

**Series: STUCK! Faith Without Traction—February 20, 2011**

**STUCK IN A SECRET LIFE**

**2 Samuel 11, John 8, Acts 5**

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1. Every so often the media bloodhounds hit the trail of some public figure who's living a secret life. Of course, they are **all** too happy to let everyone know what's going on—because, see, the **enquiring mind wants to know!** Sometime, like the mess with Bill Clinton, we're shocked—but not surprised.

-But sometimes we **are** both shocked and surprised:

\*The governor of New York—tough on prostitution—has a secret life of hiring a high-priced escort.

\*The pastor of a large church in the heart of conservative America tearfully admits to drug use and an encounter with a gay masseuse.

\*A TV Evangelist who yells and sweats, condemning another TV evangelist for his indiscretions—is caught with a hooker in the back of his limousine.

-It's easy to hear stuff like this—and get a little smug and self-righteous—but the **truth** is that we **all** have a personal shame file. And every so often we blush at the thought of what's in there. So we lock the drawers and swallow the key. Sometimes we forget that **everyone** has screwed up—and that God is compassionate, full of grace—and scandalously kind and patient! Psalm 103 says:

**God is sheer mercy and grace; not easily angered, he's rich in love. He doesn't endlessly nag and scold, nor hold grudges forever. He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve, nor pay us back in full for our wrongs. As high as heaven is over the earth, so strong is his love to those who fear him. And as far as sunrise is from sunset, he has separated us from our sins. As parents feel for their children, God feels for those who fear him. He knows us inside and out, keeps in mind that we're made of mud. (Psalm 103:8-14 MSG)**

-The issue this morning is **not** whether you and I have a personal **shame file**. That's a given, right? **RIGHT?** But being stuck in a secret life is different. Stuck means that you either **can't--or won't** get out of it. And the greatest fear is that the **truth** will come out. What I'm talking about this morning is messy, uncomfortable stuff. So. Are you okay if we keep going?

2. The first thing you need to know—is that the Bible is **full** of exposes on secret lives. Really. Let me just give you a taste:

\*Noah is an incredible hero who saves much of the created order of his day—and in the last scene from his life is drunk and naked in his tent.

\*Abraham, stellar in his faith, asks his wife, Sarah, to lie and say she's his sister. Twice! And his lie gets exposed by two kings—and almost creates disaster for the countries.

\*Judah, the head of the Jewish tribe Jesus is from, has sex with someone he thinks is a prostitute—and winds up getting exposed as the father of his daughter-in-law's twins!

\*Aaron and Miriam, Moses' siblings—High Priest and Prophetess—secretly plan a rebellion against Moses—and get exposed for their slander in front of the whole nation.

\*Solomon, world renowned king of Israel builds a temple for God that is one of the wonders of the ancient world—and then people find out that he is **secretly** involved in pagan worship that is both lewd and violent.

-Know what the connecting point is in these stories—and all secret lives? They don't remain secrets. God loves us too much **not** to expose us—and stop us.

- a. But the world-class scandal that would've kept the gossip columns going for months involved Israel's best-known leader. Writer of Psalms, mighty warrior, man after God's own heart—David. I mean, David, is living this **stellar** life of humility and integrity. But he gets sucked into a secret life at the highest point of his career. At a time when he's not even supposed to be home, he sees his friend and next door neighbour's wife taking a bath on the roof.

-I'm not sure what happened in David's heart. But he made a disastrous decision to send for Bathsheba, she came, they had sex—and she got pregnant. The deal with pregnancy is that it's **pretty** hard to hide. And David makes things worse by going into the next phase of a secret life. Lying—and cover-up. What David does is try to cover his tracks. He brings her husband, Uriah—a good friend of his—home from battle—and manoeuvres things around **trying** to get him to go home and have sex with Bathsheba—so it looks like he's the Dad. But Uriah won't compromise his--so David puts him on the front lines where he's killed.

-David marries Bathsheba—and it **looks** like the whole nasty thing might just blow over. David might even look like a hero for marrying this poor, pregnant widow. David thinks his secret life is safe—but it's not. God knows. And God tells Nathan—a prophet--who confronts David with his sin. A **very** dangerous move when it's a king you're exposing.

