

## THE PRACTICE OF CONFESSION

Read the following story to your LD group. John Ortberg in his book, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, tells this story...

Some years ago we traded in my old Volkswagon Super Beetle for our first piece of new furniture: a mauve sofa. It was roughly the shade of Pepto-Bismol, but because it represented to us a substantial investment, we thought "mauve" sounded better.

The man at the furniture store warned us not to get it when he found out we had small children. "You don't want a mauve sofa," he advised. "Get something the color of dirt." But we had the naïve optimism of young parenthood. "We know how to handle our children," we said. "Give us the mauve sofa."

From that moment on, we all knew clearly the number one rule in the house. Don't sit on the mauve sofa. Don't touch the mauve sofa. Don't play around the mauve sofa. Don't eat on, breathe on, look at, or think about the mauve sofa. Remember the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden? "On every other chair in the house you may freely sit, but upon this sofa, the mauve sofa, you may not sit for in the day you sit thereupon, you shall surely die."

Then came The Fall.

One day there appeared on the mauve sofa a stain. A red stain. A red jelly stain.

So my wife, who had chosen the mauve sofa and adored it, lined up our three children in front of it: Laura, age four, and Mallory, two and a half, and Johnny, six months.

"Do you see that, children?", she asked. "That's a stain. A red stain. A red jelly stain. The man at the sofa store says it is not coming out. Not forever. Do you know how long forever is, children? That's how long we're going to stand here until one of you tells me who put the stain on the mauve sofa."

Mallory was the first to break. With trembling lips and tear filled eyes she said, "Laura did it." Laura passionately denied it. Then there was silence, for the longest time. No one said a word. I knew the children wouldn't, for they had never seen their mother so upset. I knew they wouldn't, because they knew that if they did, they would spend eternity in the time-out chair.

I knew they wouldn't, because *I* was the one who put the red jelly stain on the mauve sofa, and I knew I wasn't saying anything. I figured I would find a safe place to confess – such as in a book I was going to write, maybe. We all have our own mauve sofa story of when we had a chance to confess but chickened out.

What is it that makes confession so hard and painful for us?

Ortberg says confession is not primarily something God has us do because He needs it. God is not clutching tightly to His mercy, as if to pry it from His fingers like a child's last cookie. We need to confess in order to heal and be changed. Nor is confession simply an accounting procedure: "That sin was on the debit side of God's ledger; now I have confessed it, and it got erased." Confession is not mechanical. It is a practice that, done wisely, will help us become transformed. When we practice confession two things happen, we are liberated from guilt. And we will be less likely to sin in the same way in the future than if we have not confessed.

How have you seen confession reduce your desire to continue in a sinful practice in your life?

Read James 5:16, spend some time in silence asking God to search your heart.