



# CONFESSION: PRACTICE THE PRACTICE



ISCOVERY  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

## The Practice of Confession and Self- Examination

**Definition:** Telling the truth about myself - to me, God, and those around me.

**Scripture:** "In Returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and in trust shall be your strength." **Isaiah 30:15**

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." **Romans 3:23-24**

"Search me O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." **Psalms 139:23-24**

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." **1 John 1:8-9**

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." **James 5:16**

"Whoever conceals their sin does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy." **Proverbs 28:13**

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit." **Psalms 32:1-2**

"Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." **Acts 3:19**

## Quotes

"A child of the light confesses instantly and stands bared before God; a child of the darkness says, "Oh, I can explain that away." - **Oswald Chambers**

"Many avoid the path of self knowledge because they are afraid of being swallowed up in their own abysses. But Christians have confidence that Christ has lived through all the abysses of human life and that he goes with us when we dare to engage in sincere confrontation with ourselves. Because God loves us unconditionally- along with our dark sides- we don't need to dodge ourselves. IN the Light of this love the pain of self-knowledge can be at the same time the beginning of our healing."

- **Andreas Ebert**

"Our cross is the point of our unlikeness to the image of Christ, where we must die to self in order to be raised to God into the wholeness of life in the image of Christ... So the process of being conformed to the image of Christ takes place right there at the point of our unlikeness to Christ.

- **Robert Mulholland**

"The truth is we all sin. Sin is anything that breaks relationships. Jesus is totally realistic about broken relationships. He experienced them. He was put to death by them. Yet Jesus taught that the damage done through sin was not the last word on life. Sin could be confessed. Sin could be forgiven. And sinful people could be set free." - **Adele Calhoun**

"The discipline of confession is not about appeasing an angry God who will send us to hell if we don't behave. The discipline of confession is about a loving Heavenly Father who wants the best for us and is willing to heal us if only we will honestly admit that we are in need of healing." - **Valerie Hess**

"To be a person of integrity is to act out of the truth of who you are as a child of God, to see and know yourself as God sees you. Living out the identity that God declares for you includes knowing that you are: a child of God (John 1:12); Christ's friend, bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19-20); a saint (Eph 1:1); salt and light of the earth (Matt 5:13-14; free forever from condemnation (Rom 8:31-34); and a minister of reconciliation for God (2 Cor 5:17-21). Living out your identity as a child of God also means you cannot be separated from the love of God (Rom 8:35-39); can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Phil 4:13); belong to God (Col 3:12) and much more! We can act out of the truth of who we are only when we trust who God says we are."- **Vernie Shorr Love**

"Self-examination is a process whereby the Holy Spirit opens my heart to what is true about me. This is not the same thing as a neurotic shame-inducing inventory. Instead it is a way of opening myself to God within the safety of divine love so I can authentically seek transformation. Confession embraces Christ's gift of forgiveness and restoration while setting us on the path to renewal and change."

- **Adele Calhoun**

"For a good confession three things are necessary: an examination of conscience, sorrow, and a determination to avoid sin." - **St Alphonsus Liguori**

"Our brother...has been given to us to help us. He hears the confession of our sins in Christ's stead and he forgives our sins in Christ's name. He keeps the secret of our confession as God keeps it. When I go to my brother and confess, I am going to God." - **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

"Do not feel worried if you do not remember all your little peccadilloes, in confession, for as you often fall imperceptibly, so you are often raised up imperceptibly." - **Francis de Sales**

"A balanced approach to spiritual transformation involves joyful acceptance of who we are as one of God's greatest gifts to ourselves and to others. This goodness includes the uniqueness of our body, our personality, the configuration of our soul and its unique way of relating to God, our background and experience, even those things that we might consider to be liabilities or deformities."

"Self-examination is a practice that facilitates spiritual awakening- an awakening to the presence of God as God really is and an awakening to ourselves as we really are. When practiced rightly, it leads us into a greater sense of God's constant loving presence in our life, it fosters a celebration of our created self, it offers us a safe place to see and name those places where we are not like Christ, and it opens us up to deeper levels of spiritual transformation."

"Confession, when practiced fully, is personal (between me and God), interpersonal (with a trusted friend or confessor, with a person I have hurt or offended) and corporate (in the context of worship in community. The interplay among these three keeps confession healthy and productive."