-David, for all his secrecy and cover-up, realizes that what he has done has displeased God—and he immediately confesses and repents. God forgives David—but the consequences are gut-wrenching. David loses his moral authority with Joab, the commander who was involved—and **especially** with his sons. There is this domino effect of rebellion—and the next **eight** chapters are a story of chaos with his sons.

- b. Another high-profile secret life was exposed in the last day of Jesus' life. Judas—one of the original disciples Jesus' chose—became secretly disgruntled with Jesus. And no one, except for Jesus, even had a clue until he led a mob to the Garden where Jesus was praying and had him arrested. Amazing, isn't—that Jesus, who was **very** careful about who he chose as his closest followers—would choose someone like Judas.

-Like most secret lives, this didn't happen over night. And Jesus warned Judas again and again about where he was headed. Early in his ministry, Jesus knew things weren't right—and said to His disciples:

**“Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.) (John 6:70-71 TNIV)**

-We aren't told exactly what went off course in Judas' mind—but it had **something** to do with money. It all boils over when Mary breaks open a very expensive jar of ointment—and pours it on Jesus' head.

**But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, “Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.” He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. (John 12:4-6 TNIV)**

-Do you see how slick Judas is? What he says here makes him sound **super** spiritual! And the other disciples apparently agree. But what was **really** going on in Judas' heart had nothing to do with a concern for the poor. I find it astounding—that Jesus sees the spectacular miracles Jesus does—hears every message—watches a perfect life from a front row seat—and yet sours and goes underground.

-Again, Jesus warned him—several times at the last supper. In fact, when he tells the group he's going to be betrayed, they all say, “Is it **me?** Is it **me?**”

**Jesus answered, “The one who hands me over is someone I eat with daily, one who passes me food at the table...Then Judas, already turned traitor, said, “It isn't me, is it, Rabbi?” Jesus said, “Don't play games with me, Judas.” (Matthew 26:23-25 MSG)**

-I don't know **what** Judas was thinking. But another record of this meal says the when he took the piece of bread from Jesus, Satan entered into him. The horror he descended into eventually drove him to suicide. The deal is, friends, when we're making our decisions about a secret path, we usually have **no** idea how high the price will actually be. As a sidenote, secret lives betray of those who love us most.

3. So, those are the stories of David and Judas. But there's a story from the early life of the church that deserves special treatment. Why? Because I'm convinced that it

continues, in some form, in every community that worships Jesus. It's a Bible story that I **don't** like—at all. Has anyone ever heard of Ananias and Sapphira? It's not one of the Bible stories we tell our kids. "A husband and wife lied to God, so He killed them" doesn't make for great flannel graph.

-Let me set it up for you. The church is quite new—and it's the context of phenomenal generosity. A guy named Joseph has just sold a piece of property—and given the entire proceeds to the church to help them assist the poor. And he gets a nickname, Barnabas—**Son of Encouragement**.

- Well, this didn't go unnoticed. A couple named Ananias and Sapphira saw this and thought, "Wow! Wouldn't it be cool if **we** had that kind of reputation as radically generous, sacrificial people?" So, they copied him. Well, not quite:

**Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 5:1-2 TNIV)**

-Do you see the **secret life** part? They wanted to have the **reputation** as people who give everything--lay it all on the line—without actually giving **everything**. So, they **pretend** and take a short-cut. See, that's what secret lives are. It's a shortcut to the admiration, sex, money, reputation--whatever it is that we want. They didn't count on **God** calling them on it.

**Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God." When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. (Acts 5:3-5 TNIV)**

-Three hours later, Sapphira comes in. Peter asks her about the property. I think he's giving her an opportunity to tell the truth—come clean. But she doesn't. And she dies, too. Has anyone thought as you've read this, "Man, that's **harsh**" **Put** yourself in God's place. He knew the future. He knew that the one name that would haunt his followers down through the years is the accusation of hypocrisy. He knew that if their secret lives—their hypocrisy--had gone unchallenged, it would've destroyed their souls—and twisted the entire church.

