

July 1, 2003

Mr. [REDACTED], Associate Editor  
*Discipleship Journal*  
P.O. Box 3504  
Colorado Springs, CO 80935-3504

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]:

Lately, instead of receiving only bills and statements from the companies I do business with—like my credit card provider, insurance agency, and bank—I also regularly receive notices about my rights to privacy. And thanks to new federal regulations, every time I visit my dentist, doctor or optometrist, I collect another form about efforts to maintain the privacy of my medical records.

But the need for confidentiality does not just influence our commercial and health care interests. From the books we check out at the library to the grades our children receive in school, with few exceptions, our lives are protected from the intrusion of others.

But when it comes to our personal relationships, what expectation of privacy should we presume? Additionally, when we do divulge or receive personal information, is there ever a situation when it should be shared with others? And more specifically, in our relationships with those we disciple, what role should confidentiality play?

When I meet with someone one-to-one, confidentiality seems implied. Biblical exhortations against gossip and slander seemingly would prevent me from sharing much of the content of these private conversations. But what if my disciple informs me of some intention to harm herself? Or what if the parents of the young woman I am discipling ask about the content of our discussions? Or perhaps as part of a formal discipling ministry, I am required to complete reports about my discipleship meetings. How do I harmonize the need to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of my disciple with the important needs to love her by seeking help, to respect parental authority over her, or to fulfill my own ministry obligations?

Having experienced all of these scenarios in my own discipleship relationships, I would like to write a 1,250-word article, “Keeping Confidence: The Role of Privacy in Discipleship” for your “One to One” column to help your readers consider the issues of confidentiality in helping others grow in Christ. In this article, I will explore the necessity of building confidence and trust in discipleship relationships balanced with the real possibility of encountering situations that are more complicated than we can handle on our own. I also will offer guidelines for establishing the type of relationships that welcome discussion of important issues requiring confidentiality. Finally, I will outline ways to maintain or restore the integrity of discipleship relationships in instances when confidence was “broken” for the greater good or even inadvertently.

In addition to the many discipleship opportunities I have had over the past few years, I also have spent much of that time writing, including my time spent as a journalist and the opportunities I have had to write for various church and organizational newsletters. I also have had two articles published in your magazine, including “Boundaries in Discipling,” in the Jan./Feb. 2002 issue.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this article. The article could be ready for submission within four weeks of approval of this query.

Sincerely,

Charity Singleton