- **Ruth Haley Barton**

"At the heart of God is the desire to forgive and to give. Because of this He set into motion the entire redemptive process that culminated in the cross and was confirmed in the resurrection. The usual notion of what Jesus did on the cross runs something like this: people were so bad and so mean and God was so angry with them that He would not forgive them unless somebody big enough could take the rap for the whole lot of them. Nothing could be further from the truth. Love, not anger, brought Jesus to the cross. Golgotha came as a result of God's great desire to forgive, not His reluctance. Jesus saw that by His vicarious suffering He could actually internalize all the evil of mankind and so heal it, forgive it."

"The followers of Jesus Christ have been given the authority to receive the confession of sin and to forgive it in His name.'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' (John 20:23) What a wonderful privilege! Why do we shy away from such a life-giving ministry? If we, not out of merit but sheer grace, have been given the authority to set others free, how dare we withhold this great gift?""We must desire to be conquered and ruled by God, or if we do not desire it, to desire to desire it. Such a desire is the gracious gift from God. The seeking of this gift is one of the preliminaries for confessing to a brother or sister."

"We do not have to make God willing to forgive. In fact, it is God who is working to make us willing to seek His forgiveness." "The discipline of confession brings an end to pretense. God is calling into being a church that can openly confess its frail humanity and know the forgiving and empowering graces of Christ. Honesty leads to confession and confession leads to change. May God give grace to the church once again to recover the Discipline of confession." - **Richard Foster**

## Books:

**Celebration of Discipline** - Richard Foster

**Sacred Rhythms** - Ruth Haley Barton

**Spiritual Disciplines Handbook** - Adele Calhoun

**Spiritual Disciplines for Children** - Vernie Shorr Love

**Invitation to a Journey** - Robert Mulholland

**Life Together** - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

**The Confessions of St Augustine** - St Augustine

**Surprised By Joy** - CS Lewis

## Other Resources:

### **Pray-As-You-Go App and Website:**

Daily and weekly guided Examen prayer

### **Podcast:**

Ruth Haley Barton-Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership

- **Season 7: Week 3** | Repentance: Cleaning our Messy House
- **Season 7: Week 4** | Confession: Coming Home to God

# Exercises

## **Reflection #1:** What Is True of Me

Take some time to sit quietly with the Lord. As you begin take a few deep cleansing breaths and become aware of being in the Presence of God. Offer yourself and this time to Him for His purposes in your heart and life.

Ask the Lord to guide you as you look for evidence of truth about yourself. The good and lovely, as well as the sinful and ugly.

First, ask the Lord to show you the good things that are true about you: The things He looks at and is so proud of. Using a journal or art materials, begin writing down the truth that is surfacing about you. What are you noticing? Don't try to analyze what comes up, simply write or draw the words that come to mind. This can be hard for some of us. Take your time. Be patient with yourself. If looking at and celebrating the positive aspects of you is not comfortable, ask the Lord for one or two things. Write those down and rejoice that you were able to notice and name a part of you that God so lovingly created!

Take a moment and look at that true list of good things about you. Thank God for being able to notice and name them today. Let Him be a proud Father for a moment, as He brags about His child.

Next, ask the Lord to show you the sinful things, behaviors or motives that are true about you. The things He longs to free you from, and to conform to the image of His Son Jesus. Again, don't analyze these, simply notice and name what He brings up into the light.

Take some time and look at that true list of sinful things about you. Thank God for being able to notice and name them today. As you look at each one of the sins that surfaced, confess to the Lord that His assessment of you is true. Admit your sin. Ask for His forgiveness and mercy. Ask for a way forward to live life differently than you have done in the past. Wait in silence and see if He offers you any specific things you can do, or say differently in the future.

Let Him be the proud Father once again, as He holds you in the silence receiving your confession, and absolving you of your sin.

Hold your paper, all that is true about you, up to the Lord and thank Him for His forgiveness. Rip off the sinful side of the paper and either tear it into pieces and throw in the trash or burn it. As you destroy that paper, let the truth settle in your heart that you are not a slave to those sins, and that you can walk forward in confident freedom, victory, and forgiveness!

Share this experience with a trusted soul friend or companion. If you have harmed another person and need to ask forgiveness do so.

# Exercises

## Reflection #2: Returning

Jeremiah 31:3 (NKJV) The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you."

Spend some time in silence, reflecting on God's eternal, unconditional, extravagant love for you.