-Anyone ever heard the term, **hypocrite**? It's when you **say** you believe on thing, but **do** another. The origin of the word is very interesting. One of the massive building projects in ancient times was a city Herod was building called **Sepphoris**. This was a kind of tribute to the Rome—and had all the cool things that great Roman cities had—including a massive theatre that seated between 3000 and 4000 people. This city was less than an hour's walk from Nazareth—and many scholars think that a craftsman named Joseph—with his young apprentice, Jesus, probably found work there.

-The actors in those theatres—likely seen by Jesus, were called **hupokrites**. Jesus was the first to take that word—and apply it to the religious leaders of his culture. It's used 17 times in the Bible—all by Jesus. Jesus uses some **very** vivid images; **white-washed** graves; bowls where the outside is clean—but the inside is filthy. It's people who do things to appear better, more generous, more admirable than they are. Think this fits Ananias and Sapphira? And to protect a Mission that is about being real, truthful and authentic--God had to take them out. This kind of a secret life is extremely dangerous.

-By the way, did you know that 85% of the young adults outside the church believe that Christians are hypocritical? What's worse is that 47% of the young adults **inside** the church say the same thing. See, we believe the same myth the religious leaders around Jesus did—"Keep the outside of the bowl clean—and no one will notice what's on the inside!"

- a. Now, is there anyone here who has **never** been tempted to make yourself appear better, more devoted, more spiritual and knowledgeable than you know you are? Why? Well, it's our ego. We may not actually **lie**—we just do things designed to make people say, "Wow!" and let them believe what they **want** to believe. Our **reputation**—*appearing* to be like Jesus is more important than our **character**—*becoming* more like Jesus.
- b. The sobering truth of this story—and ours, when we pretend to be something we know we're not—is exactly what Peter means when he says, "You haven't lied to people—you've lied to God!" In fact, Peter said to Sapphira,

**"How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord?" (Acts 5:9 TNIV)**

-Living a secret life **tests** God. How long can I mess around with the Spirit—before I hit danger? How **far** can I take this and still go to Heaven when I die? How **long** can I do this and not have my secret exposed? What happens over time is that we turn into liars? It comes so naturally, we don't even **think** about it.

4. Now, is there anyone here who **wants** to be a hypocrite? So—why would we **ever** take a path that devious? Well, it starts with something we **all** experience. Needs. Desires. These inner longings. There are legitimate ways to satisfy them; we get launched **into** a life of lies when we take shortcuts. What was David's desire? It was sex, right? A very natural desire. His short-cut was going after the woman next door. What was Ananias and Sapphira's secret desire? They wanted admiration. Recognition. Nicknames!

-Wanting a good reputation is a **good** thing. But using deception—lying—even **subtly** to get it? That's a **huge** shortcut—and once you've gone there—**very** tough to get out of. There are **core** needs—like hunger, thirst, safety and warmth. But there are **also** things we want to avoid—like shame; pain. And desires that are **very** powerful; like the longing for sexual intimacy and love—and the esteem of others. And **man**, are we curious! We think, "I **wonder...!** Hmmm...what **if...?!**"

-The Bible reveals the guardrails God has placed around these desires. **He has a right to do that, right?** And He's told us how to satisfy them without dishonouring him, wrecking our lives and destroying others. Our problem is this sneaky thought, "But I want it...**now!**" Shortcuts!

- a. Anyone here **ever** taken what you **thought** was a shortcut? Several years ago, I was driving our family to Elim Lodge in the Kawarthas—and thought I saw a **shortcut** on the map. It wasn't. And I had my whole family ticked with me.

-Let me describe what I mean by **shortcuts**. You're in pain—and the thought of having to **face** what's causing your pain and **deal** with it is overwhelming. So you think, "I could make this pain go away...!" So, you smoke up, take a drink, cut yourself, binge. And it works—for a while. But the problem is there—only worse—and eventually complicated by the addictive power of soothing your pain—not **dealing** with it.

