiding in your heart?" "Oooh, you don't really want to know that." But the Good News is that we don't have to answer negatively. We can answer in freedom. Our private life can be exposed without it being embarrassing. What do you have hidden in your heart? Psalm 119:11 says, "God, I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." In all of those deep hidden crevices of our lives, we could actually plant God's word there. Can you imagine, if you struggle with a private, hidden sin or a worry or a secret anger against someone or a certain destructive behavior, what if when you went to open that password protected closet, God's word was residing there? Wouldn't it be good to answer the question "What do you have hidden in your heart?" with an abundant sense of freedom and joy and strength and life and truth and love and hope and faith because "I have God's word hidden in there."

And as a result, when God's word resides inside of you, you can't help but to reflect that on the outside. Psalm 40:10 says "I do not hide your righteousness in my **heart**; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from people." God living in us was never meant to be a private affair. Seriously, is your faith private? That's a disgusting idea. If God is living in us, then the inside of our life is to be shared because it's good. Imagine keeping your faith private and meanwhile your neighbors' lives could really use your encouragement of faith. Our hearts are not supposed to be hidden and private. Our hearts are supposed to be lived

openly and freely for God and for others. Look, the truth is, your private life is not really yours and it is not really private. It is God's. God sees it. God shapes it. It is supposed to overflow with his pattern to positively impact others, not be covered up to the detriment of others.

Look, I know some of you are feeling a bit protective right now and saying, Ken, there are some things we should keep to ourselves. I'm not saying you should start airing your dirty laundry for everyone to see... but I am saying you need to do the laundry otherwise it piles up. You do need to air your soul, your heart, your mind, and your strength to the Lord so that he can refresh you and prepare you to display his love to this world.

Is your private life really a life?

The answer to this question is "Yes." Is your private life yours? No. Is your private life private? No. Is your private life really a life? Yes. Your private life is a life. It is precious. It is special. It is unique. It is beautiful. It reveals the image of God. So your private life is to be cherished and treated well. Your private life is not to be saturated in sin as if it is yours to trash or throw away or to hide in destructive indulgence.

Dan Leffelaar is my right-hand man in the young adult ministry at Brentview. Since the first weekend I was on staff, Dan has been my partner in ministry here. He really should be in full-time ministry, he's got God's call on his life. And that's not a private call. But until the opportunity opens, he's working in the meantime at the Heart and Stroke Foundation. In his role, Dan makes presentations on how to care for your heart. He shares about habits that we should develop in order to keep our heart strong and healthy and our blood flow clean and unobstructed.

One of the things Dan presents to people is this Vat of Fat. It's nasty. It is meant to make us sick about the bad stuff we take into ourselves that restricts our heart from working and our blood from flowing. According to the Vat of Fat, if we take in an extra serving of fast-food French Fries beyond the calories and food groups what we're supposed to take, every week, we will add to our bodies 36 pounds of solidifying fat that goes beyond what we can burn off in a year. If we take in an extra glazed donut beyond what we can handle, we will add to our bodies 22 pounds of fat. An extra soda a week beyond our daily calorie needs will add 17 pounds of this stuff. And so on. Disgusting isn't it? Too much of this stuff clogs our arteries and attacks our heart. And that limits what we can do, limits our enjoyment of life, limits our enjoyment of time with others, and eventually will steal our life away from us.

Now imagine doing this to your heart and soul. What we take into our heart, into our private life, impacts our ability to live free from obstruction. We can't truly live free if we keep saturating our life in junk and excuse it because it's our life or pretend like we can keep it hidden because it is done in private. Eventually, the clot will reveal itself and it will be destructive to you and impact everybody.

Your life is supposed to be free from the obstructions that keep you from truly enjoying the abundant life that God wants for you. Proverbs 4:20-27 says: "My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them written on your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a

man's whole body." Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil." Proverbs 3:3 says, "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart." Proverbs 6:21 says, "Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck." Proverbs 7:3 says "Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart." Psalm 37:31 says that when the law of the Lord is in your heart, your feet do not slip. Letting God's ways shape your private life impacts every aspect of how you live.

When we go to God and present to him our life, God accepts us, forgives us, and begins the work of recreating us from the inside out. His Spirit begins working in our heart to help us to live according to the pattern he has set out for us. No matter what's in your private life, God wants to help you have the wellspring of life flowing within you.

I have not said anything today without including myself in the mix. If you were to follow me around 24/7 with hidden cameras, you would certainly discover some sin that God already knows about. I don't say that to astonish anyone. My point is simply that none of us is pure. Proverbs 20:9 asks it correctly: "Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin.'" The rhetorical answer is "No one can say that."

The Good News is that the heart-clogging, soul-clotting stuff that we have been hiding can be expelled and exchanged for the heart-freeing, soul-cleansing word of God. Just because you have hidden bad stuff doesn't mean you need to keep carrying that junk in your arteries. Or just because you have been caught doing something that you did in private, doesn't mean you have to have a spiritual heart attack. You have an opportunity to restore your private life to what it should be. Psalm 51:10 cries out, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Psalm 101:2 says "I will be careful to lead a blameless life—I will walk in my house with a blameless heart."

The conclusion to all of this is simple: Your private life is God's to shape, not yours. Give him back your private life. Let him shape you from the inside out. Let him help you truly live with all the joy and abundance and strength and integrity and confidence that you can have as he lives within you.

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