

Are You a Safe Person?

Dec. 19, 2012

We all want people in our lives that we can be real with, people we can trust with our hearts and our struggles, people we can risk opening up to. But it is foolishness to share the treasure of our hearts with unsafe people who will judge us, shame us, or condemn us.

So what does a safe person look like? How do we recognize them? And more importantly, how do we become one?

Being a safe person starts with owning your own brokenness and need for Jesus. It means admitting you're not perfect. Beyond that, it means dropping the unrealistic hope of perfection in this lifetime and the pretense that you've got it all together. It means being open about your hurts, your temptations, your failings, your humanity. A safe person gets that "there but for the grace of God, go I."

A safe person is humble, which means being right-sized. Not pretending to be bigger than they really are, and not thinking they are less than they really are. Right-sized! Humble people don't look down on others from their "superior" position, but they don't put others on a pedestal either. They understand that the ground is level at the foot of the cross.

A safe person understands grace and gives it to others. I love Pastor John Ortberg's delightful definition: "Grace is the offer of God's ceaseless presence and irrational love that cannot be stopped. It's the flow of God's power and presence and favor in your life from one moment to the next that enables you to do whatever it is God has for you to do."

Grace is acceptance. It looks at others and communicates, "I accept you just as you are." Acceptance doesn't mean agreeing about everything, or condoning others' foolish or sinful

choices; it means not denying reality, and respecting other people's right to make their own choices. God accepts us just as we are but He doesn't agree with our sin. When a friend's daughter confessed she was pregnant and unmarried, it was a painful struggle for the mom. One day she protested in her prayer time, "Lord, I suppose You want me to help put together a *shower* for her?!" She was taken aback by the gentle response she received: "Every child deserves to be welcomed and celebrated." Chastened, she helped organize a shower for a little girl who has been nothing but a blessing and an unimaginable joy from the day she was born. My friend learned to live out the grace of acceptance without compromising on the sin that created the situation in the first place.

Safe people encourage others, by their example of transparency and authenticity, to be the same person on the outside that they are on the inside.

Safe people remember there are two sides to every story, and they wait to make a judgment till they hear the other side.

Safe people seek to maintain a non-judgmental attitude toward others. They don't shame others. They don't criticize others.

Safe people are honest people. They speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) as a way of life. Safe people teach themselves to be good listeners. When the other person is talking, they're not thinking about what they are going to say when the other's done; they simply receive their words with respectful attentiveness.

Safe people love with God's love. By abiding in the vine (John 15), they stay yielded to God, and His love flows through a pipeline from the Father's heart to others' hearts.

Safe people are forgiving people. They extend to others the forgiveness they have received from God and from others.

Safe people seek forgiveness when they blow it. They confess

their specific faults, acknowledge the effects of their actions on others, and ask for forgiveness.

It's especially wonderful when safe people become leaders, because they understand that brokenness and struggles are a normal part of growing and of the sanctification process. They know there will be stumbles and falls. They expect it. They're not shocked when it happens. So when it does, they recall their own desperate need for Jesus and His grace, and they extend it with sorrow rather than judgment, and compassion rather than criticism.

How safe a person are *you*?

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/are_you_a_safe_person

Poopy Messes

Recently a friend called with an urgent prayer request; she'd been summoned ASAP to her son's private Christian school and they wouldn't say why. She was concerned about her eight-year-old anyway because of some traumatic life situations they had been weathering, and she feared that maybe he was acting out because of how difficult his life had been.

Turns out someone had pooped on the bathroom floor and they had traced it to "Mark." They pulled him out of his class and had him wait for his mother in the principal's office. When my friend got there and found out what had happened, she said, "My son has occasional bowel problems. He's only eight years old. Why are you making a big deal about this?"

"Because," they replied, "he didn't tell anyone about it! He

should have told someone! You don't leave poop on the bathroom floor! That's wrong!" They made it sound like he'd been caught stealing or setting the school on fire.

"Mark," my friend asked her son kindly, "Is there a reason you didn't tell anyone?"

In a small voice Mark answered, "I didn't know what to do."

My friend reassured her son there at the school and again when they got home, even though she was boiling inside at the insensitivity of the school personnel who made a scared little boy feel like a criminal for simply not knowing what to do.

What was missing was the awareness of a safe person he could tell "I messed up" without The Fear Of God hammering down on him. What was missing was any interaction with any adult with a kind face and a disposition of grace that understands that sometimes little kids make poopy messes that paralyze them with fear, and it's okay. That we clean it up, give a hug, and you're on your way. What was missing was a grown-up who remembers that there's a difference between making a mistake and making a choice to be rebellious.

My heart hurts for little Mark and for Mark's mommy, both of whom desperately need to experience the grace of safe people for both literal and figurative "poopy messes."

So I've been thinking about what it means to be a safe person, a grace person.

It means first of all being in touch with our own messes and our own sinfulness and our own desperate need for a gracious Savior. It means delighting in receiving the grace and mercy of God, and being committed to passing that grace and mercy on to others. It means remembering that since we live in a fallen world, everyone walks around with an invisible tattoo on their forehead that says, "Please encourage me." It means trusting God to shine His love and His grace and His mercy through our

faces like so much light streaming through a stained glass window. It means remembering that everyone is still very much in process and a long way from our final form of glorified beauty and strength when Jesus is finished working on us.

It means that when someone makes a poopy mess, we set our minds on responding with “I’m sorry” rather than “shame on you.”

Because it won’t be long before we’re needing some grace for our own poopy mess. Again.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/poopy_messes