-You feel the inner ache of loneliness. You watch others who seem happy, you have a relationship end that leaves you feeling wrecked and undesirable. One day you meet someone and it seems like all this pain could just...go away. So you decide to **jump**. And it just keeps escalating. You feel awful about yourself, about the lie you're living, about the terror of being caught and exposed. But it's like you **can't stop!**

-You were just **curious** to begin with—you know, about what was out there. **Who** was out there? So one day, bored—you googled. And you took a secret dive—and **now** it has its claws in your soul.

-**Or...!**? Secret lives take **hundreds** of different forms—but they **all** are short cuts to **get what we want**.

- b. Now, is there a way to meet these desires for love, security, intimacy, acceptance and satisfaction without secrecy and lying? Of course. But we are lured in by what promises to be the fast and easy way—instead of work, setting aside our immediate needs—and actually **becoming**, over time, a person who's respected.

-Please get this; secret lives **never** start with direct action. They start with **inner** compromise. The inner walls of resistance—the ability to say **no** when we need to say **no**—get torn down one brick at a time by the things we watch and think about—and the lies we tell ourselves.

5. Now, if a person has a secret life going on—and they've lied, compromised promises they've made--do you think they want **anyone** to **know** about it? Absolutely not! That's when the lying starts. When someone cuts close to our secret life in a conversation, we act horrified; get angry. **How could you think such a thing about me?** And over time, we tell lies to cover lies...to cover lies. We actually **deceive** ourselves. We tell ourselves lies about why this is actually okay!

-Here's the problem. Ever heard someone say, "I got the mushroom treatment. I was kept in the dark and covered with...used animal feed." Secret lives, like mushrooms, grow in the dark. The covering of lies keeps us locked into our secret life. A secret life will turn you into an **excellent** liar. And, over time, you get **over-confident**.

- a. One day Jesus told a group of casual followers that, unlike their claim that they had God as their Father—their true 'father' was the father of lies. Jesus said:

**...You are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:43-44 NLT)**

-That fits what Peter said to Ananias. "How is it that **Satan** has filled your heart so that you would lie to God? Living a lie, living deceptively—links you with someone you don't want to mess with. **THE** liar, Satan—and whatever he has in mind for you—and for those around you. When you lie—live a lie—you have placed your soul on the auction block—along with your reputation as someone who can be **trusted**.

-And that's a problem—because everything that really matters in life is relational—a relationship with God, or a relationship with others. Jesus said—love God, love others—and you'll fulfill what God wants for your life. How can you live a lie—and love God—who **hates** lies? How can you love others—and **lie** to them to keep your secret safe—and have them trust and admire you?

-Let me put it this way; how many you would to be best friends with a liar? **Trust** is the glue that holds relationships together. **Trust** is what makes relationships possible. More than anything else I'm aware of, deception **destroys** relationships. When we're involved in a secret life, we think, "Well, I can lie to this group of people—my parents, my spouse, the people in my church—they're holding me back. And then I can have a great relationship with **this** person over here that I really **want** to like and admire me. Won't happen. Not for long. Lies and deception undermine relationships—**period**.

-Here's the deal. People grow to trust you, over time, when you **are** who you **say** you are; then you do what you **say** you'll do; when you **don't** do what you **say** you won't do. Break that trust—and it's gone. Trust is hard to gain—and you can lose it in a heartbeat. And it is **very** hard to regain.

-There is one infamous line from the fiasco with Bill Clinton that gets played again and again and again: **I did not have sexual relations with that woman**. Every time he reassured the leader of another nation that they could count on the US for something—think that line played? Every time he reassured people—family members--of his faithfulness—that line played. Every time he made a promise to a friend—that line played. See, friends, **that's just the way it works!**

-A secret life turns us into liars. A relationship with a person who's a liar is like turning the crank on a jack-in-the-box. You never know when something is going to pop out of the box--or what it will be.

- b. The bigger problem is what happens to our souls. We were created to be a unified whole person—where our body, mind and soul are **integrated**. A person of **integrity** is someone whose thinking and actions and soul are aligned. Now, the only One I've ever heard of who has lived a life of perfect alignment is Jesus. Most of us at least want our souls—who we are at the core—to match what we think, say and do.

