

Ephesians Week 9: Practices to Become What We Believe

Confessing Sin

What is Confessing Sin?

Confessing sin is a core part of the Lord's prayer; "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." This request contains both vertical and horizontal dimensions of confession, God's forgiveness being a vertical dynamic, and forgiving others being a horizontal one. Like the shape of the cross itself, our prayerful engagement with God implies a natural overflow of Jesus' forgiveness of us into the relationships that are around us.

The private discipline of confession is key to our spiritual growth. God wants to forgive us, but it is our acknowledgment of the sin that unlocks the forgiveness that is waiting for us. In 1 John 1:9 it says, "If we confess our sins he is faithful to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." In other words, we don't just glibly or generally admit our sins, but rather, in the light of God's presence, we allow the inner dynamics of the damaging behaviors or sinful patterns that produce the sin itself to be exposed. The Bible is also clear however that the forgiveness that flows from God can be received through another brother or sister in the Lord. Jesus said to the disciples in John 20:23 "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

How to Confess Sin:

Exercise 1: The Examen

Let's begin with a prayer exercise known as the Examen. Each person can spread out and find a comfy space to sit in, perhaps with a notebook and pen in their hand. Then, have the Leader pray to invite the Holy Spirit. After a few moments of quiet, spend time quietly with God doing the following:

Step One: Replay the week in your mind

Take a few minutes to practice active reflection of the last week, allowing it to play like a movie in your mind. Call to mind the highs and the lows of the week and all of the emotions tied to those moments.

Step Two: Invite the Holy Spirit into your reflection

Having the week before your mind, ask the Holy Spirit this simple question: "When did I fail to love God or love someone else this week?" Take a few moments to quietly replay the week in your mind, allowing the Holy Spirit to show you moments where you did not love God or others. (Remember: While the Holy Spirit convicts us in order to lead us into life, shame is not ever the voice of God. So while the Holy Spirit will correct you, the Holy Spirit will never degrade or dishonor you.)

Step Three: Acknowledge those moments before God

Once those moments have come to mind, confess them to God by acknowledging the wrongdoing towards him or towards someone else. After you've acknowledged them to God, call to mind God's readiness to forgive you and thank him for his forgiveness.

Exercise 2: Share With Others

After completing the Examen, split into groups of two to share the moments that came to mind during the Examen. If multiple moments came to mind, share one moment that felt most significant or that you feel comfortable sharing.

For the sharer, this looks like saying something like, "I realized that this week I failed to love God by _____" or "I failed to love (this person) by _____". For the listener, this looks like quietly listening without judgment. Once the person has finished sharing, thank them for sharing and share your moment in return.

After both parties have shared, spend a few minutes praying for one another and speaking the forgiveness of God over one another in prayer.