From the backdrop of this love, take some time to think about your desire to "return" or "repent", to receive God's extravagant grace and to let go of anything that may be holding you back from receiving all He has for you during this time of reflection.

Allow at least a half hour to pray through the following prayer so you can incorporate time for silence after each confession. In the silence, ask God to reveal any ways in which each confession might be true of you, but do not feel that you have to "get something" for each one. Allow this exercise to be characterized by gentle openness rather than any kind of pushing or forcing. When God does reveal something to you, quietly ask if there is anything you need to confess or to make right with any person (s) whom you have injured or offended. When you have had enough time with a confession, pray the refrain (the phrases printed in **bold**) and move to the next confession. - Jayne Price, Mount Hermon Reflective Retreat Director

Most holy and merciful Father: I confess to you that I have sinned by my own fault In thought, world and deed; By what I have done, and by what I have left undone.

I have not loved you with my whole heart, mind and strength. I have not loved my neighbors as myself. I have not forgiven others, as I have been forgiven. (Silence)

**Have mercy on me, Lord.**

I have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us. I have not been true to the mind of Christ. I have grieved your Holy Spirit. (Silence)

**Have mercy on me, Lord.**

I confess to you, Lord, all my past unfaithfulness:....The pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of my life, (Silence) **I confess to you, Lord**

....My self-indulgent appetites and ways, and my exploitation of others, (Silence) **I confess to you, Lord**

....My anger at my own frustration, my envy of those more fortunate than I, (Silence) **I confess to you, Lord**

....My love of worldly goods and comforts, my dishonesty in daily life and work, (Silence) **I confess to you, Lord.**

Accept my repentance, Lord, for the wrongs I have done: for my blindness to human need and suffering, and my indifference to injustice and cruelty, (Silence) **Accept my repentance, Lord.**

For all false judgments, uncharitable thoughts toward my neighbors, and for my prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from me, (Silence) **Accept my repentance, Lord.**

Restore me, good Lord, and let your anger depart from me. Favorably hear me for your mercy is great. Accomplish in me and in all your church the work of your salvation, That we may show forth your glory in the world. By the cross and passion of your Son, our Lord, Bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection. Amen.

**The prayer is adapted from Eastertide, Prayers for Lent through Easter- Phyllis Tickle**

# Exercises

## **Reflection #3:** Search Me O God

Use one of the following scripture passages, asking the Holy Spirit to walk you through it as He makes it your own confession.

**Hosea 11:1-11**

**Luke 15: 11-22**

**Psalms 139: 23-24**

**Psalms 32 (NIV)**

**Psalms 32 (MSG)**

**Psalms 51**

Choose a passage. Ask the Lord to take you by the hand and lead you as you offer yourself willingly on this path toward confession. If it helps, close your eyes and imagine you placing your hand in the outstretched open hand of Jesus. Sit with that image and let Him look on you with all the love He has for you. From that place of love, embark on your journey through this prayer time.

Read through the passage slowly line by line. After each phrase, stop and sit in silence as you invite the light of Love to shine on an area that needs to be confessed.

When you are ready, admit to the Lord that what He is showing you about yourself is true, and ask for His forgiveness and mercy, and for the grace and courage to leave that sin behind. Move on to the next phrase.

End your prayer with a few minutes of silence, as you bask in the joy of being loved with an Everlasting Love that has no limits. Talk to God about this experience of confession. Ask Him if there is anything you are to do to complete this process of confession. (i.e. going to a person you have wronged or harmed, confessing this out loud to a trusted soul friend or companion, etc) Listen and see if you sense anything else from Him today.

Bless your time as graced by God and go and sin no more!

## **Reflection #4** From Spiritual Disciplines Handbook- Adele Calhoun

Ask some of your family and close friends to help you see your blind spots. Ask questions like, What do I do that hurts you? How could I better love you? What is it like to be with me? Do I show interest in others or talk mostly about myself? Let their answers guide you in a time of confession.

## **Reflection #5** From Spiritual Disciplines Handbook- Adele Calhoun

Set aside some time for confession and self-examination. In the presence of God ask for light to pierce your defenses. Then ask yourself, Who have I injured recently through thoughtlessness, neglect, anger and so on? As the Holy Spirit brings people to mind, confess your feelings about these people to God. Ask God to forgive you and if need be to give you grace to forgive them. Write an apology, make a phone call or confess out loud in an attempt to put the relationship back on track.