-To **purposely** dis-align who we really are and who we **claim** to be is not merely to lack integrity—although that fits—it's to **dis-integrate**—to pull apart what was intended to be aligned. If you graph it, it might look like this. The top line represents who you claim to be, pretend to be, want people to **think** you are; the bottom line represents the secret life—who you **really** are. And if the secret life continues, it doesn't stay even. As the lie continues—you tell more and more lies, and get further and further away from who you claim to be. And the distance between who you claim to be—and who you are—is **hypocrisy**.

-Now. Think about being stuck—because of secrecy—in a place like this where you've got a divided heart—where your life really is divided into two pieces. Think that's a healthy way to live? And the problem is that sometimes that's exactly where people are when they're making critical decisions—about their future, about parenting, about finances, about marriage—and about the entire direction of their lives—and even make promises to **others** while they're living a lie! How does **that** work?

- c. And this eventually affects how you feel about yourself. In the movie **Liar Liar**, Jim Carey plays an attorney who lies about everything. His young son, sick of his Dad's broken promises, makes a wish that for just one day, his Dad will be forced to tell the truth. Well, it works; something happens where, for an entire day, he **can't** lie—which is actually quite funny. He begins to understand how his lying has damaged all his relationships and turned him into a person he despises. In the final courtroom scene, a frustrated judge yells, "If you say one more word, I'll be forced to hold you in contempt!" Carey says, "I hold **myself** in contempt!"

6. Secret lives come in all kinds of shapes and sizes. Sometimes, like David, it can mean having a relationship that you have no business having; it can mean, like Judas, pretending to be someone's friend when you're shredding them behind their back; like Ananias and Sapphira, it can mean pretending to be more generous and spiritual than you are. It can mean being everyone's friend outside the home—and a monster in it. In a world like ours, it can mean any one of a hundred addictions.

-Whatever it is—it's hurting you—and it's hurting others. See, God has this Mission to make all things right—and **truth** is at the core of it. God can use deeply flawed people to accomplish it—if they're authentic—but **fakes? People who deceive?** That contradicts everything He stands for. If you're stuck in a secret life—and you want out-

-you'll have to do the one thing you dread. You'll have to tell the truth. In that same context where He called the Devil—the **Deceiver**--the ultimate liar, Jesus tells us that **the truth is what sets us free!**

**“You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32 NLT)**

- a. Do you **want** to be free? There's no easy, pain-free way out of a secret life. Secret lives, by their nature, grow more and more complicated. To tell the truth because you're ultimately found out and **forced** to doesn't say much, does it? The longer you wait—the more you lie—the more distance develops between who you say you are—and who you really are. If you won't invite the truth into your life—and tell the truth on your own, what will it take?

-There's one thing I do know. There is a God in Heaven who offers grace and hope and life. If we will confess our sins—just **tell the truth**—He's faithful—and will forgive our sins—make us new. Jesus **is** the way, the **truth** and the life. You'll be surprised how relieved you'll feel—to just bring your life out of the darkness--and into the light. **That's** the way home!

- b. Jeff Van Vonderen, [**pic**] author and speaker--serves as a counsellor on the **A&E** show **Intervention**. He helps people rescue family members who are stuck in addictions. Years ago, Jeff spoke at a church I was leading—and told the story about an uncle of his who led worship at a small conservative church in northern Minnesota. He told about how this uncle would sing, play his trumpet—and cry so hard during some invitation songs that he couldn't even continue.

-When his uncle died—the family came to clean out his house so it could be sold and found a huge stash of pornography under the basement stairs. A secret life. Jeff asked this powerful question: **Where does a person in a church like this—go with a problem like that?**

-My prayer is that The Olive Branch will simply be a group of recovering failures, reformed pretenders—a safe community for authenticity and truth. A place where people don't **have** to lie—because it's safe to struggle and tell the truth. Where our instinct, like God's, is to offer grace and hope—not judgment!